PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

(HANSARD)

SIXTH SERIES—VOLUME 317

HOUSE OF COMMONS

OFFICIAL REPORT

FIRST SESSION OF THE FIFTY-SECOND PARLIAMENT
OF THE UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN
AND NORTHERN IRELAND
FORTY-SEVENTH YEAR OF THE REIGN OF
HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II

SESSION 1997–98

COMPRISING PERIOD
27 July—22 October 1998

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27 July 1998

THE PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

OFFICIAL REPORT

IN THE FIRST SESSION OF THE FIFTY-SECOND PARLIAMENT OF THE UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN AND NORTHERN IRELAND
[WHICH OPENED 7 MAY 1997]

FORTY-SEVENTH YEAR OF THE REIGN OF
HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II

SIXTH SERIES **VOLUME 317**

TWENTY FOURTH VOLUME OF SESSION 1997–98

House of Commons

Monday 27 July 1998

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

SIERRA LEONE REPORT

Resolved,

That an humble Address be presented to Her Majesty, That she will be graciously pleased to give directions that there be laid before this House a Return of a report of the investigation into arms sales to Sierra Leone.—[*Janet Anderson.*]

Oral Answers to Questions

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

The Secretary of State was asked—

Music and Theatre (Liverpool)

1. **Mrs. Louise Ellman** (Liverpool, Riverside): If he will make a statement on support for music and the theatre in Liverpool. [50767]

The Minister for Arts (Mr. Mark Fisher): The arts in Liverpool received £4.1 million in 1997–98. Of this, around £540,000 was for drama and £1.75 million for music. In addition, Liverpool received £16.2 million in arts-related lottery awards.

Mrs. Ellman: Is my hon. Friend aware that the National Campaign for the Arts hailed last week's announcement about additional funding for the arts as an "unprecedented and visionary move"? Can my hon. Friend give an assurance that the support that he has already mentioned, together with the additional funds, will enable the Playhouse theatre to reopen, the Everyman theatre to have security and proper recognition to be given to the local, regional, national and international importance of the great Royal Liverpool philharmonic orchestra?

Mr. Fisher: As my hon. Friend said, the £290 million of additional funding awarded to this Department last week was the biggest step forward in cultural investment for many years, and includes £130 million extra over the next three years for the Arts Council and the performing arts. Obviously, it is for the Arts Council to decide how to spend that money, but I know that a great city such as Liverpool, with its track record in the arts, will make a very strong case both to the North-West arts board and to the Arts Council.

Sports Policy

2. **Mr. Tim Loughton** (East Worthing and Shoreham): If he will make a statement on the Government's sports policy. [50768]

The Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Mr. Chris Smith): On Friday, I announced a package that will deliver more grass-roots sports development, wider access to opportunities to take part in sport and more funding for support of sport at an international level. Earlier in the month, I announced a strengthening of the United Kingdom Sports Council and its work with our top sports men and women. In addition—although this is not entirely due to the Government's activities—I am glad to be the first to congratulate our English cricketers on winning the test match this afternoon.

Mr. Loughton: I take this opportunity to congratulate the right hon. Gentleman on retaining his position in the Cabinet—but I hope that that does not presage doom for

the Minister for Sport, the hon. Member for West Ham (Mr. Banks), whom I had anticipated would answer my question.

If the Secretary of State is serious about promoting excellence in sport—the scant details of it appeared in a statement on Friday—how does he gel that with the Government's abandoning of the teaching of physical education as a core subject in schools?

Mr. Smith: The hon. Gentleman ignores the fact that PE will remain a curriculum subject in schools; it will have to be taught. He also ignores the record of the previous Government, who presided over the country's biggest-ever sell-off of school playing fields, which so damagingly set back our potential for sporting achievement. We have now put that right by introducing measures to stop the unnecessary sale of playing fields. Last Friday, I announced the biggest—indeed, the first—real-terms increase in funding for sport for six years.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Is my right hon. Friend aware that one problem for sports that do not get a great deal of attention, such as tennis, is that the base is not broad enough? Many potential tennis players never get a chance to get beyond those who run it—the twinset and pearls brigade. Will he bear in mind the fact that there are usually no athletics facilities outside cities and some of the larger towns? There is nothing in smaller towns and rural areas, so we need to broaden the base there, too. It is remarkable that we managed to win the European cup in view of the fact that we do not manage well the transition of school athletes to clubs—mainly because there are not too many clubs in some parts of the country.

Mr. Smith: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The Government's entire policy is based on two fundamental pillars: to ensure international excellence, but also to ensure at grass-roots level widespread availability of sporting facilities and the encouragement of sporting activities. One does not achieve the first pillar without the second. I tell my hon. Friend also that the 44th indoor tennis facility has recently been opened, at Tipton, and that we hope very much to see continued growth of tennis facilities in our communities across the country. He is right also to say that giving people the chance to develop skills at grass-roots level is absolutely the right way forward.

Mr. Nick Hawkins (Surrey Heath): I join the Secretary of State in congratulating the England test team. It was particularly appropriate that England should have a magnificent fight back under Alec Stewart's leadership, given that the media's normal propagation of doom and gloom, writing off the test team, was continuing even up to the third day of the match. Will the Secretary of State join me in saying that we want our media always to support British sports teams, and that such support will be an important part of supporting sports policy from whichever party? Will he also say whether any tenders have yet been issued for the new UK Sports Institute? Opposition Members are very concerned that—after the blaze of publicity and all the hype over the announcement, and after many months—no tenders have been let.

Mr. Smith: On the first part of the hon. Gentleman's question, I entirely agree. I very much hope that we shall have a supportive media for our great sports men and women, particularly with the Commonwealth games being held in only a month or two. On the second part of his question, I am delighted that Opposition Front Benchers have at last been up to Sheffield to talk to the people putting together the UK Sports Institute there, to see what is happening and to hear the good progress that has been made. I fully expect that facilities will be open at Sheffield for the UK Sports Institute in 2000.

Satellite Television

3. **Mr. Chris Mullin** (Sunderland, South): If he will introduce measures to bring satellite television within the same regulatory regime as the rest of commercial television; and if he will make a statement. [50769]

The Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Mr. Chris Smith): The Government have no early plans for changes to the current framework of broadcasting legislation, but we shall consider further the full range of issues in the light of responses to our recent Green Paper on the regulation of broadcasting and communications.

Mr. Mullin: Is my right hon. Friend aware that Sky Television has so far invested little or nothing in original production, preferring instead to purchase bland off-the-record—rather, off-the-peg—American movies, and that that is dragging down the whole of commercial television? Is it not time that we created a level playing field, and brought satellite television within the same regulatory framework that applies to the rest of commercial television?

Mr. Smith: I can give my hon. Friend an entirely on-the-record response. Sky Television—indeed, any satellite broadcaster based in Britain—is subject to exactly the same European Union provisions as domestic terrestrial broadcasters in relation to original programming, particularly programming of European origin. Sky is making good progress towards meeting those European provisions. We monitor it very carefully—as my hon. Friend may have seen in recent press reports—and progress is undoubtedly being made. I confidently expect that the 50 per cent. target will be met very shortly.

Sports (Schools)

4. **Mr. Ben Bradshaw** (Exeter): What steps he has taken to encourage sport in schools. [50770]

The Minister for Sport (Mr. Tony Banks): The English Sports Council has a number of initiatives under way to encourage sport in schools, including the sportsmark scheme, the sporting ambassadors scheme and the TOPS programme. In addition, the English Sports Council is working up proposals for an activity award for primary schools and looking at the introduction of community sports co-ordinators in schools.

Mr. Bradshaw: Does my hon. Friend share my concern about the potential impact on sport of the otherwise excellent literacy and numeracy hour in primary schools? If so, what more could be done to encourage sports activities out of school hours?

Mr. Banks: I have had a number of discussions with the Under-Secretary of State for Education and

Employment. my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Yardley (Ms Morris), about physical education in schools. It has to be made clear that physical education remains compulsory for all five to 16-year-olds, and the Office for Standards in Education will examine PE in schools. I am one of those who believe that it is ridiculous to suggest that bright kids read books and thickos do sports, but some element of that stereotyping seems still to exist. Literacy and numeracy are assisted by physical education, so I am not concerned in that sense. I am, however, keeping a careful eye on matters.

I have completely forgotten the second part of my hon. Friend's question—*[Laughter.]* These things happen; old men forget, as Duff Cooper once said.

Mr. Bradshaw: After-school facilities.

Mr. Banks: Yes, thank you. I am delighted that I am still hanging on in there, holed up in the DCMS with a "Come in and get me, copper" notice on the door.

After-school clubs will have a significant sporting element. They are one initiative among many to encourage after-school activities. I must emphasise again that sport is very important for an individual's overall development.

Mr. Richard Spring (West Suffolk): We are all crossing our fingers on the Minister's behalf.

Does the Minister not recognise the damage that the undoubted marginalisation of PE in primary schools will have on sport? Is it not the truth that he has absolutely no idea of what sport is undertaken in schools? May I urge him to institute a proper inquiry—instead of piecemeal offerings—into the true situation so that we can begin to resolve the matter in a truly co-ordinated way?

Mr. Banks: The new flexibility that has been introduced into the teaching of the curriculum has been welcomed by more than 90 per cent. of all schools, something that the hon. Gentleman has to bear in mind. In reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Exeter (Mr. Bradshaw), I said that it was something that we needed to keep an eye on from the point of view of sports. It comes back to the problem that so much of sport is, as it were, outside my immediate brief and outside that of the Department. I have had a series of meetings with the Under-Secretary of State for Education and Employment, my hon. Friend the Member for Yardley, who is herself a former PE teacher. She and I agree entirely on the importance of PE in schools, and I am certainly looking at a more co-ordinated way of trying to evaluate the range and intensity of sports in schools. It is something that we shall continue to work on in close co-operation.

Disabled Access Logo

5. **Mr. Gordon Prentice** (Pendle): What steps he is taking to promote the disabled access logo for *(a)* restaurants, *(b)* hotels and *(c)* other tourist facilities. [50771]

The Minister for Film and Tourism (Mr. Tom Clarke): Encouraging greater access to tourist facilities for all, including those with special needs, will be a core strand in the new tourism strategy, which we shall publish later this year. I will take on board the disability rights White Paper published last week by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Employment. Obviously, signs which show access would be a positive contribution.

Mr. Prentice: I thank the Minister for that reply. Mr. Roy Coulton, a constituent of mine, who is disabled and who is a doughty campaigner for disabled rights, will be encouraged by it. He told me of his personal experience of reading advertisements for restaurants and hotels in the press, and then turning up to find that there was no way of getting into the restaurant in his wheelchair. He came up with the simple idea of requiring restaurants, hotels and other facilities to put the little wheelchair logo alongside their advertisements. It seems very simple, and I do not think it requires another inquiry or report to encourage restaurateurs and others to do that.

Mr. Clarke: My hon. Friend will know from my experience in disability over many years that I agree entirely that what happened to his constituent was totally unacceptable. The Disability Rights Commission that the Government intend to introduce will put an end to such practices. I also believe—as do the widening access working group, the tourism for all group and all others feeding into my right hon. Friend's Tourism Forum—that it is not only wrong to discriminate against disabled people in any sense, but commercially unwise. Disabled customers pay and disabled people in employment are well worth the money that they are being paid. My hon. Friend should accept that, and know that the Government will look closely at those important matters, and follow what our friends in tourism are telling us.

Arts Careers

7. **Mr. Barry Sheerman** (Huddersfield): What steps he is taking to open up careers in film, theatre and the arts to a broader social range of the UK population. [50773]

The Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Mr. Chris Smith): The performing arts and creative industries in this country are a thriving economic force, attracting talented young people from across the social spectrum. My Department has set up the creative industries task force and the Music Industry Forum, which are looking at ways of promoting creativity so that young people—whatever their background—can contribute to the continued growth of those important sectors.

Mr. Sheerman: Will my right hon. Friend promise me that he will look a little more closely at recruitment and perhaps carry out a survey of young people leaving school or university as to their perception of the accessibility of careers in those sectors? Most of us get the picture that young people believe that a closet coterie of people are appointed to the BBC or the Arts Council and get insider jobs. That puts off many talented young people from the ethnic minorities or from the regions—places such as Dewsbury—who feel that it is a magic world and if one's name is not Dimbleby, it is not worth applying.

Mr. Smith: My hon. Friend makes a valid general point. It is important that opportunities in the performing arts and arts administration and even in broadcasting are

available to everyone and that what ought to count is talent and not whom one happens to know, what one's name is or what social background one is from. We are already taking steps to ensure that that can happen. The establishment of the Youth Music Trust, the new deal work that we are doing with the music industry for talented young musicians and the work that my hon. Friend the Minister for the Arts has been doing with the Department for Education and Employment on dance and drama awards for students are all ways in which we are trying to establish exactly the point that my hon. Friend is making.

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham): Although I understand the concern of the hon. Member for Huddersfield (Mr. Sheerman) that all the plum jobs in the media and the arts tend to go only to close friends of the Prime Minister, will the Secretary of Secretary nevertheless confirm that he is personally, and the Government are collectively, opposed to positive discrimination as a means by which to secure the desirable outcome of an increased range of social participation? Does he acknowledge that information, encouragement and persuasion are of the essence, but positive discrimination not only is undesirable but would be a deeply retrograde step?

Mr. Smith: Appointments are made entirely on merit, and so they should be. I notice that that does not apply to the Conservative party.

Ms Jackie Lawrence (Preseli Pembrokeshire): We are all becoming increasingly aware of the importance of the British film industry, both economically and in terms of providing opportunities for people to participate in the arts. Will my right hon. Friend outline the progress that has been made in setting up a British film office in the United States with that intention in mind?

Mr. Smith: I am happy to say that the new film office in Los Angeles for the British film industry is already working. It has received a tremendous welcome from the film industry in Los Angeles and I hope that great things will come of it.

Mr. Robert Maclennan (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross): I welcome the emphasis on access and quality in the Minister's paper, produced outside the House on Friday, but I was disappointed that so little was said about the training of young talented people and their inability to get to first base as performing artists because their local authorities are not able or willing to fund their training. Is the Secretary of State getting to grips with the problem of such diversities throughout the country?

Mr. Smith: The announcements that we made on Friday were tabled at 9 o'clock in this House—at least an hour before the press conference was held outside the House. We are getting to grips with the needs of talented young people, particularly prospective students, in dance and drama. They have great difficulty at the moment. There is a temporary scheme that benefits from lottery funding, but that is not a long-term solution. We are working on a long-term solution and will make a further announcement in a few months.

Domestic Tourism Working Group

8. **Dr. Stephen Ladyman** (South Thanet): What plans he has to implement the recommendations of the domestic tourism working group. [50774]

The Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Mr. Chris Smith): The domestic tourism working group is one of nine working groups formed from the Tourism Forum that are helping me to devise a comprehensive strategy for tourism. We are looking at how best to make use of their ideas, which will form part of the strategy that we shall publish later this year.

Dr. Ladyman: There are two major seaside towns in my constituency—Broadstairs and Ramsgate. Broadstairs has a well-defined brand image, but needs to build business. Ramsgate needs to go through a more dramatic regeneration. Following the work of the working party, what assistance might those two seaside towns and other similar towns get?

Mr. Smith: We are working with the tourism strategy working group to produce a strategy document on tourism policy in October. We are looking specifically at the particular needs of seaside resorts. The need to boost domestic tourism—encouraging British people to take at least some of their holiday in Britain—must be one of the central features of tourism policy for the coming decade.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley (South-West Surrey): Is it not an insult to the tourism industry that the Secretary of State should make his announcements away from the House, particularly when they herald the abolition of the English tourist board? Surely the domestic tourism working group relies on a strong independent central voice as well as the regional development aspects of the Department, which, as the Secretary of State knows, I have long supported.

The difficulties that I have with my voice this afternoon are a result not of the British hospitality industry, but of the excellence of British dentistry.

Mr. Smith: Coming from a member of the Government that cut so savagely the funding for tourism in this country—

The Minister for Sport (Mr. Tony Banks): And dentistry.

Mr. Smith: I forbore to mention dentistry.

I am afraid that the right hon. Lady's comment is a bit rich. We have ring-fenced the funding to support English tourism. However, we have sensibly asked whether the current structures for delivering that support are the right ones. People across the tourism industry are asking that. It is important that we get the issues right. That is why we are consulting the industry, local authorities and interested people during the next month and a half. We want to get the answers right—the right hon. Lady did not.

Mr. Peter Ainsworth (East Surrey): I congratulate the right hon. Gentleman on hanging on to his job; nobody is more delighted than I that he has done so. May I join those who are asking him to apologise for failing to

explain to the House on Friday the consequences of his meddlesome departmental review? If he feels the need to behave like a control freak, we might at least be told why. Will he admit that, in contrast to the bland reassurances that we have just heard, he sounded on Friday the death knell of the English tourist board, against the interests and wishes of thousands of small businesses?

Mr. Smith: We tabled the written answer at 9 o'clock on Friday morning and provided all relevant documents to the House of Commons Library, as, indeed, would be only right and proper. I am astonished, though, that, after such a major series of announcements on Friday about improvements in the arts, museums, sports and tourism, and a radical change in the way in which we approached those matters, the only point on which the hon. Gentleman and his hon. Friends can fasten is the timing of the announcement. Is it not about time that we had some grown-up opposition?

Mr. Ainsworth: There is plenty in that document to consider and criticise, such as the abandonment of the arm's-length principle and massive Government interference across the board, but let me return to the tourism industry. Is the right hon. Gentleman aware of the speech made by the chairman of the English tourist board only last week, in which he drew attention to the grave concern expressed by the industry about the then rumours that the English tourist board would be abolished? Did not a recent telephone poll by *Travel Weekly*—*[Laughter.]* That laughter from Labour Members shows their extraordinary ignorance. The publication is the leading weekly trade journal of the important tourism industry. The poll revealed 97 per cent. support in the industry for enhancing and strengthening the English tourist board.

Before the Secretary of State sets out on his flight to Tuscany, still heaving sighs of relief, will he please reflect on the fact that he will be returning later in the year to an industry that has had to put up with not only the lousy weather, for which we do not blame the Government—*[Interruption.]* It is tempting to do so, but I shall not. However, we shall blame the Government, as will the tourism industry, for the Chancellor's high tide of the pound. The industry will not forgive the Government for trampling on its hopes and aspirations like small boys on sand castles.

Mr. Smith: What an interesting speech. Perhaps the hon. Gentleman would like to hear what the English tourist board said on Friday. It said:

"The ETB welcomes the DCMS' recognition of its Agenda 2000 consultation in formulating clearer priorities for supporting English tourism."

Just a few weeks ago, the British Hospitality Association said:

"The industry has never received so much interest from Government and we are happy that we have built up a very fruitful relationship".

The chairman of the Tourism Society said:

"It is extremely regrettable that the Select Committee report created such a critical impression when the reality is the opposite".

I prefer to listen to them than the hon. Gentleman any day.

Sports (Disabled People)

9. **Mr. Michael J. Foster** (Worcester): What steps he has taken to encourage the participation in sport of people with disabilities. [50775]

The Minister for Sport (Mr. Tony Banks): The English Sports Council is working with the Government to change the culture and structure of sport to ensure that all sports providers offer a wide range of opportunities to people with disabilities. People with disabilities must be able to choose when and how they wish to participate, and opportunities should be provided for people with disabilities to be consulted, represented and employed at all levels of sport.

Mr. Foster: I thank my hon. Friend for that answer. Will he join me in congratulating the people who work with the many voluntary bodies, such as Worcester disability sports group and Cheslyn Hay Otters, which not only encourage people with disabilities to participate in sport, but help them to achieve and excel in sport?

Mr. Banks: Yes, I am happy to join my hon. Friend in congratulating the disability groups in his constituency. The English Sports Council works through the National Development Agency for Disabled Sports, which serves as a first-stop shop, providing information and advice nationally and regionally. Encouraging excellence for sportsmen and sportswomen with disabilities is a considerable priority for the Government. On Wednesday, I shall be at the launch of the football task force report on disabled access to football grounds and, on Thursday, I shall be in Leicester to open the world cup football championship for those with learning disabilities—if anyone wants to see some excellent football, they should come along. There are some tremendously skilled sportsmen and sportswomen out there; the mere fact that they have disabilities is no bar to their performing at the highest international level.

Mr. Tom Levitt (High Peak): Does my hon. Friend agree that the Disability Rights Commission, which was announced last week, is a major step forward for disabled people in terms of access to sport, as it will guarantee access, not only to employment, but to goods and services? Will he assure the House that his Department will work closely with the commission to ensure that disabled people's rights to access to sport are promoted?

Mr. Banks: Yes.

New National Stadium

10. **Mr. Graham Stringer** (Manchester, Blackley): If he will make a statement on the building of the new national stadium. [50776]

The Minister for Sport (Mr. Tony Banks): I am pleased with the progress to date on the building of a new national stadium, which will be a vital ingredient for a successful world cup bid for 2006 and for a future Olympics. It is still early days but, as all the partners are working productively together, I am confident that they

can meet the objective of developing a new stadium for football, athletics and rugby league in which the nation can take great pride.

Mr. Stringer: I welcome my hon. Friend's reply and agree that first-rate sporting facilities are a prerequisite for bringing the world cup and Olympic games to this country. Does he recall that, when the Sports Council decided that the new national stadium would be a revamped Wembley, it also announced a new stadium for the Commonwealth games in Manchester in 2002. May we look forward to a similar response on progress towards a first-rate stadium in Manchester for those games?

Mr. Banks: My hon. Friend knows that the Government are absolutely committed to ensuring a successful Commonwealth games in Manchester in 2002—there is no equivocation whatever about that. He will also know from his privileged position in Manchester that considerable discussions are continuing on how to deliver those games and a stadium. We must ensure that the Commonwealth games in 2002 are a great success; they are, after all, still one of the greatest sporting events on the planet and they must work as well in this country as I know that they will in Kuala Lumpur later this year.

British Films

11. **Dr. Phyllis Starkey** (Milton Keynes, South-West): How his Department defines a British film for the purposes of funding. [50777]

The Minister for Film and Tourism (Mr. Tom Clarke): The current statutory criteria are set out in schedule 1 to the Films Act 1985. The film policy review group report recommended the redefinition of a qualifying film for tax benefits and also proposed the definition of a culturally British film for monitoring and marketing performance.

Dr. Starkey: As a great fan of cinema, I welcome the increasing emphasis on the film industry as part of cultural industries. As my right hon. Friend is aware, film animation companies, such as Triffic Films in Milton Keynes, play a key role in British film production. Will he assure me that any changes in the definition of British film will enhance the role of film animation?

Mr. Clarke: I am happy to say that the answer is yes. I have had the opportunity to visit the Cardiff international animation festival, and I remind the House that one of the Oscars that we won this year, notwithstanding "Titanic", was for "Geri's Game", which was a great tribute to British animation. My hon. Friend's local animation group, Triffic, is mentioned in the Broadcasting, Entertainment, Cinematograph and Theatre Union's "Animation UK", and she can be absolutely certain that animation is taken as seriously by the Government as it should be.

Healthy Living Centres

12. **Mr. Bill Rammell** (Harlow): If he will make a statement on the Government's strategy for developing healthy living centres. [50778]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Mr. Mark Fisher): The new opportunities fund is now in place and will provide £300 million for the establishment of a network of healthy living centres across the United Kingdom over the next three years. The centres will reduce health inequalities by giving priority to the needs of people in the most deprived areas.

Mr. Rammell: I warmly welcome the Government's initiative, which is a far more beneficial use of lottery funding than, for example, the £13 million that was spent on the Churchill papers under the previous Government. I urge and re-urge my hon. Friend to ensure that the criteria for funding the centres are drawn so as to prioritise areas of high poverty and tackle one of the remaining real inequalities in society: the fact that people from socio-economic groups D and E are three times more likely to suffer from heart disease than those in groups A and B.

Mr. Fisher: As my hon. Friend says, the new opportunities fund will target areas of urban and rural deprivation and the people who suffer worse than average health, and will complement the Government's plans for health action zones.

Mr. Desmond Swayne (New Forest, West): Does the Minister agree that the best way of keeping people from requiring the services of healthy living centres is a regime of healthy exercise? In that respect, the withdrawal of physical education from the core curriculum is a most retrograde step. Will he take that up with the Secretary of State for Education and Employment?

Mr. Fisher: The hon. Gentleman clearly was not listening to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State or to my hon. Friend the Minister for Sport. Physical education has not been withdrawn from the national curriculum.

MINISTER WITHOUT PORTFOLIO (MILLENNIUM EXPERIENCE)

The Minister was asked—

Millennium Dome (Funding)

29. **Mr. Gordon Prentice** (Pendle): What use he makes of lobbying organisations to promote and secure funding for the dome and its contents. [50797]

The Minister without Portfolio (Mr. Peter Mandelson): The New Millennium Experience Company is responsible for promoting and securing sponsorship for the dome's contents. The company has not employed lobbying organisations for that or any other purpose.

Mr. Prentice: I expected a more illuminating reply from a Minister who casts such a long shadow. The right hon. Gentleman, as he will be, told me in a written answer that he never addresses meetings organised by lobbyists, yet *The Independent* on 9 July reported that he would be briefing clients of GPC Market Access: a fact that he confirmed in *The Observer* of 12 July. Why are those

meetings held off the record, under Chatham House rules? What does the Minister say privately that he will not say publicly? Will he invite me along to one of those meetings and, if not, why not?

Mr. Mandelson: In so far as any of that question related to the millennium dome, I can confirm that I neither procure nor negotiate sponsorship for it, and that I certainly do not use the services of any lobbying organisation for that purpose.

Mr. Peter Ainsworth (East Surrey): I congratulate the Minister on his appointment as Secretary of State for Trade and Industry. He knows a great deal about trade, although I am not so sure what he knows about industry; we look forward to finding out.

Will the Minister make clear the difference between private sponsorship that has been indicated and private sponsorship that has been signed up? How much of the £150 million of private sponsorship for the exhibition is the subject of firm legal agreement? Will his new responsibilities mean that he can extract the remaining millions from the private sector without recourse to his cronies in the one industry that he understands really well?

Mr. Mandelson: I am happy to reassure the hon. Gentleman that the company's target for sponsorship from the private sector is bang on schedule. I believe that we have raised more than £100 million, and the target is £150 million by the end of the year. That is not bad going, considering that we started in February and it is only July.

Mr. Robin Corbett (Birmingham, Erdington): May I remind my hon. Friend that I was among those who lobbied hard from Birmingham and the west midlands for the millennium exhibition to be sited more sensibly at the National Exhibition Centre? Having said that, I visited the site in Greenwich with colleagues last week and it is one of the most impressive pieces of engineering that I have seen. I hope that the exhibition will be an enormous success.

Mr. Mandelson: I thank my hon. Friend. Increasingly, as people realise what a feat both the construction and the engineering of the dome are and, shortly, as it fills with its contents, the project will inspire and excite the nation. I am confident in it and, in view of today's developments, it gives me special satisfaction to say that the millennium dome will come to symbolise something bold, self-confident and forward looking about Britain and it will say a great deal for Britain to the rest of the world.

Millennium Dome (HFCs)

30. **Mr. Robert Syms** (Poole): What recent representations he has received on the use of hydrofluorocarbons at the millennium dome. [50798]

The Minister without Portfolio (Mr. Peter Mandelson): I have recently received a number of representations from members of the public, via their Members of Parliament, about the use of HFCs in the air cooling system at the millennium dome.

Mr. Syms: Does not the Minister think that it is a shame that we are using HFCs, which result in global warming, in what should be a major flagship project? Natural alternatives are available, so will he reconsider the decision or leave a note for his successor to do so?

Mr. Mandelson: I am glad to say that I shall be leaving any notes on the dome for myself. The hon. Gentleman should bear in mind the fact that HFC refrigerants are a widely used alternative to the less environmentally friendly chlorofluorocarbons and hydrochlorofluorocarbons—CFCs and HCFCs. I accept that that procurement, with its use of HFC refrigerants, has not met with universal approval, but the company believes that the chiller units selected offer the safest and most flexible solution, given the time and budgetary constraints under which we are operating. The company has set a target that HFC emissions from the units will not exceed 1 per cent., which more than meets the provisions of the voluntary agreement between the Government and the refrigeration industry, which cites emissions of 10 per cent. So, that is pretty good doing for the dome.

Millennium Experience (Corporate Sponsorship)

31. **Mr. John Bercow** (Buckingham): If he will make a statement on progress in attracting corporate sponsorship for the millennium experience. [50799]

The Minister without Portfolio (Mr. Peter Mandelson): The New Millennium Experience Company is to be congratulated on the significant progress that it has made in attracting private sector sponsorship. As I reported to the House earlier, more than £100 million has been secured thus far, including contributions from British Telecom, BSkyB, Manpower, Tesco, Marks and Spencer, British Airways and BAA plc. The company is well on its way to meeting its target of £150 million by the end of the year.

Mr. Bercow: I am grateful to the Minister for that informative answer. Exactly how many of the corporate sponsors of the millennium experience come from the manufacturing sector of industry, for the devastated state of which he has today accepted responsibility?

Mr. Mandelson: For pure brass neck and nerve, that probably takes a large biscuit. The hon. Gentleman will not be disappointed to find leading British manufacturing companies represented in the dome because they are providing considerable sponsorship, as will be reported to the House shortly.

Mr. Peter L. Pike (Burnley): Does my hon. Friend's answer mean that with the corporate sponsorship each zone of the dome will be open exactly as planned and completed in the way predicted a few months ago?

Mr. Mandelson: Yes, not only will the dome be completed on time to a very high quality, but I am glad to say that, following the Prime Minister's visit to the dome for the topping-out ceremony, when he described it as

"too good to pull down",

the Government are inviting expressions of interest in its use after 2000. They will be drawing up the criteria against which bids will be judged. We have in mind three

sets of criteria: financial criteria ensuring that English Partnerships recoups the money spent on clearing up the site; environmental criteria to ensure that any proposal is sympathetic to wider development of the Greenwich peninsula and the Thames gateway; and criteria to ensure that fitting use is made of the dome, given its unique national status. That is a change from the policy of the previous Administration, who intended to pull the dome down a year after building it, but I am sure that the change will be welcomed throughout the House.

Mr. Robert Maclennan (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross): May I, on behalf of my right hon. and hon. Friends, congratulate the Minister on his advancement? I hope that he will be successful in his new role in encouraging sponsorship, not only for the millennium experience, but for the arts and millennium experiences in other parts of the country, as many of the companies that he has said are involved at Greenwich have a presence the length and breadth of Great Britain.

Mr. Mandelson: I am grateful for the comments by the right hon. Gentleman. The millennium dome will feature not only the first-class design for which the United Kingdom is becoming famous, but many of our applied arts, too. The right hon. Gentleman will recall that the millennium celebrations will mean not only the dome and the associated national programme, but a £100 million nationwide sporting, cultural, heritage and artistic festival that will allow the entire country to have an excellent year-long new year's eve party.

CHURCH COMMISSIONERS

The hon. Member for Middlesbrough, representing the Church Commissioners, was asked—

1997 Report and Accounts

39. **Sir Sydney Chapman** (Chipping Barnet): What representations the Church Commissioners have received following the publication of their 1997 report and accounts. [50807]

Mr. Stuart Bell (Second Church Estates Commissioner, representing the Church Commissioners): As I am a modest hon. Member, let me say that the Church Commissioners have received praise for their performance, and support for their investment strategy. In 1997, the value of assets increased by £505 million to £3.48 billion. The performance of the stock exchange and property portfolios has been independently measured as better than the performance of 99 per cent. of other funds.

Sir Sydney Chapman: I welcome the return on assets achieved by the commissioners in 1997, which was in the order of 20.8 per cent., following an increase of nearly 18 per cent. in 1996. Will the commissioner assure us that the increase in assets will be used to benefit parishes directly, particularly the most needy ones?

Mr. Bell: Yes. The increased value of the assets will enable us to continue to work with parishes to ensure stable and sustainable financial support for the Church into the next millennium. As the hon. Gentleman has said, the value of assets has grown strongly in recent years, and that follows a change in investment policy away from a high-yielding, low-growth mix of assets to a fund based-more on stock exchange investments, which offer higher growth prospects in the longer term.

Mr. Lindsay Hoyle (Chorley): Following that question, will my hon. Friend comment on that proof of good Government practice, which shows that returns will come from a popular Labour Government delivering their commitments, and on how companies can deliver resources on the Church's behalf?

Madam Speaker: Order. That is not at all related to the question.

Ethical Investment Policy

40. **Mr. Ben Bradshaw** (Exeter): What steps the Church Commissioners have taken to communicate their ethical investment policy to the wider Church. [50808]

Mr. Stuart Bell (Second Church Estates Commissioner, representing the Church Commissioners): The Church of England's ethical investment working group, which co-ordinates that work, makes an annual report of its activities to the Synod. I recently attended an excellent meeting at York at which the group's work was discussed with a regular to and fro between the commissioners and Church people.

Mr. Bradshaw: Does my hon. Friend agree that his job in getting the message of ethical investment over would be made much easier if the bishops gathered at Lambeth spent more time discussing ethics and less indulging in their apparent obsession with what consenting Anglicans do in the privacy of their bedrooms?

Mr. Bell: On the first part of that question, ethical policy in the wider Church is not likely to be debated at the Lambeth conference, but my hon. Friend will be pleased to learn that there will be a debate on third world debt. The resolutions will be debated next week and will be concluded in the final week of the conference.

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark, North and Bermondsey): As well as communicating their ethical investment policy to the Church, could the Church Commissioners do more to ensure that policy reflects the views of members of the Church? Will the hon. Gentleman ensure that there is full consultation with the ordinary people in the pew before the commissioners make their ethical investment decisions?

Mr. Bell: Yes. There is a full consultation procedure. Our ethical investment working group is always looking at positive criteria. We examine every company portfolio in which we invest and take that back to the Church through the Synod. Not only was there a fringe meeting on ethical investment policy at the Synod, but we made a report to the Synod through the First Estates Commissioner. The debate is on-going, but we always welcome the hon. Gentleman's comments and those of others in this field.

Mr. Michael Jabez Foster (Hastings and Rye): What plans do the Church Commissioners have, in respect of

investing in their core business, for celebrating the 2000th anniversary of the birth of the Church's founder? Is there any possibility of investment in the millennium dome?

Mr. Bell: I am always grateful for suggestions on how best we should spend our money. Investment in the dome lies outside the responsibilities of the Second Church Estates Commissioner, but in a personal capacity I have worked with others to ensure that the spirit zone will be a success, be properly financed and built, and reflect our Christian heritage.

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS COMMISSION

The Chairman of the Public Accounts Commission was asked—

Housing Associations

42. **Mr. David Heath** (Somerton and Frome): What recent discussions he has had with the Chancellor of the Exchequer on the resourcing implications of extending the role of the National Audit Office in respect of housing associations. [50810]

Mr. Robert Sheldon (Chairman of the Public Accounts Commission): I last met the Chancellor of the Exchequer on 26 March, accompanied by the Chairman of the Public Accounts Committee. Among other matters, we discussed the case for the Comptroller and Auditor General having a guaranteed right of access to all voluntary housing bodies, which are in receipt of central Government grants totalling £1.2 billion a year. As I have said to the hon. Gentleman and the House before, I believe that the absence of such rights of access represents a serious gap in accountability for public funds. The resource implications of a guaranteed right of access to the voluntary housing sector would depend on the frequency and extent to which such rights were exercised. It would be for Parliament to decide what additional resources to provide to meet the needs identified by the Comptroller and Auditor General.

Mr. Heath: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman, with whom I have been conducting a lonely dialogue on this subject for some months, occasionally joined by the Chairman of the Public Accounts Committee. Will he scour the ranks of the newly announced Government to find someone who will take the matter seriously and change the system so that we have proper accountability across the whole public sector?

Mr. Sheldon: The hon. Gentleman is right. It is a major scandal that the European Court of Auditors can find out where this £1.2 billion of public money is spent when the Comptroller and Auditor General, acting on behalf of the House, cannot. This is a major gap and he is right to keep raising the matter.

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): I have great faith in my right hon. Friend's ability to get this matter examined seriously. While he is about it, will he look at the interrelationship between the National Audit Office and the auditing system for some nationalised industries? It is clear that with the growth of independent agencies, some parts of the Government system are not making clear to Parliament exactly how they spend their money. That is a worrying gap.

Mr. Sheldon: My hon. Friend is right. I have campaigned for many years to try to give the Comptroller and Auditor General access to the nationalised industries in the same way that he should have access to the Housing Corporation. My hon. Friend is right to pursue this subject, and I hope that she continues to pursue it.

CHURCH COMMISSIONERS

The hon. Member for Middlesbrough, representing the Church Commissioners, was asked—

Asset Allocations

43. **Mr. Peter L. Pike** (Burnley): If he will make a statement on the Church Commissioners' strategy for the allocation of their assets. [50811]

Mr. Stuart Bell (Second Church Estates Commissioner, representing the Church Commissioners): During 1997, the Church Commissioners conducted a comprehensive review of their investment and asset allocation strategy, which aims to provide long-term, stable support for the Church's ministry. As a result, they are rebalancing their assets in favour of securities, primarily UK equities, while reducing their property exposure.

Mr. Pike: Given the recent turbulence in the overseas equity market, will my hon. Friend explain why the Church Commissioners are increasing their investment in equities at present?

Mr. Bell: There has been volatility in the far east equity markets, and I have said that the global economy has a thatched roof and there is a fire in that thatched roof in the far east. The commissioners were fortunate in that their exposure was relatively low in that area. Having studied independent research, they believe that UK equities provide the best long-term match with their expenditure commitments, and they intend to retain them as a cornerstone of their fund, whatever the short-term fluctuations in the market, to increase their assets from 50 to 65 per cent. of those assets.

Legg Inquiry

3.30 pm

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Robin Cook): With permission, I wish to make a statement on the Legg report.

When I appointed Sir Thomas Legg and Sir Robin Ibbs to conduct their inquiry, I asked them to complete their work before the House rose for the recess in order that I might report it to the House. I am publishing their report today, on the first sitting day after I received it.

The inquiry interviewed seven Ministers and 49 officials. Sir Thomas Legg and Sir Robin Ibbs had access to all the relevant official papers. A member of their team conducted a random search of the files at the Foreign Office and found no document of any relevance to the inquiry which had not already been disclosed.

One of the first findings of the report is that Sandline International and its arms played little or no part in the removal of the junta from Sierra Leone. It is therefore not surprising that the citizens of Sierra Leone cannot comprehend why anyone looks for evidence of a political scandal in the restoration of a civilian Government, in place of a brutal and savage military regime.

Nor have Sir Thomas Legg and Sir Robin Ibbs uncovered any political scandal, after a lengthy inquiry and a search through all the files. Their key findings, in their own words, are that

"No Minister gave encouragement or approval to Sandline's plan to send a shipment of arms into Sierra Leone."

Officials of the African department

"neither encouraged nor approved the Sandline contract".

The report concludes:

"at no time did they advocate or authorise actions in breach of the law."

Sir Thomas Legg and Sir Robin Ibbs find no fault with the conduct of the military liaison officers. In the matter of the much publicised repair to the Sandline helicopter by the crew of HMS Cornwall, the report finds that their action

"was not improper and was sensible in the circumstances",

in that

"it helped HMS Cornwall to carry out its humanitarian mission".

The briefings that Ministers received for the debates on 10 and 12 March were "deficient" and did not provide them with the briefing that they should have received on the referral of the allegations of a breach of the arms embargo.

In sum, after an exhaustive trawl of the files and more than 60 hearings of witnesses, the Legg inquiry has concluded that there was no policy by Ministers to breach the arms embargo, and there was no conspiracy among officials to undermine Government policy.

As the Legg report finds, there were a number of misjudgments by officials, largely due to overload. I have therefore asked the permanent secretary to interview each of the relevant officials and to counsel them on the basis of the findings concerning them—*[Interruption.]* This is a matter of supreme importance to the careers of a large number of officials. It does no credit to those officials to treat it as a matter of levity. Hon. Members may wish to hear that the Legg report notes:

"the officials concerned were working hard and conscientiously and should not be judged too harshly".

I therefore see no case for any further action against officials.

Mr. Penfold, the high commissioner to Sierra Leone, showed great courage and a commitment to staying at his post during the military coup last year. As a result of his consistent support to President Kabbah, he has won high standing for Britain in the country where he represents Britain. However, the Legg report details a number of criticisms of Mr. Penfold. Mr. Penfold should have taken steps to inform himself more fully about the scope of the arms embargo. He showed a lack of caution in his dealings with Colonel Spicer and to that extent gave Sandline a degree of approval for which he had no authority. He should have made more efforts to ensure that the African department had a proper record of his conversations with President Kabbah and Colonel Spicer. I have asked the permanent secretary to write to him drawing his attention to the relevant findings of the Legg report, but in the circumstances I do not think it would be justified, or in the diplomatic interest, to take any further proceedings against him.

Sir Thomas Legg and Sir Robin Ibbs state that they hope that the report will help the Foreign Office to close the chapter for officials. I agree with them. There will be no scapegoats, and this should be the end of the matter as far as individual officials are concerned. However, for the Foreign Office as an institution, the Legg report must provide the opening of a new chapter.

As Foreign Secretary, I am responsible for the Department and I am determined that we should find out why mistakes were made and make sure that they cannot happen again. The Legg report concludes that most of the trouble originated from systemic and cultural factors. I am therefore today announcing a sweeping programme of changes to address those institutional problems.

During the period covered by the inquiry, from October last year, the managerial structures of the Foreign Office remained exactly as we inherited them in May last year. The departmental hierarchies were the same. The working practices were the same. The procedures for the handling of intelligence were the same. The time has come to change them. The final chapter of the Legg report helpfully details the lessons that must be applied in the future management of the Foreign Office. I am pleased to tell the House that we accept every one of the recommendations in the report.

The Legg report finds that there was not "a sufficiently high priority" for the enforcement of sanctions. There was a dedicated sanctions enforcement desk in the Foreign Office, but the previous Government abolished it in 1996. I can tell the House that I have instructed that such a central unit shall be restored. It will be led by an official whose sole function is to make sure that the enforcement of sanctions receives the full priority that it deserves.

The Legg report expresses concern at the handling of defence intelligence reports when they arrive in the Foreign Office. It is not acceptable that even one such report should have been destroyed before being seen by the relevant official. I have therefore strengthened the

procedures to ensure that all such reports are properly logged and that there are clear instructions for their distribution.

The Legg report concludes that there should be

"more explicit guidance on how to manage relations"

with private military companies. I have issued guidance that there should be no Foreign Office contact with private military firms without permission, and that where such meetings do take place they should recorded in a full, written report.

The Legg report found that

"the demands on some Foreign Office officials meant that they had to work at or beyond the limits of their capacity",

and that

"this was a contributory cause of what went wrong".

During the previous Parliament, my two predecessors at the Foreign Office accepted cuts in their budget of 14 per cent. During the period in office of the previous Prime Minister, the number of staff of desk officer grade in London fell by a quarter. Conservative Members have become fond of describing the Foreign Office as a Rolls-Royce. It is a pity that they tried to run it on two-star petrol.

Only one decade ago, there were 430 staff in the African command. Now there are 328—a loss of about 100 posts. That sharp reduction of staff at the time of an increase in crises in Africa was part of the reason why mistakes were made by staff under impossible pressure. The recent spending review provides the first real increase in the Foreign Office budget for half a dozen years. I have given instructions that part of that increase must be used to strengthen the number of staff on the hard-pressed desks dealing with west Africa and Sierra Leone.

The last lesson of the Legg report is that—*[Interruption.]* It would have been welcome if hon. Members now chattering had taken some of those actions during the 18 years in which they were in office. After those 18 years, the Legg report finds that there is room for improvement in modern management at the Foreign Office and for fewer layers in the hierarchy. The Foreign Office attracts many of the brightest and most energetic recruits to Whitehall. They deserve a management structure that makes full use of their energy and enables them to rise on merit.

I can announce today that we have agreed on a programme of 60 different measures to improve the management of the Foreign Office. We shall recruit professional managers to specialist posts such as administration, personnel and resources to bring to the Foreign Office modern management methods. We shall increase temporary exchanges to and from the private sector, non-governmental organisations and the academic world, to bring the Foreign Office up to date with working practices and policy thinking in the outside world.

We shall introduce assessment centres to evaluate staff performance to make sure that promotion is made on merit. We shall reduce the hierarchy in the Foreign Office to enable officials to take more responsibility sooner. We shall improve the gender and ethnic balance throughout the Foreign Office—*[Interruption.]* Hon. Members will observe that Opposition Members do not want a Foreign Office that is representative of all the strengths of modern Britain.

In developing this programme, we have drawn on proposals for change from younger officials. I want them also—not only senior management—to have ownership of this project. I shall therefore invite a number of younger officials to form a working group to monitor progress and come up with fresh ideas.

I have addressed those parts of the Legg report that demolish the fantasy of a ministerial or official conspiracy. Before concluding, I want to address the reality of what has happened in Sierra Leone.

Britain was first on the scene with humanitarian aid after the restoration of President Kabbah. Since the last debate in the House, we have provided police officers to help train a new civilian police force, sponsored the United Nations resolution to provide military observers and provided staff to be those military observers. We are providing aid to fund the process of civil reconstruction and military demobilisation.

Britain is, to date, the only donor to the UN trust fund for Sierra Leone. On Wednesday, the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the hon. Member for Manchester, Central (Mr. Lloyd), will attend a donors' conference in New York and will urge others in the international community to join us in helping to fund democracy in Sierra Leone.

I have been challenged to produce the report by my hon. Friend the Minister of State after his visit to Sierra Leone in March. I have no difficulty in sharing with the House his key conclusion:

"It would be hard to find anywhere on the planet at the moment where there is more enthusiasm for Britain. Our moral, financial and practical support really is welcomed and appreciated."

That is the reality of Britain's standing in Sierra Leone among the people who know at first hand about our dealings with their country.

I therefore welcome the findings of the Legg inquiry. I shall implement all its recommendations, which will help to give Britain a modern Foreign Office. Now that the report has been published, it is time that the right hon. and learned Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Mr. Howard) started to recognise the immense good will for Britain that we have secured in Sierra Leone and tried to understand that that represents a success, not a failure of foreign policy.

Mr. Michael Howard (Folkestone and Hythe): I am grateful to the Foreign Secretary for the access to the report that he gave me this morning, and for the slightly less generous access that he gave me to the statement that he has just made.

This report, although no one would ever have guessed it from the complacency of the Foreign Secretary's statement, discloses a dire state of affairs in one of our great Departments of State. It is severely critical both of Ministers and of officials, and Ministers directly bear responsibility for the most serious failures.

When the Foreign Secretary first came to the House to deal with this matter in response to my private notice question on 6 May, he said that it was a serious matter that should be treated "with great gravity". When Sir Richard Wilson, the Cabinet Secretary, was first fully briefed on the matter, he minuted:

"This could be very serious."

[Mr. Michael Howard]

Both he and the Foreign Secretary were right, as is made clear by the report. Their attitude is in sharp contrast with that of the Prime Minister, who described it all as "overblown hoo-hah".

The inquiry that led to this report was not the inquiry that we asked for. It should have been held in public. If the Foreign Secretary had meant what he said about the need for an open investigation, it would have been held in public. The notes of evidence taken by the inquiry have not been published. Will the Foreign Secretary now undertake to publish them in the interests of open government, so that everyone can reach his own judgment, and will he publish the documents that are listed in the appendices to the report?

The picture painted by this report is of a Foreign Office in shambles. We already knew that Ministers contradicted each other and themselves, that officials contradicted Ministers and themselves and that telegrams were lost and faxes destroyed, but the detailed evidence in the report is almost beyond belief. Letters from the high commissioner go missing, reports from the military liaison officer in Sierra Leone are destroyed, officials are asked to attend meetings to take a note because they

"should be on their guard",

but no note is taken.

In all, the report contains an amazing 30 specific criticisms of the Foreign Office. It attributes those failures to what it describes as "systemic and cultural factors". We do not have to look very far to identify the source of those factors. In a television programme entitled "How To Be Foreign Secretary", the Foreign Secretary made the following boast:

"I have found that you can be a successful Foreign Secretary if you focus on the big questions and not necessarily finish the paperwork."

If officials know that the Foreign Secretary is not going to finish the paperwork, what incentive do they have to take care of it? The Foreign Secretary has told us about all the things that he intends to do to sort out the Foreign Office. Does he not accept that the cultural factors that are referred to in the report are a direct result of his own attitude and of the approach that he boasts that he takes?

The report is not exhaustive. It does not, for example, comment explicitly on the protestations of the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, who has responsibility for Africa, the hon. Member for Manchester, Central (Mr. Lloyd), and of the Foreign Secretary on his behalf that the Minister of State saw papers merely for noting in mid-April and was not fully informed of the allegations made by Sandline until 1 May; but is it not crystal clear from paragraphs 9.50 to 9.56 of the report that the Minister of State knew all the essentials of those allegations in mid-April, considered them in detail and did nothing?

The Foreign Secretary told the House that those papers gave rise to

"no ground for apprehension or concern".—[*Official Report*, 12 May 1998; Vol. 312, c. 160.]

The report describes those same papers as "sensitive and potentially troublesome". Given the complete inconsistency between the account of events in the report and the account given to the House and its Select Committee by the Foreign Secretary and the Minister of State, does the Foreign Secretary now accept that his earlier account was completely inaccurate, and will he now withdraw it?

Most damning of all, the report explains very clearly what in essence went wrong and why. The Foreign Secretary said that the report failed to uncover any political scandal. That is characteristic of the right hon. Gentleman's culture of complacency. In fact, the report concludes that the Foreign Office should have explained both the arms embargo imposed by the United Nations resolution and the Order in Council more widely and effectively. The report states that their failure to do so created a hazard for all who were affected. The nature of that hazard is clear: it is that British citizens might commit a criminal offence under the Order in Council and risk imprisonment for seven years in consequence.

The cause of the failure to explain the arms embargo more effectively is equally clear. Devastatingly, the report concludes that, although the British framers of the United Nations resolution that imposed the arms embargo on Sierra Leone intended that embargo to be comprehensive in its coverage and had no doubt that it was, British officials and Ministers—and Ministers—played the report down, not accidentally but deliberately. That is the report's finding, and the reason, at least in part, was that Ministers knew that there were those on the ground in west Africa who, in the words of the report, explicitly contemplated the use of force. Paragraph 3.29 of the report states:

"Government has a responsibility to give citizens, and its own officials, reasonable publicity and explanation of the laws it makes under delegated powers, especially laws creating criminal offences."

That was not done in this case. Given that failure and the report's finding that it was the result of a deliberate attempt by Ministers to deceive, how can the Foreign Secretary remain in office?

Mr. Cook: I have to report to the House that the right hon. and learned Member for Folkestone and Hythe had six hours in which to prepare that response, in the course of which he could find only five questions. That is despite the fact that his six hours to study one volume was twice as long as the time that I had to study the five volumes of the Scott inquiry. I am bound to say that I came back with more than five questions.

The right hon. and learned Gentleman's reading of the report does not seem to have been complete. He quoted paragraph 9.55 as showing that my hon. Friend the Minister of State did not closely consider the documents that were given to him because, as it stated in the paragraph "their allegations were sensitive"—*[Interruption.]* That is what the right hon. and learned Gentleman said. He read that paragraph. I shall read to the House the rest of the paragraph. It states that the documents:

"were also misleading, since they appeared to be saying that the FCO had no prior knowledge of any shipment of arms. In the absence of reference to the full facts . . . they were substantially incomplete."

My hon. Friend the Minister of State was entirely justified in coming to the conclusion that he reached in mid-April.

The right hon. and learned Member for Folkestone and Hythe says that the report is severely critical of Ministers. He has the opportunity to speak again at the end of this exchange. I challenge him to find one single paragraph in

the hundred-odd pages of the report which is severely critical of Ministers. Of course he complained that this was not a public inquiry, but a private, independent inquiry not held in public. That is a bit rich from a right hon. and learned Member who as Home Secretary never once ordered a public inquiry into the 17 times that he lost cases in the courts. For that matter, he never once ordered an independent Legg-type inquiry either. In reality, he wanted a public inquiry because it would have taken another two years to finish, in the course of which he could have gone around every studio peddling his conspiracy theories without their being knocked on the head as they have been today.

Having found nothing of substance in the report, the right hon. and learned Gentleman fell back on the device of playing the man rather than playing the ball. His attacks on me would be offensive if his own record did not make them comic. After all, he was the Home Secretary who explained that he was not responsible when the IRA escaped from prisons, because that was an operational matter. He was responsible for the policy, which was to keep them inside.

I am glad to have the right hon. and learned Gentleman as a partner and I am glad that events today have confirmed that we will be together for another year. He is very helpful to me. However, in fairness to everybody else, it is time that he started to show some interest in serious foreign policy questions, instead of making mountains out of molehills, as he has done on this issue.

Mr. Donald Anderson (Swansea, East): I thank my right hon. Friend for allowing me to see the Legg report in advance, which I commend to other Ministers as an excellent precedent in dealing with Chairmen of Select Committees. Having read the report over some seven hours this morning, I do not recognise the description given by the right hon. and learned Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Mr. Howard).

Is not the clear message in the report that no Minister encouraged, approved or had knowledge of the sale of arms to Sierra Leone? Although the misunderstandings, accidents and human failings which are detailed clearly in the report need to be seriously addressed, they give no support to those who have consistently tried to pillory Ministers to go for the men and the women and not for the ball, and who tried, unavailingly, to dress up the matter as though it were an arms to Iraq scandal.

Mr. Cook: I am grateful to my hon. Friend both for his statement and for his thanks to me for making the report available to him six hours before this statement. He has plainly considered the report with his usual close attention and diligence. I confirm that he has come to the absolutely correct conclusion—*[Interruption.]*—as will every other hon. Member who bothers to read his way through the report.

The report makes it clear that there was no ministerial approval, encouragement or prior knowledge of the Sandline contract. I look forward to my exchange tomorrow with the Select Committee on Foreign Affairs, when I will be able to demonstrate that to all its members.

Mr. Menzies Campbell (North-East Fife): Notwithstanding the constrained language of the report and the Foreign Secretary's characteristic and robust defence, is not the truth that the report reveals an embarrassing catalogue of error and inadequate management, which has no doubt substantially dented the Foreign Office's reputation for effortless superiority?

As the report finds that senior officials in the Foreign Office did not give sanctions enforcement a sufficiently high priority, whose was the responsibility for that? As the report finds that Mr. Penfold acted without authority in some matters and showed a lack of caution in others, whose was the responsibility for that? Who was directing his actions in an area of foreign policy of obvious importance to the Government? Where is the evidence of the ministerial scrutiny which the House was entitled to expect?

Why did the Minister of State persist in giving the impression in the House and elsewhere that the arms embargo was confined to the military junta which had seized power, when it clearly applied to any transfer of arms to anyone in Sierra Leone, as the report has found? If, as the report concludes, misunderstanding of the arms embargo was a significant part of the problem, did not the Minister of State contribute to that misunderstanding?

The Foreign Secretary has made substantial proposals for the restructuring of the Department, but the House would be interested to know what lessons Ministers intend to learn from these matters.

Mr. Cook: I can respond straight away to the hon. and learned Gentleman's last point. We have already issued guidance on the briefing for Ministers, in particular that there should be a clear and highly prominent display of those points that are likely to be sensitive in Parliament and among the public.

To pick up one of the wider points made in the Legg report, it highlights that there has been a lack of sensitivity in the handling of a matter that might be of concern to Parliament and the public. That is why I believe that it is important to press ahead with the commitments that I have given the House to increase exchanges to and from the Foreign Office with the outside world, in order to break down what is possibly too closed a culture within the Foreign Office.

The hon. and learned Gentleman asked about contact and control of the high commissioner to Sierra Leone. In fairness to both sides, it should be borne in mind that he was operating in unique circumstances. He was in an hotel in a country where there was no British mission, and where there was therefore no opportunity for secure communication.

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): That is not true.

Mr. Cook: As a matter of fact, it is true The high commissioner was in an hotel in Conakry, where we have no British mission. Therefore, any secure communication he made had to go via either Germany or Nigeria. In those circumstances, the breakdown in communication is understandable, but it should not have happened.

I should like to pick up the hon. and learned Gentleman's opening remark. There are lessons in the matter for Foreign Office management, and I have outlined to the House how I intend to act on them. I hope that I will be able to work with the Select Committee in seeing through those changes and in discussing how we

[Mr. Cook]

shall apply them. However, I tell both him and the House that, going into that programme of changes, it will not help us to encourage anyone to believe that there is effortless superiority on the part of anyone. It is important that we frankly examine the things that went wrong, work out why they went wrong, learn from those mistakes and show the humility—all within the Foreign Office—to apply the lessons of those mistakes.

Mr. Andrew Mackinlay (Thurrock): Will the Foreign Secretary reflect on the fact that many people are uncomfortable about firms such as Sandline being able to continue operating from the United Kingdom? I wonder whether Ministers will examine the efficacy of such military outfits working from here, and consider whether, as a matter of principle, they should be regulated or banned from operating in the United Kingdom.

We are overstretched not only in Africa but, for example, in the Caspian region and in the former Soviet Union's Asian republics. As a crisis comparable with that in Sierra Leone could occur in other dangerous spots in the world, is there not serious overstretch which has to be dealt with urgently? The Foreign Secretary has already given the example of Conakry, which has no United Kingdom representation. Does not our level of representation stand in stark contrast to that of the Federal Republic of Germany, which has many more diplomatic missions—diplomats and trade officials—around the world, yet does not have the legacy of modern empire and obligations, as we do? Is it not time that we substantially increased both the number of countries in which we are represented and the number of diplomats representing us there?

Mr. Cook: First—in response to my hon. Friend's question about military firms—the Government will continue to keep the matter under review. I am interested in the regulations for such firms that South Africa has introduced. However, I should tell him that the immediate first step is the one that we were right to have taken: to ensure that any Foreign Office contact with such firms occurs only with permission and with a full report on a written record. That arrangement is now in place and should prevent a recurrence of some of the difficulties that arose from incautious contacts with Sandline over this year.

My hon. Friend made a perfectly reasonable point on overstretch. All the countries in the Caspian basin region became independent new countries at the very time when the previous Government were cutting the Foreign Office budget and there were no spare resources to be redeployed. Consequently, we have 13 diplomats in total among five countries there, compared with more than 80 diplomats from Germany. That is the current situation in a region that will very shortly be producing 10 per cent. of the world's oil production—which is why it is so important that we ensure that we have a more adequate diplomatic representation. I can tell my hon. Friend that one of the priority areas where we will be spending our extra resources will be the Caspian region.

Mr. David Wilshire (Spelthorne): As a member of the Foreign Affairs Select Committee, my main concern is to know whether the Foreign Secretary has no shame. Does he have no embarrassment at blaming a shortage of officials for his Ministers' failure to read and act on their papers? Does he have absolutely no embarrassment at dumping almost all the blame on Peter Penfold and accepting absolutely none himself? Does he have no embarrassment at publishing the findings of the Legg inquiry while refusing to publish the evidence?

Mr. Cook: It is not I but the Legg report that is pointing out that many of the mistakes that occurred had, as a contributory cause, the fact that, to use the Legg report's words, officials in the Foreign Office had

"to work at or beyond the limits of their capacity."

It was the Government whom the hon. Gentleman supported who left us with a Foreign Office in which those officials faced that impossible overload. The hon. Gentleman asks about shame; I am inclined to ask him whether the previous Government have no shame about putting officials in the position of having far too heavy a work load to discharge.

I would perfectly happily accept any criticisms of myself in the report, but there are none. There are some criticisms of Peter Penfold, but I thought that I put them perfectly in perspective to the House. He is a high commissioner who has served Britain well, and I have no intention of taking further formal disciplinary proceedings against him. As I said, there will be no scapegoats. The important thing is that, as an institution, we learn the lessons and make the necessary changes.

Mr. Ernie Ross (Dundee, West): Does my right hon. Friend agree that the publication of the Legg report has exposed the cynical attempt by Members on the Opposition Front Bench and some members of the Foreign Affairs Select Committee to create something of substance out of something that simply did not exist? The previous Government are responsible for the cuts in budget, staff and the enforcement desk. Instead of allowing the Select Committee to get on with its real work, the Opposition have tried to use it to concoct a conspiracy. Should not those who continually call for the resignation of my hon. Friend the Minister of State start apologising to the House?

Mr. Cook: My hon. Friend the Member for Dundee, West makes his own points in his own way, and it is unnecessary for me to add to them. However, as he refers to the Select Committee, of which he is a member, I should like to say that I hope that the publication of the report will enable us to close a chapter in the relationship between the Foreign Office and the Select Committee. Having gone through the report, I do not believe that there is any further fact left to be chased about what happened. Where I would welcome a constructive engagement with the Select Committee is in making sure that the Foreign Office and I are harried, pursued and kept up to scratch in putting in place the programme of reform that I have announced today.

Sir Raymond Whitney (Wycombe): The Foreign Secretary has told the House that the Legg report confirms that the Minister of State and the Under-Secretary of State were briefed on 10 and 12 March. Does that not call into question some of the subsequent ministerial statements? What were the alleged deficiencies in those briefings on 10 and 12 March? Finally, will the reforms to the Foreign

Office procedures, which the Foreign Secretary has announced today, include an improvement of the procedure whereby the Foreign Secretary signs important authorisations submitted to him by the Director General of GCHQ, so that in future the Foreign Secretary will not incur the wrath of or any rebuke from the security controller?

Mr. Cook: I did indeed say that Ministers were briefed for the debates on 10 and 12 March—it would have been quite extraordinary if they had not been briefed. However, I also told the House that they were not briefed that allegations of a breach of the arms embargo had been passed to Customs and Excise. For the record, the report says that the briefing in relation to Baroness Symons was "inaccurate, incoherent and indigestible".

The hon. Gentleman went on to refer to the question of the signing of warrants. I concede straight away that there was an error at the end of last year, when the wrong form was attached to a submission for a warrant submitted to me. I read the submission and signed the form, unaware that it was the wrong form. I apologise to the House for that error. As the commissioner very fairly acknowledged, I have put in place procedures to make sure that that can never happen again.

The experience has prompted me to read the back numbers of the reports of commissioners. I discovered that in the last three years of the previous Government, there was not one error, not three errors, but 33 errors, including one when the Secretary of State dated the warrant but failed to sign it. I have apologised to the House for that one error. I hope that the Conservatives will apologise for their 33 errors.

Mr. Ted Rowlands (Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney): In the spirit that my right hon. Friend suggests of constructive thoughts as to the future management structure of the Foreign Office, I recall there being a hierarchical, centralised decision-making system. The report describes an alternative structure of autonomous commands, and it seems most extraordinary that information did not come out of the Department, even to senior officials, let alone Ministers. Does that not leave room for thought and reconsideration in the light of the findings of the report?

Mr. Cook: My hon. Friend is absolutely right about one of the key findings of the report—the need to improve communications within the Foreign Office, part of which may be to do with the hierarchy within the Foreign Office. I am anxious that we should consider that very carefully, because I want to minimise the number of steps through which any piece of information must go before it reaches the effective level. I can assure my hon. Friend that I will be pursuing that, I hope in co-operation with the Select Committee.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley (South-West Surrey): Not being a member of the press, who as ever have had days and waves of spin and information, and not being Chairman of the Select Committee, I have only the Secretary of State's statement. It seemed to be a breathless account of shameless complacency and buck passing by a Foreign Secretary who invested unprecedented amounts in promoting his ethical foreign policy and launching his mission statement—a coffee-table book on human rights, with more photographs than text, including one of himself shaking hands with President Suharto of Indonesia. Does he now think that all that effort on videos, coffee-table books, spin and hype could have been better spent in ensuring that his Department was running better? Is this not another example of the total preoccupation with style over substance that characterises the Government?

Mr. Cook: If I recall rightly, the launch of the mission statement last May cost exactly £6,000. The right hon. Lady's point entirely overlooks everything that I have said about modern management methods and about the fact that no private sector organisation approaching anything like the scale of the Foreign Office would not have a clear, agreed mission statement from the top.

As for publishing a human rights report, that was one of our manifesto commitments. It may surprise the right hon. Lady to hear this, but we believe that it is a priority to carry out our manifesto commitments. The cost of publishing that report was well below the travel budget of the Select Committee in investigating it.

Ms Diane Abbott (Hackney, North and Stoke Newington): I welcome my right hon. Friend's statement this afternoon, although it is surprising, if the Legg report found nothing seriously wrong, that it should be the occasion of no fewer than 60 changes to the management of the Foreign Office. Does he agree that one matter of particular interest to those outside the House who have a real interest in Africa is the increased scrutiny and control of officials' relationships with mercenaries? Mercenary forces have played a particularly malign role in the history of Africa post-independence. I hope that, arising from the Legg report, there will be more and better scrutiny of how officials relate to mercenaries.

Mr. Cook: I can give my hon. Friend a categorical assurance that I do not expect any official ever again to meet a private military firm without first seeking senior permission—and I will wish to know whenever such a permission is given—and without submitting a full written record. I am confident that those rules will make sure that we will not end up once again in the position when, quite frankly, officials were taken advantage of.

Sir John Stanley (Tonbridge and Malling): The right hon. Gentleman referred to criticisms in the Legg report of the high commissioner apparently failing to inform himself sufficiently of the ambit of the UK sanctions order in relation to Sierra Leone. Does he agree that it would have been fairer to the high commissioner had he not also made it clear that his Department had failed to convey to the high commissioner the complete terms of the UK sanctions order?

Mr. Cook: As I said to the House, there were misjudgments by officials in the African department and that is why they will be interviewed by the permanent secretary. One example was the failure to make sure that the information was properly available to the high commissioner. However, the terms of the resolution are routinely circulated to all posts. In this case, it is likely that there was a problem because of the unique circumstances in which our high commissioner to Sierra Leone was operating—he was not in the post at the time. There is a reason why information did not reach him.

[Mr. Cook]

However, having considered the matter carefully, the Legg inquiry believed that there was fault on both sides. He should have been informed, but he should also have taken more trouble to make sure that he was informed.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): Is my right hon. Friend aware that, of all the statements that I have heard in the House about arms sanctions busting, this is the only case in which the end result was the restoration of a democratic Government, not keeping in power tyrannies that we have condemned many times. I do not condone mercenaries in any way—as my right hon. Friend said, Sandline's position was clearly much exaggerated—and I recognise the United Nations Security Council resolution, but is not this country's popularity in Sierra Leone based on the fact that we were associated with the democratic forces, not with those who overthrew a democratically elected Government?

Mr. Cook: President Kabbah—there could be no greater authority on the issue—has written at length to express his appreciation of the moral support, financial support and advice that he received from Britain during his period in exile. Throughout that exile, we were a close friend of President Kabbah and the legitimate Government of Sierra Leone. We pursued that friendship in the United Nations, the Commonwealth and Conakry, where he was in exile. Now that he has been restored, Britain is foremost in leading the international effort to achieve civil reconstruction and an end to the fighting. We can all take some satisfaction from Britain's positive record in Sierra Leone. Now that the Legg inquiry's report has been published, I hope that that can be seen.

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip–Northwood): Would not the Foreign Secretary's statement have carried more authority if, instead of reciting the mantra about "systemic and cultural" deficiencies in his Department, he had outlined some of the specific examples of mismanagement by Foreign Office officials? Would we not have more confidence that things were going to get better in his Department if he were to say how, for example, the recruitment of more ethnic or female members of staff would have helped the resolution of the crisis, or why, given that Sandline personnel were instrumental in the efficacious distribution of food aid, he is so ready to apportion blame to specialist personnel on whose services Her Majesty's Government clearly had cause to call?

Mr. Cook: The hon. Gentleman talks about a mantra of "systemic and cultural" factors. Those words are quoted directly from the Legg report, which I hope that he will find time to study. I have presented the changes to the House clearly as a programme to modernise the Foreign Office and ensure that it is representative of modern Britain. I have a single figure number of women heads of mission out of 140-odd posts. If the hon. Gentleman does not understand why improving that gender balance should be part of a modern programme, I cannot help him any further.

Mr. Malcolm Savidge (Aberdeen, North): Does my right hon. Friend believe that, in the light of the report, the attacks made on him and on the Foreign Office by the right hon. and learned Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Mr. Howard) can be seen to be

"full of sound and fury, signifying nothing"?

To pursue the quotation, they were a tale told by a right hon. and learned Member for Folkestone and Hythe.

Mr. Cook: My hon. Friend makes his point well and with great literary knowledge. I shall not pursue him on that. I used to be a teacher of English and I would give him 100 per cent. for that effort.

Mr. Tim Collins (Westmorland and Lonsdale): Twice this afternoon, the right hon. Gentleman has quoted the Legg report, saying that the briefing provided to Ministers in advance of the Adjournment debate in March was seriously inadequate. Given that, does it not follow that—perhaps entirely inadvertently—Ministers misled the House? If that is so, should there not be a formal apology?

Mr. Cook: If the House was misled, of course there should be an apology. I have refreshed my memory by re-reading this morning what was said in the relevant passage by the Minister of State, and did not see any point at which he could have been accused of misleading the House. It is to his credit that he raised the issue in a debate in which nobody else raised it. I think that he should have had a full briefing on the allegations, although I should add that I would have been very distressed had he told the House that a Customs and Excise investigation was about to start. We are not going to get many convictions if we start to insist that Ministers should announce such investigations the moment they are set up.

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Inverclyde): I was in a minority of one on the Select Committee in arguing for the Committee to investigate the Sierra Leone affair following the publication of the Legg report. I argued that case in the interests of natural justice for those who were to be cross-examined by Sir Thomas Legg. The Foreign Secretary referred to officials needing to obtain permission before they engage in discussions and negotiations with representatives of private military companies. Should the process not be tougher than that? Should there not be a code of practice concerning dealings with these so-called private military companies? Did not my hon. Friend the Member for Thurrock (Mr. Mackinlay) get to the heart of the matter, when he said that there should be tougher supervision and regulation of groups of mercenaries that go under the rubric "private military companies"?

Mr. Cook: As I said, we will keep very much under review whether further supervision or regulation is required. I assure my hon. Friend that I have circulated written guidance—it goes under the rubric of "code of conduct"—that will require permission to be sought at head of Department level before any such contact takes place. Nobody should assume that, when sought, such a permission will automatically be given.

Mr. Andrew Lansley (South Cambridgeshire): The report offers no criticism of Ministers, yet does the Foreign Secretary not understand that it should have done so—and for the following reason? Speaking as a former civil servant, may I ask whether the Foreign Secretary

understands that a strong culture throughout the civil service demands that civil servants direct their efforts towards full and accurate briefing of Ministers? Does he not understand that Ministers might not have received a full and accurate briefing, and, in pursuance of that, neglected or failed to give full, accurate and timely information to Parliament, because of the way in which he and other Ministers conducted themselves in the management of the Department? Before the Foreign Secretary casts out the mote in other's eyes, should he not see whether there is a beam in his own?

Mr. Cook: If the hon. Gentleman wants to bother to take the time to read the Legg report, he will find that the passage on briefing of Ministers is, perhaps, the longest in the report. If he looks at it, he will find that it is not consistent with his description of conventional practice. As for the rest of his comments, I would say only that the idea that I should have sent back the Legg report because it did not criticise me sufficiently has given me the best laugh of the day.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): Am I misguided in being rather uneasy about the treatment of a letter to Peter Penfold? On 11 May, the Prime Minister was widely reported as going out of his way to praise Britain's high commissioner in Sierra Leone, Peter Penfold, who was accused of co-operating with a mercenary operation mounted by Sandline International. According to the Prime Minister, Mr. Penfold had done "a superb job" in dealing with the consequences of the military coup and in working closely with the President. How can a man who was told by his Prime Minister in May that he had done "a superb job" receive a career-ruining letter of rebuke—for that is what it is—and be required to attend an interview with the permanent secretary in July? What differed between May and July?

Mr. Cook: My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister indeed said that Peter Penfold behaved as a hero during the original coup. In fairness to myself, I repeated that point in my statement when I said that Mr. Penfold showed great courage and commitment during that original coup and that he had since won high standing for Britain in Sierra Leone. He is entirely entitled to have that good record taken into account against the explicit findings of the Legg report on his contacts with Sandline. I announced to the House that I had taken that into account; that is why I do not intend to institute any formal proceedings against him. In the circumstances, a letter drawing the permanent secretary's attention to the report's findings is the least that could be done; indeed, I should expect the House to expect me to make him aware of what was said in the report.

Mr. David Heath (Somerton and Frome): Do not the "systemic and cultural" problems revealed by the report underline the fact that the Foreign Affairs Committee was entirely correct to take a real interest in the matter? Is not the Foreign Secretary slightly concerned at the lack of intellectual curiosity displayed by senior members of his Department when difficult questions on Sierra Leone were asked in March and April? Does he regret that his decision to change the sanctions regime on arms exports was not highlighted in the report published by the Department of Trade and Industry on 1 July?

Mr. Cook: I plainly could not have expected the Department of Trade and Industry to highlight in its report of 1 July something that I am announcing in response to a report that I received on 24 July, but we shall be in contact with the DTI, with which we work closely on this matter, to ensure that everyone understands our new working procedures. I am not sure that I am entirely aware of the difficult questions that the hon. Gentleman says were raised in March. The Legg report certainly draws attention to the failure in February of senior management to act on information, but that is put in the context of what was then a major military engagement in Sierra Leone and of the substantial demand for humanitarian assistance, which management perhaps rightly regarded at the time as the more important priority.

Mr. Howard: May I again direct the Foreign Secretary's attention to the questions that I posed at the end of my response to his statement? He may not have heard them; he certainly made no attempt to answer them. Is he aware of the criticisms in paragraph 3.19 of the report that Ministers played down the fact that the coverage of the United Nations Security Council resolution was comprehensive? Does he appreciate that the report concludes that that playing down was deliberate, as Ministers knew that people on the ground were contemplating the use of force? Has he read paragraph 3.20, which, together with paragraph 3.19, specifically criticises the Minister of State and his answers to Parliament? Is he aware of the seriousness of those criticisms? Does he have any defence to them? If so, will he now say what it is?

Mr. Cook: The most obvious defence to paragraph 3.20 is that it does not refer to my hon. Friend the Minister of State—*[Interruption.]* I am merely reading the paragraph to which, after six hours of research, the right hon. and learned Gentleman has directed me. If the most damaging paragraph that he could find was one that contained no reference to my hon. Friend, perhaps I should have given him 12 hours to demonstrate how clean the report was.

On paragraph 3.19, much of the presentation was indeed that the UN resolution was aimed at the military junta. In that, the statements were entirely correct—the embargo applied to the junta. It did not apply only to the junta, however, and we shall take on board the recommendation that we ensure that all press lines give the full legal position. In defence of the news department and my officials, I should say that someone in the outside world who took a news line as an authoritative statement of the legal position would be very odd.

Mr. Howard: On a point of order, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: I am sorry, but I cannot accept points of order until we have heard all the statements. I will take points of order after the next statement.

Immigration and Asylum

4.29 pm

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Jack Straw): With permission, Madam Speaker, I should like to make a statement on immigration and asylum.

I am today publishing a White Paper, "Fairer, Faster and Firmer—A Modern Approach to Immigration and Asylum", following a wide-ranging examination undertaken as part of the comprehensive spending review.

Governments have few more complex and sensitive responsibilities, yet the system has been subject to piecemeal and ill considered changes that have failed to tackle the real problems. Indeed, the changes have often made the problems worse. The arrangements for supporting asylum seekers are a shambles: huge backlogs have been allowed to develop, and additional complexity and regulation have made the system unwieldy to operate.

Despite the dedication and professionalism of immigration staff at all levels, genuine applicants have suffered, while abusive claimants and racketeers have exploited delays in the system. It is time for a new approach. The Government are determined to maintain firm control over immigration, but to do so in a way that meets our international obligations and our commitment to strengthening human rights.

The volume of passenger traffic arriving at our ports of entry has grown very fast in recent years, from 55 million arrivals in 1992–93 to 80 million in 1997–98, and it is projected to reach nearly 100 million passengers in only two years' time. We want to welcome genuine visitors to our shores, and to provide them, and British citizens who travel abroad, with a fast and efficient service.

Our immigration policy will continue to support family life by admitting the spouses and minor dependent children of those already settled in the United Kingdom. It must also sustain and promote racial equality. It is particularly important for us to acknowledge the huge contribution that immigrants and their descendants have made to our society in all walks of life.

The Government have already begun to put in place a fairer and more efficient system. Last June, as promised in our manifesto, we abolished the primary purpose rule; but fairness is not well served by a system of decision making that labours under huge backlogs and outdated methods of working. The White Paper sets out our plans for an integrated approach to the modernisation of immigration control. We are making organisational changes in the immigration and nationality directorate of the Home Office, backed by new technology, which will result in a new integrated casework directorate.

We also intend to integrate the overseas entry clearance operation with the other elements of control. A core feature of the new approach will be a single management structure, drawn from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the Home Office, to manage the overseas operation. We will use new technology and more flexible legislative provisions to the best advantage.

Many people resident in this country want their relatives to visit them for important family and other occasions. In our view, the previous Government were wrong to remove the right of appeal to those refused a visit visa in such circumstances. Such a right of appeal provided an element of independent oversight of what are bound to be very difficult and often emotive decisions.

Honouring our manifesto commitment, we propose to introduce a streamlined right of appeal for those refused a visa to visit a family member in this country. We also intend to test a financial bond scheme for visitors, as has been urged upon us by many groups representing, in particular, those from the Indian sub-continent.

Many problems and much confusion are caused by passengers arriving in the United Kingdom without the required visas, or in some cases without any passport. We shall adopt a tough approach to deterring and preventing the arrival of such inadequately documented passengers. One of the best ways to achieve that is through the use of airline liaison officers. We already have five officers placed overseas working with carriers and the relevant authorities to combat document and other frauds. We intend to increase that network to about 20 officers in total.

Fundamental to our overall strategy is the need to speed up the system. There are too many avenues of appeal, so in future there will be a single right of appeal for those lawfully present in the United Kingdom at the time of their application. We recently published a consultation document on that. The aim is to create an appeals system that will provide a fair opportunity to review decisions, but to do so quickly, and to minimise the scope for manipulation of the system.

In our manifesto, we said that we would "control unscrupulous immigration advisers". As many hon. Members from both sides of the House know from their constituency casework, a significant minority of such advisers abuse the system and exploit their clients. We have consulted widely about that, and will introduce a statutory scheme to regulate immigration advisers, which may include those who are legally qualified.

The United Kingdom has long given shelter to those fleeing persecution from other parts of the world. We will continue scrupulously to observe our international obligations to protect genuine refugees. Those who are accepted as refugees or given exceptional leave to remain should be helped to integrate into local communities. To aid that integration, we will reduce to four years the qualifying period for settlement for asylum applicants granted exceptional leave to remain, and give immediate settlement to those recognised as refugees.

The number seeking asylum has increased eightfold in the past 10 years, from 4,000 to 34,000. The reasons for that are many, including political instability, but there is no doubt that the asylum system is being abused.

Around three quarters of asylum applications are refused outright because they meet the requirements neither for refugee status nor for exceptional leave to remain. The vast majority of such failed applicants appeal, but only 6 per cent. of the appeals are successful. Of course, a failed asylum application does not necessarily mean that the applicant has abused the system, but many claims for asylum are made by those seeking to migrate for purely economic reasons, or as a means of prolonging a stay in the United Kingdom without legitimate reason.

That places substantial pressure on a system that is already under severe strain, and it is unfair to genuine refugees who have to wait long periods in the system for a decision on their claim to refugee status. At the end

of May this year, there was a backlog of 52,000 asylum applications on which not even an initial decision had been taken. Of those applications, 10,000 were more than five years old. On the same date, a backlog of 32,000 immigration appeals were waiting to be heard, of which more than 70 per cent. were asylum cases.

Modernising the controls and simplifying and speeding up the procedures will help to tackle those problems. However, we cannot create the faster system that we all want without clearing existing backlogs. We are strengthening immigration control, and there will be no amnesty, either now or in the future, for any applicant. We will instead allocate additional resources to deal with that inheritance. We will also adopt a practical approach to the application backlog when an initial decision has been outstanding for some years, and we will ensure that the effect of long delays is properly taken into account, but in ways that will not outweigh other factors such as serious abuse.

The package of measures that I am announcing today will ensure that new applicants can be dealt with more quickly. As part of that process of strengthening our control, I am announcing that, from today, the period allowed for asylum seekers to submit further representations after interview will be reduced from 28 days to five days in port cases. It is already five days for in-country applicants. No one intent on exploiting the system should be under any illusion that those measures to clear the backlog will benefit them.

We shall take further enforcement measures to ensure that asylum seekers who are refused leave to enter or remain are returned quickly to their countries of origin. We have previously undertaken special exercises to tackle sudden increases in applicants, and we will not hesitate to do so again. All told, we aim by 2001 to have average process times for initial asylum decisions of two months, and for appeals of a further four months.

We shall not hesitate to use detention where necessary to ensure the integrity of immigration control. We have, however, decided that detainees should be given written reasons for their detention, and that, subject to legislation, there will be judicial oversight of the process.

The current support arrangements for asylum seekers are a shambles. They are the product of ill-considered legislation that later required the intervention of the courts. The Asylum and Immigration Act 1996 imposed a burden on local authority social services departments that was unplanned for and inappropriate. It cannot be allowed to continue. Action must be taken to contain costs and to relieve the burden that has fallen heavily on London authorities in particular, and more recently on the local authorities of Dover and Kent.

In opposition, I said that, in a civilised society, genuine asylum seekers could not be left destitute, and I am honouring that commitment today. We need a system that reduces the incentive to economic migration, and recognises that the genuine asylum seeker needs food and shelter, not a giroeheque.

Support on the basis that I have outlined will therefore be separated from the main social security benefits system, and will principally be provided in kind, not in cash. Where accommodation is needed, it will normally be provided directly, with no choice about location. We will also consider the extent to which support for food and other basic needs can be provided by vouchers or other non-cash means. In general, support will not extend beyond the point at which the application has been decided and all appeal rights have been exhausted.

That support will require new national machinery to plan and co-ordinate provision. There will be a single budget for asylum seeker support costs, which will be managed by the Home Office alongside the costs of the process for considering asylum cases. That will enable more flexible use of resources to reduce overall costs. New central machinery will also be created under Home Office management, to contract with a range of providers to obtain accommodation. They will include the private sector, voluntary bodies, housing associations and local authorities.

The intention is to develop a national approach making use of support from existing communities and voluntary groups, and to relieve over-concentration on London and one or two other areas, which is creating such severe problems in those areas. The Government will consult widely on the details, and on transitional arrangements. In taking this work forward, we will ensure that the needs of children, whether unaccompanied or members of families, are fully protected.

The Government are committed to promoting a more positive view of citizenship that both reflects and celebrates the multicultural, multiracial society that we have become. We will take action to reduce waiting times for processing applications for British citizenship to give a more welcoming signal to prospective citizens.

The measures described in the White Paper provide a much clearer framework for what our immigration control should be. They should also provide the staff of the immigration and nationality directorate of the Home Office with a workable system. Bureaucracy, over-complexity, delays and backlogs often frustrate the best efforts of staff to give effect to the law and to the policies of Parliament and Ministers. Despite those difficulties, staff in the directorate have consistently achieved impressive results, and I take this opportunity to thank them for their hard work. A clear framework and better tools for the job will enable everyone to take a fresh and more purposeful view of what they can and should achieve.

The White Paper sets out a comprehensive and integrated strategy for immigration control. It tackles the failings of the current system, and addresses the challenges that we will face in future. The Government will introduce legislation to implement the White Paper as soon as parliamentary time allows. The legislation may be a good candidate for consideration by a Special Standing Committee. Britain requires an immigration and asylum system appropriate to the demands of the 21st century. The system in place is simply not up to the job. We need radical change to deliver a modern and efficient system that is fairer, faster and firmer. I commend the White Paper to the House.

Sir Norman Fowler (Sutton Coldfield): Our general attitude is that strict immigration control is necessary to good race relations. We shall back any measures to improve race relations and to create full equality of opportunity. We shall also back any effective measures to prevent illegal immigration. In far too many cases, applications for political asylum are a means to evade immigration control. As the Home Secretary and the

[Sir Norman Fowler]

White Paper say, three quarters of asylum applications are refused because they do not meet the requirements of either refugee status or exceptional leave to remain. Only 6 per cent. of appeals are successful.

Even at that, however, the Home Secretary plans to spend almost £1 billion over the next three years on support of asylum seekers. That is almost four times what he plans to spend on his new crime programme, and it is almost as much as total extra spending on the police during the same period. It must be sensible to reduce that bill radically, and to divert the money to better purposes.

Does the Home Secretary feel on reflection that the position in the United Kingdom would have been substantially improved if the Labour party had not with great ferocity opposed our Bills in 1993 and 1996? Does he recall that the Prime Minister, then shadow Home Secretary, played down the seriousness of the issue because of a temporary fall in applications?

If not, the right hon. Gentleman will perhaps remember that, when he was shadow Home Secretary, he opposed us when we proposed benefit withdrawal. He did not say that our changes were insufficient, as he appears to argue now. He said then that they were far too stringent. We shall support his changes to the benefit system, but we know that, if the Conservative Government had proposed them, Labour spokesmen would have toured the country condemning them. We are not prepared to take lectures from the Home Secretary or the Labour party on effective immigration control, because they opposed virtually all our measures to tackle abuse.

The White Paper is important enough to require a full day's debate, and I hope that the Government will arrange one. For now, I have three sets of questions. First, much of our immigration control system depends on border controls, to which we are committed, and to which we hope the Government are committed.

The Home Secretary has referred to the vast increase in passenger traffic to 100 million passengers in two years time. He is giving immigration officers more power, but is he satisfied that there are enough of them to police our borders effectively? He also intends to introduce a new right of appeal for visitors. Is there a danger that that will put more pressure on the appeals system, just when he is trying to reduce pressure?

Secondly, the Home Secretary abolished the primary purpose rule last year. Previously, applicants had to prove that gaining entry to the United Kingdom was not the primary purpose of their marriage. The latest Home Office figures show a significant increase in applications from spouses. Does that trend continue into 1998? Will he give us the latest figures?

Thirdly, and most importantly, the Home Secretary has said that there will be no amnesty for political asylum applicants because of the time that they have been waiting. However, the statement was less than forthcoming, compared with the White Paper, on the right hon. Gentleman's intentions.

Will there not now be two special provisions for asylum applicants? Ten thousand people who have been waiting since before July 1993 will now normally be given indefinite leave to remain. Will the right hon. Gentleman confirm that that is the position? In addition, 20,000 people who made applications between mid-1993 and the beginning of 1996 will also be considered under special criteria not available generally. They will have been waiting not seven or five years, but two and a half or three years.

Will the Home Secretary explain the detail of that second scheme, which affects so many people? Does it not mean that 30,000 of the 50,000 people waiting for initial decision will be considered under special criteria not available generally, and that, certainly with one group, settlement will be the normal, almost automatic, outcome, when he has said that the average of false applications is very high? That is the background against which the policy is set. For all those reasons, the Opposition will want to examine those two schemes in particular with great care.

We have heard the Home Secretary's words. We want to monitor carefully the effect of what he has announced. We fear that his plans in action may not match up to the words that he has used this afternoon.

Mr. Straw: The right hon. Gentleman asks for a full day's debate on this important White Paper. I would welcome that, but it is a matter for business managers. I will pass on his request to them.

The right hon. Gentleman made some curious assertions, given the record of the previous Administration. He first complained that the costs of asylum support given on the last page of the White Paper are likely to add up to £1 billion over the next three years. That is simple arithmetic, but had we not taken the costs in hand, our inheritance meant that the figures would have risen to about £800 million in a single year. Anything up to £2 billion could have been wasted on support of applicants and those awaiting removal and deportation in a system that was a shambles from beginning to end. That was the system we found when we came into office.

I have read the debates in which my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and I took part in 1992-93 and 1995-96. One reason that we opposed those measures was that we said that they would not deliver the changes—*[Laughter.]* Oh, yes we did. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, then the shadow Home Secretary, once a distinguished position—the jury is still out on whether it is still distinguished—said:

> "No one on the Opposition Benches condones bogus applications for asylum: everyone condemns them. However, weeding out false claims should not be at the expense of prejudicing genuine claims, and that is our fear about the Bill."—[*Official Report*, 2 November 1992; Vol. 213, c. 36.]

The effect of that, and the 1996 Bill, was to create the worst of all possible worlds, in which genuine asylum seekers were left in limbo for years while their applications were considered, while the very delays that the Bills had established enabled bogus asylum seekers to come, claim benefit, work and carry on ripping off the system.

Let me deal with the right hon. Gentleman's explicit questions. On border controls, he asked whether there will be enough immigration staff. Again, this is an area that he should have researched more. The staff numbers in the immigration service were to have been cut and cut again under the spending plans that we inherited. We are arranging over the next three years to put an extra £124 million into immigration and asylum control. We

have put some more money in already precisely to deal with the rising number of visitors and the overhang of asylum applications.

The right hon. Gentleman made a serious point about whether the new right of appeal for visitors refused a visit for family purposes could put pressure on the appeal system as a whole. We do not intend that it should. It will be a separate, self-contained, streamlined system. As we make clear in the White Paper, it will be a system whose costs will be paid by the applicants.

The right hon. Gentleman asked about the numbers who have applied for settlement as spouses following the ending of the primary purpose rule on 5 July last year. He is right to say that numbers have increased. That was bound to be the case, because there was a huge logjam. The Opposition, under the previous shadow Home Secretary, now the shadow Foreign Secretary, had every opportunity to oppose the abolition of the primary purpose rule and make a prayer in this House to negate my changing the rules. They did not, and the decision had the surprising vocal support of the hon. Member for Rochford and Southend, East (Sir T. Taylor). He and many other Conservative Members recognised the injustice of the rule, and the fact that it offered no serious means of control.

The right hon. Gentleman's last point concerned our proposals for dealing with the backlog, which are set out in full in paragraphs 8.29 and 8.30 on page 41 of the White Paper. For those who made initial applications before 1 June 1993 that have still not had an initial decision, we are saying that delay in itself will normally be considered so serious as to justify as a matter of fairness the grant of indefinite leave to remain.

That will not apply to applicants whose presence is not conducive to the public good or to applications for asylum made after the commencement of removal or deportation cases. For those who made applications between 1 July 1993 and 31 December 1995, the delays will be weighed in the balance in each case against their current circumstances.

Let me make this clear to right hon. Gentleman. Again, he has come to his position without the benefit of even looking at the asylum statistics for 1997. The previous Administration faced a huge backlog. The figures show that the number granted exceptional leave to remain in 1992–93 shot up suddenly from 2,000 to 15,000 in 1992, and to 11,000 in 1993. Their policy for dealing with the backlog was much less discriminating than ours. The policy was entirely secret. It never surfaced publicly, and was never disclosed to the House. It became apparent only when the statistics were published much in retard.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Madam Speaker: Order. That initial exchange took precisely 28 minutes. I ask Back Benchers for direct questions and the Secretary of State for brisk answers. This is not a debate, but a question and answer session.

Mr. Keith Vaz (Leicester, East): I warmly welcome the Home Secretary's statement, and especially his determination to deal with the backlog and his proposals on visitors' visas, which are a significant development. When does he propose to put in place the framework for dealing with unscrupulous immigration advisers? Many hon. Members have constituents who have been advised by these miserable people, who have given false information and advice that has added to the backlog.

Mr. Straw: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his support for the proposals. The requirements relating to unscrupulous immigration advisers will depend on legislation that we shall bring before the House as quickly as possible.

Mr. Richard Allan (Sheffield, Hallam): The Liberal Democrats welcome many of the measures that the Home Secretary has announced, because we share the Government's commitment to sort out some of the mess left by the previous Government, especially the 1996 Act. We welcome the fact that this problem is being dealt with early in the Parliament rather than close to a general election, as happened with the 1996 Act.

I have a few brisk questions to ask the Home Secretary on the criteria that he has set himself for developing a faster, fairer and firmer system. If the system is to be faster, will he confirm that the extra money will reverse the staff cuts proposed at Croydon, which amount to several hundred over the next couple of years? Will he be able to get the computer system, which is already several months behind schedule, into play more quickly?

If the system is to be fairer, will the Home Secretary consider, in addition to help in kind, making small cash payments to asylum seekers to cover small costs such as travel and telephone calls? Will he ensure that asylum seekers are not clustered into hostels, which could become targets for racial abuse—a problem that we have seen in other countries? If the system is to be firmer, will he look again at immigration service officers' extended powers and consider keeping the police in place for that purpose? Immigration officers have expressed concern about their ability to deal with the extended powers.

Finally, will the Home Secretary confirm that all detainees will have the right to a bail hearing, and say whether they will be legally supported when they go to such hearings?

Mr. Straw: The hon. Gentleman asked whether we will reverse the staff cuts. The answer is yes. We inherited the computer system—such matters cuts across all Governments at all times—and it is behind schedule—*[Interruption.]* I am sorry, the hon. Member for Hertsmere (Mr. Clappison) is muttering something from a sedentary position.

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Straw: The computer system that we inherited was put in place to develop a casework programme. It is behind schedule, and we are hoping to bring it nearer schedule. I understand the case for making small cash payments available to asylum seekers within the overall regime of providing benefits in kind, and we shall consult on that. We considered whether we should direct people to hostels, as happens in a number of other countries, but we accept the strong arguments against doing so. The hon. Gentleman, among others, has adumbrated the reasons against it.

A judicial oversight of the detention system will apply to virtually all detainees. Those who are detained for a very short time—overnight, for example—will not be

[Mr. Straw]

covered, but nobody seriously suggests that they should be. With respect to immigration officers' powers, I strongly believe that giving immigration officers proper powers and training will greatly assist them in their job, and release pressures on the police.

Mr. Gwyn Prosser (Dover): Is my right hon. Friend aware of the patience and tolerance that my constituents have shown over the past 12 months, when large numbers of east European people seeking asylum arrived in the port of Dover and settled in Dover? Is he aware that there have been serious social tensions recently because of the concentration of those asylum seekers, and the fact that an inordinate cost has been imposed on Dover district council, Kent county council and the local police force in seeking to manage those difficulties?

I congratulate my right hon. Friend on producing such a balanced White Paper, which meets all the main concerns of my constituents and will receive their support.

Mr. Straw: I am grateful for my hon. Friend's support. I applaud the tolerance of the people of Dover and other ports in Kent in putting up with such a serious abuse of our system of immigration and asylum control. I thank my hon. Friend for the way in which he has pursued the matter. We seek to remove the unacceptable burdens on areas such as his and a number of inner-London boroughs.

Mr. Charles Wardle (Bexhill and Battle): Any proposals to reduce the asylum backlog should be welcomed because it is costly and delays genuine applications, and they should be given fair consideration in the House. However, does the Home Secretary accept that the use of "exceptional leave to remain" as an administrative device to shorten the queue does not amount to improved control, as was shown in the late 1980s? If more money is to be spent on in-country enforcement, will the Home Secretary ensure that port-of-entry controls remain as strong as ever? Finally, where will the streamline right of appeal take place when visitor visas are refused?

Mr. Straw: I am grateful for the hon. Gentleman's welcome for our proposals. Given his considerable experience as a former Immigration Minister in the Home Office, he will accept that the key to improving enforcement is to reduce delays—it is the delays that have been so exploited. The prospect of cash payments and the absence of direction on where benefits in kind could be taken led to a huge burst of economic migrants, for example, from eastern Europe. We are wholly committed to maintaining effective border controls, which is why my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister was successful in writing into the Amsterdam treaty legal protection for our border controls, which were at risk under the Maastricht treaty.

Mr. Neil Gerrard (Walthamstow): I welcome my right hon. Friend's comments about visit visa appeals, the control of advisers, and dealing with the backlog. However, will he look again at support for asylum seekers? Although we all accept that local authorities should not carry the burden, we have learnt in the past year or two that there are problems with benefits in kind. If it is coupled with a policy of dispersal, as the White Paper appears to suggest, we might be setting up a complex and bureaucratic system that will not deliver easily. The real issue is to get decisions taken quickly, because, if anything will deter abusive claimants, it is quick and efficient decision taking.

Mr. Straw: I forgot to answer a question raised by the hon. Member for Bexhill and Battle (Mr. Wardle) about where visitor appeals would take place. The prospective visitor would obviously have to stay in the country in which the application was made, and the appeal would almost certainly be heard here, on the papers. However, we are consulting on that.

I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Walthamstow (Mr. Gerrard) for his overall welcome. He asked about benefits in kind. We discussed that matter in great detail, particularly whether we should have a combined system of benefits in cash and benefits in kind, and where the cut-off point should be. In the end, we judged that the only way to run an effective system was by paying benefits in kind, because that would not deter genuine asylum seekers who are fleeing persecution and want shelter, food and accommodation in this country, but it would deter economic migrants.

There are two issues. First, I entirely agree with my hon. Friend that the system must be speeded up—that is key. Secondly, we must ensure that the rest of the system does not act as a pull on economic migrants who have no basis for making a claim under the 1951 convention.

Mr. Humfrey Malins (Woking): I thank the Home Secretary for his comments about a visitor right of appeal, and the proposal for a register of advisers. He will know that the Immigration Advisory Service, which I founded, has long campaigned for those. Does he accept that tens of thousands of those who lose their appeals, right the way through the system, then go to ground and are never heard of again because there is no system whereby they can be retrieved and removed from the country? Does he think that that problem will get worse or better, and does he recognise that it is a major problem?

Mr. Straw: It is a major problem, and it is made much worse by the fact that people can exercise multiple rights of appeal and, because the immigration appeal tribunal is not currently a court of record, far too many applications for judicial review are approved by the judge dealing with the Crown Office list, even if they are later rejected on the merits of the case. As the hon. Gentleman said, applicants then go to ground partly because adjudicators may take many months to produce their adjudication.

We are taking a number of steps, which are set out in the White Paper, greatly to improve enforcement. We are ready to increase the use of detention at the point of removal if necessary so that we can toughen the system up. The point of having a single right of appeal is that it will not only deal with the merits of the application but impose removal directions.

Mr. Jim Marshall (Leicester, South): May I welcome my right hon. Friend's statement in general, but make two specific points? The Home Secretary has already made it clear that there will be a right of appeal and a charge for visitors. What will the charge be, and does he intend to cover the cost of the appeal system through a charge on visitors who appeal?

My second point relates to asylum seekers. My right hon. Friend appears to have made quite clear the position for those who have made an application prior to June 1993 and who have not yet received a decision on their application, but the post-June 1993 position still seems to be a bit cloudy. Can he say what sort of criteria he will use to decide whether people can stay or have to leave the United Kingdom?

Mr. Straw: On the question of visitor's rights of appeal, it is intended that the fees charged to all family visitor applicants, plus a specific charge where a right of appeal is exercised, should together cover the cost of running the appeal system. There is an issue of balance between the initial charge and the appeal charge, but we are looking at a cost of a right of appeal of about £200 to £250.

The criteria for dealing with those who are in the application backlog, no decision having been made between 1 July 1993 and 31 December 1995, are set out in paragraph 8.30 of the White Paper.

Mr. Marshall: I have not seen the White Paper yet.

Mr. Straw: I appreciate that my hon. Friend has not yet had a chance to read it. It states:

"delay will not normally of itself justify the grant of leave to enter or remain . . . but in individual cases will be weighed up with other considerations and, if there are specific compassionate or other exceptional factors present which are linked to the delay . . . a decision to grant limited leave to enter or remain may then be justified."

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip-Northwood): First, may I express my appreciation for those of the Home Secretary's measures that will reduce the burden on Hillingdon borough council and other London borough councils, which have in the past borne an inordinate share of the cost of supporting asylum seekers? However, may I express anxiety at the fact that he and the Government have not yet fully addressed the control of would-be asylum seekers from overseas?

The right hon. Gentleman has not managed to impose a charge on French railways for the carriage of would-be refugees without the appropriate visa through the channel tunnel; nor has he changed the terms of the Dublin convention that allow other European Union countries to pass on to the United Kingdom asylum seekers they ought properly to deal with themselves and return to their country of origin.

Mr. Straw: I am one of the world's few experts on the problems of imposing carrier's liability on the French railways. I regret to say that that goes back to defects in the Sangatte protocol, which laid the ground—sorry, the underground—for the channel tunnel, and there are major legal problems. The French Minister of the Interior, Jean-Pierre Chevènement, has been very co-operative in ensuring that far better checks are imposed by the French border police, DICCILEC, than was previously the case. Although that is not as good as the imposition of carrier's liability, which I was able to achieve in respect of the Brussels end of Eurostar, it is a great deal better than was previously the case.

The Dublin convention is not a satisfactory international European treaty. It was signed, I think in their sleep, by Ministers whom the hon. Gentleman technically supported, in 1990. I have succeeded in changing its application. One of the important triumphs of the justice and home affairs presidency of the United Kingdom—I was the president of the Justice and Home Affairs Council during that period—was to have an article 18 committee meeting on 27 May, which laid down new and better interpretations of the Dublin convention. However, the convention is far from satisfactory, and would that it had never been signed.

Ms Jenny Jones (Wolverhampton, South-West): Will my right hon. Friend confirm that, when he introduces welcome and long-overdue legislation to regulate immigration advisers, legally qualified individuals will come under that legislation? Regrettably, solicitors are often the worst transgressors in giving out bogus immigration advice.

Mr. Straw: We have not yet made a final decision, but I note entirely my hon. Friend's comments. There is no question but that some solicitors and others who are legally qualified are the worst perpetrators of fraud on innocent applicants and abusers of the system.

Mr. Roger Gale (North Thanet): It is now nearly a year since my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Mr. Howard) and I visited the Home Office to warn in person of the dangers of a tide of economic migrants from eastern Europe. Since then, that tide has continued, and has embraced Albania and Czechoslovakia.

The Home Secretary referred to flaws in the Dublin convention, which we accept, but what my constituents cannot understand is why, at the very least, the Government are not and have not been able for the past year to say simply that, if people arriving in this country have travelled right across Europe, through France, Germany and Belgium, we shall immediately determine that they cannot possibly be asylum seekers, and return them to their country of origin. What is he going to do about it?

Mr. Straw: The hon. Gentleman makes a literally incredible point. It was his Government, whom he supported, who signed the Dublin convention. Of course it is preposterous that people should be able to travel across perfectly safe countries in western Europe and to arrive at our door and that we find huge difficulty in getting them accepted by the countries that should have entertained their asylum application in the first place.

Mr. Gale: Why can we not send them back to the country of origin?

Mr. Straw: The hon. Gentleman says that we should send them back, but we have to observe international conventions and international law, and it was his Government who signed the ludicrous Dublin convention, which, in many cases, has made the situation very much worse. We have been working to ensure that the Dublin convention at least works better than it worked before. If he wants to explain to his constituents why those people are arriving on our shores, he will have to have the courage to say, "I am responsible, along with the shambolic Administration whom I supported over many years."

Mr. Harry Cohen (Leyton and Wanstead): I congratulate my right hon. Friend on having had a good

[Mr. Harry Cohen]

hard think about these extremely difficult issues, but will he consider the risks of going for benefit in kind, instead of restoring benefit rights to asylum seekers? What is the wisdom of the Home Office running its own social security department for asylum seekers? Is there not a danger of asylum seekers facing a squeeze from right wingers and racists saying that they are living like lords on the Home Office, whereas, in reality, they face bureaucracy, indignity and perhaps abject poverty? How is benefit in kind going to work?

Mr. Straw: We have considered the matter in great detail. We are committed to making sure that no genuine asylum seeker is left destitute. There is no doubt that, while genuine asylum seekers are happy to be provided with shelter and accommodation in kind, the prospect of a cash benefit acts as a major pull for economic migrants who have no basis whatsoever for settlement in this country under the 1951 convention.

It is perfectly right that the provision of hardship relief in kind for asylum seekers should be separated from the social security system. The social security system is there to provide benefits to people who are entitled to be resident in this country on a permanent basis, but we were about to get into a position where returning residents who had every right of settlement here were treated less well under the social security system than were asylum seekers. That is not acceptable.

Dr. Evan Harris (Oxford, West and Abingdon): We understand that there will be no amnesty, and that there will instead be realistic decisions about removability. Will the right hon. Gentleman understand that, if he makes sensitive and fair judgments on that, he will be judged against common humanity and supported by hon. Members on these Benches, rather than judged by *Daily Mail* editorials, talk of "floods", and "send them home" comments from Tory Members?

Will the right hon. Gentleman accept that those of us who know detention centres locally can still see no reason why they should not be Home Office establishments, instead of privately run establishments? Because of the problems that there have been at detention centres, we look forward to a reduction in the number of places, not an expansion.

Mr. Straw: I am sorry to disappoint the hon. Gentleman on that last point, but the truth is that there are many more people who ought to be detained than can be detained. That picks up on a point raised earlier by an Opposition Member about the number of people who go to ground when, finally, removal directions are put down. However, as is made clear in the chapter on detention in the White Paper, paragraph 12.15, we intend that there should be proper statutory rules for all detention centres, whether run directly by the Home Office or by contractors.

Mr. Peter L. Pike (Burnley): Will my right hon. Friend tell the House a little more about the time scale in which we will be able to deal with those people who have waited an unacceptably long time—a problem that we inherited from the previous Government? Is he absolutely certain that, under the measures that he has announced, no new waiting lists will build up so that people will still have to wait for an unacceptable time?

Mr. Straw: I appreciate that my hon. Friend has not had a chance to read the relevant chapter—chapter 8—of the White Paper. It sets out in detail how we intend to proceed with those cases. We intend to proceed as quickly as possible, but the nature of the system is such that it will take a lot longer than people would like.

My hon. Friend asked me whether I am absolutely certain that the changes will improve matters. I am probably certain, but we live in a world of human frailty and potential error. I shall work my socks off, as will my colleagues and officials, to ensure that the measures work. However, there is no more absolute certainty in this matter than there is in Burnley or Blackburn Rovers winning the next FA cup.

Mr. Peter Viggers (Gosport): I support the Home Secretary's words—which are in stark contrast to his party's attitude when in opposition—and the abolition of the primary purpose rule. To put the problem in context, will the Home Secretary confirm that about 250,000 people have applied for asylum in this country in the past 10 years, of whom 10,700 have been given asylum and 13,000 have been deported, leaving 226,300 people whose cases have not been satisfactorily resolved? If, on average, 6 per cent. of appeals are granted, what is the Home Secretary's intention regarding the other 94 per cent. and what will be his performance?

Mr. Straw: The figures are set out in the Home Office statistical bulletin, copies of which are available in the Library of the House. We must add to the figures that the hon. Gentleman mentioned—the number of people formally granted asylum—the number of those granted exceptional leave to remain under the previous Administration and this Administration, and it is entirely right that that should be the case. Only a small proportion of those who seek asylum are granted either refugee status or exceptional leave to remain, and the rest fall to be removed from this country, since there is no basis for them to be here.

We want far fewer people whose position is unfounded under the 1951 convention to make applications in the first place. We shall be able to achieve that through the combination of measures that we are taking. However, we want swifter appeals—within six months, on average—for people whose applications are refused, with the appeal setting the removal directions and, in normal circumstances, administrative removal following quickly thereafter.

Mr. Gordon Prentice (Pendle): We all have constituents who are prepared to put up money or offer security so that their relatives can enter the country with a promise that they will return. I was interested in what the Home Secretary said about testing a new financial bond. How would that work?

Mr. Straw: The details of that scheme are set out in paragraphs 5.11 and 5.12 on page 24 of the White Paper. I appreciate that my hon. Friend has not had a chance to read it. He is absolutely right to say that his constituents and those of myself and other hon. Members have made

many representations for a bond scheme. We are consulting on that and will take into account the views of hon. Members as well as those of organisations representing people from, for example, south Asia, before finalising its details.

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): Will the Home Secretary comment on how many people have been misled by illegal advice and how many have acted out of frustration and used illegal methods to enter the country because of their treatment by entry clearance officers, who have made them wait for a long time after their long journeys before interviewing them and then turning them away? Are measures being taken to tighten up the work of the entry clearance officers and achieve speedier judgments?

Following the question by the hon. Member for Pendle (Mr. Prentice), has any assessment been made of those who are currently considered illegal entrants who are self-supporting and not a drain on the economy, some of whom are seeking medical attention?

Mr. Straw: If people are seeking medical attention, they are self-supporting and it is clear that they will return after receiving medical attention, normally they are admitted. The principal issue for visitors is whether they will return at the end of the relevant period. Entry clearance officers in posts abroad have to be very firm in their assessment of applications, because people enter as visitors, and, with increasing regularity, abuse immigration control and their right to stay here by inventing an application for asylum. We aim to deter that.

We aim greatly to improve the administration of the entry clearance system in posts abroad by putting it under the direction of a combined Foreign and Commonwealth Office and Home Office operation, so that there will be much better co-ordination between the two Departments than hitherto.

I think that the hon. Gentleman was asking me about the total number of people who are illegally here. By definition, we cannot know that, but we know that the immigration and nationality directorate is detecting an increasing number of people who come here wholly illegally.

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): I thank the Home Secretary for removing the burden on local authorities of paying for the cost of asylum seekers and their residence. Will he think again about the principle of the Home Office setting up a benefits system, its likely high costs—which some of my hon. Friends have pointed out—and the unfortunate principle of paying benefits in kind rather than in cash? Would it not be cheaper to reintroduce the benefits to asylum seekers that were so callously taken away by the previous Government?

Is my right hon. Friend aware that many of us are concerned that immigration officers apparently will be given powers of arrest and removal from people's property, which they do not have at present? Does he think that that is wise?

Mr. Straw: On the latter point, immigration officers already have powers of arrest, but their corresponding powers are very unsatisfactory. Others apart from police officers have powers of arrest—customs officers have such powers—but they are subject in full to the provisions of the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984, which works satisfactorily. It is far better in principle for such work to be done by immigration officers with proper training, supported in appropriate cases by properly trained police officers.

The practice of local authorities providing benefits in kind rather than in cash has worked satisfactorily for individual applicants. The London boroughs and social services departments for ports in Kent and elsewhere have provided satisfactory, humane and sufficient systems of support in kind for applicants. The problem is that the provision of those benefits has been disproportionately concentrated in the hands of a very few boroughs. It is unreasonable for those localities to bear that burden. For that reason, the burden must be taken on nationally.

I do not accept what my hon. Friend said about payments of benefits in cash. They will not solve the problem of ensuring that genuine asylum seekers do not remain destitute, but they will provide an opportunity for fraud, and economic migrants would view them as a pull factor to come to this country.

Mr. Julian Brazier (Canterbury): Is there not a danger that the measures on asylum seekers that the right hon. Gentleman is introducing will simply be undermined by his actions on the primary purpose rule? What message does he have for an elderly, disabled constituent of mine who was grossly exploited even under the old arrangements? What steps will he take to monitor the growth in applications that will occur under the new category and the leakage of people seeking to overstay, which, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Sutton Coldfield (Sir N. Fowler) said, will also increase under the new category?

Mr. Straw: I am afraid that I have lost the thread, because the question was a little confused.

Mr. Brazier: The primary purpose rule.

Mr. Straw: The primary purpose rule has nothing whatever to do with asylum. Moreover, people who are granted entry to this country as spouses or fiances are not given temporary permission to stay. Initially, they are given permission to stay for 12 months, and if the marriage is shown to be working, they are given leave to remain for a further four years, and they are then allowed to settle in this country. That has nothing to do with the matter before the House.

I point out to the hon. Gentleman only that many of us witnessed the operation of the primary purpose rule—it was not only unfair but unworkable. It hurt only the innocent, and did not deter or detect those coming to Britain for bogus marriages, because it was an unjusticiable rule. That fact was recognised by the right hon. and learned Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Mr. Howard). Although he had done nothing to remove the primary purpose rule while in government, when in opposition he decided not to oppose its removal.

Fiona Mactaggart (Slough): My constituents will be grateful for many aspects of the Home Secretary's statement, particularly the new arrangements for visitors, but two things deeply concern me. One is the fact that

[Fiona Mactaggart]

people will get only one choice of where they go to live. Will my right hon. Friend reassure the House that he will not seek to place asylum seekers in rural areas where there are no people who speak the same language, or no people with whom they have any connection, because that may lead to children in schools being seriously discriminated against, and cause extra stress to people seeking asylum?

My other concern is my right hon. Friend's statement about a right of appeal. He said that there would be a single appeal for those "lawfully present" at the time of application. I think that the arguments for a single appeal are overwhelming, but if the only people who get an appeal are those who are lawfully present at the time of application, in effect any appeal against deportation or removal has been withdrawn. That means that the circumstances of people whose lives depend on the immigrant or asylum seeker cannot be taken into account. For many women in my constituency, if appeals against deportation are not retained in some form, it will cause real hardship.

Mr. Straw: We are providing only one choice. It would be wrong to provide greater housing choice for people who have come into this country than we provide, under legislation that we have supported, for the homeless who are resident and citizens here. People who are homeless have only one opportunity in relation to housing provision by a local authority. If they refuse that, they have made themselves intentionally homeless. I do not think it unreasonable to apply the same rules to asylum seekers.

It will be for the central agency to be as sensitive as possible about where individuals are placed, but let us make it clear that we intend that this power should be used to relieve the burden on some London boroughs, Dover and other ports in the south. That may mean that asylum seekers have to go to areas that they would otherwise not wish to go to, but, if they are genuine asylum seekers, seeking refuge from persecution by their country of origin, they will not mind that.

As to appeals, we are proposing that there should be a single appeal—let me make that clear. The single appeal will deal with all matters, including removal directions and, if necessary, deportation as well. If there are any compassionate circumstances, they can be raised at that time. What we are not having is people abusing the system by putting in appeal after appeal, which is one of the reasons we face the shambles that we do.

Dr. Vincent Cable (Twickenham): I add my welcome to the decision to transfer liabilities in respect of asylum seekers from local authorities. Will the Home Secretary say when the new central funding arrangements will come into effect? Will he confirm that there will no longer be a threshold that local authorities have to reach before central Government will reimburse them for the costs of, for example, unaccompanied children?

Mr. Straw: The new central funding arrangements will come into force once legislation is through and after a proper commencement period. At that stage, the question of thresholds, I suggest, will not arise, because this will be a central Government responsibility, although we will seek to use local authorities. Meanwhile, we will have discussions with, among others, local authority associations about the transitional arrangements that should apply.

Mr. John McDonnell (Hayes and Harlington): On that point, may I urge the Home Secretary to launch that investigation of the costs of unaccompanied children immediately, which we welcome because it deals with some of the most needy children entering this country after having faced severe circumstances in the countries of origin?

On the intelligence that will be provided to the appeal system and to the right hon. Gentleman as Home Secretary, will that mechanism be reviewed to ensure that a greater range of information is provided on the human rights record of the countries of origin of asylum seekers and refugees? In particular, will that mechanism be broadened to include independent organisations that have a track record of monitoring human rights in those countries of origin?

Mr. Straw: I agree with my hon. Friend entirely about the importance of the information that is available—both to staff who make the initial decision and to the appeals adjudicators—being much more independent and objective. For that reason, I have already set in hand arrangements for the country assessments to be the subject of scrutiny by outside non-governmental organisations and other bodies, and to be made publicly available. The White Paper sets out a series of changes, which I have already introduced, to make the system much more open and accessible.

Ms Diane Abbott (Hackney, North and Stoke Newington): I am concerned about, among other things, the withdrawal of benefit from asylum seekers, but may I take the opportunity to welcome the proposal to pilot cash bonds for visitors? I know that this is problematic and that it does not help the poorest, but one of the most miserable aspects of our immigration system occurs when much-loved [illegible] are not able to come to an important christening or funeral. If the cash bond system can be piloted successfully, many of my constituents will welcome it.

Mr. Straw: I am very grateful to my hon. Friend for her welcome. I dare say that she gets as frustrated as I do in constituency surgeries when our best guess is that the application is entirely genuine, but we also understand the problems that the entry clearance officers and posts abroad will face. It is worth trialling the idea of cash bonds. It may not work, but, with careful attention to its detail, it should work, and it will certainly make life a lot better for our constituents.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): Does the Home Secretary recollect that, when we were in opposition, he and I and several others had a lot and a half to say about trauma and the fact that some of those who were seeking asylum had suffered very recent terrible trauma? *[Interruption.]* That meant that they were often in no fit state to answer questions accurately, and that later, because of the inaccuracy of their answers, they were disadvantaged. Do his proposals do much to give the benefit of the doubt to those who have suffered severe trauma, often in appalling, very recent circumstances?

Mr. Straw: If my hon. Friend is able to study the proposals as a whole, I think that he will see that we

are aiming to be much swifter and sympathetic to those applications in respect of people who meet the convention criteria for refugee status. Where people come from countries or, to pick up a point that was made by my hon. Friend the Member for Hayes and Harlington (Mr. McDonnell), parts of countries where they clearly are at risk on convention grounds, the idea is that staff will be able to grant them refugee status or exceptional leave to remain much more quickly than they do at present, but what we want is a system that far better distinguishes between the genuine applicant who meets convention criteria and the abusive applicant from other areas—where, frankly, there is no possibility of persecution—who does not.

Mr. Geraint Davies (Croydon, Central): In welcoming my right hon. Friend's statement, in particular the reference to the reversal of job cuts in Lunar house, Croydon, and to spreading the burden of costs from places such as Croydon and inner London through a national network of support, may I ask him, on behalf of my colleagues in Croydon, to confirm that the current cost of £2 million a year for Croydon council's asylum seekers is likely to go down?

Will my right hon. Friend speak to the Secretary of State for Education and Employment about factoring in the unseen education cost of asylum seekers, particularly in London? It is not obvious that that is readily recognised as an unseen cost in the education budget for local authorities.

Mr. Straw: I pay tribute to the many thousands of my hon. Friend's constituents and others in the Croydon area for their efforts in keeping the immigration and nationality system in being, despite some substantial difficulties. Our proposal is that, when the legislation is debated and implemented, which will take some time, the burden of meeting this system of benefits in kind should be borne by central Government.

My hon. Friend invites me to pass on some remarks to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Employment. Of course I shall do that, but our proposal for the Home Office to take responsibility for the provision of support for asylum seekers relates to provision under the National Assistance Acts and the Social Security Acts. It does not relate to provision under, for example, the national health service or the education services, for reasons that I think my hon. Friend will appreciate.

Points of Order

5.40 pm

Dr. Evan Harris (Oxford, West and Abingdon): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. As an Opposition Back Bencher, I seek your advice on my own behalf and that of other Back Benchers who are co-sponsors of the age of consent amendment which was defeated in another place.

We understand that the business is now in the hands of the Government and the Home Secretary, but surely, as Opposition Members made a political stand and co-sponsored the amendment, we should be entitled to be consulted on the fate of the measure. This matter is of great concern to us, and I should like your advice, to us or to the Government, on whether it is appropriate that we were not consulted about what happened, and whether it is appropriate that the first occasion on which we are liable to hear about the fate of the amendment that we and Labour Back Benchers strongly supported will be at a press conference later this evening.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): That is not a point of order for the Chair. It is a matter that hon. Members must find ways to take up with Ministers. The Home Secretary is on the Treasury Bench and will have heard what the hon. Gentleman said. I am sure that he can pursue it in some other way.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I think that you will agree that it is distracting, particularly for Ministers who face complicated questions such as I asked the Home Secretary on trauma and asylum, when mobile phones or bells go off outside the Chamber. Could something be gently done about that, because it is very distracting?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Madam Speaker has ruled that mobile phones are not permissible within the House. There is slightly less control over what may happen in other areas that are above the Chamber. The matter will be attended to. I am sure that the Serjeant at Arms will note that fact, and will make sure that Madam Speaker's ruling runs throughout the Chamber.

Orders of the Day

Northern Ireland Bill

[4TH ALLOTTED DAY]

Considered in Committee [Progress, 24 July].

[MR. MICHAEL J. MARTIN *in the Chair*]

Clause 54

THE NORTHERN IRELAND HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION

5.41 pm

Mr. John McDonnell (Hayes and Harlington): I beg to move amendment No. 175, in page 25, line 26, after 'Commission', insert

'with membership from Northern Ireland reflecting the community balance.'.

The First Deputy Chairman of Ways and Means (Mr. Michael J. Martin): With this, it will be convenient to discuss the following amendments: No. 40, in page 25, line 28, leave out

'appointed by the Secretary of State'

and insert—

'(2A) Her Majesty may by Letters Patent from time to time appoint persons to be chairman and members, and any person so appointed shall hold office during good behaviour.'.

No. 41, in page 25, line 29, leave out 'the Secretary of State' and insert 'Her Majesty'.

No. 56, in schedule 8, page 46, line 34, after 'to', insert 'section 54(2A) and'.

No. 57, in schedule 8, page 46, line 41, leave out 'The Secretary of State' and insert 'Her Majesty'.

No. 58, in schedule 8, page 47, line 11, leave out

'in accordance with directions of the Secretary of State'.

Government amendments Nos. 209 and 210.

Mr. McDonnell: I shall be brief. The commission will conduct critical work to ensure that human rights are preserved and protected in the interests of all sections of the community. Clause 54(3) states:

"In making appointments under this section, the Secretary of State shall as far as practicable secure that the Commissioners, as a group, are representative of the community in Northern Ireland."

That is somewhat weaker than our proposal because the amendment seeks a definite community balance. It does not use the words "as far as practicable" and is not merely representative of the community as a whole. As I have said, the commission will play important roles and that is why it is prudent to get its composition right.

Throughout debate on the legislation, members of the Committee have been meticulous in pointing to the need for community balance and agreement across the board in decision making and in the exercise of these powers. The amendment would help to meet that need.

Mr. Kevin McNamara (Hull, North): I should like to speak to my amendments Nos. 40 and 42 and to comment on Government amendments Nos. 209 and 210. Amendment No. 40 states:

"(2A) Her Majesty may by Letters Patent from time to time appoint persons to be chairman and members, and any person so appointed shall hold office during good behaviour."

The amendment seeks to give the commission a greater quasi-constitutional status and greater independence from the Northern Ireland Office than the Bill envisages. It would bring it closer to the Office of the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration; indeed, the amendment is based on the legislation that established that office. There is also another reason to which I referred generally on Second Reading. I should like to go into more detail on the points that I made then, and I shall do so now to obviate the need to repeat them on subsequent amendments. I trust that the Minister of State will bear them in mind.

First, the United Nations established in the Paris convention some principles known as the Paris principles, and they outline what should or should not be contained in an effective human rights body such as a commission. The first of those is that the body should be seen to be as independent as possible of the state. Appointments by letters patent rather than by the Secretary of State will ensure that they are not political appointments and subject to the differing pressures that might arise. That is of the utmost importance.

Secondly, the Paris convention also envisaged that a human rights commission should be not only reactive but proactive. That is also embodied in my suggestion as to how the chairman should be appointed, and it appears in some of the later amendments that have been chosen for discussion. In particular, such a commission should have the power to initiate investigations, help people and to be an amicus curiae if and when it feels that that is necessary.

The flavour of the majority of the amendments that have been tabled in my name and those of my hon. Friends is that it is important to ensure from the start that the commission will be independent. I regret that, although the Government have tabled some amendments to the parts of the Bill that deal with equality—they do not go far enough, but at least some action has been taken—there does not seem to be a Government amendment to the part of the Bill dealing with the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission that would embrace the points that I raised earlier. I appreciate that other Departments may be interested in these matters, but my second major point is that it is important for these matters to be in the Bill.

As I said on Second Reading, in December at the Strasbourg Heads of Government meeting, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister endorsed the Strasbourg declaration to establish a human rights commissioner for the Council of Europe. Basically, that consists of all the well-established democratic countries of Europe, emerged and newly emerging.

This will be the first creation of a human rights commission in any of the well-established European democracies since that declaration. The emerging European countries are looking to other countries for examples of how to approach the question of human rights, enforce them and establish independence from the usual organs of the state in examining whether there have been abuses. Those countries will look carefully at such examples and will look specifically and directly at the

newest example of a human rights commission. It will be in the United Kingdom, and specifically in Northern Ireland. Northern Ireland will have what we do not have—a draft human rights Act. It is therefore of the utmost importance that we should have these powers, which are embodied in the concept of a chairman appointed under letters patent rather than by the Secretary of State.

I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will pay heed to the flavour and intention of all the amendments relating to the Human Rights Commission, so that we can feel that there will be independence from the Secretary of State and thus from political opinion and other pressures.

I want to deal with Government amendments Nos. 209 and 210, which would replace the word "its" with the word "their". I always thought that the word "commission" was a collective noun and therefore singular. Why, then, do the Government want to replace "its" with "their"? If we were talking about commission members, I could understand the use of "their", but to use "their" when referring to the commission is stretching the bounds of language.

Mr. John D. Taylor (Strangford): We need to know exactly what is meant by the term "community balance" in amendment No. 175. The hon. Member for Hayes and Harlington (Mr. McDonnell) did not spell that out. Does he mean that there should be a balance on a sectarian basis, a religious basis or a political basis? It was intended that the Parades Commission should have a community balance, but when two members resigned the two who replaced them did not preserve that balance. On this occasion, we need to know more clearly what is meant by "community balance" before we can reach a conclusion on the amendment.

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Inverclyde): I readily added my name to the amendments tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Hull, North (Mr. McNamara). If my hon. Friend the Minister is not minded to accept these reasonable amendments, will he assure the Committee that the clause, unamended, is compatible with paragraph 5 of the agreement, which calls for a human rights commission

"with membership from Northern Ireland reflecting the community balance"?

In a sense, that answers the question of the right hon. Member for Strangford (Mr. Taylor); the agreement specifies "community balance".

The very helpful notes on clauses state:

"Subsection (2) provides that the Commission is to consist of a Chief Commissioner and other Commissioners appointed by the Secretary of State. The Bill deliberately makes no reference to the size of the Commission, nor the method of appointment, which will be dealt with administratively."

I need hardly remind my hon. Friend the Minister that in paragraph 10 the agreement calls for

"a joint committee of representatives of the two Human Rights Commissions".

Do the two Governments envisage that the two commissions—one in the Republic and the other in the north of Ireland—would have the same number of members and deal with the same matters, which, presumably, they would discuss when considering

"the possibility of establishing a charter, open to signature by all democratic political parties, reflecting and endorsing agreed measures for the protection of the fundamental rights of everyone living in the island of Ireland"?

If the Minister is unwilling to accept the amendments, will he give me the assurance I have requested and comment on the compatibility of the two commissions, one in the Republic and the other in the north of Ireland?

Mr. Peter Robinson (Belfast, East): I welcome amendment No. 175. It is about time we had a body dealing with human rights in Northern Ireland that had some community balance. The Standing Advisory Commission on Human Rights certainly did not have any community balance—it was very much weighted against the Unionist community.

I suppose that the very fact that amendment No. 175 has been tabled shows that some hon. Members believe that the Secretary of State, were she left to her own devices, would appoint a human rights commission that did not reflect the balance of the community. There is some healthy scepticism among those on the Labour Back Benches which is to be welcomed. I am glad that those hon. Members want the commission to be balanced so that there is respectable Unionist representation on it, which is not the case at the moment.

There should be no need to put into the Bill a requirement on the Secretary of State to appoint a balanced commission; it is what one expects a Secretary of State to do. However, neither the Secretary of State nor Ministers have appointed people who reflect the community balance, so there needs to be a requirement for them to appoint on a cross-community basis. It is important that the Minister put on the record today clear guidance on what he understands by "community balance"—whether it be representation across the political and religious divides or simply on the basis of gender or some other aspect.

The Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office (Mr. Paul Murphy): The Human Rights Commission is an important aspect of the Bill because it is an important aspect of the agreement. I remind the Committee that we spent many days in the talks on this matter. They were profitable talks and negotiations, with little disagreement on the principles behind the Human Rights Commission.

I am sure that all hon. Members will agree that, when the commission is formed, we will have one of the strongest human rights institutions in Europe. The commission will advise the Government and the Assembly Executive on human rights. It will see all Assembly legislation and be able to offer an opinion on whether it is compatible with the European convention on human rights. It will, as a priority, consult and advise on the drawing up of a Bill of Rights to suit Northern Ireland's particular needs, and such a Bill would also become fundamental law by being put into a Westminster Act.

The commission will be able to support people whose human rights have been denied or abused by helping them to take their cases to the courts. It will be a powerful voice and force in developing, through education and research, an active human rights culture in Northern Ireland. It will be independent of Government, employing its own staff and deciding how best to carry out its tasks. It will do everything it can to ensure that the north-south human rights committee, envisaged by the agreement, is set up.

I understand that aspects of the Bill are not entirely satisfactory to hon. Members or to organisations that deal with these matters in Northern Ireland. My right

[Mr. Paul Murphy]

hon. Friend the Secretary of State has already said—and I repeat the promise—that, during the summer and before the Bill goes to the other place, we will consult political parties both here and in Northern Ireland to ensure that some of the points that are sensibly made are dealt with in the other place. Indeed, as we go through today's debate, I shall be more than prepared to accede to or consider further a number of amendments. We are listening to the debate on the understanding that there will be more time for consultation.

One of the reasons for more consultation is that the agreement contains only one paragraph dealing with the new Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission. Inevitably, the agreement is silent on a number of issues. Consequently, there is all the more reason for us to consult further.

6 pm

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): The Minister will be aware that the agreement mentions not party balance but community balance. Although I have every belief that he—or whoever appoints the commissioners—will ensure that the commission has a community balance, does he accept that the legislation probably would be strengthened if the Bill specifically stated that there should be such a community balance?

Mr. Murphy: I shall in fact deal now with the amendments—the first of which, No. 175, was moved by my hon. Friend the Member for Hayes and Harlington (Mr. McDonnell). It states that the commission should have

"membership from Northern Ireland reflecting the community balance."

My hon. Friend was right to say that that provision is in the Belfast agreement—in the second line of paragraph 5, on page 17—but I do not agree with him that it is not in the Bill. We believe that the wording of clause 54(3) is the best way to give legislative effect to that part of the agreement referring to community balance.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hull, North (Mr. McNamara) made some points on the commission's independence and the position of the Secretary of State and of Her Majesty. I think that the Bill and the agreement—and everything that has happened in between—show that we are more than happy that the commission should be genuinely independent. However, we still believe that it is for the Government to appoint the commission. Moreover, if Her Majesty had to appoint the commission, the Secretary of State—as leading Minister in these matters—would be advising her.

Although I take the point that my hon. Friend the Member for Hull, North, made on the ombudsman—who deals with slightly different matters—I do not think that amendment No. 40 would change the position.

Mr. John D. Taylor: What exactly does the Minister mean by "community balance"?

Mr. Murphy: It is a matter not of what I think but of what the agreement said. It very clearly said:

"membership from Northern Ireland reflecting the community balance".

I am sure that, when my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State appoints the commissioners, she will be bearing in mind exactly the type of talks and discussions that we had in the negotiations leading to the Belfast agreement. I am sure that, in so doing, she will be able to reflect the community balance. I am sure, too, that the right hon. Gentleman is aware of that.

Mr. Taylor: As the Minister was involved in the talks, and the Secretary of State was rarely involved in them, surely he can tell us what is meant by "community balance"?

Mr. Murphy: Yes, I can. However, I think that it would be more profitable if such a discussion were held in the next two months with all the parties in Northern Ireland.

As I said, one paragraph in the agreement deals with the commission's community balance. I think that all the world knows what traditions and communities we are considering: the broad Unionist community and the broad nationalist community. There are also other parties in Northern Ireland, such as the Alliance party, that very much think that there is another tradition that is not aligned to either Unionism or nationalism. As the right hon. Gentleman knows—as he is an Assembly member and will have to state his designation—there are other categories.

When we discussed the matter, I have not the slightest doubt that we referred to the nationalist and Unionist communities. However, my right hon. Friend will have to take into account the fine balancing required in the matter when she and I consult the parties in the summer months.

Two other issues were raised in the debate, the first of which—on the use of "theirs" rather than "its", as proposed in Government amendments Nos. 209 and 210—was raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Hull, North. For the 11 years that I have been an hon. Member, I have been constantly amazed at singles being plurals and vice versa. However, I am advised that such wording is the legal and technical way to legislate, even if it is not always the best English.

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): Is it possible that "they" is necessary for the joint committee that the Minister mentioned? If not, "it" should cover one commission. How is there a legal aspect to the matter? Surely the English language has a clear enough meaning.

Mr. Murphy: I sometimes wonder about that. I think that, in this case—I promise to come back to the hon. Gentleman if I am wrong on this—the use is not in the context only of the joint committee, which I shall deal with now.

My hon. Friend the Member for Greenock and Inverclyde (Dr. Godman) mentioned the joint committee, which is mentioned also in the agreement. It will be for the Republic of Ireland to decide the composition of its part of the committee in its own jurisdiction. Clause 55(7) provides for the commission to do all it can in facilitating the agreement. I am sure that my hon. Friend will be satisfied by that.

With those remarks, I should be grateful if amendment No. 175 were withdrawn, as many of the points that have been raised in the debate will be the subject of consultation in the summer months with parties in Northern Ireland.

Rev. Martin Smyth: The Committee must face the issue of community raised by amendment No. 175. In my constituency, it would be possible to appoint to a commission people from the upper Malone, for example, who would be perceived as representing one part of the community, and other people from Balmoral, who would be perceived as representing another part of the community. I do not think that people from either group would be seen as representing the Markets, Sandy Row, the Donegall road or Taugh Monagh. As has been said in this debate, communities are not simply political parties. We have to remember that we are dealing with human rights and with issues affecting people in every part of the community.

I wonder whether the Government have allowed themselves, in clause 54(3), a cop-out in the phrase "as far as practicable". As my hon. Friend the Member for Belfast, East (Mr. Robinson) said, once people on the Parades Commission realised what they were called on to do, they resigned and were replaced by those who were perceived by some—including those in authority—as representing the other community. However, they lived so remote from the other community that they could not represent it. We have to deal with the situation as it is.

I appreciate the Minister's comments on re-examining the use of the English language. He is a Welshman and I speak Ulster English. I should like to think that our English is accurate, especially when we deal with any legal interpretations that could cause us problems.

I should have liked the effects of amendment No. 40 to be teased out a little more. As a Unionist, I would have no difficulty with such a provision involving Her Majesty. I am not sure whether use of the words "Letters Patent" suggests that guidance to Her Majesty would come from the Lord Chancellor or from someone else who holds an office that is perhaps less political than that of the Secretary of State's, thereby providing some independence in the matter. On the other hand, some people might perceive it as a little mischievous if, instead of leaving the responsibility with the Secretary of State, the Committee placed it on Her Majesty's shoulders—bearing in mind the fact that some people in Northern Ireland have a strong republican tradition and might regard that as a departure from the agreement.

Mr. McDonnell: I am grateful to the Minister for saying that he will be reviewing the position in the coming months and will consult on the definition of community balance. For the sake of clarity, I urge him to ensure that that consultation takes place before the Bill goes to another place.

Throughout our discussions on the Bill—I have sat through them all—we have tried to ensure that the Bill reflects the agreement. As my hon. Friend the Member for Greenock and Inverclyde (Dr. Godman) made clear, the amendment directly reflects the statement in the agreement that the Human Rights Commission should reflect the community balance. I appreciate the need for the implementation to be spelled out in clause 54, but unfortunately I do not think that subsection (1) goes far enough in reflecting the agreement.

On the definition of community balance, there will obviously be a matrix of different factors that need to be taken into account. That is why it is critical that there be consultation and clarity before the Bill goes to another place. I welcome the Minister's assurance that there will be further consideration, and I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Question proposed, That the clause stand part of the Bill.

Mr. Eddie McGrady (South Down): The series of amendments to clause 54 deal with the—I am sorry, Mr. Martin. I shall resume my seat. I had intended to speak to clause 55; I apologise to the Committee.

Question put and agreed to.

Clause 54 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Schedule 8

THE NORTHERN IRELAND HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION

Amendments made: No. 209, in page 48, line 2, leave out 'its' and insert 'their'.

No. 210, in page 48, line 4, leave out 'its' and insert 'their'.—*[Mr. Paul Murphy.]*

Question proposed, That this schedule, as amended, be the Eighth schedule to the Bill.

Mr. McNamara: It is not my intention to delay the Committee long, but it will have seen from the amendment paper that I had tabled an amendment relating to the budget of the Human Rights Commission, which the Chairman of Ways and Means, in his wisdom, did not select.

I am concerned to ensure that the commission should be given adequate budgetary powers to enable it to carry out all its functions. It will have some significant tasks, which were outlined by the Minister. For example, when the commission consults on the new Bill of Rights, the amount of money suggested in the Bill could well be expended simply on getting reports in that connection. The question of litigation in which the commission might be involved also underlines the need for sufficient funding.

I am especially concerned about the fact that there could be considerable delays because of Northern Ireland Office scrutiny. Questions might be asked of the commission as to whether its money is properly used. It is important that all the functions of the commission should be properly funded. There should be no restrictions on any distribution of funding as among the functions that the commission has been given. It is important that there should be adequate funding because funding could affect the commission's operation, strategy, standing, credibility and independence. For example, problems arose with the Standing Advisory Commission on Human Rights, which sometimes faced difficulties because it did not have sufficient independence and, from time to time, did not get the attention that it deserved from the Government.

The explanatory and financial memorandum notes that the costs associated with the Human Rights Commission and the new Equality Commission will be £750,000. It is important to know the spread of moneys between those

[Mr. McNamara]

two bodies. I hope that I have put down a couple of cautionary markers to the Minister as to how the money will be allocated and the impact of that allocation.

Mr. John D. Taylor: We have already discussed the importance of having a community balance in the commission's membership. Schedule 8 also refers to the commission's staff.

In Northern Ireland, we have experience of fair employment legislation. We have a Fair Employment Commission, which is supposed to ensure a proper balance of employment among institutions and businesses. However, one of the worst examples of imbalance in employment is to be found among the staff of the Fair Employment Commission itself. Throughout its entire history, it has always had among its employees an imbalance to the disadvantage of the Protestant community. It has never rectified that imbalance and has been a failure to the extent that it has not set an example to other employers in Northern Ireland. Therefore, it would not be sufficient for us to assume that applying the present fair employment legislation in Northern Ireland would mean a proper balance within the staff of the new commission, unless the schedule stated clearly—as it does in respect of the membership of the commission—that the staff should likewise reflect the community in Northern Ireland.

6.15 pm

Mr. William Ross (East Londonderry): In the earlier debate, some concern was expressed about what community balance actually meant. It seemed that the Minister did not know the meaning of the phrase, because he kept on talking about there being more discussions over the summer months. My right hon. Friend the Member for Strangford (Mr. Taylor), who was a member of the talks team, was anxious to have the matter clarified but did not, if I may say so, receive any clarification from the Minister.

We do not yet know whether community balance with regard to the commissioners is based on religious persuasion, political persuasion or on something else, or whether there will be representation involving people who have migrated to Northern Ireland from Great Britain, the Irish Republic or elsewhere. Nor do we know how the atheists and agnostics are to be represented.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Strangford also referred to a different body that has an imbalance in its staff. Another imbalance in that body is that Mr. Cooper has always been the most prominent of its members—

Mr. John D. Taylor: Sir Robert.

Mr. Ross: Yes, he is Sir Robert now. He has been well rewarded for his services to the community in Northern Ireland. It seems that no one other than he has been able to fill the post that he has held.

Dr. Godman *rose—*

Mr. Ross: I shall continue, if the hon. Gentleman will allow me.

Paragraph 2(2) of schedule 8 states that the chief commissioner shall not be appointed for more than five years at a time and that any other commissioner shall not be appointed for more than three years at a time. We need to know how many five-year or three-year terms those individuals will be permitted to serve, as we do not want a permanent occupant of the post being established. Indeed, I think that most of us would be greatly put out if we were to discover that Sir Robert Cooper was to transfer to the new body.

We are also deeply concerned about lines 4 and 5 on page 48 of the Bill, which state that the commission may make provision about

"the discharge of its functions by committees (which may include non-commissioners)".

In the circumstances, perhaps the Minister will tell us how he will ensure the balance when non-commissioners are included, as that could introduce considerable imbalance by the back door? We need to know a great deal more from the Government than we have heard hitherto.

The matter will be complicated for many years in Northern Ireland and we need to get it right. It is no use the Minister coming along in the latter stages of the Bill's passage through the House and saying, "Do not worry about it. We will get it right over the summer." At least two of my right hon. and hon. Friends who have considered the matter for many months are clearly unhappy—and, indeed, unclear—about the wording of the Bill in this regard. We certainly deserve a much more detailed explanation from the Minister than he has so far given. May we please have the information that we seek before we proceed any further?

Dr. Godman: In my view, in respect of representation on such bodies, it is entirely right and proper that the Government should seek a community balance and should attempt at all costs to avoid the creation of institutionalised sectarianism.

Mr. Ross: The hon. Gentleman has raised another interesting point. He refers to institutionalised sectarianism. In my own Church, a debate on sectarianism has raged for the past year. I always have some difficulty with that as, in essence, any religious denomination must be sectarian. Otherwise, it does away with its own reason for existence—and I do not see very many being prepared to accept that. If the hon. Gentleman has any more to say about that, I would be happy to hear it, as he has made interesting contributions to the debate. He now appears to be saying that community balance must be extended beyond those who are Roman Catholic or Protestant in the broadest sense. Later today, we will consider amendments on that point. However, if we take that route, we will find ourselves with an extremely large commission.

Mr. Corbyn: The hon. Gentleman has given the most peculiar definition of religion that I have ever heard—that it has to be based on a sectarian point of view—but I shall let that pass. In his reply to the amendment tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Hayes and Harlington (Mr. McDonnell) and me, my hon. Friend the Minister said that there would be consultation with all parties. The agreement refers not to parties but to communities that should be represented on the commission. The Minister

said that, if necessary, he was prepared to introduce further amendments in the House of Lords, so is it really necessary to have a lengthy exploration of schedule 8 at this stage?

Mr. Ross: This is the perfect opportunity to have a lengthy exploration of the matters, as we did not get the explanation that we sought from the Minister. The hon. Gentleman would be well served if he went to the Library and looked up the meaning of "sectarian" in one of the very many excellent dictionaries there. He would find that I am much closer to the mark than he seems to believe.

Mr. McNamara: I thank the Committee for its patience. I want to raise one point with regard to the statements that were made about Sir Robert Cooper. Sir Robert has been a fine, principled public servant during his time at the Fair Employment Commission and, before that, at the Fair Employment Agency. He has been objective and strong, although he has not always been supported by Government to the extent that he should have been. He certainly has a reputation for impartiality throughout Northern Ireland of which any public servant would be proud, and I hope that all members of the commission, from whatever part of the community, have the same sterling virtues as Sir Robert.

Had the right hon. Member for Strangford (Mr. Taylor) been a member of the Committee considering the legislation in the 1980s, he would recall that the agency advertised specifically for applicants from the majority community to take up places within the Fair Employment Commission. The Fair Employment Commission sought desperately to achieve and maintain a balance among the people who served on it.

Mrs. Maria Fyfe (Glasgow, Maryhill): I should like to raise another aspect of representativeness in the community. Like all legislation, the Bill refers constantly to "he" and "him", as if only the male half of the population could participate in the bodies concerned. This may seem a small point, so let me ask hon. Members to ask themselves whether, if the legislation referred constantly to "she" and "her", that would create an impression that it was intended solely or mostly for women.

Does the Minister agree that, in the interests of ensuring proper participation by women in the Human Rights Commission and other bodies, it is high time that the wording of legislation reflected the balance in society? If that cannot be done during the passage of the Bill, will my hon. Friend at least ensure that everything possible is done to ensure that the public are made aware that women should play a full part in the commission?

Mr. Paul Murphy: On the last point, I understand that the Interpretation Act 1978 makes it clear that the word "he" also refers to the word "she". However, I take my hon. Friend's point about the importance of women being represented on public bodies in Northern Ireland—particularly the public body to which the schedule refers.

I shall try to answer some of the points that have been raised, but first let me make two general points that cover much of what has been said in the past 20 minutes or so.

Everyone agrees that the great success of the agreement was that it brought together nationalism and Unionism to the benefit of all the people of Northern Ireland. There are of course Protestant nationalists and Catholic Unionists and it is sometimes difficult to disentangle the subtleties of the ways in which people identify themselves. That is why, in the Assembly, people are asked to identify themselves as representatives of the Unionist community or the nationalist community. I also understand that there is provision for representatives to identify themselves as neither. Everyone understands that the purpose of the agreement was to bring together people who have for many decades been bitterly divided.

We do not want to have too mechanistic a view of the composition of the commission and to tie ourselves down to a formula that is unrealistic or not sensible. We want the commission to secure human rights for everybody and to be representative of everybody. We also understand that the community cannot be represented only by people from the Upper Malone road and Balmoral. Obviously, we accept the point that, initially, appointments to the commission must be made on merit so that the people who are to do those jobs will do them well. However, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State must ensure that people have confidence in the commission, whether they are Unionists or nationalists. That is why the Bill—and particularly the agreement—refers to the balance.

There will also be a non-statutory memorandum of understanding between the Government and the commission on various administrative matters. Clearly, we want to keep a watchful eye on the appointments and how the commission develops.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hull, North (Mr. McNamara) referred to funding. He was right to draw attention to the memorandum at the beginning of the Bill, as the reference to the funding of the Human Rights Commission and the Equality Commission is wrong. The £750,000 is for the running of the Human Rights Commission alone: it does not include the Equality Commission. My hon. Friend is right to point out that there must be adequate funding. There is no point in having a commission, which is a central part of the agreement, unless there is money to ensure that it works properly. I assure my hon. Friend that we shall ensure that the commission is properly funded.

Question put and agreed to.

Schedule 8, as amended, agreed to.

Clause 55

THE COMMISSION'S FUNCTIONS

6.30 pm

Mr. McNamara: I beg to move amendment No. 43, in page 26, leave out lines 2 to 6 and insert—

'(3) The Assembly shall refer all proposed Measures to the Commission in draft and the Commission may advise the Assembly whether a proposed Measure is compatible with human rights, as the Commission thinks appropriate.

(4) The Assembly shall receive any such advice, and take it into account when considering the proposed Measure.'.

The First Deputy Chairman: With this, it will be convenient to discuss the following: Amendment No. 155, in page 26, line 2, leave out subsection (3) and insert—

'(3) The Assembly shall refer all Bills to the Commission in draft. The Commission may advise the Assembly whether a Bill is compatible with human rights as the Commission thinks appropriate. The Assembly shall receive any such advice, and take it into account when considering the Bill.'.

[The First Deputy Chairman]

Government amendments Nos. 181 and 182.

Amendment No. 189, in page 26, line 17, at end insert—

'(6A) The Commission may decide to publish its advice and the outcome of its research and investigations.'.

Amendment No. 190, in page 26, line 18, leave out 'facilitate' and insert 'ensure'.

Amendment No. 191, in page 26, line 19, leave out 'referred to' and insert 'envisaged'.

Amendment No. 44, in page 26, line 24, at end add

'and all other international human rights standards which are relevant.'.

Amendment No. 177, in page 26, line 24, at end add—

'(9) In addition to the powers the Commission has at present, the Secretary of State shall order a review, to be completed within one year, to review the remit and structure in line with international best practice, and shall consult with the office of the UN High Commissioner, non-governmental organisations and other interested parties.'.

New clause 2—*Power of Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission to seek restraining injunctions*—

' .—Where the Commission considers that, unless restrained, a person is likely to engage in a persistent breach of the provisions of the Human Rights Act 1998, or of section 62 or 63 of this Act, the Commission may apply to the High Court for an injunction restraining him from doing so; and the court, if satisfied that the application is well founded, may grant the injunction in the terms applied for, or in more limited terms.'.

New clause 3—*Power of Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission to conduct investigations*—

'.—(1) Where the Commission considers it appropriate, it may conduct investigations to determine whether a breach of the Human Rights Act 1998, or of section 62 or 63 of this Act, has occurred, or may be occurring.

(2) Where the Commission proposes to conduct an investigation, it shall afford an opportunity to those with sufficient interest to comment on the desirability of conducting such an investigation.

(3) For the purposes of an investigation, the Commission may require any person who in its opinion is able to furnish information or produce documents relevant to the investigation to furnish any such information or produce any such document.

(4) For the purposes of any such investigation the Commission shall have the same powers as the Court in respect of the attendance and examination of witnesses and in respect of the production of documents.

(5) If any person without lawful excuse obstructs the Commission or any officer of the Commission in the performance of his functions under this Act, or is guilty of any act or omission in relation to any investigation under this Act which, if that investigation were a proceeding in the Court; would constitute contempt of court, the Commission may certify the offence to the Court.

(6) Where an offence is certified under this section, the Court may inquire into the matter and deal with the person mentioned in subsection (5) in any manner in which the Court could deal with him if he had committed the like offence in relation to the Court.

(7) If, after conducting an investigation under this Act, it appears to the Commission appropriate, it may lay before each House of Parliament and the Assembly a special report.'.

New clause 14—*Human Rights Commission: Review*—

'—(1) On the expiry of the third year following the establishment of the Human Rights Commission, the Secretary of State shall invite the Commission to submit a report reviewing its activities to date and, if appropriate, submitting proposals for revising its mandate and structure.

(2) The Secretary of State shall, following public consultation on the report of the Commission, bring forward such proposals as he feels are appropriate, taking into account the report of the Commission and the process of public consultations.'.

Mr. McNamara: My hon. Friend the Minister inadvertently misled the Committee—or perhaps I misheard him—when he was speaking about the powers of the new Human Rights Commission. He gave the impression that it was to be empowered to examine all legislation from the new Assembly. That is not what the Bill says. I propose in amendment No. 43 that the Assembly should refer proposed measures to the commission in draft and that, if the commission gives advice on whether the measure is compatible with human rights, that advice should be taken into account.

The Assembly should have a responsibility to send all draft legislation to the commission. The commission should have the discretion to choose which measures to comment on. For the commission to have scrutiny powers only when issues are referred by the Assembly would reduce its effectiveness. Requiring the commission to comment properly on all legislation would overburden it and disable it from acting strategically, concentrating on issues that are considered to be of primary importance. It is preferable for the Assembly to be required to receive the commission's views and consider how best to respond than for the initiative to come from the Assembly.

Amendment No. 44 would extend the power of the commission when considering various international organs and statutes to enable it to consider issues on the international stage as well as in the European context. The Paris convention of the United Nations is one example.

New clause 2 mirrors existing legislation for the Fair Employment Commission, the Equal Opportunities Commission and the Commission for Racial Equality, enabling the commission to initiate litigation if it considers that there is a pattern of human rights violations. That would enable the commission to be more effective.

New clause 3 would give the commission powers that it currently lacks to investigate breaches of human rights and the rights envisaged in the Paris principle. The crucial issue is what powers the commission should be given to make such investigations effective. The amendment would provide that the commission, like the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration, would have the power to allow discovery of documents and to require witnesses to attend and testify at an inquiry, together with adequate safeguards to ensure procedural fairness for witnesses.

New clause 14 would make provision for the Human Rights Commission to report on its work after a number of years, and to consider what improvements might be made. That mirrors the provision in the Fair Employment Acts for an examination of what was happening under the Acts, which resulted in the report of the Standing Advisory Commission on Human Rights, on which I hope to see legislation in the next Session.

Mr. McGrady: The functions and powers of the Human Rights Commission are among the most important aspects of the Belfast agreement. It is important that the Bill reflects the letter and the spirit of the commitments entered into by the two Governments and the other signatories to the agreement.

The SDLP is not satisfied that the Bill gives full expression to the letter and spirit of the agreement on the Human Rights Commission. The commission must be a

powerful guardian of new standards resulting from the implementation of the agreement. In our debates on clause 54 and schedule 8, we have dealt briefly with the resources and personnel at the disposal of the commission and its composition. Those factors—finance, composition and personnel—will determine the quality, the style and the importance of the commission. The enormous wealth of international expertise might be brought to bear on the commission's problems.

The amendments are crucial to help the Human Rights Commission in its initiating role, its investigations of violations and non-performance on issues within its remit and its scrutiny of proposed legislation. Those are vital issues. I am fearful that a repeat of the assurance that the Minister gave on the issues raised on clause 54 and schedule 8—that the matters will be considered at length over the summer and reflected in amendments in the other place—will not give us a chance to tie down some of the existing requirements, agreed by two Governments and eight parties. The aim of the amendments is to ensure that the Human Rights Commission is fully able to undertake the matters referred to it.

It would be inappropriate to repeat the arguments of my hon. Friend the Member for Hull, North (Mr. McNamara), but perhaps I could refer to a further issue that is not reflected in the Bill. In paragraph 10, under the heading "Rights, Safeguards and Equality of Opportunity", the agreement says:

"It is envisaged that there would be a joint committee of representatives of the two Human Rights Commissions, North and South, as a forum for consideration of human rights issues in the island of Ireland. The joint committee will consider, among other matters, the possibility of establishing a charter, open to signature by all democratic political parties, reflecting and endorsing agreed measures for the protection of the fundamental rights of everyone living in the island of Ireland."

How does the Minister see that being provided for and, indeed, implemented under the powers of the Human Rights Commission and its sister group in the Republic of Ireland for the purpose of ensuring that the human rights of all citizens of Ireland—north and south—are dealt with comprehensively and harmoniously? As the Minister rightly said in relation to clause 54, this very important area took up considerable debating time in the inter-party talks.

I repeat that we are not satisfied that the letter and spirit of the agreement are fully reflected in the Bill. We are, alas, very dependent on the Minister taking on board what has been said, listening to the consultation which he has promised during the summer months and making available amendments to implement the aspects that have been omitted and to create the joint committee before the matter goes to the other place for final consideration.

Mr. Lembit Öpik (Montgomeryshire): Amendment No. 155 is essentially the same as amendment No. 43, which was moved by the hon. Member for Hull, North (Mr. McNamara), with the exception that it would replace the phrase "proposed Measures" in amendment No. 43 with "Bills". We thought it appropriate to reflect the change between the draft Bill and the Bill before us in the amendment. The amendment's aim is largely the same as that of amendment No. 43: to seek elucidation of the exact process by which the commission will comment and provide advice on Bills and draft Bills—not least because the commission will welcome such guidance.

Our ideal is that all Bills comply with human rights requirements. That could be achieved if all Bills were referred to the commission every time that it can make a contribution—at an early stage, just after the Bill is published, and once again at the end of the process, once the Assembly has amended them. It would certainly take far too long if the commission were invited or expected to examine every new dot or comma and every tiny change. We need to ensure that the Human Rights Commission sees the Bills on enough occasions and at the right times in order for it to comply with the requirements. At the same time, we must ensure that demands on it are not so strict and persistent that the whole process would be held up.

The Bill should provide that the Assembly automatically refers all draft legislation to the commission, which would have the discretion to choose on which pieces of legislation it would comment. The commission may make very little comment on some pieces of legislation, while others may require substantial investigation and advice. Allowing the commission powers to scrutinise only issues that the Assembly has referred to it would massively reduce the commission's effectiveness. Indeed, some friction between the commission and the Assembly may be generated. By the same token, it would be rather unhelpful if the commission felt duty bound to comment on every piece of legislation. It would not be helpful to refer matters that are not relevant to its core work. It would be nice to be reassured that the commission would have such latitude.

I basically support amendments Nos. 189 and 190. As I understand it, amendment No. 189 adds the proviso that the commission may decide to publish any advice it has given and the outcome of its research and investigation. I see the hon. Member for South Down (Mr. McGrady) nodding. Adding such a proviso is sensible, and would make the commission more open and accountable. More than anything, it would make it clear to the public that the commission can be expected to behave in such a way, which is all to the good. Amendment No. 190 would leave out the word "facilitate" and insert the word "ensure", and amendment No. 191 would change the words "referred to" to "envisaged" They encourage the commission to take a firmer line and ensure that a north-south human rights commission is established. That is also very sensible.

6.45 pm

Taken together, amendments Nos. 189, 190 and 191 go slightly further than the wording in the agreement. There does not seem to be a mandate in the agreement for demanding that the commission ensure the creation of such a north-south commission, although it is certainly in the spirit of the agreement—indeed, the language of the agreement implies that it would be reasonable—to take the matter a little further. I would be very supportive of that. I look forward to hearing the Minister's views on that group of amendments.

I very much support new clause 3, which would allow the commission to be proactive as well as reactive in upholding human rights and ensuring that justice is done. It makes it easier for the commission to ensure that test cases—class actions—can be brought forward rather than an individual being required to bring forward a case which the commission could investigate. It seems right that the commission can embark on such an approach.

[Mr. Lembit Öpik]

The amendments provide that, like the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration, the commission has specific powers to enable discovery of documents and to require witnesses to attend and testify before such an inquiry—together with adequate safeguards to ensure procedural fairness for witnesses. All in all, therefore, new clause 3 would significantly strengthen the commission's opportunities to act proactively. Given the clear spirit and intent of the agreement, it would be very helpful if the Government seriously considered accepting new clause 3, or something very similar, during their deliberations over the next few months.

Amendment Nos. 155, 43, 189 to 191 and new clause 3 would strengthen the sections of the Bill on the commission's work and are very much in line with the agreement.

Mr. Corbyn: I should like to draw the Committee's attention to amendment No. 177, which was tabled by me and my hon. Friend the Member for Hayes and Harlington (Mr. McDonnell). It concerns the role of the Secretary of State in asking for a review within one year. New clause 14, tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Hull, North (Mr. McNamara) and others, would require a review at the end of the third year. My hon. Friend and I suggest that an earlier review might be more appropriate.

Given the growing power of the United Nations High Commissioner on Human Rights and the importance of human rights that many Governments are now recognising, it would be appropriate if, in reviewing proceedings, the Secretary of State and the commission consulted the UN high commission on whether it feels that the Human Rights Commission's operations are in line with UN best practice. Indeed, the UN high commission could provide helpful advice. In Northern Ireland, we are—hopefully—moving towards a much more peaceful future, where respect for human rights is a cornerstone. The greater the transparency and the greater the involvement of international organisations such as the UN high commission, the more successful the Human Rights Commission is likely to be.

I welcome amendment No. 189, which was tabled by the hon. Member for Foyle (Mr. Hume) and others, for its desire for transparency in the commission's work. I am however surprised that its says only that the commission "may . . . publish" some of its findings. It would be more appropriate for the commission to make public all its findings and research, so that people have much more confidence in it and do not suspect that some unpublished evidence is lurking around which might be the subject of leaks or speculation. Transparency is most important if we are to overcome all the difficulties in Northern Ireland.

Mr. John D. Taylor: The Minister will recall that, in the multi-party talks prior to the Belfast agreement, there was considerable discussion of human rights, especially human rights in the Republic of Ireland. When the Council of Europe at Strasbourg debated the agreement, it requested in its resolution that provision be made for human rights in the Republic of Ireland, as required by the European convention on human rights.

In the multi-party talks, subjects such as family planning legislation, divorce legislation and compulsory Irish in schools were raised. In particular, there was discussion about the discrimination against Protestants from Northern Ireland who marry people from the Republic and move there, but cannot find employment in the public sector because they have never learnt the Irish language. Of all the professions, schoolteachers are most aggrieved at that discrimination; they cannot find jobs, even in Protestant schools, because the rules forbid the employment of teachers who do not have a qualification in Gaelic.

The creation of a human rights commission in the Republic of Ireland would be an important part of the new arrangement within the island of Ireland, by which, I hope, Northern Ireland will be able to live at ease with its neighbour. I hope that the Minister will bear that in mind as consideration of the Bill continues.

Mr. Peter Temple-Morris (Leominster): I agree with the right hon. Member for Strangford (Mr. Taylor)—one of the welcome features of the Belfast agreement is that parallel movement in the south will cover the problem to which he alludes. Indeed, further provision is made for joint participation on the human rights front; the two commissions will eventually, I hope, have a joint body where such issues can be raised when anyone, on either side of the border, fails to come up to scratch.

Mr. McNamara: The thought occurred to me that that would be an excellent subject for a cross-border committee between Dail Eireann and the new Assembly—such a committee could explore all sorts of problems.

Mr. Temple–Morris: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. No doubt the right hon. Member for Strangford has heard what he said and will in time support such a progressive endeavour.

I underline what my hon. Friend the Member for South Down (Mr. McGrady) said about the importance of the clause and the functions of the commission. Under the Bill as it stands, the commission has a benevolence about it; it is an also-ran to almost everyone. However, it does not have many teeth, which is what a human rights body needs if it is to be effective.

That is why I think that the phraseology of the amendment is superior to that of the Bill. I also think, with respect, that the amendment would be more effective than amendment No. 155—although I agree with every word that the hon. Member for Montgomeryshire (Mr. Öpik) said—so I hope that the Minister will actively consider it. It is only right that all measures should be referred from the Assembly to the commission. Equally, the commission should not be obliged to submit its opinion in all cases; it should be free to do so when it wills. Currently, the proposal is on the weak side.

I put almost a higher priority on new clauses 2 and 3, which contain the real teeth. Those of us who have had anything to do with human rights matters will be aware that the power to bring injunctions is vital; the efficacy of the commission could be transformed if it were able to conduct its own investigations rather than only advise others.

Dr. Godman: Like my hon. Friend the Member for Leominster (Mr. Temple-Morris), I believe that the

Government should treat new clauses 2 and 3 with considerable sympathy. New clause 2 would enable the commission to

"apply to the High Court for an injunction".

That is utterly compatible with the agreement, which states, in paragraph 5 on page 17, that the commission's role not only should be advisory and consultative, but should include

"in appropriate cases, bringing court proceedings or providing assistance to individuals doing so."

That would give the commission the power of sanction, which would be most welcome.

Fiona Mactaggart (Slough): I support new clauses 2 and 3. Indeed, my hon. Friend the Member for Greenock and Inverclyde (Dr. Godman) has made the point that I wanted to make. I vividly recall how strongly I felt, hearing my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State report on the Belfast agreement, that the human rights measures set a future standard for the whole of the United Kingdom—they represent a powerful articulation of what we should deliver.

My concern is that the Bill does not fully articulate all the points in the agreement. Like my hon. Friend the Member for Greenock and Inverclyde, I believe that new clause 2 would deal with one aspect of that. Moreover, I believe that new clause 3 would deal with the power to investigate.

To be proactive and to get to the bottom of abuses, a human rights body requires an investigatory power. The Paris principles state that human rights commissions should have powers

"to examine any situation involving violation of human rights".

Without such powers, the commission will not be in accord with those principles or be as effective as it could be.

I have urged colleagues who are concerned with human rights to accept the model that is powerfully set out in the agreement. The Bill deals well with the educative powers, and the other powers are important, but unless the commission fully reflects what is set out in the agreement—the amendments and new clauses would help it to do so—it will not be the ground-breaking, precedent-setting body that it needs to be: it will not be as effective as it should be. An effective guarantee of human rights is the first step towards an effective guarantee of peace.

Mr. Paul Murphy: This has been a very useful debate. My hon. Friend the Member for Slough (Fiona Mactaggart) was right to emphasise the importance that the agreement and the Bill attach to human rights. However, the agreement and the Bill were both time restrained, so there were gaps in the final talks. Both the agreement and the Bill are silent on some areas, as there was insufficient time to do everything as well as we could expect. That is why, I say to my hon. Friend the Member for South Down (Mr. McGrady), consultation with the parties is so important. In a sense, it is a continuation of the talks. We must get the balance right between the parties' views, and then Parliament will make the final decision. The Bill is a Bill of the British Parliament, but it must reflect the spirit and words of the agreement.

We were able to put much more detail in the Bill on strand 1 than on the commission, because the detail on that has simply not been worked out yet. Everyone involved in the talks was conscious of the spirit, which is why it is so important to be able to consult the parties during August and September.

Amendment No. 43 concerns the way in which the commission will deal with legislation by the Assembly. Clause 11 requires the Assembly to send a copy of each Bill, after its introduction, to the commission, but is of course silent on the Assembly's duty to take into account the commission's advice. The amendment would go beyond what is in the Bill, because it refers to "proposed" legislation.

7 pm

The agreement says that members of the commission should consider

"draft legislation referred to them by the new Assembly".

Does that mean that all legislation has to be considered by the commission, or only those laws that the Assembly wants to refer, because they have a human rights impact? Of course, the commission must offer advice when specifically asked by the Assembly to do so, but the agreement is not totally clear on the point. Hon. Members can rest assured that clause 11 gives the opportunity for each and every Bill from the Assembly to go to the commission for consideration. That applies also to amendment No. 155.

Government amendment No. 181 will enable the commission to make occasional visits overseas, if it considers that necessary to promote human rights in Northern Ireland, but it will properly prevent it from taking up cases of human rights abuses that have nothing to do with Northern Ireland. Amendment No. 182 is consequential upon it.

The hon. Member for Montgomeryshire (Mr. Öpik) said that he supports amendment No. 189, as do the Government. We accept the amendment, as it would be useful to make it clear in the Bill that the commission can publish its advice and the outcome of its investigations.

Mr. Corbyn: As the amendment says "may publish", does that mean that the commission itself will decide whether to publish its findings, or will that decision be taken by someone else?

Mr. Murphy: The principle behind the wording of the amendment is that there should be publication. For the detail, I suggest that my hon. Friend refer to those who tabled it, but the Government agree with the wording and believe that the commission's ability to publish is an extremely good idea. The amendment, which we accept, does not say whether publication should be compulsory, but perhaps we can consider that in future.

Mr. William Ross: Having gone two or three steps of the way, could not the Government go the rest of the way, and also publish the evidence on which the commission bases its decisions and advice?

Mr. Murphy: As I said, there is to be a memorandum of understanding between the commission and the Government on various issues. Practice will tell whether evidence should be published. Generally, of course, evidence is published in such circumstances, and I see no reason, on the face of it, why that should not be the case,

[Mr. Murphy]

but there may be such reasons, and I do not want to give a definitive answer at this stage. All that the Government are prepared to agree to specifically is what is said in amendment No. 189.

The Government are also prepared to accept amendment No. 190, under which the Bill will say:

"The Commission shall do all that they can to ensure"—

rather than "facilitate"—

the establishment of the committee referred to in paragraph 10".

That is a reference to the joint committee of the human rights commissions in Northern Ireland and in the Republic. We are grateful to those who tabled the amendment, as we think that it better reflects the spirit and intention of the agreement. It is not within our power to require that the Government of the Republic of Ireland establish their side of the joint committee; the most that we can do is to require by law that our commission does all that it can.

The charter rights are mentioned in the agreement, and that point is covered in clause 55(7), which says:

"The Commission shall do all they can"

to establish the committee referred to in the relevant part of the agreement. That naturally includes considering a possible charter of rights for the whole of Ireland.

I cannot be so generous on amendment No. 191. We believe that the clause as it stands covers everything that is necessary.

I do not think that we would benefit by accepting amendment No. 44, which could restrict the commission's activities. The term "human rights" is deliberately not strictly defined in the Bill, to give the commission the greatest possible freedom to determine for itself the standards of human rights protection against which laws and practices should be judged.

We obviously want to monitor very carefully the commission's functions and powers, but we have not yet finalised precisely what those powers are likely to be—that is a matter for consultation between the Government and all the parties in Northern Ireland—and we ought to wait until that is established before instituting a review as envisaged in amendment No. 177.

Mr. Corbyn: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for what he has said thus far, but his argument would not preclude a later discussion, after a year or whatever period is deemed appropriate, with the United Nations or other relevant organisations. We are a major signatory to the European convention on human rights, and as we are setting up a ground-breaking commission, it would surely be beneficial to both sides to consult the UN.

Mr. Murphy: I am sure that there is indeed great benefit in consulting the United Nations, but at this stage in the legislative process it would be inappropriate to accept the amendment until we know exactly what the final powers are to be.

New clause 2 would give the commission significant additional powers. We cannot accept it at this stage, but in forthcoming consultations we shall certainly consider some of the points that lie behind it. The same goes for new clause 3, which is perhaps the most significant new clause or amendment in this group. It concerns the commission's powers to investigate, which is the matter on which we have had the greatest representation. That has spurred us on to ensure that there will be consultation over the summer. There are differences of view and we are not yet convinced that we have got it right. We must consult the parties in Northern Ireland and elsewhere.

For the convenience of the Committee I will again list the amendments that the Government are prepared to accept, which are Nos. 189 and 190 tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Foyle (Mr. Hume). As I said, we intend to look further at many of the other points raised during this important debate and to consult parties in Northern Ireland, as well as representatives in the House.

Mr. McNamara: I thank my hon. Friend for his comprehensive reply. However, clause 11, requires

"the Presiding Officer to send a copy of each Bill, as soon as reasonably practicable after introduction, to the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission . . . enabling the Assembly to ask the Commission, where the Assembly thinks fit, to advise whether a Bill is compatible with human rights (including the Convention rights)."

The commission has such a power only if it is asked for its opinion. That is the distinction between my amendment and the clause and that is why I tabled my amendment. I trust that my hon. Friend will re-examine that point, which is significant. I am not asking that the commission be forced to comment on all legislation—only on legislation that it thinks significant or legislation referred to it for comment by the Assembly. My hon. Friend seems to be saying that the commission can comment on every Bill that is passed to it. If that could be put on the face of the Bill, it would clear up the ambiguity.

Mr. Murphy: Clause 55(3) states that the commission can comment on all Bills whether they are referred to it or not. My hon. Friend's amendment deals with the stage at which Bills would be referred to the commission.

Mr. McNamara: I am not certain that clause 55 is as explicit as my amendment would be. It states:

"The Commission shall advise the Secretary of State and the Executive Committee . . . of legislative and other measures which ought to be taken to protect human rights—

(a) as soon as reasonably practicable after receipt of a general or specific request for advice; and

(b) on such other occasions as the Commission think appropriate."

I take my hon. Friend's point about the clause, but it is not as precise as I would wish.

I listened carefully to what my hon. Friend said about new clause 3. There is indeed great feeling about the need for the Human Rights Commission to have teeth. I must return to the Paris principles, as did my hon. Friend the Member for Slough Fiona Mactaggart—not only to the effect that failure to implement those principles would have in Northern Ireland but to the example that that would give to the rest of Europe.

I am surprised at my hon. Friend's reluctance with regard to new clause 2, which merely replicates a power that exists for all the other bodies concerned with human rights. If we are to have a commission for human rights it would seem strange if it did not have such a power, which will presumably be given to the Equality Commission. I am grateful to my hon. Friend for saying that he will look into that and I hope that he will do so carefully as it is an important power.

I am grateful for the progress that my hon. Friend has made in meeting our arguments so far and I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Amendments made: No. 181, in page 26, line 9, leave out 'in Northern Ireland'.

No. 182, in page 26, line 10, after 'rights', insert 'in Northern Ireland'.—*[Mr. Paul Murphy.]*

Amendments made: No. 189, in page 26, line 17, at end insert—

'(6A) The Commission may decide to publish its advice and the outcome of its research and investigations.'.

No. 190, in page 26, line 18, leave out 'facilitate' and insert 'ensure'.—*[Mr. McGrady.]*

Clause 55, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 56

ASSISTANCE TO INDIVIDUALS

7.15 pm

Mr. McNamara: I beg to move amendment No. 45, in page 26, line 29, at end insert

' ; or

(c) which an individual has commenced, or wishes to commence, under section 62 or 63 of this Act; or

(d) which an individual has commenced, or wishes to commence, by way of judicial review which raises relevant issues within the general remit of the Commission.'.

The amendment deals with assistance to individuals. As the Bill stands, it does not permit the commission to assist complainants who want to commence proceedings under the anti-discrimination provisions. The application of the clause is limited to paragraphs (a) and (b), and I want to extend it to include (c) and (d), to make it possible for the commission to help individuals in such cases.

I should also be grateful if the Minister would clarify whether the commission will be able to assist litigants who want to go to judicial review when such issues are raised.

Mr. Paul Murphy: As I have made clear, the Government have received many proposals to enhance the powers of the commission, in the form not only of amendments but of representations by interested bodies in Northern Ireland and elsewhere. We have taken those proposals seriously and want to consult colleagues and interested parties further before reaching a final view. We are open to the possibility of tabling amendments in another place to give effect to some of those representations. Although we would not want to accept the amendment at this stage, we will not reject the arguments behind it until we have looked into it more carefully and consulted. The judicial side will be dealt with later.

Mr. McNamara: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, and I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Mr. McNamara: I beg to move amendment No. 46, in page 27, line 4, at end add—

'(5) The Commission may, with the permission of the court, submit its opinion as *amicus curiae* on the substance of the proceedings before the court, irrespective of whether the Commission is either a party to the proceedings, or has granted assistance in relation to proceedings under subsection (2).'.

The First Deputy Chairman: With this, it will be convenient to discuss the following: Amendment No. 47, in clause 57, page 27, line 12, after 'Ireland', insert

'the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland, the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission, any organisation with a legitimate interest,'.

Clause 57 stand part.

Mr. McNamara: The sad thing about the clause is that it mentions restrictions on applications that may be made. My amendment would extend the rights of the commission so as to extend the rights of citizens in general. It would clarify the commission's position in litigation to which it is not a party or acting to assist a complainant, but in which it has an interest in issues that have been raised. The commission should have the power to submit amicus curiae arguments to courts in which litigation is of relevance to its mandate. It should be able to submit legal arguments on the interpretation of matters before the court even if it is not a party to the litigation, as that would enable it more effectively to carry out the advisory and educational functions envisaged in the agreement. When push comes to shove, the commission will be able effectively to conduct its important responsibilities only if it is able to appear before the courts.

Amendment No. 47 seeks to add to the list of people who are not subject to restrictions on applications of rights

"the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland, the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission, any organisation with a legitimate interest".

The amendment is tabled in the broad public interest to prevent discrimination. The ability to challenge discrimination should not be confined to the Government, but should be opened out to include those organisations. During our debates on incorporation of the European convention on human rights in United Kingdom domestic law, there were arguments about the powers of people to intervene as third parties in class issues or other cases in which they might have an interest. As we are to have a commission, I believe that that power should be given to the organisations that I have mentioned, and should not be limited only to law officers, whose interests may not always coincide with those of the other organisations.

Mr. Peter Bottomley (Worthing, West): I support the amendments. Without such amendments, the commission would have to work through Ministers, and it needs the ability not to do only what Ministers want. It needs to be able to do what it wants, even if Ministers are not convinced of the arguments.

Amendment No. 46 deals with amicus curiae. Do organisations have the power to act in that way without the amendment? If not, I hope that the Government will consider it carefully. Such a power has been important in cases away from Northern Ireland. While Louise Woodward's plight attracted much attention in the United States, there was no attention for a man who is black,

[Mr. Peter Bottomley]

British, a business man and old. He is exactly the opposite to Louise Woodward, who is a young white woman. Mr. Krishna Maharaj won a re-hearing of part of his conviction because two people were able to be amicus curiae in the Florida supreme court. British Members of Parliament asked to be amicus curiae, and the resulting hearing got Mr. Maharaj off death row. The same thing applied when Geoffrey Robertson QC and Philip Sapsford QC applied on behalf of the human rights group of the English Bar. We should learn lessons from outside our jurisdiction to ensure that we do not restrict ourselves within it.

Dr. Godman: The Belfast agreement states that the commission may be

"in appropriate cases, bringing court proceedings or providing assistance to individuals doing so."

As the hon. Member for Worthing, West (Mr. Bottomley) said, it would be extremely helpful if the court could receive the assistance of an amicus curiae. The Latin term can be interpreted as meaning one who, as a bystander when a judge is doubtful of or mistaken on a matter of law, may inform the court. It ordinary use implies the friendly intervention of counsel to remind a court of some matter of law that has escaped its notice and in regard to which it is in danger of going wrong. The amendment makes good sense. Courts may require the friendly intervention of the commission, and I urge the Minister to consider the amendment seriously. The commission could be seen to be playing an important, if rare, role, and that should be provided for in the Bill.

Mr. Öpik: All that talk about Latin into English reminds me of my Latin teacher. We all remember a good teacher, and it is thanks to Jed Rothwell that I understand "amicus curiae". He used to give an exercise in which a phrase was translated from English into Latin, then to Greek and back again. I am told that when "out of sight, out of mind" is subjected to that exercise, it comes back as "invisible lunatic".

I strongly support the amendment as it would clarify the commission's position in litigation to which it was not a party or in assisting a complainant, but in which issues were raised on which it could helpfully give guidance. The commission should have the power to submit amicus curiae arguments to courts in such cases. Given the spirit of the agreement, it is likely to be enormously beneficial in ensuring an appropriate outcome to such an investigation. The commission should have the power to submit legal arguments on interpretation of legal issues before the court, even if it is not a party to the litigation. Furthermore, that would enable it more effectively to carry out the advisory and educational functions envisaged by the agreement.

I emphasise the importance of the commission's objectivity in relation to such a power. Any suggestion of sectarian behaviour, or any imbalance in the commission, would be enormously harmful to an organisation that is encouraged to provide an independent perspective as a third party. I am sure that that will not happen, as enough safeguards exist to make the commission objective. However, we must have at the back of our minds the importance of ensuring not only that the commission is objective but that it is seen to be objective and fair.

Mr. Temple-Morris: I, too, support the amendments, particularly amendment No. 46. The point is technical, but it would be a brave Secretary of State or Government who tried to prevent the commission from offering itself as an amicus curiae if it decided to do so. One could argue that it would be within its rights to do so under several clauses. However, the amendment seeks to clarify the position against a background in which specific functions have been alluded to and in which there are financial considerations. It would be best to have clarification in the Bill, although I dare say that the practice could occur without that.

I underline what was said by the hon. Member for Worthing, West (Mr. Bottomley). The amicus curiae procedure is useful to the court. It would be a classic exercise for the commission to offer itself in that capacity to help the court. With the wealth of experience that we hope the commission will rapidly gather, I am sure that any court would be grateful for that assistance.

Mr. Paul Murphy: I am told that legal Latinists pronounce amicus with a long "i", but I do not believe that that is the right way. I know that my hon. Friend the Member for Hull, North (Mr. McNamara) was using ecclesiastical Latin in pronouncing it with a short "i". No one has used the English yet: friend of the court. It is to that purpose, and the principle behind it, that amendment No. 46 refers.

The commission can already assist a court as an amicus in the normal way without the need for special legislation. We recognise the force of the argument that it might be useful to make that clear in the Bill, but the wording of the amendment is not quite right. For example, an amicus does not normally act in cases in which it has an interest, and its role is to advise on the law rather than on the substance of a case. We will reflect further on this matter and return with an amendment if necessary, as we will on amendment No. 47. We cannot accept it at this stage, but the Government have received many representations on the proposal. Like several other proposals that we have considered this evening, we will reconsider it in the next few weeks.

Mr. McNamara: I am most grateful to my hon. Friend the Minister for his three quarter promise on the first amendment and his half promise on the second. I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Clause 56 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 57 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 58

STANDING ADVISORY COMMISSION ON HUMAN RIGHTS: DISSOLUTION

Question proposed, That the clause stand part of the Bill.

7.30 pm

Mr. McNamara: I shall not delay the Committee long, but clause 58 winds up the Standing Advisory Commission on Human Rights and it would be wrong to allow the occasion to pass without recording the appreciation of—I hope—the whole Committee for the work of successive chairmen and members of the commission, for the way in which it has advanced human rights in Northern Ireland and for the way that it has been prepared to stand up to Governments and insist on the primacy of human rights and of its right to be considered.

It is tragic that Governments have often acted without reference to the commission, despite its terms of reference. Governments did not submit proposals to it and took abrupt courses of action which often resulted in effects quite the contrary to those sought or proposed. Examples include the right to silence and freedom of the press, quite apart from the gamut of security and other legislation affecting human rights. I pay tribute to all the commission chairmen and members who acted for it. Sometimes I agreed with them and sometimes I disagreed, but I knew that they always did a very fine job for Northern Ireland.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: I associate myself with what the hon. Member for Hull, North (Mr. McNamara) said. I speak as a junior member of the club of ex-Northern Ireland Ministers and as a co-president of the new dialogue—or new consensus—group. If he was fully fit, I know that the hon. Member for North-East Derbyshire (Mr. Barnes) would want to say the same thing. The human rights work done by people across the spectrum, often showing great courage and interest, has been important, and they should be thanked for it.

Mr. John D. Taylor: I join hon. Members in their tribute to the chairman of SACHR, a person for whom I have the highest regard. I cannot extend the same sentiment to the commission or to its deliberations and conclusions. The body lacked community balance and its decisions reflected that. Many of its decisions were seen as partial and political and were not respected by the greater number of people in Northern Ireland.

Question put and agreed to.

Clause 58 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 59

THE EQUALITY COMMISSION FOR NORTHERN IRELAND

Mr. Öpik: I beg to move amendment No. 156, in page 27, line 33, at end insert—

'(1A) The Equality Commission for Northern Ireland shall give equal weight and equal consideration to all forms of discrimination that people or groups of people may face.'.

The Chairman of Ways and Means (Sir Alan Haselhurst): With this, it will be convenient to discuss the following: Government amendment No. 170.

No. 192, in page 27, leave out lines 40 and 41 and insert

'as far as practicable secure that the Commissioners as a group are representative of the community in Northern Ireland.'.

Clause 59 stand part.

Government amendment No. 205

Schedule 9 stand part.

Government amendments Nos. 202 to 204.

Clause 60 stand part.

No. 168, in clause 61, page 28, line 37, leave out subsection (4).

Government amendment No. 213.

Mr. Öpik: The agreement is clear about several aspects of the equality of human rights that we can come to expect in Northern Ireland. Page 16 states:

"Against the background of the recent history of communal conflict, the parties affirm in particular . . . the right to equal opportunity in all social and economic activity, regardless of class, creed disability, gender or ethnicity."

Amendment No. 156 seeks to tighten the Bill on the spirit of true equal rights. It attempts to firm up the individual's protection against discrimination beyond the sectarian discrimination that we often discuss. In essence, it would ensure that the commission pays due regard to all forms of discrimination.

This is part of the normalisation process in Northern Ireland. It must be explicit that traditional religious and political discrimination are not special in any sense or more important than any other form of discrimination. Religious and political discrimination might be more common than other forms in Northern Ireland—that is debatable—but, even if they are, it does not mean that they should be set above discrimination on grounds of, say, gender or age.

Amendment No. 156 keeps more in line with the spirit of the agreement, paragraph 3 on page 16 of which talks of an obligation

"to promote equality of opportunity in relation to religion and political opinion; gender; race; disability; age; marital status; dependants; and sexual orientation."

That paragraph is the first time that such a document has explicitly listed sexual orientation as a criterion for non-discrimination. No European or United Nations document has done it. The Liberal Democrats welcome this, because it provides Northern Ireland with an opportunity to lead the way, rather than being seen as an area of Europe that trails.

Mr. Dominic Grieve (Beaconsfield): I am interested in the hon. Gentleman's comments—I agree that that is apparently a first. How does he reconcile this with the way in which we have been incorporating the European convention on human rights on a United Kingdom basis? Does he see a danger that we will lose the concomitance of human rights development throughout the United Kingdom, which I believe should go together?

Mr. Öpik: I agree that it behoves us to ensure that the whole United Kingdom will benefit from this sort of legislation. I fully expect that we will achieve that. I emphasise that I see no conflict of interest in including the commitment to non-discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation, because it means exactly what it says: the elimination of such discrimination. To put it simply, it says that it is no longer acceptable to behave prejudicially because of a person's sexual orientation.

Whatever we decide, and however long it takes, that does not conflict with the Bill's aspiration to ensure that, in Northern Ireland at least, that form of discrimination is

[Mr. Öpik]

spelled out as unacceptable in any form. I agree with the hon. Gentleman that we need to hurry to ensure that the rest of the United Kingdom keeps up with Northern Ireland.

Discrimination is experienced by individuals, not just groups, so the commission needs to work to eliminate discrimination against individuals, rather than simply deal with discrimination towards a particular group. Put starkly, it does not matter much to an individual why he or she is discriminated against; the important point is that it is happening. To that extent, it is wrong to place the importance of eliminating sectarian discrimination above that of eliminating, for example, sexual or racial discrimination. Amendment No. 156 makes that point clearly.

Government amendment No. 203 appears to provide that the commission will aim to secure an appropriate division of resources between the functions previously exercised by the councils and committees that the Bill will abolish and replace with the Equality Commission. This point has already been made, but it is so important that I shall mention it again. Adequate funding for that provision is vital. Whatever powers we may provide through legislation, if the commission does not have adequate resources, it will not be able to use its powers effectively. I seek reassurance from the Minister that the money that will go into the new Equality Commission will be sufficient to ensure that it can do what it is supposed to do.

I understand that there may be some economies of scale as a result of streamlining four institutions into one, but the new commission's responsibilities may be greater than the sum of responsibilities of its predecessors. If it is expected to enforce and implement its wide-ranging powers to eliminate discrimination, it will need necessary resources; otherwise, it will be a recipe for disappointment and frustration.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The House will take the hon. Gentleman's point about resources and the fact that some common services might provide worthwhile economies, but has he noticed that membership of the all-embracing commission will be between 14 and 20 people? They will not do the work for a living, but will deal with problems of politics and religious denominations as well as work in respect of fair employment, equal opportunities and race equality. A question that the Government must face, not just now but later in the Bill, is whether between 14 and 20 people can do all that.

Mr. Öpik: The hon. Gentleman makes a good point. Indeed, my next point touches on exactly that matter. As well as having adequate resources, the new commission's structure must be adequate to ensure that it can carry out the many responsibilities that it will absorb. The hon. Gentleman seemed to imply that we must be careful not to overload individuals with more work than they can physically do in the time available, and with the human resources available to the new organisation.

Will the Minister assure us that he has given that matter due consideration, and has seriously consulted the bodies that will give up their powers to the Equality Commission? I think that the number of people involved in the centre should be kept as low as practicable. Does the number that has been decided on reflect the views of the organisations that are replaced? Do they think that that relatively small number of people, compared with the number replaced, will be sufficient to do the job?

Legislation of this type does not provide the best opportunity to secure guarantees about the funding of the commission. I shall not pursue that point now, but the Minister must understand that, if the commission is not properly funded, it will become the focus of many oral and written parliamentary questions in the months and years ahead. That is not because anyone wants to stir up trouble, but because it will be a false economy if the commission is underfunded. There will be far greater costs in terms of lost opportunity, as well as stress, strain and friction within the Northern Ireland community, if the organisation is underfunded.

The Government's amendments seem to be designed to assuage the concerns of the vast bulk of respondents to the public consultation exercise who were opposed to the amalgamation of the equality commissions. Like them, I am concerned that that may lead to a hierarchy of discrimination. None the less, the amendments should be supported, because they are consistent with the agreement's intention to amalgamate the commissions. The agreement was very clear about that; page 17, paragraph 6 says:

"Subject to the outcome of public consultation"

the intention was to create

"a new statutory Equality Commission".

I should be grateful if the Minister could reassure us that the Government will keep a close eye on the new commission's ability to do its work, and ensure that those who were previously involved in that work are allowed to have an input once the new commission is set up, so that their expertise and insight are not lost.

7.45 pm

Will those in favour of amalgamation be given an opportunity to participate in the commission's work in a more formal way? Does the Minister have a clearer definition of the phrase, "appropriate resources"? What remedies, if any, exist for those who believe that the resources are inappropriately allocated? What opportunity will there be to increase the sum if the work load is far greater than budgeted for, or if the budget is insufficient for the projected work load? Finally, what resources have been allocated to fund the operation of the consultative councils? That question has not been clearly answered.

We should be grateful for some reassurance on the matters that I have mentioned. Let me emphasise again that the agreement clearly states that the Equality Commission will replace the other commissions. Whether we like it or not, therefore, our job is to ensure that the Equality Commission has the best start in life. We must not simply provide the bare necessity, but ensure that the previous commissions feel involved so that continuity is maintained.

Mr. Eddie McGrady: Amendment No. 192 requires that the commission, as far as practicable, secures the representation of a broad section of the community in Northern Ireland. That is almost self-evident, and we have already debated the matter under a previous clause. I

assume that it is accepted that any such commission should have a broad cross- community representation, however that might be defined. I noted an earlier remark that the description "cross- community" is difficult to define in practice, but one can only do one's best in ensuring that cross-community and cross-grouping representation exists in the commission.

Amendment No. 48 is a probing amendment, which seeks to address the possibility of deleting clause 59. It was tabled because clause 59 flies in the face of the public consultation that has already taken place. The hon. Member for Montgomeryshire (Mr. Öpik) referred to paragraph 6 of the Belfast agreement, which said:

"Subject to the outcome of public consultation currently underway, the British Government intends a new statutory Equality Commission to replace"

the four bodies listed therein.

The important point is that the matter is subject to public consultation. My understanding is that, to date, that public consultation has had a weighty and influential majority against the amalgamation of the bodies referred to in that paragraph. The Minister must take account of that when deciding whether or not to proceed with the Equality Commission on the proposed basis.

The Belfast agreement left a number of aspects of the earlier White Paper, "Partnership for Equality", open for public consultation, including whether the statutory duty on public authorities to promote equality of opportunity should be enforced by a new Equality Commission, with the amalgamation of the statutory equality commissions. That approach has been substantially rejected by the bulk of those who responded to the consultation.

The amalgamation of the commissions should not take place at this time; the issue should be referred to the new Human Rights Commission for consideration in the context of its investigation into the scope for a possible supplementary Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland.

Currently, the four commissions cover different disciplines, and have different objectives and pools of expertise and experience. There is a great fear that that body of experience and knowledge will be lost in the tight amalgamation into a 14 to 20-person committee, which, by its very numbers, cannot embrace anything like the spread of experience in the different disciplines that has been available hitherto. It is certainly desirable that there should be rationalisation to the extent that experience, aspects of expenditure or even personnel are shared, but the worry felt by those who made submissions, the commissions themselves and those of us who have knowledge of their work is that the particular discipline of each commission may be watered down in the totality of a single Equality Commission.

Currently, each commission has a strong independent drive to look after and assert the aspect of human rights for which it is responsible. It would be to the detriment of human rights as a whole if the existing commissions were amalgamated too tightly into a single Equality Commission.

I would not be dogmatic about this point, but, at the very least, there should be provision lest the experiment be seen to be not working. If we must have one Equality Commission, it must be clearly divided internally into the various human rights disciplines, and the funding for those disciplines should be ring-fenced, so that it is not drawn one way or the other by the strength or weakness of one particular arm.

Those were the concerns clearly expressed in the consultation, and the Belfast agreement stated that we must take into consideration the consequences of the consultation with the public and interested parties. The respondents are clear in their view that there should not be one commission in the guise proposed in the legislation.

There is a middle road or halfway house, in that there could be an Equality Commission acting as an umbrella for the various commissions. I am sure that, in terms of administration, it would be a great convenience for civil servants to have everything under one wing or in one department, but that does not necessarily mean that such a commission would do a better job. I ask the Minister to take into consideration the strong and experienced opinions voiced during the public consultation.

Mr. Jeffrey Donaldson (Lagan Valley): It is crucial that the membership of the Equality Commission should reflect the balance of the population in Northern Ireland. In the past, that has all too often not been the case: as one from the Unionist tradition, I have to say that many Unionists have felt under-represented on many such bodies.

Those who are appointed to Northern Ireland bodies often do not accurately reflect the political balance in Northern Ireland. What might be regarded as token appointments are made of people whose views do not reflect broad public opinion, so, in seeking to ensure the commission's membership reflects the community, I hope that the Government will not make token appointments, but will try to ensure that public opinion and the various traditions are provided for.

I welcome the Government amendment that places the responsibilities currently exercised by the Northern Ireland Disability Council on a par with those of the other three bodies that are to be subsumed into the new Equality Commission. I share many of the doubts expressed by the hon. Member for South Down (Mr. McGrady), and I know that there is widespread opposition to the establishment of the new commission, not least among the bodies that are to be replaced by it. I believe that there are advantages and disadvantages in the formation of the new commission.

The hon. Member for Montgomeryshire (Mr. Öpik) spoke about the resources and funding available to the commission, and I agree that it is absolutely essential that the new commission has access to resources and funding that are at least on a par with those available to the four organisations that it will replace. The commission will not only take on the responsibilities of those four bodies, but have additional responsibilities. I hope that the Government will commit themselves at least to providing a level of resources that matches that available to the existing organisations, and preferably to providing additional funding to take account of the new commission's additional responsibilities.

As I said, I welcome the fact that the powers exercised by the Northern Ireland Disability Council are on a par with powers relating to other equality issues. For a long time, disability rights issues in Northern Ireland have taken second place to other issues, so it is important that the new commission, if and when it comes into being, should give a strong priority to disability issues.

Looking at the responsibilities that the new commission is to exercise, my concern is that it will focus on fair employment issues, because they have in the past been

[Mr. Jeffrey Donaldson]

controversial. However, I hope that disability issues will be given equal prominence and equal resources, because that is what disabled people in Northern Ireland deserve. I hope that that is the intention behind the Government amendment, and that it will be carried into practice when the new commission is established. Disabled people must be given a fair and equal say.

Disabled people should be represented in the membership of the Equality Commission. That is very important, because, as in the rest of UK society, there are disabled people in Northern Ireland, and they should have representation. When the Government say that they want the membership of the commission to reflect "as far as practicable" the community, I hope that they mean that to include representation of disabled people, so as to ensure that disability rights are given equal prominence in the new commission's work.

Although I share some of the concerns expressed by the Equal Opportunities Commission, I am less concerned about the Fair Employment Commission, which is also to be subsumed into the Equality Commission. The Fair Employment Commission needs to be more accountable and fair employment issues need to be set in a proper context. The proposal in the Bill to set those issues alongside equal opportunities issues is therefore beneficial and makes sense, because they overlap and concern the same rights. Issues of fair employment may become less controversial in the politics of Northern Ireland.

Finally, I want again to encourage the Government to ensure that adequate funding and resources are made available to the new commission.

8 pm

Mrs. Fyfe: I come from Glasgow, which has a history of religious discrimination in job appointments, so I am familiar with that. I am familiar also with the fact that it is possible for a community to stop discriminating and, indeed, religious discrimination in job appointments in Glasgow is now virtually non-existent. Societies can change. I support all those who, with good will, are attempting to make progress on that in Northern Ireland.

I agree with the hon. Member for Lagan Valley (Mr. Donaldson) that there is a need to avoid discrimination on the ground of disability. That has clearly been much neglected, because, for obvious reasons, religious discrimination took up so much of our attention. Other aspects of discrimination, such as disability, have not received the attention that they deserve.

I hope that, in attempting to ensure that the community is fairly represented in all its diversity, the Minister will take account also of the need for the body to include people who are free from any kind of irrational prejudice and who can be relied on to have a clear-minded view of how the commission's business should be conducted.

If the hon. Member for Montgomeryshire (Mr. Öpik), who tabled amendment No. 156, intends that there should be no hierarchy of discrimination, and that each case should be treated with equal seriousness, I fully support him. However, the amendment could be read to mean that equal amounts of the money and time of those involved would be devoted to each kind of discrimination, which would not necessarily be sensible. If the commission were to find that 10 times as much discrimination of one kind occurred as of another, it would not be sensible to allocate funds equally to each form of discrimination.

Mr. Öpik: I assure the hon. Lady that her first explanation is my intention, and that we should regard each form of discrimination as equally unacceptable. I accept her point that different amounts of resources are likely to be needed to tackle each of the various forms of discrimination.

Mrs. Fyfe: I am glad that the hon. Gentleman has cleared up that point, because the amendment is ambiguous.

I think that I understand the Government's thinking behind having one body, but, as we have not yet heard the Minister's explanation, I am not yet sure of their reasons. I imagine that they include the considerations that the body will serve a relatively small population, that it will be possible to gather together in one unit all the expertise, and that discrimination against one individual can easily occur on two or more grounds.

Members of the Women's Coalition in Northern Ireland have told me that they were treated with extreme rudeness during the talks. If such remarks are made to women in open debate in a public place, heaven knows what lurks in the unspoken thoughts of those who made the remarks.

There may be a fear that expertise will be lost by having one body. I am sure that that will have worried some of the hon. Members who tabled the amendment that did not get selected. That would not happen if specialists were appointed in sufficient numbers to cover every aspect of discrimination.

It might be useful to consider for a moment the Equal Opportunities Commission in Scotland, which, under the Scotland Bill, will not be a separate body. However, it will be answerable to the Scottish Parliament, and will give it advice and assistance, while remaining responsible to its United Kingdom headquarters. That is inevitable as long as equal opportunities laws are United Kingdom laws, but Northern Ireland is moving towards a better understanding of the ways in which unfair discrimination can take place than exists in other parts of the UK, and that is excellent.

I have been wondering what the views are of people in Northern Ireland. The hon. Member for South Down (Mr. McGrady) has told us that there is general unhappiness about the formation of one body, so I hope that the Government will listen to those views and state what they intend to do to reassure people.

I hope that the proposal is not simply a way to cut costs. In the current circumstances, it would be extremely foolish to cut the costs of running such a body. It must have funds at least similar to the total funding of the present four bodies if it is to ensure that the issues are tackled effectively and thoroughly. It would also be useful for the Government to consider the hon. Member for South Down's suggestion of ring-fencing moneys.

Above all, the body must be accepted by people in Northern Ireland as one that meets their needs and commands their respect. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will be able to reassure us on those points.

Mr. John D. Taylor: It is encouraging to hear the hon. Member for Glasgow, Maryhill (Mrs. Fyfe) assure the Committee that there is no discrimination on the basis of religion in Glasgow. That is not exactly what I hear when I visit Glasgow. I have been told several times that no Protestant has been allowed to become the Lord Provost of Glasgow for 25 years. I am sure that the hon. Lady supports new Labour and its removal of the Lord Provost of Glasgow.

Mrs. Fyfe: To clear up a misunderstanding, I point out that I was referring to the job market. Discrimination has virtually, rather than totally, ended.

The Chairman: Order. Perhaps we can try to clear away the misunderstanding completely as it is not relevant to the amendment that we are discussing.

Mr. Taylor: The point was made because we are discussing religious discrimination, and I am glad that the hon. Lady has clarified it because I was unable completely to agree with her earlier remark. As you know, Sir Alan, the religious discrimination in Monklands has been well publicised in the past year.

I want to ask the Minister a simple question. If the Belfast agreement failed and the Assembly collapsed, would the Equality Commission and the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission continue as if nothing had happened?

Ms Margaret Moran (Luton, South): I share some of the concerns about the structure of the proposed Equality Commission, although we also need to have regard to the lessons that have been learnt in ensuring that equality issues are mainstream in our political life. One of those lessons is that, far too often, there has been too much focus on the need to retain existing structures, rather than on ensuring that the whole issue of equality is in the mainstream of the work of both Government Departments and external organisations.

In that sense, I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will pay less attention to the cries for retaining existing organisations and much more attention to the ways in which the equality agenda can be mainstreamed throughout the work of the Northern Ireland Office and the Assembly. That is a greater priority than worrying about one organisation's integrity and about it retaining its separate identity in relation to the Assembly.

I was grateful to the hon. Member for Montgomeryshire (Mr. Öpik) for his clarification of his amendment because I, too, read it as implying that he was requesting that equal resources be given to each of the areas of discrimination identified in the Bill. That would not be appropriate. It is not correct to say that equal time or equal resources need to be devoted to each area of discrimination. We need to phrase our amendments better and to look carefully at the priorities that are given to individual areas. It is true that in a number of areas of discrimination—for example, race—Northern Ireland is nearly 20 years behind this country. Some of those issues do need to be given much greater priority.

As other hon. Members have said, in some areas, Northern Ireland is at the forefront of equality, particularly in respect of fair employment. We in the United Kingdom would like some of that progress to be transferred back to us and the UK to take a lead from Northern Ireland in that respect. Therefore, we need to ensure that we give correct priority, rather than equal priority, to each area.

I raise one issue of great importance: gender equality. There is an implicit assumption that gender equality will be tackled throughout the Bill, but it is not explicit. I see that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland has just entered the Chamber. That issue must be dear to her heart, having been one of the very few women to be involved, with the handful of women from the Northern Ireland Women's Coalition, in the negotiations at the time of the Good Friday agreement. It is important that we promote greater gender equality across civic and political life in Northern Ireland. The agreement commits the Government and the new Northern Ireland institutions to promoting women in public life and to guaranteeing the right of women to full and equal political participation.

This area often provokes some antagonism or antipathy from other parties in Northern Ireland. I pay particular tribute to the Northern Ireland Women's Coalition for its work and persistence in trying to promote gender equality throughout the agreement. I hope that it will continue to do so in the Assembly, where it will have a small but significant role. Therefore, I ask the Minister to look at that point when he considers the Equality Commission and its work.

8.15 pm

Mr. Malcolm Moss (North-East Cambridgeshire): Amendment No. 31, which has not been selected, would have deleted clause 60 in its entirety. That would have taken us back, effectively, to the status quo with regard to the various bodies that, under clause 60, will be aggregated under the newly defined Equality Commission.

There is a certain inconsistency creeping in here—inconsistency between interpretations of the agreement. I think that this was touched on by the hon. Members for South Down (Mr. McGrady) and for Lagan Valley (Mr. Donaldson). They asked what support there was on the ground in Northern Ireland, particularly in three of the groups that will be aggregated, for establishing the new Equality Commission.

We have been told on many occasions during our deliberations on the Bill that we can never stray too far from the words of the agreement, so I went to the agreement to find the appropriate words that relate to this clause which, as many contributors have said, is one of the most important parts of the legislation. Paragraph 6 on page 17 says:

> "Subject to the outcome of public consultation currently underway, the British Government intends a new statutory Equality Commission to replace the Fair Employment Commission, the Equal Opportunities Commission (NI), the Commission for Racial Equality (NI) and the Disability Council."

Those are the four groups that are listed in clause 60.

The most important thing here is that that paragraph is conditional. It says:

> "Subject to the outcome of public consultation",

so when people, during the talks, looked at this point, they left it rather on the shelf; it was subject to consultation. The conclusions of that consultation would probably arrive much later than the signing of the agreement.

[Mr. Malcolm Moss]

Indeed, that has been the case. The thought has been left in the minds of many of those who are working in these key areas that this whole matter has been rushed through, and that a full and in-depth consultation has not taken place—the sort of consultation that they were promised and, on reading the agreement, felt that they were entitled to.

The proposal is opposed directly by the Equal Opportunities Commission for Northern Ireland, the Commission for Racial Equality for Northern Ireland and, I believe, the Northern Ireland Disability Council, so at least three of the bodies that will be incorporated into the new Equality Commission are opposed in principle to being moved into it. The reasons are fairly clear; some have been touched on tonight. The proposal for this merged commission arose in the Government's White Paper entitled "Partnership for Equality." That was published, I believe, in March this year. It was the Government's response to a review of the fair employment legislation.

The proposal, which was in the consultative part of that document, was not made on the basis of proper consultation. It was part of the consultative section; it was not a firm proposal at that stage and those who are now involved in the changeover feel that the consultation has not been adequate or thorough.

It is being suggested by the Government that the new proposal will be a one-stop shop and that that one-stop shop will help employers. The Government have also said that they will harmonise the four pieces of existing legislation, but the people involved in these key areas believe that there is potential for conflict because the four pieces of legislation will still have to be treated separately and, at times, may set different priorities.

There was strong opposition in the responses to the White Paper. Of the 123 respondents, only 29 were in favour and at least 57 were opposed. Presumably the others who did not form an opinion did not particularly address the issue. The Commission for Racial Equality and the Equal Opportunities Commission felt that there was some kind of hidden Government agenda and that the Government had made up their mind well in advance.

On page 16, paragraph 3 of the Belfast agreement states:

"Public bodies would be required to draw up statutory schemes showing how they would implement this obligation"—

that is, the obligation of public bodies to pay due regard to the issues that are listed in the clause. It then states:

"Such schemes would cover arrangements for policy appraisal".

The next words are important. The paragraph continues:

"including an assessment of impact on relevant categories, public consultation, public access to information and services, monitoring and timetables."

The bodies that I have mentioned think that the strong wording in that part of the agreement has not been incorporated in the Bill in anything like the strength that they were led to expect in discussions and consultations. The Government have made some effort to do that, and their amendment No. 206, which we shall discuss shortly, places on the new body the responsibility to make some impact assessments. However, that is not as strong a commitment as some of the bodies would like and they are more attracted to new clause 4, which is in the name of the hon. Member for Hull, North (Mr. McNamara).

There is some inconsistency because the Government seek to put in the Bill proposals that, in the agreement, are conditional on further consultation with the aggregated bodies. I am sure that the hon. and learned Member for North Down (Mr. McCartney) and many of his colleagues would not wish to sign up to a new arrangement that goes against what the people who will implement the policies would like. That also raises the question whether this important part of the legislation should be in the Bill. It relates to a key issue, and it will apply in Northern Ireland a measure that will not apply in the same way to other parts of the United Kingdom. The matter could be left to the Assembly, hence our amendment No. 31 which would delete clause 60. The Assembly could revisit this key area and make up its mind about what is best for Northern Ireland.

Mr. Roger Stott (Wigan): I agree with the right hon. Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble) about the inclusion of disabled people on the Equality Commission. My hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Maryhill (Mrs. Fyfe) also mentioned that. It would be intolerable if the new commission did not contain representatives of the disabled. I have a brief question. Clause 60 lists the commissions that will be incorporated in the Equality Commission. Will the staff of the Fair Employment Commission, the Equal Opportunities Commission and the Commission for Racial Equality be absorbed into the new Equality Commission?

Mr. McNamara: I tabled two amendments to delete clauses 59 and 60 because I wanted to express the concern throughout Northern Ireland about the Government's proposals for the new Equality Commission. I do not want to go over ground that many hon. Members have already covered, but it is right to say that the matter was subject to the outcome of public consultation and that the public were overwhelmingly against the proposals. I know from the answer to a parliamentary question that 23 per cent. were in favour and 45 per cent. were against; the remainder did not voice an opinion. Two bodies were excluded from the list of those who were against. One was Derry Women, but I cannot remember the name of the other one.

There is a feeling that the proposals are part of an existing agenda. The Government's desire to amalgamate the current bodies existed when the most recent employment legislation was passed. There was a desire to weaken the set-up. One has the feeling that there has been no real examination of the alternative proposals by many of those who responded. The essence of those proposals was a strong internal mechanism in the civil service to ensure the implementation of the duty. That would have been coupled with a strong external mechanism to ensure the adequate participation of groups in the making of decisions that affected them.

One can appreciate the benefits of the Equality Commission but, unlike my hon. Friend the hon. Member for Luton, South (Ms Moran), I do not want to go to the wall for the proposed commission and I do not see any value in having one commission rather than four. The allocation of resources, time, money and manpower and womanpower is important. The Government amendments do not go far enough. As a result of the Bill's vagueness, there is concern that the powers and functions that will be transferred could be harmonised down rather than harmonised up. Some of the strong existing powers on the equality of women and fair employment might be lost.

Clause 60 lists the commission's principal functions. Subsection (4) states:

"The Secretary of State may by order make such supplemental, incidental or consequential provision as appears to him to be appropriate as a result of subsections (1) to (3).

In particular, an order may include provision—

(a) amending an enactment".

There is no limitation on that power. We need to spell that out much more clearly, perhaps after extensive consultation in the summer, and there should be more detail about what will happen.

There is a great suspicion—I shall return to this on later amendments—that the civil service in Northern Ireland has been hostile throughout to the concept of fair employment, equality and other such issues. It has not wanted to accept the responsibility, but instead wanted to push it outside. It is part of its agenda.

8.30 pm

My hon. Friend the Member for Luton, South rightly praised the role of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and the Women's Coalition. However, she should remember that the only party that produced a document on women's rights in the Assembly elections was the Social Democratic and Labour party. Brid Rodgers and several of her colleagues were very active in the negotiations around the agreement. That was true also of Sinn Fein. It is fair to point out that, apart from the Women's Coalition, SDLP and Sinn Fein are the only two parties with women Members of the Assembly.

Mr. Donaldson *rose—*

Mr. McNamara: I am sorry; there is also a woman Ulster Unionist. I immediately apologise for my error. I welcome the appearance into the early 20th century of the Ulster Unionist party. Who knows, it may one day have more than the one woman Member it now has.

Rev. Martin Smyth: On a point of order, Sir Alan. Is it right to mislead the Committee by welcoming the Ulster Unionist party into the early 20th century, when my party has had women Members of Parliament in this Chamber and in the Northern Ireland Parliament—and Cabinet Ministers at that?

The Chairman: Order. That is a matter of debate.

Mr. McNamara: I can just about remember when the Ulster Unionists had a lady Member of the House—Mrs. Patrick McLoughlin, if I remember correctly. She was well known for some of her relations with rubber companies.

My hon. Friend the Minister needs to answer some questions about the Government amendments. What is meant by "appropriate division of resources"? Does my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State intend to issue guidance on what is appropriate? What remedies, if any, will exist for those who believe that the resources are inappropriately allocated between the different discrimination bodies?

What specific resources have been allocated to fund the operation of the consultative councils? We need a little more description about the role of the consultative councils. Who are the people, the great and the good, who will advise the Equality Commission? In what capacity will their advice be taken? Whom will they represent—what interests and what issues? Will they have any statutory powers? Must the Equality Commission refer to the advice that it has received from a consultative council in making its decisions? If it has not accepted that advice, must it say why? Is it duty bound to refer matters to a consultative council and can a consultative council refer matters directly to the commission, which must then examine them? All those questions are not answered in the Belfast agreement, which is fairly thin on this matter, or in the schedule, yet they involve matters of considerable importance.

There is a rather strange sentence about the unified commission:

"Such a unified Commission will advise on, validate and monitor the statutory obligation"—

which statutory obligation?—

"and will investigate complaints of default."

Which default? We have been told that all parties and all Ministers, north and south, considered the issue for hours, weighing the value and importance of every word.

I am not certain what that strange sentence means. It appears to be a compendium of different ideas thrown together, as it refers to the commission's role to

"advise on, validate and monitor the statutory obligation and . . . investigate complaints of default."

Why will it not investigate the statutory obligation or monitor complaints of default? These are important matters.

I say to my hon. Friend the Minister, given his background, that I must not cherry-pick, so I am not suggesting that the sentence should be altered one word or one iota. I merely point out that it must have been very late in the night when people were dealing with this issue.

Mr. Grieve: The hon. Gentleman raises an important point. One way of reading much of the text in the clauses is that there is a great deal of verbiage and pious aspirations, but not much reality. Will he comment on that? Of course, we could look at the matter in two ways. One is that the text should be simplified and the other is that it should be made more complicated.

Mr. McNamara: I do not think that it should be made more complicated—it should be simplified, although that might require many more words, explanations and definitions. That is what I am urging on my hon. Friend the Minister when he considers the matter in the summer months—and perhaps even between now and Report, although that might strain matters too much. There should be opportunity for real discussion.

There is a real suspicion that, given the decision to establish the Equality Commission, and given the nature and range of some of the powers that it may or may not have, the urgency for legislation to amend the Fair Employment (Northern Ireland) Act 1989 is likely to be put on the back burner. Will my hon. Friend the Minister say whether that suspicion is correct? If it is not, when can we hope to see the legislation that the Government appeared to promise in their reply to the report from the Standing Advisory Commission on Human Rights? As the

[Mr. McNamara]

major thrust of the reply seems to have been taken from the statement in May and is contained within this Bill, will we or will we not see legislation?

Mr. Paul Murphy: Hon. Members are right—the Equality Commission was discussed in the talks in a slightly different context from the Human Rights Commission, because the consultation on its establishment started simultaneously with the talks. The result of that consultation has only recently been determined. Paragraph 6 on page 17 of the agreement states:

"Subject to the outcome of public consultation currently underway, the British Government intends a new statutory Equality Commission".

The White Paper consultation was genuine and showed how we might protect the priority given to gender, race and disability within the new structures. We believe that, in the Bill and the amendments which we have tabled, we have taken account of the concerns expressed during the consultation. I am aware that a number of bodies objected to the creation of the Equality Commission, but there were also bodies that said that it was a good idea—for example, the Fair Employment Commission and the Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Authorities.

In the end, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State decided that we would retain the Equality Commission, but we have made changes as a result of the consultations. A number of them have already been mentioned. Consultative councils will allow for the maintenance of strong links between the existing bodies and the non-governmental organisations in Northern Ireland—not necessarily the great, but I certainly hope the good, will be on those councils.

The councils will be adequately funded. Perhaps more significantly, the bodies that currently deal with those equal opportunities matters—the Equal Opportunities Commission, the Fair Employment Commission, the Commission for Racial Equality and the commission dealing with disability—will be sitting on the working party that establishes the commission itself and all its structures. Therefore, those bodies' identities—what they represent—will not be subsumed into the Equality Commission, as some people fear.

There is still tremendous merit in having a "one-stop shop". There is merit also in ensuring that, in creating the Equality Commission, the employment aspects of discrimination do not predominate over the difficulties faced by people who use the EOC and other bodies. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has taken account of those matters.

What about the commission's funding? As I told the Committee earlier, the figures in the explanatory and financial memorandum are inaccurate. However, I assure hon. Members that funding will be at least as generous as that currently received by the four statutory bodies taken together. The estimated initial cost of the commission will be the same—at £4.9 million—as that of the four bodies, although some economies of scale will be achieved. However, as the commission will also perform other functions, there will be no diminution in funding. The commission will be created not for financial reasons but because we think that it is best and most effective way of tackling discrimination.

The right hon. Member for Strangford (Mr. Taylor)—who has left the Chamber—raised the important issue of what will happen if the Assembly somehow collapses or fails. We all hope and believe that it will not fail, but, in the unlikely event that it does—whatever happens—it is important to remember that the issues dealt with by the Standing Advisory Commission on Human Rights and by the Equality Commission will continue to exist. There is a strong case for saying that, whatever the future holds, those bodies should continue to operate. Moreover, my right hon. Friend has created the Equality Commission because of a review started before the current talks began, and, as I said, SACHR is not an entirely new body.

My hon. Friend the Member for Wigan (Mr. Stott) asked about the various commissions' staff. They will become employees of the Equality Commission once it is established.

I tell my hon. Friend the Member for Hull, North (Mr. McNamara) that legislation on fair employment issues consequent to the White Paper will be dealt with later in the year.

Amendment No. 156, which was moved by the hon. Member for Montgomeryshire (Mr. Öpik), deals with the wider aspects of discrimination. We shall deal with that matter when we debate the next set of amendments, to clause 61. However, everyone involved in the talks knew that the Equality Commission would be established to accommodate the four commissions that I mentioned—dealing with disability, gender, employment and race. The commission will deal with those matters because people were consulted on those matters. However, I do not in any way undervalue the important points that he made, which, as I said, we shall debate in more detail later in the debate.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has tabled Government amendment No. 170. My hon. Friends the Members for Foyle (Mr. Hume), for South Down (Mr. McGrady), for Greenock and Inverclyde (Dr. Godman) and for Hull, North have tabled amendment No. 192. The two amendments say essentially the same thing. I ask my hon. Friends not to press their amendment and to accept in its place Government amendment No. 170—which deals with the appointment of Equality Commission members by the Secretary of State and would require her to

"as far as practicable secure that the Commissioners as a group are representative of the community".

The Bill requires only that my right hon. Friend should have regard to the desirability of that objective. The amendment is a stronger provision and will fulfil the intention of amendment No. 192.

Government amendment No. 205 deals with the issue of resources, which has been raised by many hon. Members in today's debate. The amendment was tabled in response to consultations that the Government have held on the Equality Commission. The fear was that issues of gender, race and disability might receive insufficient priority in the commission's work.

Our amendment, with Government amendment No. 203, is designed to ensure that the issues receive priority and to achieve transparency in the commission's allocation of resources, both financial and manpower, between the functions formerly exercised by the four separate bodies.

8.45 pm

Amendments Nos. 202 and 204 are technical, and correct an error in clause 60 based on a misunderstanding of the relationship between the Northern Ireland Disability Council and the National Disability Council.

As I said, amendment No. 203 ensures that none of the four functions loses out in resource allocations.

Government amendment No. 213 is a technical one, to correct an earlier drafting mistake.

I again tell the Committee that we are conscious of the representations made on the issues that have been raised not only by hon. Members but by bodies in Northern Ireland. My right hon. Friend takes the issues very seriously. I therefore ask the hon. Member for Montgomeryshire to ask leave to withdraw his amendment and the hon. Members who tabled the other amendments in this group not to press them. We have already made considerable changes to our initial view on the commission.

Mr. Öpik: I have listened to the Minister, but I am not terribly happy with the reply. I know him to be a man of great reason and fairness, and believe him to be committed to doing the right thing, especially when it comes to issues of discrimination. He must therefore know how nervous the Equal Opportunities Commission and the other three bodies are about the proposed merger. I am pleased to hear his reassurance that the arrangements are designed to ensure that those concerns will be taken seriously. Nevertheless, the bodies have an emphatic worry that the changes will be damaging not only for the individuals involved but for the new organisation in doing its work.

The issues raised in amendment No. 156 will not simply disappear. Although I realise that the Committee will soon debate the other forms of discrimination, I repeat that there must be a body to which individuals facing those forms of discrimination can bring their grievance. It is all very well talking about a "one-stop shop", but the last thing that we want to do is to make some people feel that their concerns are right at the back shelf, discounted or in the bargain basement. Providing such a reassurance was the purpose of tabling and moving amendment No. 156. The amendment would ensure that people feel that they can take their concerns to the Equality Commission, even if the form of discrimination affecting them is not related directly to the most frequently debated forms of discrimination.

Amendment No. 156 is not—as the hon. Members for Glasgow, Maryhill (Mrs. Fyfe) and for Luton, South (Ms Moran) said—about equal resources but about equal priority. We have to give equal priority to any form of discrimination. As I said earlier in the debate, ultimately, individual are less interested in why they are discriminated against than in the fact that such discrimination is happening. All discrimination can wreck lives. Giving the Equality Commission the mandate to tackle all discrimination and then to allocate resources accordingly could provide the opportunity for Northern Ireland to lead the way in the United Kingdom in tackling what is basically a waste of human opportunities and, still worse, the very frictions that the settlement Bill is designed to prevent.

On the understanding, however, that the Minister has listened to our concerns and that he will carry on doing so, including those that the various commissions that are to be merged have raised and will continue to raise, and in the hope that we can carry on making informal contributions to the guidance that we have discussed, I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Amendment made: No. 170, in page 27, leave out from beginning of line 40 to 'representative' in line 41 and insert

'as far as practicable secure that the Commission's members, as a group, are'.—*[Mr. Paul Murphy.]*

Clause 59, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Schedule 9

THE EQUALITY COMMISSION FOR NORTHERN IRELAND

Amendment made: No. 205, in page 49, line 17, at end insert—

'() The report shall, in particular, give details of how resources have been divided between the functions previously exercisable by each of the bodies listed in section 60(2).'.—*[Mr. Paul Murphy.]*

Schedule 9, as amended, agreed to.

Clause 60

THE COMMISSION'S PRINCIPAL FUNCTIONS

Amendments made: No. 202, in page 28, leave out lines 10 and 11 and insert—

'(d) the Northern Ireland Disability Council.'.

No. 203, in page 28, line 11, at end insert—

'(3A) In exercising their functions the Equality Commission shall—

(a) aim to secure an appropriate division of resources between the functions previously exercisable by each of the bodies listed in subsection (2); and

(b) have regard to advice offered by a consultative council.

(3B) In subsection (3A) "consultative council" means a group of persons selected by the Commission to advise in relation to the functions previously exercisable by one of the bodies listed in subsection (2) or in relation to the Commission's functions under Schedule 10.'.

No. 204, in page 28, line 14, leave out 'to (3)' and insert 'and (2)'.—*[Mr. Paul Murphy.]*

Clause 60, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 61

STATUTORY DUTY ON PUBLIC AUTHORITIES

Mr. Corbyn: I beg to move amendment No. 199, in page 28, line 20, leave out from 'opportunity' to end of line 2 on page 29 and insert

'in relation to religious belief, political opinion, race, gender, disability, language, age, marital status, dependants and sexual orientation.'.

The Chairman: With this, it will be convenient to discuss the following amendments: No. 179, in page 28, leave out lines 21 to 25 and insert

'in relation to religion and political opinion; gender; race; disability; age; marital status; dependants; sexual orientation; and language.'.

[The Chairman]

No. 32, in page 28, line 21, leave out from 'opinion' to end of line 22 and insert 'or racial group'.

No. 33, in page 28, line 23, leave out 'generally' and insert

'as provided by law; or'.

No. 34, in page 28, line 24, after 'without', insert

', as provided by law'.

No. 35, in page 28, line 24, leave out from 'without' to end of line 25.

No. 180, in page 28, leave out lines 26 to 28.

No. 193, in page 28, line 26, after '(2)', insert

'Without prejudice to its obligations under subsection (1),'.

Government amendments Nos. 183, 206 and 211.

New clause 4—*Duty of public authorities to publish impact statements*—

'.—(1) It shall be the duty of every public authority to prepare a statement ("Impact statement") of any significant impact that any proposed action by it may have on its ability to fulfil its duty under section 61.

(2) It shall be the duty of every public authority to include in every impact statement information on—

(a) the aims and purposes of the proposed action;

(b) any significant impact that in its view the proposed action may have on its ability to fulfil its duties under section 61;

(c) alternatives to the proposed action—

(i) which may achieve the aims and purposes of the proposed action but which may be less likely to have an adverse effect on its ability to fulfil its duty under section 61, and

(ii) which may achieve the aims and purposes of the proposed action but may be more likely to have the effect of enabling it to achieve better compliance with its duty under section 61;

(d) the justification for the rejection of any alternatives identified in paragraph (c).

(e) proposals to mitigate any unavoidable impact of the action which would be likely to have an adverse effect on its ability to fulfil its duty under section 61, by recourse to accompanying social and economic measures; and

(f) mechanisms to monitor the impact of the action, following its introduction.

(3) The public authority shall ensure that an impact statement is made available to the public in good time to enable effective consultation to take place by the public authority with those directly affected by the proposed decision.

(4) The impact statement and the results of any consultations on it shall be taken into account by the public body in any subsequent decision whether to proceed with the proposed action.

(5) Following a decision to proceed with the relevant action, the public body shall publish the decision, together with its reasons for doing so.'.

New clause 5—*Duty of public authorities to make arrangements to secure compliance with section 61*—

'.—(1) It shall be the duty of every public authority to make appropriate arrangements with a view to securing that their various functions and responsibilities are carried out with due regard to the need to comply with the duty set out in section 61.

(2) An annual report shall be laid before each House of Parliament with respect to the measures and policies adopted to advance the duty set out in section 61.

(3) Without prejudice to subsection 2, within three years of the coming into effect of this Act, and once every five years thereafter, it shall be the duty of every public authority to review the extent to which its various functions and responsibilities are carried out with due regard to the need to comply with the duties set out in section 61.

I should point out that it was decided to separate this group of amendments from the group that we have just discussed, but I thought that there was some leakage from the first debate into the debate on these amendments. I hope that, for the general convenience of the Committee, and in view of the business that we have to get through, hon. Members will have regard to that.

Mr. Corbyn: There will be no leakage on my part, as I did not speak to the previous group of amendments. However, I understand and readily accept your point, Sir Alan.

The amendment, tabled by my hon. Friends the Members for Hayes and Harlington (Mr. McDonnell), for Erith and Thamesmead (Mr. Austin) and for Brent, East (Mr. Livingstone) and by me, aims to simplify clause 61 considerably by omitting the bulk of it and inserting the words

"in relation to religious belief, political opinion, race, gender, disability, language, age, marital status, dependants and sexual orientation",

which would make the clause rather less long-winded.

Most of the words in the amendment are included in the agreement, so we are trying to simplify the Bill accordingly. The only difference to be found in the amendment is the question of language, a subject that was raised earlier by the right hon. Member for Strangford (Mr. Taylor) in relation to English-speaking people moving to the Republic. However that, too, is covered in the agreement. On page 19, the agreement states:

"All participants recognise the importance of respect, understanding and tolerance in relation to linguistic diversity, including in Northern Ireland, the Irish language, Ulster-Scots and the languages of the various ethnic communities, all of which are part of the cultural wealth of the island of Ireland."

The amendment is an attempt to ensure that potential discrimination in many areas is dealt with, and that language is included.

As we have said, equality, respect for human rights and the ability of various institutions to cope with differences are paramount. The clause would place a requirement on the whole government apparatus in Northern Ireland to operate in a non-discriminatory way. It should not be especially difficult to accept the amendment as discrimination, and all the issues surrounding it have at various times been discussed and agreed in the UK Parliament. As I said, the only addition to the list is language. I suppose that a parallel would be the passage of the Welsh Language Act 1993.

The amendment simplifies what has already been decided in relation to the other commissions, and it adds the question of language, which is already included in the agreement. It makes a clear, simple statement that everyone can understand. As Northern Ireland progresses, we hope, to a more peaceful future, it should be clear to every citizen there and, indeed, in the Republic that any form of discrimination is wrong and unacceptable and that everyone should strive to build a non-discriminatory society. I hope that the amendment will be seen as helpful and simple.

Mr. Grieve: I shall speak mainly to amendments Nos. 32 to 35, but first I shall respond to the

hon. Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn), to whom I listened carefully. Simplification may sometimes appear to be desirable, but the amendment would make the clause read as follows:

"A public authority in Northern Ireland shall . . . have due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity in relation to . . . political opinion".

It is not clear what the hon. Gentleman intends, whereas the original text makes it clear that there should be equality of opportunity

"between persons of different . . . political opinion".

As I understand the amendment, those words would be left out. I respectfully suggest that the amendment does not make sense.

I make it clear at the outset that amendments Nos. 32 to 35 are probing amendments. We accept that there has been a vote, that a decision has been made on the basis of the agreement, and that the agreement incorporates much of what is now in the Bill. I am bound to say that the Bill raises some questions and we are seeking some answers. Clause 61 is clearly intended to go beyond simply requiring public authorities to fulfil their legal obligations. One of the problems concerns definition. Generally, we require people to obey the law, not to carry out positive duties to implement certain courses of action.

The Bill establishes various commissions. I can well understand that the Equality Commission will have a remit to promote a particular end. However, the role of a public authority—which will include the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister—will be to promote that end. Clause 61 states that the promotion of equality of opportunity should be

"between persons of different religious belief, political opinion, racial group"

and adds:

"age, marital status or sexual orientation".

As the hon. Member for Montgomeryshire (Mr. Öpik) rightly said, this is the first time that sexual orientation features in that way in legislation. Again, I make no criticism; the House of Commons has voted on the matter. However, whether all the electors in Northern Ireland were fully cognisant of the way in which certain forms of political correctness would be introduced as an intention, as opposed to obedience of the law, may be an open question.

Mr. Corbyn: The hon. Gentleman obviously heard what I said—that the United Kingdom Parliament has already voted on the issue. Is he saying that there is something wrong with trying to end discrimination against people on the grounds of their sexual orientation? Is it wrong to introduce it in an important piece of legislation regarding the future of Northern Ireland?

9 pm

Mr. Grieve: No, not at all. I am mindful of the fact that I participated in the debates on the incorporation of the European convention on human rights. It is reasonably well known that I am in favour of incorporation. However, the incorporation debate avoided grandiose statements. The purpose behind incorporation of the convention was to allow the principles to be established and, thereafter, the law to develop. In this case, we are trying to do something different, and that is why it is important that the Government should say exactly what is meant by the Bill, line by line.

We are told to promote equality of opportunity

"between men and women generally".

I hope that the Secretary of State will forgive me if I ask what is meant by "generally". We are dealing with matters that are potentially the subject of dispute. The Equality Commission will apparently have input and a degree of tutelage over the way in which the legislation is operated by public authorities. It will criticise, validate and castigate public authorities for the way in which they operate. What is a public authority to make of the words

"between men and women generally"?

What is the intention behind that phrase?

The Bill then refers to equality of opportunity

"between persons with a disability and persons without".

The Secretary of State will note that to both paragraphs we seek simply to add the words "provided by law". I am sure that the hon. Member for Islington, North and the Secretary of State will agree that there is already much legislation on a United Kingdom-wide basis dealing with precisely those forms of discrimination.

Paragraph (d) refers to equality opportunities

"between persons with dependants and persons without."

Again I ask—it is a matter worthy of clarification and some debate, as I do not see that expression included in the agreement—why that phrase has been inserted. I can understand perfectly the reason behind the generality of it, but we are doing something quite unusual. I have no doubt that, earlier, when the hon. Member for Slough (Fiona Mactaggart) was present, her enthusiasm for the legislation was in part because she saw it as going much further than ordinary human rights legislation in the United Kingdom.

Although I accept that the matter has been voted on, it calls for very close scrutiny and some answers from the Government on how they see the provisions operating in practice. We would suggest respectfully that the same aims might be achieved without quite the same detail and by adhering to the existing principles of law.

The end of the first world war saw President Wilson's 14 points. At the time they were introduced, Mr. Clemenceau said:

"Fourteen? The good Lord has only ten."

We have to be careful about generalised expressions of intention when we are drafting legislation, especially when we are putting statutory duties on others—not just on local authorities, but on the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister. If the legislation is to work, the Government must have a clear idea of how it will work in practice and what it means line by line.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): The hon. Gentleman says that he is not sure how all the issues arise, as they are not in the agreement. However, in paragraph 3 on page 16, under the heading "Rights, Safeguards and Equality of Opportunity", there is a reference to dependants, so it would seem that what we are debating is very much what is in the agreement.

Mr. Grieve: I stand corrected. Perhaps I was misled by persons without about the word "dependants". I had

[Mr. Grieve]

missed that. I appreciate the fact that the provisions have been lifted bodily from the agreement, but I had wondered whether that was so in this case.

I should be interested to hear how the Government think that the provisions will work in detail. Pious aspirations on their own are not enough.

Judy Mallaber (Amber Valley): As I have signed several of the amendments, I thought that perhaps I should provide some variety in the voices of those who are speaking on them. I should like to be more positive than the hon. Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Grieve). Many of us feel that the agenda on equality and human rights represents a positive way forward. I should like to refer to new clauses 4 and 5 and Government amendment No. 206. The issues were touched on in the debate on the previous group.

I particularly welcome the Government amendment to schedule 10, which will allow the Equality Commission to require a public authority to submit schemes setting out its arrangements for studies on the impact of policies. I wrote to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State last week pointing out that impact studies were included in the Belfast agreement but did not appear in the Bill. I welcome that inclusion.

Before the Bill returns to the House in the autumn, I hope that Ministers will consider ways of strengthening it along the lines of new clause 4, specifically to incorporate a direct requirement on public bodies to examine the impact of their policies and decisions on disadvantaged groups, following Government policy on fair treatment. Putting that policy into statute would require a direct responsibility on public bodies rather than matters being dealt with only via the Equality Commission. That would help to strengthen the Bill.

Mr. McNamara: Paragraph 3 of the section of the agreement under "Rights, Safeguards and Equality of Opportunity" says:

"Public bodies would be required to draw up statutory schemes showing how they would implement this obligation."

There is no requirement in the Bill.

Judy Mallaber: I hope that that will be clarified over the summer. I also hope that the wording of the Bill will allow challenges before decisions are implemented rather than only after a decision, when the impact on disadvantaged groups has been discovered. That is another point that I raised with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and I hope that it will be considered further.

My interest in strengthening the Bill comes from many years' experience working for my union—formerly the National Union of Public Employees, now Unison. The union has many disadvantaged members, particularly women. My hon. Friend the Member for Luton, South (Ms Moran) referred to the importance of promoting gender equality. My experience from my union and from looking at other organisations is that promoting the equality agenda has helped to build bridges across community divides. I hope that that will be built on into the future as a positive way forward. The focus has always been on the rights of the disadvantaged, whatever the form of their disadvantages. We should keep that focus. That is one of the strengths of having powerful equalities mechanisms.

It has been said that, in some respects, Government policy in Northern Ireland is in advance of policy in the rest of the UK. I hope that we do not now fall behind. I hope that Ministers will ensure during their summer consultation that our policies stay firm and the provisions are worded strongly.

To those to whom I have spoken, such issues are seen as fundamental building blocks of the future. It is important to get the mechanisms right. These issues are not the stuff of drama; they are about social inclusion, the consent of the excluded and putting justice and fairness at the heart of government. The fair treatment guidelines, which are embodied in practice through processes such as the impact studies, seek to deal with some of the most vulnerable groups in Northern Ireland. Bringing people together is important. The coalitions of disadvantaged groups that have developed over the years or have been formed in recent months are looking for a way forward that will take on board the issues of disadvantage. It is important that we deal with them. The hon. Member for North-East Cambridgeshire (Mr. Moss) suggested that some of the issues might be put off to the future. I am not quite sure how many of those raised in today's debate should be left for future discussion. Many groups want action quickly, even if it requires much hard thinking and discussion in the coming months.

I should like to quote something that the Secretary of State said at the launch of the report of the Women Seen and Heard project in Northern Ireland, which brought together representatives of a wide range of women's groups—300 of them—under the European peace and reconciliation programme. The extraordinary range of women included young and elderly women, people with disabilities, travellers, the Chinese community and women from the toughest loyalist and nationalist areas. The Secretary of State said:

"The European Programme has set up the structures where women's voices can be heard. It is also a mechanism of beginning to build respect, trust and confidence between different folk around the table. What we have to do as government is to see how we can integrate these structures."

The new clauses would put the onus of dealing with the structures directly on Government bodies. The provision of equality would be a duty that was placed directly at the heart of government, and the impact studies would be a direct responsibility of public authorities. New clause 5 would strengthen the requirement on public authorities to act in accordance with section 61. I see such proposals as a very positive way forward.

Will the Secretary of State say on whether such issues could be strengthened? Does she believe that new clause 4 reflects the details of schemes that would secure the Secretary of State's approval? What timetable does she expect for the submission and approval of such schemes? Will she consider making such proposals a direct responsibility of public bodies?

Mr. McGrady: I am grateful for the opportunity to speak to amendment No. 193. It would insert the words

"Without prejudice to its obligations under subsection (1)",

so ensuring that it was a defined duty of public authorities in Northern Ireland to exercise and perform both the functions stipulated in clause 61(1) and (2).

Subsection (1) refers to

"the need to promote equality of opportunity"

in the various groups that are listed in paragraphs (a) to (d), and, indeed, in amendment No. 179, to which the hon. Member for Hull, North (Mr. McNamara) spoke. Subsection (2) refers to

"the desirability of promoting good relations between persons of different religious belief, political opinion or racial group."

Government amendment No. 183 would change the wording "desirability of promoting" to more obligatory terminology.

Amendment No. 193 would ensure that public authorities cannot, in promoting good relations, disguise the fact if they are failing to promote equal opportunity under the various classifications in the Bill. It is simple and direct. We want section 61 of the Act to state clearly that there is an obligation on public authorities fully to perform both functions.

Amendment No. 179 is akin to amendment No. 199, but it adds the words "and language". As my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn) said, language is an important issue. In the inter-party talks, parity of esteem was the subject of considerable discussion; it was decided that parity of esteem related not only to politics and symbolism, but to language and culture. Indeed, in recent months, we have heard much about parity of esteem from different quarters—in relation to Drumcree, for example. However, the Bill does not specify the need to promote parity of esteem in language or culture, which is an unfortunate omission, and I ask the Secretary of State to say how she proposes to introduce that important matter into the Bill.

9.15 pm

Mr. Grieve: Amendment No. 179 refers to dependants, about which I asked. Does the hon. Member understand whether the reference is to persons with dependants or—as the amendment suggests—to the dependants themselves?

Mr. McGrady: I am referring to the dependants themselves.

My hon. Friend the Member for Amber Valley (Judy Mallaber) ably spoke about new clauses 4 and 5, and I endorse all that she said about impact statements and their aims and availability to the public. Such statements would be an important way through which to assess the impact of public authorities' actions. New clause 5 would impose a duty on all public authorities to ensure that their various functions and responsibilities were appropriately carried out, to lay a report before each House of Parliament and to review—within three years initially and then every five years—the extent of compliance. The measure would be an important weapon in the armoury to ensure that equality of opportunity is properly executed and assessed. I commend the amendments and new clauses to the Committee.

Mr. Öpik: I add my support to the comments that have been made about new clause 4, which I, too, believe would tighten up the Bill. New clause 5 would require public authorities to establish effective internal mechanisms for the enforcement of the equality of opportunity duty. One could argue that the Bill already requires that in spirit, but it would be helpful if that were specified, especially as the Government have continually stated that their intention during consultation has been, in effect, to enact the sentiment behind the new clause.

It is sometimes too easy to forget that the decisions that we make here have a practical impact in Northern Ireland. The sentiments expressed by the hon. Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn) on amendment No. 199 ring true with anyone who has lived in Northern Ireland and experienced discrimination beyond the obvious.

For example, my sister experienced discrimination at school, because her name is Urve Öpik—some would say that it was even harder to pronounce than my name—and she spoke with an accent that was not Northern Irish. Amendment No. 199 is designed to ensure that people who experience such discrimination have a readily accessible recourse. It is important that the content of the Bill should be open to clear and unambiguous interpretation, because the last thing that we want to do is to put additional barriers between an individual with a grievance and the mechanisms that could help him or her to resolve it.

Amendment No. 199 is insightful and—without getting into whether its language is precisely correct—we very much support it.

Mr. McNamara: I do not think that there is a great difference in substance between amendments Nos. 199 and 179.

I support new clauses 4 and 5. I welcome Government amendment No. 206, but it contains a few weaknesses. Paragraph 3 of the section of the agreement headed "Rights, Safeguards and Equality of Opportunity" says that the Government intend

"to create a statutory obligation on public authorities in Northern Ireland to carry out all their functions with due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity in relation to religion and political opinion; gender; race; disability; age; marital status; dependants; and sexual orientation",

but—and this is the important part—it goes on to say:

"Public bodies would be required to draw up statutory schemes showing how they would implement this obligation."

It continues:

"Such schemes would cover arrangements for policy appraisal, including an assessment of impact on relevant categories, public consultation, public access to information and services, monitoring and timetables."

The obligation on authorities under clause 61(1), as mentioned in amendment No. 206, is not a statutory and binding obligation on those statutory or public authorities. Schedule 10 gives the commission the power, "where it thinks appropriate", to

"request a public authority to make a first or revised scheme, showing how it proposes to fulfil those duties in relation to some or all of its functions."

There is a power to request, but there is no statutory duty on an authority to have an impact assessment scheme. The schedule says that a public authority "shall respond" to such a request, so the matter is very much up in the air.

The Bill does not state that a public authority must create an impact assessment and gives only a discretionary power for the Equality Commission to have one. However, the agreement states that a public authority shall draw up an impact assessment. I hope that, in the

[Mr. McNamara]

summer months, the Minister will resolve that question—I see his holiday in France diminishing daily because of all the matters that have come up.

Mr. Tony McWalter (Hemel Hempstead): Farewell Tuscany.

Mr. McNamara: No, my hon. Friend the Minister does not want to evict his landlord, which in Irish terms would be a turn-up for the books and a strange twist of history.

If my hon. Friend is to meet the requirements of the Belfast agreement there has to be such a statutory obligation. I hope that, as a result of his talks and of examining what is contained within that agreement, he will read it in that way. I still believe that it would be better to accept new clauses 4 and 5, which encompass all that should be in an impact assessment and what the follow-up should be.

I have a number of questions for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State about her amendments. Bearing in mind the fact that it is to be hoped that she will be coming back with something better in the autumn, what would she expect to see in the guidelines for the operation of statutory equality schemes so that they might meet her approval as required by schedule 10, which states that the commission shall on receipt of a scheme for which it has asked—although it does not have to ask for it and no one is bound to produce one—

"approve it; or . . . refer it to the Secretary of State"?

Schedule 10 continues:

"Where a scheme is referred to the Secretary of State he shall—

(a) approve it;

(b) request the public authority to make a revised scheme; or

(c) make a scheme for the public authority."

Does my right hon. Friend regard the contents of new clause 4 as what she would expect to be within such a statutory scheme? If so, can she say so, and could that be contained in an amendment to the Bill? What timetable does my right hon. Friend envisage for the submission of such equality schemes and for their approval?

Returning to the vexed question that we discussed earlier—additional resources for the new Equality Commission—my hon. Friend the Minister in his reply to the previous debate rightly said that there might be some economies of size. People are fearful that such economies might become the object of the exercise rather than a thorough examination of the problems in hand. He went on to admit that there were further responsibilities. I imagine that the examination of schemes would take considerable time and expense, and many resources over and above the £4.3 million that we are told is expended on the commissions at present.

I should be grateful if my right hon. Friend would answer those questions.

Mr. Donaldson: I welcome Government amendment No. 206 because it is important to deal with policy appraisal and fair treatment. The Secretary of State and the Minister will be aware that such provisions exist already in Northern Ireland, and it is important to have them in the Bill. I echo the comments of the hon. Member for Amber Valley (Judy Mallaber) by encouraging the Minister to consider new clauses 4 and 5 to ascertain whether provisions on policy appraisal and fair treatment could be added to. There is a particular need for monitoring policy appraisal and fair treatment in public bodies, because we want to ensure that proper accountability is built into the system. Policy appraisal and fair treatment must be given proper precedence in the Bill so that they are adequately provided for.

9.30 pm

Mrs. Fyfe: I want to make one point only about clause 61(2). I am sure that everyone would agree with the

"desirability of promoting good relations between"

communities, but that expression could be interpreted pretty minimally. It would be perfectly understandable, for example, if the police were to interpret good relations as being an absence of open conflict, or a great reduction in law breaking. While those are good things that should not be looked down on, I wonder whether my hon. Friends on the Front Bench might care to add to the Bill expressions such as "mutual respect" or "equal rights" to make it clear that there is a fuller agenda than simple reduction in open conflict.

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Marjorie Mowlam): Clause 61 is important. The statutory duty on public authorities to promote equality of opportunity is one that we consider crucial. I have listened carefully to points made on both sides of the House, particularly those on impact assessment and the chances of measuring objectively that what is being attempted is being achieved. I hope that some points are covered in the Government amendments, but, as we have made clear all along, we shall listen carefully and shall consider over the summer what we can do to respond to points on which there is broad agreement.

I am sad to say that I must ask the House to resist amendments Nos. 199 and 179 for the simple reason that the present wording of clause 61(1) is more precise. It makes it clear that our objective is to promote equality of opportunity between people of different religions, and between men and women. Although the amendments reflect the wording of the agreement by using "in relation to", we believe that that wording could cause difficulties of interpretation if it were included on a statutory basis. Pararagraph 3 on page 16 of the agreement, which deals with "Rights, Safeguards and Equality of Opportunity", does not include language in the list of equality of opportunity issues that are to be covered by statutory obligation. That does not mean that we do not consider language as central to the cultural identity of the different communities in Northern Ireland.

There are a number of commitments on linguistic diversity, and the Irish language in particular, in the agreement, as several hon. Members, especially my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn), pointed out. They are being implemented by administrative and, where appropriate, legislative means. For instance, the commitment to place a statutory duty on the Department of Education to encourage and facilitate Irish medium education has already been enacted. The Government have also decided to sign the Council of Europe charter for regional or minority languages and will specify Irish for part III purposes, at an early date.

Mr. Dennis Canavan (Falkirk, West): I am listening carefully to my right hon. Friend, but will she confirm

that nothing in the agreement would exclude placing a statutory responsibility on public authorities to promote and encourage equality of opportunity in the matter of the Irish language vis-a-vis English or any other language?

Marjorie Mowlam: I thank my hon. Friend. I was making it clear that we have already made much progress on language as part of cultural identities in Northern Ireland. He knows that we have been trying all along in the settlement Bill to implement the Good Friday agreement without taking away from it or adding to it so that it is what the parties agreed. If the Assembly wants to make other changes in the months and years ahead, it is up to its elected Members so to do.

On amendments Nos. 32 to 35, the hon. Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Grieve) asked what "men and women generally" meant. There is nothing new; it is the same as in existing sex discrimination legislation. He also asked about dependants, as mentioned in paragraph 3 on page 16 of the agreement. Paragraph 3 gave clear notice of the Government's intention to create a statutory obligation exactly as set out in the Bill.

Mr. Grieve: I take it from that that the suggestion that the provision referred to dependants, as opposed to persons with dependants, was wrong?

Marjorie Mowlam: I think that that would be the case.

I ask the Committee to resist amendments Nos. 32 to 35. We have sought to legislate for the full range of equality issues covered under the policy appraisal and fair treatment administrative guidelines issued in 1993 under the previous Administration. The amendments would remove from the scope of the equality of opportunity obligation three areas where there is no anti-discrimination legislation: age, marital status and sexual orientation. We see no reason why the statutory obligation should deny consideration to elderly people, single people or gays that they had under the administrative guidelines of the previous Government. The amendments should be rejected because of their minimalist approach to equality of opportunity legislation.

On the points made by the hon. Member for South Down (Mr. McGrady), it would be helpful if we accepted amendment No. 193 and withdrew Government amendment No. 183. I ask the Committee to resist amendment No. 180 because we regard equality of opportunity and good relations as complementary. There should be no conflict between the two objectives. Good relations cannot be based on inequality between different religions or ethnic groups. Social cohesion requires equality to be reinforced by good community relations. The provision will create a clear statutory obligation on public authorities to have regard to the desirability of promoting good relations between persons of different religious belief, political opinion or racial group. The Government amendment would strengthen that and bring it into line with the obligation to promote equality of opportunity. I repeat that we see no conflict between those two objectives.

The point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Amber Valley (Judy Mallaber) gained a degree of support from both sides of the Committee. I agree that promoting gender equality is an essential aspect of the Bill. I acknowledge that her union, Unison, has worked extremely hard on this issue in Northern Ireland. It is essential that we do not fall behind the rest of the United Kingdom in respect of the progress made on issues relating to justice and fairness, which are crucial to progress in Northern Ireland. My hon. Friend mentioned a conference on women's issues. It was an impressive conference and I hope that it will develop in years to come because the issues that it debated were crucial.

The main point that my hon. Friend raised, which was repeated by my hon. Friend the Member for Hull, North (Mr. McNamara), concerned the status of new clauses 4 and 5. Those new clauses are crucial and I hope that they will be very similar to, if not the same as, the statutory guidelines that will be drafted by the new Equality Commission. New clause 4 provides a comprehensive model for those guidelines.

Government amendment No. 206, which gained the support of the hon. Member for Lagan Valley (Mr. Donaldson), was tabled in response to a number of concerns that have been raised. I hope that it is complete, but if a number of hon. Members feel that it is not, we shall look at it again. The amendment clarifies the statutory equality schemes which the Equality Commission will request public authorities to set up, and says that they should include

"assessing the likely impact of policies . . . on the promotion of the equality of opportunity".

In our statement of 10 July on the White Paper consultation, we said that statutory equality schemes should contain a requirement to assess the equality impact of policies. The amendment achieves that objective. The existing policy appraisal and fair treatment administrative guidelines require similar assessments, and the statutory arrangements that will supersede PAFT should impose a similar requirement on the public sector. The statutory guidelines that the Equality Commission can issue on those schemes should contain more detail about those impact assessments. The statutory equality schemes will also provide for publication of the results of impact assessments.

Mr. McNamara: I appreciate my right hon. Friend's comments on new clause 4. Does she intend to amend the Bill to place a statutory obligation on public bodies to draw up schemes? Such an obligation still does not appear in the Bill or the amendment emphatically as a prime responsibility of public bodies, but it does appear in paragraph 3 on page 16 of the Belfast agreement.

Marjorie Mowlam: Public authorities must produce schemes when asked to do so by the Equality Commission. I expect the commission, in time, to request all public authorities to draw up schemes, except in exceptional cases. It is right for the commission to be able to prioritise its requests. As I have made clear, new clause 4 contains the kind of statutory obligations that would make a difference. My hon. Friend says that he wants that to appear in the Bill. The amendment that we tabled clearly satisfied neither him nor a number of other hon. Members, so I shall look at the matter again during the summer and see whether I can come closer to satisfying the points that he made earlier about timetable implementation and placing a statutory obligation in the Bill.

I looked carefully at the issue and I had thought that our new amendment would achieve what people wanted, but there is clearly still a degree of dissatisfaction. We

[Marjorie Mowlam]

shall do all that we can over the summer to satisfy those folk who feel that more should be done. As I said at the beginning, we are listening carefully and we shall do everything possible to add where we can to the settlement Bill, but, however important equality issues are to us all, we shall be in difficulty if we go further than the Good Friday agreement, as I am sure hon. Members understand. I thank my colleagues for raising some useful points, which we shall certainly consider.

Mr. Corbyn: Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Marjorie Mowlam: Yes.

Mr. Corbyn: I know that giving way is the one thing that my right hon. Friend really wants to do. Before she sits down, will she say a word about the issue of language and the way that it is included in the agreement? If, as seems likely, my amendment is not accepted, what happens in relation to language?

9.45 pm

Marjorie Mowlam: As I said earlier, language is an important part of cultural identity in both communities and the Irish language is crucial. We have moved a long way in terms of the Irish language—for example, with a statutory obligation in respect of Irish-medium schools. Our specification of Irish for the purposes of part III of the Council of Europe charter for regional or minority languages will make a difference. That comes close to fulfilling the obligations relating to language in the Good Friday agreement. If my hon. Friend believes that that is not the case and he comes to me with other specific changes, we shall consider them; however, I must point out that we are addressing these questions within the Good Friday agreement.

Mr. Corbyn: As another member of Unison, I thank my right hon. Friend for the inclusion of part III of the charter in respect of the Irish language and the work to promote it. Although I recognise that she has gone a long way in that direction, I do not think that everything we wanted to achieve in our amendment has been met. In the circumstances, I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment, but I should like to take the opportunity of further discussion with my right hon. Friend on the issue of language and the promotion of language.

A Bill as important as this one should contain a clear, simple statement of the purpose of the Northern Ireland Government in future, not only to carry out existing legislation, but to promote positively anti-discrimination and equality legislation. I endorse completely what my hon. Friend the Member for Amber Valley (Judy Mallaber) and others have said in that respect. If we can say to everyone in Northern Ireland that, from now on, that will be the purpose of the Government, things will be very different from how they were in the past.

Mr. McNamara *rose—*

The First Deputy Chairman of Ways and Means (Mr. Michael J. Martin): Order. The hon. Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn) has asked leave to withdraw his amendment, but I cannot put the Question on that if the hon. Member for Hull, North (Mr. McNamara) wishes to speak.

Mr. McNamara: My hon. Friend the Member for Islington, North is giving way to me, Mr. Martin.

The First Deputy Chairman: Oh, I am sorry.

Mr. McNamara: I want to suggest to my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, North that he should thank our right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for her kind words about the new clause as regards impact. I am sure that he agrees that that is most important and our right hon. Friend deserves to be congratulated on her openness.

Mr. Corbyn: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Our right hon. Friend deserves to be congratulated on what she said in that respect. The new clauses proposed by our hon. Friend the Member for Amber Valley are excellent, because they bring the issues of transparency, reporting, openness and identifiable performance measurements to the fore. Parliament passes legislation on all sorts of matters, but unless there is efficient and effective reporting and monitoring to ensure that the original decisions are carried out, the legislation becomes meaningless. We have had a good and useful debate.

I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Amendment made: No. 193, in page 28, line 26, after '(2)', insert

'Without prejudice to its obligations under subsection (1),'.—*[Mr. McGrady.]*

Mr. Öpik: I beg to move amendment No. 157, in page 28, line 36, at end insert—

"(f) Any other body which would be included within the definition of a public authority for the purposes of the Human Rights Act 1998'.

The First Deputy Chairman: With this, it will be convenient to discuss amendment No. 159, in clause 62, page 29, line 36, at end insert—

'(j) Any other body which would be included within the definition of a public authority as defined in the Human Rights Act 1998.'.

Mr. Öpik: The amendment is technical, and would make a straightforward improvement to the Bill by simply tightening up the definition of a public authority.

Clause 6 of the Human Rights Bill, which we discussed in June, states:

"In this section, 'public authority' includes—

(a) a court or tribunal, and

(b) any person certain of whose functions are functions of a public nature,

but does not include either House of Parliament or a person exercising functions in connection with proceedings in Parliament."

The intention is to standardise the definitions. The Government have accepted as effective the definition in the Human Rights Bill, and it therefore stands as the

official definition. By including that definition in this Bill, we would close any loopholes and protect the definition in case of any discrepancies in future.

The Government made a manifesto commitment to introduce the Human Rights Bill, and its provisions must be included in our work on Northern Ireland. If we did not include the definition, there would be a risk that people would use the provisions of the Human Rights Bill instead of those of the Northern Ireland Bill, which would be messy.

Mr. Grieve: Surely the Bills aim to achieve two completely different ends. The Human Rights Bill imposes certain duties under the law on public authorities, whereas, as we were discussing earlier, this Bill sets out to make public authorities achieve certain ends.

Mr. Öpik: The amendment's aim is to clarify exactly that point. It is perfectly clear to me that the definition of a public authority will not change according to what we are discussing, so I have a different interpretation from that of the hon. Gentleman. We need one definition of a public authority. There is nothing controversial in what I am proposing. I believe that, if I had made the point informally when the Bill was being drafted, the definition would have been included.

The amendment would provide a simple solution to any future problems of messy interpretation between the Northern Ireland Bill and the Human Rights Bill, which has already been considered. We should include the Human Rights Bill's definition of a public authority.

Mr. Grieve: I am sorry to have to disagree with the hon. Member for Montgomeryshire (Mr. Öpik), but the Bills aim to achieve two completely different ends. If the Committee accepted the amendment, I would want to have a thorough discussion about the implications for all public authorities, some of which, as we know from discussion on the Human Rights Bill, extend way beyond what some people might consider public authorities, into the realms of quasi-private organisations. I assumed that the definition used was deliberately not that of the Human Rights Bill, and that it was drafted precisely to refer to specific types of public authority that the Government wish to use to promote their agenda in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Öpik: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the definition of a public authority will not change from one discussion to the next? The provisions in the Human Rights Bill and those that we are discussing today may require different applications, but that does not change what a public authority is.

Mr. Grieve: All I can go on is what the Bill says. I should be interested to hear the Minister's explanation. I note that the definition of a public authority in the Bill appears to be much narrower than the definition in the Human Rights Bill.

Mr. Paul Murphy: I ask the Committee to resist the amendment, on the basis that it would add to the list of bodies that are prevented from discriminating on the ground of religious belief or political opinion anybody who, as the hon. Member for Montgomeryshire (Mr. Öpik) said, could be included in the definition of a public authority in the Human Rights Bill. The likely effects of the amendment are too unclear to allow us to accept it.

The definition of a public authority in the Human Rights Bill is very wide and includes, for example,

"any person certain of whose functions are functions of a public nature".

Theoretically, that could include Churches and religious organisations. A Church could be prevented from discriminating on the ground of religious belief in making appointments, which is obviously nonsense.

Therefore, we do not think that we can accept the amendment at this, or indeed at any, stage. I understand that the purpose is to try to ensure that the Bill has the widest possible application, but, because of the amendment's lack of clarity, it might have consequences that are not intended by either the agreement or the Bill.

We already have an extensive list in clause 62. We think that that is the appropriate one for the Bill, because it builds on what exists already in Northern Ireland. I ask the House to reject the amendment.

Mr. Öpik: I am slightly amazed by the Minister's response. Nothing could be simpler than the importance of having one single definition in all parliamentary activities for "public authority". It was certainly my understanding that one of the great benefits of passing the Human Rights Bill was to achieve clarity in areas such as this. If the Minister and Government seek to have two different interpretations of "public authority", that stores up enormous trouble for us in future, because one then has to provide some sort of ruling on which definition of a public authority is correct.

Mr. McWalter: I shall try just to clarify. There is even a difference between the definition of "public authority" in clause 61 and that in clause 62, depending on whether it is a public authority in Northern Ireland or a public authority of the United Kingdom. It appears that it is necessary to have differences in how we define public authorities.

Mr. Öpik: Without trying to prolong the debate any further, I should say that the discrepancy in the Bill, and, more to the point, between the definition in the Human Rights Bill and the Northern Ireland Bill, is a store for trouble. We cannot redefine a public authority just to suit the particular case in hand.

Notwithstanding the fact that this may cause difficulties legislation such as the Northern Ireland Bill and other Bills that from time to time come before the House, we need to face facts, and recognise that we have an objective definition of a public authority and that we will end up in all sorts of trouble if we seek to redefine what a public authority is according to what suits us on a particular day and in a particular debate.

I heard what the Minister said. I sincerely hope that he will not reject out of hand—although that is what I interpreted his response to be: a rejection out of hand—the point that I have made. I sincerely urge him and his colleagues to revisit the proposal, because it tries to simplify something, not make it more difficult. The one thing that we can all be certain of is that any uncertainty, any vagueness, is likely to cause difficulty when an interpretation is needed and when a different interpretation will best suit one group or another.

[Mr. Öpik]

I will reluctantly withdraw the amendment, but I serve notice that this issue will not go away, and I shall make direct representations again on the matter in the House. I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Clause 61, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Schedule 10

EQUALITY: ENFORCEMENT OF DUTIES

Amendments made: No. 206, in page 50, line 40, at end insert—

'() for assessing the likely impact of policies adopted or proposed to be adopted by the authority on the promotion of the equality of opportunity mentioned in section 61(1);'.

No. 211, in page 51, line 26, leave out 'subsection' and insert 'paragraph'.—*[Mr. Dowd.]*

Schedule 10, as amended, agreed to.

Clause 62

DISCRIMINATION BY PUBLIC AUTHORITIES

10 pm

Mr. McGrady: I beg to move amendment No. 51, in page 29, line 4, after 'discriminate', insert 'directly or indirectly'.

The First Deputy Chairman: With this, it will be convenient to discuss the following amendments: No. 158, in page 29, line 5, leave out from 'discriminate' to end of line 6 and insert

'against a person or group of persons on any grounds set out in section 61(1), subsections (a) to (d).'.

No. 52, in page 29, line 5, after second 'of', insert

'gender, race, disability, age, marital status, dependants, sexual orientation,'.

No. 53, in page 29, line 6, at end insert—

'(1A) Subsection (1) does not preclude any law, programme or activity that has as its object the amelioration of conditions of disadvantaged individuals or groups, including those that are disadvantaged because of gender, race, disability, age, marital status, dependants, sexual orientation, religious belief, or political opinion.'.

No. 172, in clause 79, page 38, leave out lines 18 to 25.

No. 171, in clause 79, page 38, line 18, at end insert—

'(3A) Subsections (2) and (3) do not preclude any law, programme or activity that has as its object the amelioration of conditions of disadvantage because of gender, race, disability, language, age, marital status, dependents, sexual orientation, religious belief or political opinion.'.

No. 54, in clause 79, page 38, leave out lines 22 to 25.

Mr. McGrady: The amendment is simple, and asks that discrimination be dealt with whether it is direct or indirect. The clause simply states that it is unlawful to discriminate on the grounds of religious belief or political opinion. As hon. Members have said, we need to be more specific, and amendment No. 52 seeks to add other grounds to make the clause more specific.

Amendment No. 53 would put into effect what I am sure the Committee would intend—that any programme or activity that seeks to ameliorate discrimination should not be unlawful. I ask the Government to take that on board. Amendment No. 54 seeks the removal of subsection (5) of clause 79, which states:

"A certificate purporting to be signed by or on behalf of the Secretary of State and certifying that an act specified in the certificate was done for the purpose of safeguarding national security shall be conclusive evidence that it was done for that purpose."

Great injustices have been caused over many years in Northern Ireland by the issue of such certificates, and I shall give two brief examples.

One of my constituents was fired without cause because a colleague wanted his position, and used the confidential telephone to inform the authorities that my constituent was not a reliable person and was suspected of association with terrorist activities. Nothing could be further from the truth, but because that person worked in a military establishment in my constituency, he was fired forthwith. He had no recourse, and was not given a reason, and I could not extract information about any avenue through which he could make his views known. A telephone call to a confidential line alleging paramilitary involvement cost him his job, and he had no recourse whatever.

Another example from my constituency gave rise to considerable legal interest this week. Five to seven years ago, the firm of Tinnelly in Rostrevor in my constituency won a demolition contract from Northern Ireland Electricity. However, the firm was barred from executing the contract by a certificate of the type referred to in clause 79(5). The firm had extreme difficulty in proving that it was not a security risk. It took the firm many years to do so, and only within the past 10 days has it been vindicated by the European Court of Human Rights. The case is now known as the Tinnelly case.

The Secretary of State of the day certified that the firm employed people who were a risk to security, and that cost that firm a substantial contract. Again, there was no recourse to any avenue of justice—not even the reasonable course of putting its case against the Secretary of State's case, which was unstated and therefore irrefutable. I cannot accept that a Secretary of State, certifying on the ground of safeguarding national security, can be conclusive. This is an example of where it is anything but conclusive. Indeed, the European Court has now found that the Secretary of State was wrong to issue such a certificate, and that the case did not impinge on national security.

I ask the Minister to accept the amendment, or find some other means of ensuring that national security is preserved and safeguarded, rather than this archaic, unjust and, to my mind, wholly unlawful one-sided act, which is completely indefensible and gives no justice to the person or firm against which the certificate is issued. I commend the amendment to the Committee and the Minister.

Mr. McNamara: I want to speak briefly about the Tinnelly case. Those who considered the fair employment legislation—as I did with my hon. Friend the Member for South Down (Mr. McGrady)—will remember our long debates with the Ministers of the day about the need to amend clause 42, which is now contained in clause 79(5).

My hon. Friend has referred to the gross unfairness of the Tinnelly case, for two reasons: first, the secretive and vicious nature of particular actions that could result in

people losing their employment; and, secondly—the trade unions have made this point—the gross unfairness of no compensation being paid to any worker dismissed under the clause.

At the time that we considered the fair employment legislation, we urged that other methods be found, because of the gross infringement of civil liberties. The then Secretary of State refused to do anything. We cited the Tinnelly case—a particularly nasty and vicious case, as it involved lying by Northern Ireland Electricity Services. The Secretary of State put out a document without a proper examination of the causes and reasons. The court upheld it, because it felt that it could not get behind the mind of the Secretary of State and had to take the clause as it stood, without question. It is to the credit of Tinnelly that it has taken the case all the way to the European Court.

It is interesting to read what the European Court said in its judgment:

"The Court acknowledged the security considerations at stake in this case and the need of the authorities to display the utmost vigilance in the award of contracts for work involving access to vital power supplies or public buildings situated in town centres in Northern Ireland. However, the Court considered that the conclusive nature of the certificates has a disproportionate effect on the applicants' right of access to a court to have a judicial determination on the merits of their complaints that they were victims of unlawful discrimination. It stressed in this respect that the right to a court guaranteed by Article 6.1 of the Convention cannot be displaced by the *ipse dixit* of the executive even if national security considerations constitute a highly material aspect of the case."

The European Court said:

"In the Court's opinion such a modified procedure or the introduction of other special procedures could only serve to enhance public confidence in the administration of justice"—

namely, that the procedures invoked have had to be modified.

I am surprised that clause 79(5) is even included in the Bill, given both the undertaking in the Belfast agreement that the matter would be considered—it obviously has been considered, and thrown away—and the known imminence of the judgment from the European Court of Human Rights. I support the comments of my hon. Friend the Member for South Down on the provision.

I support my hon. Friend the Member for South Down also in his attempt to extend the definition of discrimination, to state whether it is direct or indirect. The distinction is of the utmost importance in fully considering discrimination in Northern Ireland and all the related issues.

Mr. Öpik: I speak again in my continuing crusade for human rights in Northern Ireland. I shall not repeat points that I made earlier, but simply highlight a few arguments. Amendment No. 158 is straightforward in its attempt to tighten up the definition of who is to be protected against discrimination under this part of the Bill and would include in clause 62 the forms of discrimination listed in clause 61.

The reason for doing so is simple. We think that limiting the definition of discrimination in the Bill to that based on

"religious belief or political opinion"

is too restrictive. We should like the Bill's definition of discrimination to be widened.

Amendment No. 158 would have essentially the same effect as amendment No. 52, which I very much support.

Amendment No. 53 seems to make sense, and will ensure that we do not preclude important work that is done to ensure that the conditions of disadvantaged individuals and groups improve.

Amendments Nos. 171, 172 and 54 seem to exclude the possibility of acting in a possibly discriminatory manner for national security, public safety or public order reasons. We cannot go along with such a provision. Given Northern Ireland's history, we feel that we should have a safeguard to act in such a way—although I am sure that every hon. Member hopes that such a necessity is in the past for Northern Ireland.

We hope that—simply in the interests of consistency—the Minister will look kindly on our efforts to widen the definition of discrimination from the very narrow one in clause 62.

Mr. Paul Murphy: I am conscious of the fact that the Committee would like to move to the next group of amendments, but I shall do my best to deal as quickly as I can with the points made by hon. Members in this debate.

The inclusion in the Bill of a provision dealing with indirect discrimination would create much future uncertainty for public authorities, as case law establishes the grounds of justification for a requirement or condition resulting in disproportionate impact.

We believe that the statutory obligation in clause 61 to

"have due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity",

combined with our stated intention in government to extend fair employment legislation to cover goods, facilities, services and premises, will achieve much of the intended purpose of amendment No. 51.

Amendments Nos. 158 and 52—which are similar—suggest extending the scope of clause 62 to include a broader range of potential spheres of discrimination, identical to those for which the equality of opportunity obligation would apply under amendment No. 61. The danger is that, by extending clause 62 to cover all categories without having an extensive list of exemptions, common administrative practices could become unconstitutional.

Possible cases include state benefits for people with disabilities; minimum age thresholds for education, employment, voting and the age of consent; age thresholds for pensions; tax incentives for married couples; and tax incentives and state benefits for people with benefits. We therefore resist amendments Nos. 158 and 52.

As for amendment No. 53, we accept that there are circumstances in which affirmative action is right and necessary; but where that conflicts with the provisions in the Bill against discrimination, it should be clearly specified in the appropriate legislation, with explicit amendments to the legislation where necessary. That is also established by the fair employment legislation.

A general exception to the clause on the basis of affirmative action would, we believe, create great uncertainties in this complex legal field, especially if taken with amendment No. 51, which would outlaw indirect discrimination.

Amendment No. 54 is linked with amendment No. 172. We accept entirely that the recent judgment by the European Court of Human Rights does in fact affect the

[Mr. Paul Murphy]

clause. We shall have to consider the implications for the clause of that judgment, but I would ask that the amendment be withdrawn in the knowledge that, as I said on Second Reading, we will look very carefully at the consequences of the court case in Europe.

Amendment No. 171 would create an exemption to clause 79(2) and (3). These subsections refer to direct discrimination in Acts of the Assembly and in executive functions. We do not believe that direct discrimination, even for purposes of redressing disadvantage, is acceptable. It may also contravene the European convention on human rights and European Union law. With those comments, I ask that the amendment be withdrawn.

Mr. McGrady: In view of the Minister's undertakings to the Committee, and of his reassurance that he will replace subsection (5) of clause 79, I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Clause 62 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clauses 63 and 64 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 65

CONSULTATION WITH CONSULTATIVE CIVIC FORUM

10.15 pm

Rev. Ian Paisley (North Antrim): I beg to move amendment No. 95, in page 31, line 23, at end add—

'(6) The membership of the Forum shall be determined by the Assembly voting on a cross–community basis in accordance with section 4(5).'.

The First Deputy Chairman: With this it will be convenient to consider clause 65 stand part.

Rev. Ian Paisley: In the agreement, there was a proposal that there should be a civic forum. I understand that the reason was that people who were at the talks thought that they would not be elected to the Assembly. They therefore thought that they should safeguard themselves and have a sort of House of Lords to be a second chamber—

Mr. Peter Robinson: Unelected.

Rev. Ian Paisley: Yes, it would be an unelected second chamber to be brought into being by the patronage of the First Minister designate and the Second Minister designate. They would have full charge of all the arrangements, the money to be paid, the whole set-up and all the people who were to be members of the forum. The amendment would mean that the Secretary of State could appoint the First Minister designate and the Second Minister designate to implement the recommendations and to make nominations, but that the Assembly itself, under the consensus rule that is held up as the means of controlling discrimination against any section of the community, should determine membership of the forum. Those who are so keen to have the forum and all the consultation should readily agree that it would be entirely in order for nominations to be approved by a consensus vote in the Assembly. At least that would put the new forum on a democratic basis.

When Ministers are appointed under the terms of the legislation, they will have to undertake a great deal of consultation. Committee Chairmen will be breathing down Ministers' necks and Vice-Chairmen will be breathing down the necks of Committee Chairmen and Ministers. Every Committee member will be judge and jury, with the ability to cross-examine the Minister and all his staff. The Minister will have to put all his books on the table. That will be in addition to any consultation that will take place through lobbying—every Minister consults interested parties on every matter that comes before him.

To set up an elaborate second Chamber and to make it a matter of patronage is to say, "If you are a good boy, you will get a job." One of the defeated candidates castigated the electorate for daring to reject him after all the great work that he had done for eight years. He said, "Surely I have been disfranchised by the electorate". All democrats must stand for election and if people do not vote for them, that is too bad. People do not necessarily appreciate the ability, skill and dedication of the person concerned, and that is what happens in elections—the best man does not always win and the electorate have the final say.

The civic forum may be a vast body. We do not know how many members it will have—perhaps the Minister will help us with that. We do not know where they will come from and there is no guarantee that they will represent the community across the board. Other bodies in Northern Ireland that are supposed to represent the community across the board do not do so because they are quangos. Anyone who agrees with the Government but is defeated in an election is sure to be appointed to one of those bodies. Two that come to mind are the Police Authority and the Northern Ireland Housing Executive. One has only to look at who is represented on them—those who have the patronage of the Government. Those who do not say yes to everything that the Government say have a baldy's chance, as they say in North Antrim where I come from, of getting nominated. If they are nominated, they are soon removed. My party has suffered that in the Northern Ireland Housing Executive and the Police Authority, as have others. Nominations to quangos in Northern Ireland do not reflect the strength of political parties among the electorate.

Members of the new super-quango—a replica of the patronage-driven House of Lords—are to sit with Ministers and give them instruction and consultation. The Committee should allow Ministers to have such a forum, if they want it, and to recommend various people to sit on it, but at the end of the day, the Assembly, under the consensus rule which means a majority of Unionist and nationalist representatives, would need to rubber-stamp the nominations. I do not think that anything could be fairer than that. The Committee should consider that proposal and the Minister should accept our amendment. It is probably the only amendment that we may have accepted, although I do not have any optimism about that. Perhaps we shall say that it was good to sit here for six hours every day moving amendments if at least one is accepted. One is better than none.

Mr. Peter Robinson: My hon. Friend the Member for North Antrim (Rev. Ian Paisley) may be too optimistic in

expecting that the Government might accept an amendment from this side. They can prove me wrong if they wish.

I support my hon. Friend's amendment, which would add a subsection to the clause to ensure that those on the new civic forum were representative of the community as a whole. The hon. Member for Hull, North (Mr. McNamara) tabled an amendment on a previous clause to ensure that the commission would be representative of the community as a whole. This amendment is one way in which that can be done for the forum. Anything that is not representative of the community will not be passed in the Assembly by the cross-community vote required under clause 4(5). The amendment would ensure balance in the membership of the forum.

One can study several documents to find out the purpose of the civic forum. I agree with my hon. Friend that the last thing that a Minister will need under the new system is more advice. There will be advice from every quarter. Commissions will be advising; 108 Members of the Assembly will be advising; special committees are being set up to advise; and there will be the normal lobbying. The elected representatives in Northern Ireland will be much closer to the electorate and the various interest groups, and therefore more in touch with their views. The civic forum is clearly being set up to allow individuals to have some patronage—some jobs to hand out to keep people happy and on board. There will be seats for political rejects.

The Bill does not reflect the agreement on the civic forum. The agreement says:

"The First Minister and the Deputy First Minister will . . . establish guidelines for the selection of representatives".

There is nothing in the Bill about guidelines for the selection of representatives. Clause 65 says only:

"The First Minister and deputy First Minister acting jointly shall make arrangements for obtaining from the Forum the views of the community on social, economic and cultural matters."

There is no suggestion that they have responsibility for making arrangements for selection.

The Bill restricts the First Minister and Deputy First Minister in determining the membership. It allows them to designate sectors that can be included, but it does not allow them to name individuals. If the sectors in the agreement must be included in the civic forum, plus any other sectors, there will have to be a mechanism to determine who represents each sector. Will each sector have a mechanism for sending forward its representatives or will they be selected? If so, will it be by the United Kingdom Government, by the First Minister and Deputy First Minister or by the Assembly?

To some extent, I have the answer to that question because I asked a question of the Minister of State, the hon. Member for Torfaen (Mr. Murphy), in Northern Ireland Question Time on Wednesday—or was it the Wednesday before? The days are beginning to merge after all these debates. The Minister said:

"The agreement makes it clear that it is a matter for the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister to lay down guidelines for appointments to the civic forum."

He is dead right; so it does, but the Bill does not. The Minister continued:

"They will be put to the assembly for its consideration and approval."—[*Official Report*, 15 July 1998; Vol. 316, c. 395.]

The amendment seeks to encourage the Minister to make it very clear that not only the guidelines on and general arrangements for the civic forum, but the appointments will be put before the Assembly so that the Assembly can approve them or otherwise. It is a very simple matter. I hope that the Minister can satisfy us on that point.

10.30 pm

Mr. Temple-Morris: I would dearly love to grant the hon. Members for North Antrim (Rev. Ian Paisley) and for Belfast, East (Mr. Robinson) an amendment, but it is not within my gift. Charitable as I am in wishing to do so, I do not believe that the Government should accept amendment No. 95—surprise, surprise.

I should like to make a couple of basic points about what I understand to be going on. The consultative civic forum is not as awe-inspiring as the hon. Member for North Antrim seems to think. It is certainly not a patronage-driven House of Lords or a second chamber. I would have thought that the very motive behind the procedure of appointment is that it should not create an institution—that the forum should be as different from that as possible. Its essence is that it should be above the party politics of Northern Ireland; it should bring into the processes that surround and are part of the Belfast agreement people whom Northern Ireland sadly lacks at present. It should bring in people who do not go into active politics.

Clause 65(2) states:

"The arrangements"—

as they are called—

"shall not take effect until after they have been approved by the Assembly."

There is a control. The hon. Member for Belfast, East was right to draw attention to the fact that, in addition, under the Belfast agreement, which surely will be pursued under the Bill and the eventual Act,

"The First Minister and the Deputy First Minister will by agreement establish guidelines for the selection of representatives to the Civic Forum."

Indeed, those guidelines will doubtless come back to the Assembly for approval.

In no way is the civic forum a sort of House of Lords. It is a consultative body which will provide a valuable and additional activity. It should not be—this is why I am very much opposed to the amendment—brought into the political process. It should be kept out of that and remain consultative to it. That is the essence of the Bill and of the Belfast agreement.

Mr. Peter Robinson: The hon. Gentleman suggests that, by not having the Assembly approve membership, as the amendment suggests, appointments would be kept away from the political process. Somebody has to appoint and approve; it will be politicians. It will either be this Government, the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister or the Assembly—all those involved are politicians. How does choosing one mechanism over the other take the appointments away from the political process?

Mr. Temple-Morris: Everything is part of a political process. The point is to provide for the, hopefully, worthy

[Mr. Temple-Morris]

gentlemen who will serve on the civic forum a certain separation—a wall of the system between them and the hon. Gentleman and his hon. Friends. People who serve on the civic forum must be kept apart. At the same time, the hon. Gentleman and his hon. Friends, by reason of clause 65(2) and the general powers of the Assembly, will doubtless have all the voice that they need. Goodness knows, they are not exactly short of it.

Mr. Paul Murphy: Hon. Members will know that the civic forum was set up by the agreement, but they may not know that, during the strand 1 negotiations, a second chamber—perhaps on the lines of the old Stormont Senate—was seriously considered. However, the parties concluded—they were probably right—that as the Assembly would have 108 Members, a second chamber was not needed.

A consultative civic forum is enshrined in the agreement because the parties also thought that, over the past 30 years, when the political stability of Northern Ireland was in question, people from business, the trade unions, the Churches and the voluntary sector had in many ways made the country work.

The Bill says:

"The First Minister and deputy First Minister acting jointly shall make arrangements for obtaining from the Forum the views of the community on social, economic and cultural matters."

Clause 65(2) states:

"The arrangements shall not take effect until after they have been approved by the Assembly."

That clearly provides the Assembly with the opportunity in law to pass judgment on the arrangements that will be suggested to it in a report. The Bill also refers to the way in which the forum will be financed. Again, that is a matter for the Assembly, which will have the right to determine its own financial matters, including those relating to the forum.

I understand the points made by the hon. Members for North Antrim (Rev. Ian Paisley) and for Belfast, East (Mr. Robinson), but I must disappoint them. We must operate in the context of what is happening at the moment—the hon. Member for Belfast, East referred to this—which is that, under the Bill, the Secretary of State is charging the Assembly to consider the question of a civic forum, and particularly how its members should be appointed. The First Minister and the Deputy First Minister will present their report to the Assembly when it meets in September, and then the Assembly will have to consider the report and how the forum is to work.

The agreement is reflected in the way in which the Secretary of State has, through the Bill, directed the Assembly and the First Minister and Deputy First Minister to act. There is ample opportunity for Assembly Members to debate, discuss and finally approve how the civic forum should operate, how it should be paid for and how it should be made up.

Rev. Ian Paisley: It is all very well for the Minister to tell us about the guidelines, but that is not sufficient. The Assembly must be able to have a say on whether the make-up of the membership follows the guidelines. As I said, we have consultative bodies that are supposed to represent the community, but do not. The only way in which to monitor whether bodies are representative is for the Assembly to decide whether the guidelines on membership that are set out by the two Ministers have been correctly applied.

The hon. Member for Leominster (Mr. Temple-Morris) was not at the talks, but I know what some of those sitting at the table said. They said, "We might not be elected. After all our good work, we might have no place." As the Minister said, there was a long discussion about a second Chamber. I know things that are happening in Northern Ireland of which the hon. Member for Leominster is evidently not aware. It is simply a matter of patronage. Those who could not get elected to the Assembly will be on the body, and it will reflect the politics of those who were rejected by the electorate.

Mr. Peter Robinson: The Minister said that the arrangements referred to in subsection (1) would be arrangements for setting up the forum, but he should look again at the wording, which refers to "arrangements for obtaining views" from the forum, not for setting it up.

Rev. Ian Paisley: My hon. Friend makes an important point, to which the Minister should reply.

Let no one be deceived. All over Northern Ireland, people who submitted themselves to the electorate and were rejected suddenly turned up as chairmen of quangos, with far greater power than local government, making decisions and spending vast sums. It is only right that we have a consensus vote and both sides of the community can decide whether a person should be a member of the body. What could be fairer than that?

As the Bill stands, those in the forum will be appointed by one person. I talked to one of the Ministers the other day. I pulled his leg and asked whether he had his nominees ready. He said, "Oh, yes. There are many people I want to get on to the forum." It will be a body of cronies.

If we want to know what the trade unions think, we can go to the trade unions. If we want to know what the Churches think, we can go to them. If we want to know what women's groups think, we can go to them. They are all very well organised. Why say that the forum is not a political body when we are discussing it only because of people who wanted to take over the country at the election—they said that some of us would sink, to rise no more—but who sank and who now hope that a life belt will be thrown to them?

Mr. Paul Murphy: The point about the arrangements is extremely important. I know that the hon. Member for North Antrim (Rev. Ian Paisley) has concerns, and were those concerns accurate I would share them. Certainly, the civic forum should not be a second chamber by default. It is there specifically to represent the views of the organisations and bodies to which I have referred. It would be wrong if it were usurped by party politics.

The body is consultative, and the method of the consultation, which will then feed into the Assembly, is the most significant aspect. It is not a law-making body; it is there specifically to give advice to the Assembly, and the method of giving that advice should be determined by the Assembly.

Rev. Martin Smyth: How many people will be on the civic forum, and who will nominate them? The Minister

mentioned business, trade unions and community groups. Sometimes, business interests have nominated people to the community partnerships, for example, and those bodies have had to be reformed as a result of the lessons that we have learnt. Will the Assembly do more than make arrangements for how it is to get the information? Will it assess whether the debate has been fully communicated and how many people attended any particular debate? People in a rump may pass on views and, when they have been given the status of the civic forum, we can guarantee that they will be a thorn in the flesh of any elected body that dares to turn down those views.

Mr. Murphy: The Bill states that the Assembly should determine how the forum makes its views known to it, so the Assembly will consider how best the advice can be used. Will it be used at some stage in the legislative process? Will the Assembly use it by debating reports that it receives? I do not know. It is a matter for the Assembly to decide.

Rev. Martin Smyth: What about the method of appointment?

10.45 pm

Mr. Murphy: Again, that is something that the Assembly is to consider in September. The agreement charges the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister with doing that. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State wrote to the Ministers and to the Assembly saying that both were to consider the guidelines by which people would be appointed to the forum. When that report is before the Assembly, I am sure that all the points that hon. Members have made tonight will be debated at length. It is important that that issue is debated and that the forum is not a second chamber, but a consultative forum. It is novel and it could be interesting if it develops properly, according to the agreement.

Rev. Ian Paisley: In view of what the Minister has said—I am glad that it is in *Hansard* because I will have the joy of reading it to the Assembly during that debate and will have the authorised version before me—I am happy to beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn,

Clause 65 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 66

PARTICIPATION IN NSMC AND BIC

Mr. McGrady: I beg to move amendment No. 194, in page 31, line 33, after '(a)', insert 'meeting and'.

The Chairman of Ways and Means (Sir Alan Haselhurst): With this, it will be convenient to discuss the following: Amendment No. 133, in page 31, line 35, at end add

'where such agreements and arrangements have been agreed by the Assembly voting on a cross community basis.'.

Amendment No. 216, in page 31, line 35, at end add

'within the terms of the authority defined in advance for those participating by the Executive Committee and in accordance with the provisions of the Belfast Agreement.'.

Amendment No. 96, in page 31, line 35, at end add—

'(3) No executive function shall be discharged under this section, by a Minister or Ministers, without the prior approval of the Assembly voting on a cross-community basis in accordance with section 4(5).'.

Amendment No. 160, in page 31, line 35, at end add—

'(3) No agreement regarding new implementation bodies made by a Northern Ireland Minister under subsection (2)(b) above shall be binding, or shall be considered binding, unless—

(a) it has been approved by a vote of the Assembly with cross-community support; or

(b) it is part of a Bill which has been considered and approved by the Assembly, in accordance with sections 8 to 11 of this Act.'.

Amendment No. 195, in page 31, line 35, at end add—

'(3) Participation in the North-South Ministerial Council shall be an essential responsibility of the First Minister, deputy First Minister and Northern Ireland Ministers.

(4) The Assembly shall, on the joint proposal of the First and Deputy First Minister, defray a share of the North-South Ministerial Council's expenses, as may be agreed in the Council, and shall ensure the provision of such share of the Council's property, staff and services as may be agreed in the Council.'.

Amendment No. 217, in clause 68, page 32, line 7, leave out 'he considers is established' and insert

'is proposed to be established in any agreement made by the New Northern Ireland Assembly'.

Amendment No. 97, in clause 68, page 32, line 15, at end insert

'but may not be made without the approval of the Assembly voting on a cross-community basis in accordance with section 4(5).'.

Amendment No. 98, in clause 68, page 32, line 23, at end insert—

'(6) The authority vested in the Secretary of State by virtue of this section shall lapse if the Assembly is dissolved or prorogued.'.

Amendment No. 197, in clause 79, page 37, line 3, at end insert—

'the "British-Irish Council" means the British–Irish Council established pursuant to the Belfast Agreement;

the "British-Irish Intergovernmental Conference" means the British-Irish Intergovernmental Conference established pursuant to the Belfast Agreement;'.

Amendment No. 198, in clause 79, page 37, line 28, at end insert

'the "North-South Ministerial Council" means the North/South Ministerial Council established pursuant to the Belfast Agreement;'.

New clause 6—*Certain bodies to cease to exist when Assembly is prorogued—*

'If the Assembly is prorogued the Civic Forum, the British-Irish Intergovernmental Conference, the North-South Ministerial Council and implementation bodies established under Clause 68 shall cease to exist.'.

New clause 11—*Relations between Northern Ireland Ministers or Departments and authorities in Ireland—*

'—A Minister or Northern Ireland department may—

(a) consult on any matter with any authority in Ireland; and

(b) through the North-South Ministerial Council, and in accordance with the provisions of paragraphs 6 and 12 of Strand Two of the Belfast Agreement, enter into arrangements with any such authority in respect of any transferred matter.'.

Mr. McGrady: Amendment No. 194 is simple and merely inserts the words "meeting and" before the word "consulting" in clause 66(1)(b), which would ensure that

[Mr. McGrady]

the First and Deputy First Minister and other Northern Ireland Ministers did in fact meet, and that the consultation was not by way of letter, telephone call or some other meaningless exercise. They would have a statutory requirement to meet and consult other members of the council and to enter into agreements to that effect.

Amendment No. 195 would add two subsections to clause 66. The first would ensure that participation in the north-south ministerial council

"shall be an essential responsibility of the First Minister, deputy First Minister and Northern Ireland Ministers."

It simply reflects the terms of paragraph 2 of strand 2 of the Belfast agreement, which makes it clear that participation in the council is

"to be one of the essential responsibilities attaching to relevant posts in the two Administrations",

and is fairly self-evident.

The second subsection states:

"The Assembly shall, on the joint proposal of the First and Deputy First Minister, defray a share of the North-South Ministerial Council's expenses, as may be agreed in the Council, and shall ensure the provision of such share of the Council's property, staff and services as may be agreed".

It would oblige the Governments of both the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland to ensure that the necessary funding was made available to that body.

Amendments No. 197 and 198 would simply clarify the interpretation of clause 79 by defining the meaning of the British-Irish council, the British-Irish intergovernmental conference and the north-south ministerial council. They are simple matters of clarification of the interpretations given in clause 79. The mention of "line 3" in amendment No. 197 is obviously wrong, because the amendment does not fit in at that point, but I am sure that the Minister gets the drift of the amendments. I want to ensure that the meanings of bodies are clearly understood in terms of the Belfast agreement.

New clause 11 raises my concern about a lack of clarity and some ambiguity in the Bill's legal basis for the operation of the north-south ministerial council. The new clause gives that basis some statutory substance. We have heard the Government argue during consultation and in other ways that such a statement is not necessary, but we who tabled the new clause think that it will remove any ambiguity or other difficulty in interpretation. It is proper that the Bill should provide a legal base for constitutional and institutional arrangements arising from the Belfast agreement. There should be a clear basis for operation of the north-south ministerial council.

Mr. Öpik: I shall comment briefly on amendment No. 160. We want to ensure that the Assembly has some influence on decisions made on a cross-community basis. The Bill currently seems not to include such an assurance. Put simply, the amendment seeks to introduce a safeguard that is consistent with the spirit of the Bill. It will give the Assembly the right to veto agreements Ministers make with Dublin regarding the establishment of any new implementation bodies. Paragraph 12 on page 12 of the Belfast agreement states clearly that any arrangements further to those set out in the agreement are

"to be by agreement in the Council and with the specific endorsement of the Northern Ireland Assembly".

It may not be necessary for the Assembly to endorse every detail of all routine arrangements between Ministers and Dublin, but it is vital that the Assembly should have the opportunity to veto agreements made in relation to new implementation bodies for the simple reason that the agreement says that it should. However, the Bill does not say so explicitly at present.

I think that amendments Nos. 216, 96 and 133 seek the same assurance. I hope that I do not misrepresent those who tabled them. I infer from my reading of them that the provision has caused considerable worry among various parties. I want the Minister to make it clear for the record that there is an expectation that the Assembly will have the opportunity to veto. Without such a provision, Ministers could make agreements unilaterally with Dublin that cannot be overturned by the Assembly. That is a recipe for difficulties and friction.

Amendment No. 194 creates rather a strong mandate by requiring that Ministers cannot abstain from meeting their counterparts on the council. I assume that my reading is correct. I am not convinced that we want to put such a strong mandatory expectation on Ministers.

Amendments Nos. 197 and 198 try to define the British-Irish council and the British-Irish inter-governmental conference. It is important that we understand clearly what they entail. We must eliminate as much vagary as we can in anticipation of developing strands 2 and 3 further. I want the Minister to explain what safeguards ensure that the Assembly can veto decisions that it does not agree with made by Ministers on its behalf with the Dublin Government.

Mr. Canavan: Some of the amendments mention the British-Irish council, commonly referred to as the Council of the Isles. Will my hon. Friend the Minister clarify what the Government have in mind regarding the method of appointment, election or whatever of its members? The Belfast agreement is rather ambiguous. It states:

"Membership of the BIC will comprise representatives of the British and Irish Governments, devolved institutions in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales, when established, and, if appropriate, elsewhere in the United Kingdom, together with representatives of the Isle of Man and the Channel Islands."

The agreement is unambiguous about the representatives of the British and Irish Governments. They will be members of the respective Executives, but what exactly is meant by the term

"institutions in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales"?

Does that mean the Scottish Parliament, the Welsh Assembly and the Northern Ireland Assembly, or does it refer to the Executives or Administrations associated with them? We are entitled to some explanation. Will a Member of the Scottish Parliament be eligible to be a member of the Council of the Isles or would that Member have to be a member of the Scottish Government or Scottish Executive?

Paragraph 11 of strand 3 states:

"The elected institutions of the members will be encouraged to develop interparliamentary links, perhaps building on the British-Irish Interparliamentary Body."

That body has existed for some seven or eight years. I have been a member of it for almost its entire lifetime. It is a useful body for the exchange of opinion and for bringing closer together politicians from the House of Commons, the House of Lords, the Dail and the Irish

Senate. It is a pity that the Ulster Unionists choose to boycott that body, because it would be more representative if they came along and expressed their views, and participated in much of the dialogue, whether formally on the Floor of the House or informally after the debates. If they contributed their views and listened to the views of others, that would assist the mutual understanding that is vital if we are to heal the divisions within the island of Ireland.

11 pm

Dr. Godman: My hon. Friend mentioned his membership of the British-Irish Inter-Parliamentary Body. Paragraph 11 of strand 3 on the British-Irish council says:

"The elected institutions of the members will be encouraged to develop interparliamentary links, perhaps building on the British-Irish Interparliamentary Body."

Does my hon. Friend believe that the British-Irish Inter-Parliamentary Body will continue to exist once the British-Irish council has been set up?

Mr. Canavan: I seek the Minister's views on that matter. My view, which is not absolutely firm, is that there is merit in having one parliamentary tier, rather than several. The Ulster Unionists may find it easier to enter a broader body that is representative of all the peoples of Britain and Ireland. Do the Government have in mind one parliamentary tier or several? There is merit in the British-Irish council, or the Council of the Isles, replacing the existing British-Irish Inter-Parliamentary Body, but my mind is not closed on the issue.

Mr. Peter Robinson: Amendment No. 96, to which the hon. Member for Montgomeryshire (Mr. Öpik) referred, deals with the rule of the Assembly in relation to any decisions that may be taken in the north-south body. It goes to one of the twin pillars of the agreement and was a central issue during the referendum campaign.

Clause 23 dealt with one area where the Government and the First Minister designate clearly did not live up to their pledges to the people of Northern Ireland, and clause 66 deals with another. Both the Prime Minister and the First Minister designate made a number of commitments. Having looked at the opinion polls and consulted the various working groups that he had set up, the Prime Minister dashed over to Northern Ireland with five pledges, one of which dealt with clause 66. He gave a commitment to the people of Northern Ireland about north-south co-operation. He used the word "co-operation", and made it clear that the body was to have no Executive powers or functions; it was simply a body set up for co-operative purposes. However, his second pledge was that it was to be accountable to the Northern Ireland Assembly. Nothing in the Bill says that the north-south council is accountable to the Northern Ireland Assembly. The Minister must address that issue.

Having gone that far, the Prime Minister gave encouragement to the First Minister designate of Northern Ireland, the right hon. Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble), who sent to all and sundry a personal letter—well, it was apparently a personal letter, but I rather suspect that he did not sign all the copies himself—which was headed "A Message from the right hon. David Trimble MP Leader of the Ulster Unionist Party". In the letter, the right hon. Gentleman speaks of

"the creation under the Assembly's control of a consultative North-South Council with no executive powers."

When we read the Bill, we need to be clear about whether there is any executive power or function within the north-south body, or whether it is simply consultative.

The body is consultative in the first part of clause 66, but the clause then branches off and states that "participation" is to include:

"entering into agreements or arrangements with the other member or members of the Council in respect of transferred matters."

It is clear from clause 66 that Ministers from Northern Ireland will themselves, on their own, be able to act. Let us look at an example: a Sinn Fein Minister will be able to go down south, sit down with his Dublin counterpart and enter into arrangements and agreements. There is nothing in the Bill that would prevent that Minister from entering into an agreement on his or her own.

Dr. Godman: Clause 66(2)(b) refers to such agreements. Would the hon. Gentleman expect there to be a need for those agreements to obtain the approval of Members of the Assembly?

Mr. Robinson: We do expect that, which is why we have tabled our amendment asking that that should happen, but the Bill does not say that; it would be necessary to return to the Assembly only if the agreement required some form of financial or legislative back-up. If a Minister entered into an agreement with the south in respect of some cross-border matter—for example, a road—he might need finance for his part of that deal, so he would have to go the Assembly in those circumstances. Similarly, if legislation were required, he would have to go to the Assembly. However, if he made an arrangement or entered into an agreement that did not require those things, he could do so on his own.

Under strand 2 of the agreement, under the heading "North/South Ministerial Council", paragraph 3 states that the council can

"meet in different formats:

(i) in plenary format twice a year . . .

(ii) in specific sectoral formats on a regular and frequent basis with each side represented by the appropriate Minister".

We are to have the Minister sitting down, by himself, with his counterpart from the Irish Republic, entering into agreements and making arrangements with the Irish Republic, without needing the approval either of his ministerial colleagues or of the Assembly.

That is contrary to the promise given by the Prime Minister when he rushed over to Northern Ireland and personally signed the billboard with five pledges on it, the second of which said that the north-south body would be accountable to the Assembly and would be consultative. Both aspects of that pledge have been broken by the Bill. The leader of the Ulster Unionist party made similar and, indeed, more extensive pledges, which have broken by the Bill. We need to look seriously at the consequences of the Bill going beyond the pledges that were made.

I have to say honestly that I do not believe that the Bill is unfaithful to the agreement as I interpreted it, but the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom and the leader of the Ulster Unionist party interpreted the agreement differently and, on the basis of their interpretation, the Prime Minister was able to swing an extra percentage of

[Mr. Robinson]

people's votes to the yes campaign during the referendum. Those people are entitled to get what the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom promised them they could have.

We have no doubt about what is in the mind of the Government in respect of the north-south body, because the Government revealed their hand when they produced a draft Bill and allowed some of us to participate in consultation. It was good that they did so, and I think that Ministers did the right thing in consulting the political parties, but, in the course of that consultation, they handed over a draft Bill. The original draft contained the disappearing clause 26, which is not in the Bill before the Committee. That clause said:

"A Minister or a Northern Ireland department may . . . consult on any matter with any authority in Ireland"

and

"enter into agreements or arrangements with any such authority in respect of any transferred matter."

That is another issue. How often were we told during the referendum campaign that the Government did not know why Unionists were getting so excited about north-south issues because they related to matters such as animal health and plant welfare? Now we find out from the Bill that any transferred matter—every single function given to the Northern Ireland Assembly—can be dealt with by the north-south body, and arrangements and agreements on those matters can be entered into.

The Minister needs to explain why the Prime Minister has not fulfilled the commitments that he made to the people of Northern Ireland. I cannot ask the Minister to answer for the right hon. Member for Upper Bann, the leader of the Ulster Unionist party, or the right hon. Member for Strangford (Mr. Taylor), neither of whom is in his place tonight; one is in the sunshine and the other may be in the darker recesses of the building. If the Minister deals with the Prime Minister's pledge, we will deal at another time with the pledge made by the right hon. Gentlemen.

Mr. Roy Beggs (East Antrim): The hon. Gentleman will confirm that there are those of us in the Ulster Unionist party who encouraged the electorate to vote for what was in the agreement, not for promises that were added on paper.

Mr. Robinson: Yes, and those members of the party and others who did the same will have been vindicated since the publication of the Bill because the promises that were given have not been honoured and, as a result, many people in Northern Ireland have lost their confidence in the Government and in the process.

Amendments Nos. 97 and 98 are relevant and I ask the Minister to deal with them. Amendment No. 97 deals with the implementation bodies, which are clearly Executive bodies. They implement decisions made by Ministers in the north-south body behind everybody's back. I want the Minister to confirm that, before the Secretary of State confers any powers on those bodies, that decision must have the approval of the Northern Ireland Assembly. If that did not happen, Ministers could enter into agreements without reference to the Assembly and hand over functions to the implementation bodies; before the Assembly knew it, it would have no powers left, because the Secretary of State would have conferred them all on implementation bodies on the basis of agreements reached by Ministers. It is only right that the Assembly should have some say if powers and functions are to be taken from its responsibility and given to all-Ireland bodies.

Amendment No. 98 also deals with implementation bodies. If the power conferred by the clause were to continue after the Assembly was dissolved or prorogued, it could be as dangerous as, or even more dangerous than, it is under the Bill. The amendment would mean that the powers vested in the Secretary of State to confer powers on all-Ireland bodies would lapse if the Assembly were dissolved or prorogued.

The amendment is in line with new clause 6, which states:

"If the Assembly is prorogued the Civic Forum, the British-Irish Intergovernmental Conference, the North-South Ministerial Council and implementation bodies established under Clause 68 shall cease to exist."

Many people in Northern Ireland would be very concerned if they thought that the all-Ireland aspects of the deal would live on if the Assembly were dissolved or prorogued.

That would be contrary to the Belfast agreement. *[Interruption.]* The Minister is listening carefully to me and the Whip at the same time, but he will realise that the agreement states:

"It is accepted that all of the institutional and constitutional arrangements—an Assembly in Northern Ireland, a North/South Ministerial Council, implementation bodies, a British-Irish Council and a British-Irish Intergovernmental Conference and any amendments to British Acts of Parliament and the Constitution of Ireland—are interlocking and interdependent and that in particular the functioning of the Assembly and the North/South Council are so closely inter-related that the success of each depends on that of the other."

It is clear that all those aspects are tied in together, and I want it clearly on the record that all of them fall if the Assembly falls. If the Minister is not able to give me that undertaking, he will depart from the agreement.

11.15 pm

Mr. Winnick: Inevitably, the hon. Members for Belfast, East (Mr. Robinson) and for North Antrim (Rev. Ian Paisley) have tried to portray the north-south ministerial council as a sinister plot that, within a relatively short period, will take Northern Ireland into the Irish Republic. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Belfast, East nods his head in agreement. I doubt whether many people see it in that light.

The ministerial council seems to make a lot of sense. Matters of common interest on the island of Ireland can be duly discussed. Undoubtedly, there will be every opportunity for the Northern Ireland Assembly to discuss what has happened and is likely to happen before meetings take place between Ministers in the two parts of Ireland, so the sinister plot that the hon. Member for Belfast, East has been telling us about is far removed from reality.

I want to touch on what my hon. Friend the Member for Falkirk, East mentioned.

Mr. Canavan: Falkirk, West.

Mr. Winnick: I apologise.

Again, there will be every opportunity, once the British-Irish council is up and running, for Members of the Assembly to meet British Members of Parliament, and Members from the Scottish Parliament and Welsh Assembly. The particular point about the eight years of experience of the British-Irish Inter-Parliamentary Body is that it has provided for an on-going dialogue between parliamentarians from both Parliaments—the United Kingdom and the Irish Parliaments—with each expressing their point of view in discussions.

It is true that, unfortunately, those representing constituencies in Northern Ireland were not present on that body, but Conservative Members, who take a pro-Unionist view, certainly put that view at every opportunity at that body's meetings. The idea that, because we meet together, we have to adopt someone else's point of view, is nonsense, as has been shown during the eight years of that body.

I should like to ask my hon. Friend the Minister how he sees the future of that body. I do not take, I must confess, quite the pessimistic view of my hon. Friend the Member for Greenock and Inverclyde (Dr. Godman). The work that is undertaken may become part of the British-Irish council; on the other hand, the existing body represents two sovereign Parliaments and it may be—I do not know; time will tell and, in another two or three years, conclusions will be reached—a useful supplement to the British-Irish council.

We have no wish—if I may speak on behalf of the British members of the British-Irish Inter-Parliamentary Body—to keep ourselves in existence for the sake of existence; to keep our jobs, so to speak. If we have no role to play, so be it, but I need to be convinced, as I believe a number of my hon. Friends have yet to be, that our days are finished. I shall be interested in what the Minister says on that aspect.

Mr. William Thompson (West Tyrone): This clause deals with the very important issue of the north-south ministerial council. Those of us who opposed the agreement opposed it because of the formation, or the likely formation, or the anticipated formation, of that ministerial council. Unionists do not oppose co-operation between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. There is no reason why there cannot be co-operation between Ministers and civil servants in the way that Governments normally operate. We do not accept that an institution should be set up to bring that about. We rightly believe that the institution's purpose is to increase and speed up the nationalist desire for a united Ireland and to bring that about in a kind of secret way.

Rev. Ian Paisley: Labour Members have said that the council will be a consultative body. If that is the case, it is strange that it will make decisions and implement them.

Mr. Thompson: The council will be far more than a consultative body. It will have tremendous powers, as the Bill and the agreement show. When Ministers get there, it seems that they will be able to take decisions within the remit of their Departments. There seems to be no necessity for recourse to the Assembly to have those decisions approved. Unionists seek to limit the body while nationalists seek to extend it. That is shown by new clause 11, which states that this new body may

"enter into arrangements with any such authority in respect of any transferred matter."

It is obvious that the new clause would increase the powers of the council, and we reject that. In addition, amendment No. 195 states that the Assembly will be under an obligation

"to defray a share of the North-South Ministerial Council's expenses, as may be agreed by the Council, and shall ensure the provision of such share of the Council's property, staff and services as may be agreed in the Council."

That seems to mean that the Assembly will be expected to pay up, to share the bill, while it will have little influence on what goes on. That is completely unacceptable.

Mr. Winnick: As First Minister in the Assembly, the hon. Gentleman's leader, the right hon. Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble), will obviously attend meetings of the north-south ministerial council. I do not understand how he could be persuaded to bring about a united Ireland, because clause 1 makes it perfectly clear that there can be no question of Northern Ireland ceasing to be part of the United Kingdom without the consent of the majority of people in Northern Ireland voting accordingly. How on earth could the council be described as part of some sort of plot to bring about a united Ireland against the wishes of the majority of people in Northern Ireland?

Mr. Thompson: Of course, it is obvious that the council's whole purpose is to try to cushion people and to persuade them that this is the way that they should go.

Rev. Ian Paisley: The Bill does not refer to the wishes of the majority in Northern Ireland; it refers to the wishes of the majority voting in a poll. We have been over that point. The Government have decided that the majority wish will not prevail.

Mr. Thompson: The majority in a poll can well mean a minority of the Unionists in Northern Ireland. That is another reason why we object to the agreement.

Amendment No. 160, tabled by the hon. Member for Montgomeryshire (Mr. Öpik), is welcome and should be supported. It would ensure that any additional implementation bodies would have to have the approval of the Assembly.

The clauses under discussion go to the heart of why we are opposed to the agreement. When the new Executive is set up—I hope and pray that it never will be—there will probably be a majority of nationalists on it. They will be able to go to the ministerial council. They will not always have the leader of the Ulster Unionist party, or the First Minister, with them, so they will have a free hand to do what they like. Unionists will have very little influence and will not be able to stop them. That is why we are against the agreement.

Mr. McGrady: The hon. Gentleman has just stated that the majority on the Executive will be nationalists. That is a total misrepresentation of the application of the d'Hondt principles. How does he square his statement with the reality? I am not sure what party the hon. Gentleman is

[Mr. McGrady]

in at the moment, but certainly the Ulster Unionist and the Democratic Unionist parties, among others of Unionist persuasion, will be on the Executive. Presumably, under the d'Hondt system they will make up at least half, if not the majority, of the Executive. How can he tell the House that that is not the case?

Mr. Thompson: The hon. Gentleman should go home and do a bit of arithmetic. If the Executive ever gets off the ground, the proposed composition will be four members of the Ulster Unionist party, probably four member of the SDLP and probably two Sinn Fein members. That seems to me to be a majority of nationalists.

The clause highlights the difficulties we have with the agreement and the Bill. It endorses all that we have objected to and, no doubt, it will lead to very much trouble in the days ahead.

Mr. Paul Murphy: I shall try to answer some of the points that have been raised.

The hon. Member for West Tyrone (Mr. Thompson) made a most interesting speech. I cannot say that I agreed with much of it, but I am sure that he was sincere. However, it did not represent what the agreement says or what the Bill incorporates of the agreement.

I want to respond to the speeches of my hon. Friends the Members for Falkirk, West (Mr. Canavan) and for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick). The British-Irish council is occasionally called the Council of the Isles. That is an accurate description as it comprises more than just Britain and Ireland; it also incorporates the Isle of Man and the channel islands. It is one of the most interesting, if not exciting, aspects of the agreement; the opportunity that it will eventually give, after devolution, to Wales, Scotland, the Belfast Administration, the Republic of Ireland and the British Government is unique. An enormous number of areas can be covered, including cultural, educational, transport and free trade matters. I could go through a long list of areas. The British-Irish council is developing, and the agreement mentions a number of ways in which it may operate.

Who will be on the British-Irish council? The Executives of the Scottish Administration and of the Welsh Assembly will be on it. My hon. Friend the Member for Falkirk, West asked whether parliamentarians may be represented on it. The answer is no, as it will be composed of the Governments—the Executives—of those places.

11.30 pm

As my hon. Friend the Member for Falkirk, West rightly said, however, there will be an opportunity for parliamentarians within those devolved areas of the United Kingdom—whether in Scotland or in Wales—to form themselves into interparliamentary groups, perhaps building on the British-Irish Inter-Parliamentary body itself. There may be an opportunity for hon. Members who wish to do so to join the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, or to make bilateral arrangements within the British-Irish council—between, for example, the Republic of Ireland and Wales, between Scotland and Northern Ireland, and between the Isle of Man and the others parts of the United Kingdom to which it has most affinity. There are all sorts of possibilities. I know that some hon. Members find the idea of interparliamentary links very attractive. We shall develop the idea.

Mrs. Margaret Ewing (Moray): The Minister has described the Council of the Isles as a very interesting jigsaw. Does he envisage that it will have also an international dimension? The Nordic Council of Ministers, for example, played such a role under Dag Hammarskjöld at the United Nations. Does the Minister foresee such potential for the council in the international community, beyond the British isles?

Mr. Murphy: The agreement certainly envisages considering examples such as the Nordic Council of Ministers and the co-operation between the Saar in Germany and parts of Luxembourg, between parts of Luxembourg and Belgium, and in Alsace-Lorraine, in France. All those areas have common interests in matters such as declining coal and steel industries. Although they belong to different nation states, they work very closely together.

I think that, earlier in the debate—because of the lateness of the hour—I said "free trade"; I meant to say "trading arrangements". I had better put that on the record.

The British-Irish council, in all its forms, will be a very exciting venture that we can all look forward to. I do not think that many hon. Members will disagree with that.

There is not as much unanimity on strand 2—on the north-south ministerial council—which was the basis of an important division in the referendum. The essence of our debate has been the accountability of Ministers. As the talks on strand 2 developed, it was very important to try to understand to whom the north-south ministerial council would be accountable. It will be accountable both to the Dail, in Dublin, and to the Belfast Assembly. It must be so.

Ministers who will operate the north-south ministerial council are themselves accountable to the Assembly. They cannot go to the north-south ministerial council unless they know that, when they return to the Assembly, they will be able to persuade the Assembly to pass the various measures—whether financial, legal or administrative—that they are suggesting.

The Ministers will also have to report to the Assembly's Committees. The hon. Member for North Antrim (Rev. Ian Paisley) mentioned those committees being on Ministers' backs. The Committees will be on Ministers' backs also about the north-south ministerial proceedings.

The reality is that none of the arrangements will work unless the Assembly agrees with the way in which the north-south ministerial council operates. The realpolitik is such that the council will work only if the Assembly itself decides that it must work.

Mr. Öpik: That being the case, why will the Minister not accept the amendment, which explicitly states what he says will happen anyway? By accepting the amendment, he would greatly reassure many people.

Mr. Murphy: I have not come to the amendment yet. The hon. Gentleman does not know whether I am going to accept it or not, but we shall soon get there.

The hon. Member for West Tyrone said that there was nothing wrong with north-south co-operation. Such co-operation has occurred for many years and will continue. My right hon. Friends the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State have referred many times to the north-south co-operation that already exists. Of course, as members of the European Union, the Republic of Ireland and ourselves will continue to have that co-operation.

Amendment No. 194 stands in the names of the hon. Members for Foyle (Mr. Hume) and for South Down (Mr. McGrady) and others. There is nothing wrong with the amendment, and I am happy to have another look at the points that were raised. It states merely that the north-south ministerial council will have to meet. It will not be much of a council if it does not, but we will need to ensure that that provision is included in the Bill in some form or other. It is probably unnecessary as we assume that the council will meet, but we shall certainly consider the matter.

Other amendments in the group were tabled by the hon. Members for East Londonderry (Mr. Ross) and for North Antrim, the right hon. Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble) and, of course, the hon. Member for Montgomeryshire (Mr. Öpik). Some refer to accountability. I accept that we need to have another little look at how the Bill's wording reflects precisely the spirit of the agreement. The spirit of the agreement was clear. There is no question but that the north-south ministerial council is linked to the Assembly, and that they are interdependent—no Assembly, no north-south ministerial council. That was clear throughout the talks, but how do we make that clear in the Bill?

Some of the amendments go too far—they go beyond what the agreement says. However, amendment No. 216, in the name of the right hon. Member for Upper Bann, refers directly to the agreement. It would add the words:

"within the terms of the authority defined in advance for those participating by the Executive Committee and in accordance with the provisions of the Belfast Agreement."

If we refer to the Belfast agreement, we do indeed see the need for the interlinking between the Assembly and the ministerial council.

I accept that amendment No. 160, tabled by the hon. Member for Montgomeryshire, is very much in the spirit of the agreement, but I am not sure that it is necessary. The establishment of a new implementation body is a matter for endorsement by the Assembly, as envisaged by paragraph 12 of strand 2 of the agreement. Even if a Minister were to attempt to make such an agreement without approval, it would be unlikely to be enough to enable a new body to function because, of course, the Assembly would have to pass laws giving the body the necessary status, and finance would be necessary. The amendment is not necessary, although I accept that it relates to the agreement itself.

Also, Ministers are going to have to sign a pledge of office, and that pledge refers to the accountability that they must have, just as we do, to the Legislature.

Amendment No. 195 in the name of the hon. Member for Foyle and others deals with two separate issues: the responsibility of Northern Ireland Ministers to participate in the council, and the Assembly's responsibility to provide funding. I have some sympathy in respect of both issues, and, if the amendment is withdrawn, we shall certainly undertake to take another look at them.

Amendment No. 97, in the name of the hon. Member for North Antrim, refers to the transitional period between now and when the full powers of the Assembly are in operation. Between then and now, it is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, by order, to deal with these matters. Of course, when the Assembly is up and running, it will be a matter for the Assembly itself, passing its own laws.

In the limited time—if any—that I have left, I shall refer to the other matters raised in this debate, the most important, I suspect, being what happens to implementation bodies and to everything else if all this does not work. As I said last week, we are planning for success, not for failure. It is important to ensure that the Bill reflects not only the agreement, but the confidence of the people of Northern Ireland who voted for the agreement to work.

Nothing in the agreement says that the British-Irish council must wind up if the Assembly is prorogued or dissolved, although that would mean that an important part of that council was not operating. Of course we would have to look at the issue at the time, but if bilateral arrangements were made between Wales and the Republic, for example, the council would not necessary disappear.

Mr. Peter Robinson: May I refer the Minister to the declaration of support in the agreement? Paragraph 5 on page 14 makes it abundantly clear that the British-Irish council is one of the bodies that are interdependent and interrelated and depend on the future of the Assembly. Is the Minister going back on the agreement?

Mr. Murphy: No. Of course they are interdependent, but it is important for everyone—including the implementation bodies—to understand that if something good is set up and working well, it need not necessarily collapse as a result of what may be only a temporary disagreement or problem within the Assembly. I entirely accept that the life of the north-south ministerial council depends on the life of the Assembly—if the Assembly goes, so does the council—but if, as the hon. Member for West Tyrone said, sensible co-operation resulted from the Assembly deciding what would happen by way of an implementation body, is it sensible for that body to disappear?

Mr. Donaldson: I thank the Minister for giving way. He must understand that this is precisely the concern that many Unionists have—

It being six hours after the commencement of proceedings on the Bill, THE CHAIRMAN, *pursuant to the Order [17 July], put forthwith the Question already proposed from the Chair.*

Amendment negatived.

THE CHAIRMAN *then proceeded to put forthwith the Questions necessary for the disposal of the business to be concluded at that hour.*

Question proposed, That the clause stand part of the Bill:—

The Committee divided: Ayes 135, Noes 3.

Division No. 348] **[11.41 pm**

AYES

Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Atkins, Charlotte
Barron, Kevin
Bayley, Hugh
Betts, Clive
Blears, Ms Hazel
Brown, Rt Hon Nick *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Butler, Mrs Christine
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Canavan, Dennis
Clapham, Michael
Clarke, Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Coaker, Vernon
Colman, Tony
Connarty, Michael
Cooper, Yvette
Cousins, Jim
Crausby, David
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Denham, John
Dobbin, Jim
Dowd, Jim
Ennis, Jeff
Etherington, Bill
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Foster, Michael J *(Worcester)*
Foulkes, George
Fyfe, Maria
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Godman, Dr Norman A
Goggins, Paul
Gordon, Mrs Eileen
Gorrie, Donald
Grogan, John
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Harris, Dr Evan
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Healey, John
Heath, David *(Somerton & Frome)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith
Hood, Jimmy
Hope, Phil
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Ms Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Iddon, Dr Brian
Jackson, Ms Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jenkins, Brian
Jones, Ms Jenny *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Kemp, Fraser
Laxton, Bob
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCafferty, Ms Chris
McCartney, Ian *(Makerfield)*
McDonnell, John
McGrady, Eddie
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McKenna, Mrs Rosemary
McNamara, Kevin
McNulty, Tony
McWalter, Tony
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Michael, Alun
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin
Mowlam, Rt Hon Marjorie
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Murphy, Paul *(Torfaen)*
Öpik, Lembit
Osborne, Ms Sandra
Pike, Peter L
Pope, Greg
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Quinn, Lawrie
Reed, Andrew *(Loughborough)*
Rendel, David
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Cov'try NW)*
Rooney, Terry
Roy, Frank
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Sanders, Adrian
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Ms Helen
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Rt Hon Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Touhig, Don
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Vis, Dr Rudi
Wareing, Robert N
Welsh, Andrew
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wise, Audrey
Wood, Mike
Woolas, Phil
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, Dr Tony *(Cannock)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. John McFall and
Jane Kennedy.

NOES

Beggs, Roy
Donaldson, Jeffrey
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Rev. Ian Paisley and
Mr. William Thompson.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Clause 66 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clauses 67 to 69 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Schedule 11 agreed to.

Clauses 70 to 76 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Schedule 12 agreed to.

Clause 77

ORDERS AND REGULATIONS

Amendments made: No. 207, in page 36, line 22, after '15(3),' insert & 20,'.

No. 208, in page 36, leave out lines 25 and 26.—*[Mr. Dowd.]*

Clause 77, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clauses 78 to 80 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Schedule 13

MINOR AND CONSEQUENTIAL AMENDMENTS

Amendments made: No. 212, in page 59, leave out lines 7 to 9.

No. 213, in page 60, line 41, leave out 'Northern Ireland Equality Commission' and insert

'Equality Commission for Northern Ireland'.—*[Mr. Dowd.]*

Schedule 13, as amended, agreed to.

Clause 81 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Schedule 14 agreed to.

Schedule 15

REPEALS

Amendment made: No. 214, in page 64, line 2, column 3, at beginning insert—

'Article 42(1) and (3) to (5).
Schedule 1.'

—*[Mr. Dowd.]*

Schedule 15, as amended, agreed to.

Clause 82 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Bill reported, with amendments.

Bill, as amended, to be considered tomorrow.

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 118(6) (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation),

INTERNATIONAL MONETARY FUND

That the draft International Monetary Fund (Increase in Subscription) Order 1998, which was laid before this House on 1st July, be approved.—*[Mr. Dowd.]*

Question agreed to.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 118(6) (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation),

IMMIGRATION

That the draft Special Immigration Appeals Commission (Procedure) Rules 1998, which were laid before this House on 2nd July, be approved.—*[Mr. Dowd.]*

Question agreed to.

DEREGULATION

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael J. Martin): With permission, I shall put together the Questions on the deregulation orders.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 18(1)(a) (Consideration of draft deregulation orders),

DRIVING LICENCES

That the draft Deregulation (Exchangeable Driving Licences) Order 1998, which was laid before this House on 29th June, be approved.

PRIVATE HIRE VEHICLES

That the draft Deregulation (Taxis and Private Hire Vehicles) Order 1998, which was laid before this House on 8th June, be approved.—*[Mr. Dowd.]*

Question agreed to.

Monetary Management

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Dowd.]*

11.55 pm

Mr. Austin Mitchell (Great Grimsby): I congratulate the Paymaster General, my hon. and long-standing Friend the Member for Coventry, North-West (Mr. Robinson), on his new role as the Government's night-watchman, keeping the forces of Keynes at bay. I expected to meet my hon. Friend the Member for Airdrie and Shotts (Mrs. Liddell), but I gather that, rather than continue in her role as the Government's chief Mitchell minder, she has taken refuge in Scotland. I had hoped that I would have been called to Downing street, so that I could give the reply to my own speech, but things did not work out in that way.

In my view, we should not be having this debate on the stability of monetary management at all; the Government should have listened to the long list of warnings about the rise in the exchange rate and its consequences for manufacturing. When one puts up interest rates—I am afraid that the Labour Government have been very good at that, for whatever reason—one increases inflation. Historically, there is a strong correlation between high interest rates and high inflation—high interest rates are the cause of high inflation. There is also an effect—one could call it the Viagra effect—on sterling's exchange rate: the pound goes up, which is particularly dangerous when far eastern currencies are being devalued and European uncertainties are driving money out of Europe into sterling.

Manufacturing suffers a double whammy: it has to face not only higher interest rates, but higher exchange rates, which makes it more difficult to sell products overseas and increases the competitiveness of imports. We become locked into an inevitable wind-down, and manufacturing has to shed jobs. My hon. Friend the Paymaster General was in manufacturing—at Jaguar—and well knows that, in such circumstances, fewer services are bought, investment is cut, the balance of payment gapes, and there is a further deflationary urge to cut demand. We become locked into the same kind of wind-down that the economy went through between 1979 and 1981 and again between 1989 to 1992.

We should have learnt from that, but we are repeating the process. I fear that, unless policy is changed, the wind-down will be inescapable. It is no use lecturing manufacturing and hoping that circumstances will change—they will not. What is to change them?

The consequences will be the same as they were in the early 1980s and the early 1990s. It is no use preaching at manufacturing to cut costs. It cannot possibly cut costs by the 30 per cent. by which sterling has appreciated against the deutschmark and regain its lost competitiveness. It is no use preaching increased productivity, because productivity increases only with increased production. Production is going down because of the exchange rate effect.

It is no use preaching investment. Industry will not invest, because it needs the prospect of profit to make investment worth while. It is no use trying to encourage inward investment. Who will invest here when our competitiveness is so bad because of the exchange rate?

[Mr. Austin Mitchell]

It is no use preaching to manufacturing to make itself more competitive, because that shows an intellectual confusion by assuming that increased productivity is the same as increased competitiveness, which is not the case, because competitiveness is about price, which is affected by the exchange rate. A nation with low productivity—China, for example—can be extremely competitive because of its exchange rate. A nation with high productivity—the United States is the classic example—can be uncompetitive because its exchange rate is too high.

Manufacturing is being crucified by the exchange rate. It is no use the Government wringing their hands—I assume that we shall get an element of that tonight—and saying that we had to damp down unsustainable growth: we did not. It is no use saying that low inflation is worth the price, or that we are trying to bring stability, because we will produce only the stability of the graveyard.

A 30 per cent. appreciation in the exchange rate is not stability. The only way of getting stability is to have both weapons of economic management—monetary policy and fiscal policy—in the same hands, and to manage them together to offset and damp down the forces of instability washing in from outside. We are not doing that. Effectively, the Government have no macro-economic policy, so the Bank of England manages macro-economic policy—it should not be left to do it—on the basis of its inflation targets, which merely compounds the instability that is coming in from outside.

The Monetary Policy Committee is not bringing stability, because it has instituted endless nudging rises in interest rates, which have been put up five times. In that constant fiddling, members are encouraged or almost required to play safe and ignore the effects of the rises on competitiveness. Our interest rates are among the highest in our group of competitor nations, and very high in real terms on an historic basis. That burden on manufacturing and on everyone in the community has been imposed under the guise of fighting inflation, when in fact the rises cause and increase inflation.

The committee does not bring stability, because it is characterised by endless disagreements. The January vote was 5:3; the February vote 4:4; the March vote 4:4; the April vote 5:3; the May vote 6:2; and in June—I suppose that God gets advance notice of the minutes, but the rest of us do not—eight voted for an increase, which the committee had voted against only a month before, and only DeAnne Julius, bless her little cotton socks, was for a cut.

On what Barclays calls a hawkometer, Professor Buiter is now rated top hawk in the committee, with Sir Alan Budd as the second and Messrs King and Goodhart third equal. The interesting thing about the hawkometer is that the Chancellor's appointees, with the exception of DeAnne Julius, have been the ones who have put up interest rates against the advice of the banking professionals, who are usually against an increase.

All that is compounded by secrecy. The Treasury Select Committee asked for earlier publication of the minutes, saying that that would reduce the opportunity for leaking and prevent over-reaction by the markets, as the reasons behind the MPC decisions would be clearly spelled out and not left to speculation. That assumes that there is a rational explanation for the decisions, when there does not seem to be one, and that markets will accept it.

The build-up to the decisions and the run-off afterwards have encouraged speculation. The Library has undertaken a study of speculation between the dollar and sterling in the five days before and the five days after a decision. The range of speculation in the five days before is 40 cents, up and down. In other words, speculation builds up as the decision approaches. Speculation in the five days after the decision is slightly less. Therefore, the process encourages speculation, which is heightened by press speculation about what the MPC will do. That is not stability.

My hon. Friend the Paymaster General will tell us that the Government's aim is stability, but we are not getting it; we are getting instability and speculation, which are damaging industry and creating an economy in which we will get even more instability. Fighting inflation with high interest rates works on industry, which is at the front line of international competition, largely by closing it down and killing it. In so doing, it damages our best hope of defeating inflation.

Only manufacturing can bring down inflation—by increasing its production and bringing down its unit costs. The rest of the economy cannot do that. So the more we shrink manufacturing, the higher the proportion of our output in those sectors that are sheltered from international competition. Those are the sectors in which productivity increases are hardest to achieve, in which growth is hardest to achieve and at its lowest, and in which interest rate increases, which are meant to control inflation, have the least effect, because those sectors are not in the front line of international competition.

The more we disturb the balance between manufacturing, which is shrinking, and the sheltered service sector, whose comparative weight is increasing, the more we blunt the weapon of interest rates, and the less effective it is. The more we weaken manufacturing, the more we build the stagflation society. We have gone a long way down that road, and that is why our interest rates—historically and at the moment—are higher than those of other competitors.

We are building a society in which manufacturing cannot flourish because it cannot produce at a profit with those interest and exchange rates. With his manufacturing background, my hon. Friend knows that. It is a society in which interest rates will go ever higher, because, if they are the only weapon, we will have to use bigger and bigger doses of the medicine. Having killed manufacturing, it has less effect on the rest of the economy. That is the sort of economy that we are building, and we have gone a long way down that road. When the Ernst and Young Item club suggests even bigger doses of higher interest rates, it is suggesting a folly, because they will have less and less effect the more that manufacturing shrinks.

What should we do? We are trapped in a situation in which the high exchange rate will destroy a large section of our manufacturing base. There are various solutions. We could abandon this experiment of handing interest rates over to the Bank of England—I think we should. We could change the target and bring in growth and employment as well as inflation. We could change the weapon and, instead of relying exclusively on interest rates, control credit by other means.

I want to show myself moderate to my hon. Friend because he knows that I am moderate in these matters. I accept that it is difficult for the Chancellor to say, "I'm sorry, chaps, but we got it wrong. We shouldn't have handed interest rates to the Bank of England." So let me make a suggestion.

Why not raise the inflation target, because 2.5 per cent is very low? Why not expand the time in which the target is to be achieved? There is no sense in aiming at 2.5 per cent. inflation on a monthly or quarterly basis. That is fine tuning with a vengeance, and we should have given up fine tuning, because it does not work and there is no use bringing it back as central to Government policy. Why not achieve our target rate over two years, or, better still, over the economic cycle in which we hope to achieve our borrowing targets?

The case for doing that would be stronger if the Bank of England, the Monetary Policy Committee and the Chancellor would abandon their obsession with stopping wages rising, although they are bound to rise at this stage of the cycle. The biggest wage rises are in financial services and the City, where high interest rates mean higher bonuses. It is manufacturing that is punished for those wage increases, particularly in my part of the country, which has suffered for the follies and excesses of the City and the financial sector.

The proportion of gross domestic product represented by wages has fallen substantially during the past decade, and it was falling in the decade before that, too. Some catching up of wages, as distinct from profits, is not only possible, but desirable. Why not adjust the inflation target to allow for that, and to recognise that it is not a primary dynamic of inflation?

It is not realistic to keep the inflation target down, and to try to keep wages down as a proportion of GDP. We should not try to fit the economy into a straitjacket, but I fear that that is what we are doing. We should not create the most stable environment of all—a coffin—but we will do that if we kill growth by setting impossibly low rates of inflation.

The Government's aim must be stable and steady growth, not the stability of the graveyard. Growth is the only way to generate a surplus from public spending, and, as Tony Crosland said all those years ago, to redistribute wealth and to improve people's lives by growth in public spending generated by growth in the economy. We are heading in the opposite direction, and that damages the people, manufacturing, the economy and the Government.

Black clouds are gathering, and we are moving towards recession. We are at the end of the golden weather, and it is time to reiterate warnings that it would be wrong to go on chanting the mantra of stability. It is time to re-think. It is time to change. We need to stop the recession that has already hit manufacturing from becoming wider, and increasing unemployment over the next year.

12.12 am

The Paymaster General (Mr. Geoffrey Robinson): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell) on securing the Adjournment debate. Quite contrary to what he said about the call to Downing street, I fear that it may still come, but I do not think that he would make quite the same speech if it did. When he gave us the voting figures from the Monetary Policy Committee, I thought that he was referring to Coventry City's home results in the second half of the season. Of course, his views come as no surprise to me as I have followed them with great interest for many years. If I doubted them at all, I overcame doubt by reading his "Commons Diary" in *The House Magazine*, titled "Preparing for office", in which, in his 21 July entry, he gave a clear account of how he saw the Chancellor's views and what he thought of them.

The United Kingdom's post-war growth performance has been poor compared with that of other industrialised countries. Our record on stability has been equally bad, with excessive swings in output and inflation. We can all agree on that. Those facts are related, because macro-economic instability has been one of the factors behind the poor growth record. That is why economic stability is a key platform of the Government's economic policy. It will make a vital contribution to our central economic objective of high and stable levels of growth and employment. That is the objective of policy; we have no difference on that.

Stability is important because it gives businesses and individuals the confidence to plan effectively for the long term. That will improve the quantity and quality of long-term investment, and help raise productivity. Confidence that inflation will stay low will also encourage the savings that go to fund investment.

If my hon. Friend talks seriously to businesses, they will tell him that their overriding priority is stability and the ability that that provides to plan for the long term. Macro-economic instability entails substantial personal cost. The loss of security and confidence that arise from recessions is considerable. In addition, instability makes it difficult for individuals to retain or develop the skills needed for long-term employment. High inflation also leads to an arbitrary redistribution of income and wealth. Those on fixed or low incomes who have little or no bargaining power often lose the most from high inflation. If my hon. Friend checks the record of previous Governments, to which I shall come shortly, he will find that that is the case.

High inflation is associated with more volatile inflation. Volatile inflation results in higher-risk premiums in long-term interest rates, and increases the distortions to economic decisions caused by difficulties in distinguishing between changes in individual prices and changes in the general price level. When inflation is volatile, it increases the risk that policy makers will make mistakes with damaging consequences for the stability of growth and employment. I ask my hon. Friend to bear that in mind.

As soon as the Government took office, we took action to ensure that the UK economy decisively broke with the cycle of boom and bust, which I know that my hon. Friend deprecates as much as I do—especially the two biggest booms and busts that we had in the 1980s and early 1990s. That is why we set out to reform the frameworks for monetary and fiscal policy to secure low inflation and sound public finances. The new monetary policy arrangements were put in place immediately on taking office. The Bank of England Act 1998 gave the Bank of England's Monetary Policy Committee operational responsibility to set interest rates to achieve price stability as defined by the inflation target.

There is a clear division of responsibility. The Government set, as they must, the economic objectives, particularly the inflation target of 2.5 per cent.

[Mr. Geoffrey Robinson]

The Monetary Policy Committee can then focus on the level of interest rates needed to achieve the target. Subject to the stability objective, the Bank is required to support the Government's economic policy, including our objectives for growth and employment.

The Chancellor appointed leading outside experts to the Monetary Policy Committee to complement existing Bank staff. Whatever my hon. Friend says about them, he must admit that an objective and balanced team has been chosen. The figures that he quoted with some delight clearly show that. The transfer of the responsibility for setting interest rates to the committee ensures that interest rate decisions are made in the country's long-term interest, not for short-term political considerations. That step was absolutely necessary because the old arrangements were not generating the necessary confidence in monetary stability.

Both the Bank and the Government are accountable for the performance of their tasks. To assist this, the framework has many features to strengthen accountability and transparency. In all fairness, my hon. Friend cannot dispute that. They include a clear and simple inflation target of 2.5 per cent. It is only sensible to keep it clear and simple. There is an exceptionally transparent decision-making process, including publication of the minutes, press notices and the Bank's inflation report. Monetary Policy Committee members are held to account through the publication of their votes. I see no alternative to that. If we are to operate a policy that is straightforward, transparent, clear and understandable, we must do that so that we do not get the endless press speculation that would occur in the event of their not being published. My hon. Friend will note that the European bank's chairman proposed never to reveal voting records. My hon. Friend would deprecate such a policy.

Monetary Policy Committee members make regular appearances before the Treasury Select Committee, which is chaired by a distinguished colleague whom my hon. Friend and I have known for years. Under the open letter system, the Governor has to send an open letter to the Chancellor if inflation is more than 1 per cent. above or below the inflation target. That system gives the Bank the opportunity to explain in full why the overshoot or undershoot has occurred, and what it intends to do about it.

Together, those arrangements make the framework of the UK's monetary policy among the most open and transparent in the world. Indeed, a recent Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development survey said:

"Transparency and accountability requirements are very strong in international comparison."

It was referring to the system that the Government have set up since coming to office.

My hon. Friend may say that that is damning with faint praise, but compared with what other countries have done, there can be no question but that the arrangements that we put in place seek to achieve those objectives, to which my hon. Friend attaches as much importance as I do.

It was clear last May—some 15 months ago—that stability required action to head off inflationary pressures that had been allowed to build up before the election. My hon. Friend must accept that successive advice from both the Treasury and the Bank of England to the former Chancellor was that inflationary pressures were building up. We found them when we came to power, and interest rates had to be raised to hold them back. That is why short-term interest rates have gone up by 1.5 percentage points. Combined with the deficit reduction plan, those measures should achieve the necessary slowing of the economy so that it gets back on track for steady and sustainable growth, as forecast in the past two Budgets. I shall say a few words about the forecasts in a moment.

The Government recognise the difficulties that higher interest rates cause businesses and individuals, but history has shown that the bigger the boom, the bigger the bust. In the 1980s and early 1990s, we had the biggest boom and the two biggest recessions since 1945, and that was under a system that had so discredited itself that the incoming Labour Government had to do something about it if they were to gain the credibility of the markets, which was essential. We were right to take action.

Early action to reduce inflationary pressures was essential to minimise the size of the adjustment. Interest rates remain reasonably low by historical standards, and at 7.5 per cent., they compare favourably with the mid-teen rates of the late 1980s and early 1990s.

Mr. Mitchell: Real interest rates.

Mr. Robinson: I take my hon. Friend's point, but if he checks the figures, he will find that, even in real terms, they are considerably lower than they were during that period. The fact that our booms and busts were out of sync with the rest of Europe accounts for part of the difference.

The failure of the old "Ken and Eddie show", to which my hon. Friend appears to want to revert, was that people had no confidence in its long-term ability to deliver low inflation. A measure of the success of the new arrangements is what has happened to long-term interest rates and inflation expectations. As my hon. Friend said, he is a fair and moderate man, but he is also a man of fixed views. One can admire that while not agreeing with him in this instance. To be fair in these matters, one cannot take any particular point in time—certainly not one after only 15 months in office—and say that that is the position. We must look at the long-term position as projected by those who know best—those in the market—who determine such matters.

Interest rates on long-term measures, such as 10 or 15-year gilts, have fallen from some 7.4 per cent. to some 5.9 per cent., and are now at their lowest level for 33 years. That must help long-term investment, which is what the whole policy is about. The long-term differentials between UK interest rates and those in other counties have also fallen. The differentials in forward rates five years ahead—it can also be said for 10 years—have fallen from 1.1 to 0.5 per cent. with respect to Germany, and from 0.7 per cent. to zero with respect to the United States. That is where the markets think that we are going. That must be our aim, which is why we have this policy for the long term.

On inflation, the average of the comparison of independent forecasts for inflation in the fourth quarter of 1998 has fallen from 3.1 to 2.7 per cent. The average inflation forecast for 2000 has fallen from 2.9 to 2.5 per cent.—exactly what the inflation target is. Thus the markets are taking a different view. I do not know what my hon. Friend's experience is, but it is hard to prove the markets that wrong over a number of years.

The markets have taken a different view from the one that my hon. Friend has taken. He appears to be trying to repeat the arguments of the past, but we are doing something substantially different from what was done in the past. If he looks closely at the policies, he will see how they are playing out.

Success will not come easily and everyone has a part to play. As the economic and fiscal strategy report noted, it is vital that those involved in wage bargaining in the private sector recognise that the new environment means low inflation permanently and adjust their expectations accordingly. We are determined to deliver on that in the medium and the long term. I must say that I disagree with my hon. Friend here and that I would have disagreed with him in any of my previous occupations in the private sector. Failure to achieve that on the part of those involved in private sector wage bargaining will lead to unnecessary job losses and lower growth. In addition, as the OECD report commented, the credibility of the new framework could improve further as the Monetary Policy Committee continues to establish a track record.

I am not trying to duck the issue, so I hasten to add that some hon. Members have said that we should tighten fiscal policy. In fact, when the opportunity has arisen, the Government have used fiscal policy precisely to support the stance of monetary policy—the two have gone hand in hand. My hon. Friend will be aware that the fiscal stance has tightened significantly over the past year, by about £20 billion or 2.74 per cent. of GDP. That is the largest fiscal tightening in one year since 1981. My right hon. Friend the Chancellor's recent statement on the economic and fiscal strategy report ensures that that fiscal tightening is locked into the medium term—that is why we have gone on to three-year programmes. My hon. Friend will appreciate that that is utterly different from the whole cast of previous Government policy. The speeches made and the stance taken by Treasury Ministers, in particular by the Chancellor, show utter determination to make the policy stick this time. We cannot change and tack from side to side.

We do not have a target for sterling, but we aim for a stable and competitive exchange rate over the medium term consistent with the objective of price stability. My hon. Friend and I have different views on where that balance falls, but that is the Government's policy. Economic stability is in the long-term interest of the UK economy as a whole, including manufacturing and exporting—

The motion having been made after Ten o'clock, and the debate having continued for half an hour, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *adjourned the House without Question put, pursuant to the Standing Order.*

Adjourned at twenty-five minutes past Twelve midnight.

House of Commons

Tuesday 28 July 1998

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

TAMAR BRIDGE BILL

Lords amendments agreed to.

Oral Answers to Questions

HEALTH

The Secretary of State was asked—

General Practitioners

1. **Mr. John Healey** (Wentworth): What steps he is taking to improve access to general practitioners, with particular reference to areas with a low number of general practitioners per 1,000 population. [50976]

The Minister of State, Department of Health (Mr. Alan Milburn): We have introduced a range of initiatives, such as a salaried general practitioner scheme, that will be beneficial particularly in areas with low GP numbers.

Mr. Healey: I thank the Minister for his response, which was encouraging. However, is he aware that simply to bring our patient waiting list sizes down to the national average, we have to increase the number of GPs by one third in Rotherham, by one quarter in Barnsley and by one fifth in Doncaster? Is he aware that increasing GP numbers is one of the central objectives of the health action zone in the South Yorkshire coalfields? Will he therefore tell me what operating freedoms he is considering giving to health action zones to tackle the problem of GP numbers, and when he expects to reach a decision on the matter?

Mr. Milburn: I thank my hon. Friend for his question. Health action zones are currently working up their outline bids into full proposals, which we shall be examining very carefully. We want to ensure that the difficulties are plugged in all parts of the country, especially those with problems—which the Government have inherited—in recruiting GPs. I can tell my hon. Friend that his health authority has just agreed additional funding for a salaried GP post. I hope that that will be helpful. He will be aware that the Government have concluded negotiations with the British Medical Association to introduce a salaried GP scheme, and also to beef up the GP retainer scheme. As he will also be aware, many general practitioners have worked in, but left, the national health service. The Government want to recruit them back into work, for the benefit of patients.

Mr. Alan Duncan (Rutland and Melton): I look forward—I say rather unexpectedly—to doing battle with the Minister in the next year. I know that he had high hopes of promotion, which he well deserves. I can only assume that the Prime Minister had given him an early pledge.

Does the Minister agree with the BMA chairman that the extra GP trainee places will come on stream only in about 16 years' time? Moreover, the BMA says that the promised 7,000 extra doctors are those who are already doctors. What proportion of those 7,000 doctors will come from overseas? Does he agree with the BMA that we should use only United Kingdom trained doctors, and that importing doctors from overseas will not solve the problem?

Mr. Milburn: I had planned on saying that the hon. Gentleman's first remarks were unworthy of him, but perhaps they were not. The British Medical Association is wrong on the more substantive issue that he raised. Doctors do not grow on trees—they cost extra cash, which is precisely what the Government have provided in the comprehensive spending review. If we had not provided extra cash, we would not be able to recruit extra doctors or to give the go-ahead to a massive expansion in the number of GP medical students—which I hope that he will welcome.

Medical Negligence

2. **Mr. Tam Dalyell** (Linlithgow): Pursuant to his answer of 23 June 1998, *Official Report*, column *491*, what representations he has received on methods of reducing clinical negligence litigation. [50977]

The Minister for Public Health (Ms Tessa Jowell): We have received more than 120 replies to our call for ideas on how to reduce the threat of litigation in the national health service. The replies have come from a wide range of sources, including the health care and legal professions, and the NHS and patients. My officials are currently studying the replies to identify key issues and ideas that we can develop.

Mr. Dalyell: Are Ministers at all uneasy about the way in which some lawyers—not all—seem to encourage clients to take litigation against medical practices, and about the natural reaction of doctors and their colleagues, therefore, to practise defensive medicine, which may not be in the best interests of patients as a whole? Over the summer, will my hon. Friend and her lawyers look carefully at the submission by Lord Justice Sir Philip Otton—a complex document that I have given to the Department in the hope that legislation can be brought forward to overcome an increasing and delicate problem?

Ms Jowell: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has already met Sir Philip Otton. We shall consider his proposals. We want to avoid patients being led to believe that they have grounds for legal action. The risk of defensive medicine follows. We want to ensure that lawyers are kept out of the operating theatres and doctors are kept out of the courts. That is good for patients.

Hospitals (Clinical Performance)

3. **Mr. Dennis Turner** (Wolverhampton, South-East): What representations he has received on general practitioners' rights to information about the clinical performance of their local hospital. [50978]

14. **Mr. Paddy Tipping** (Sherwood): What representations he has received on access by *(a)* general practitioners and *(b)* patients to information about the clinical performance of their local hospitals. [50989]

15. **Mr. Peter L. Pike** (Burnley): What plans he has to publish average clinical performance of hospitals by procedure. [50990]

The Secretary of State for Health (Mr. Frank Dobson): A wide range of people, including general practitioners and members of the public, have expressed strong support for our proposals to give patients and GPs a clear right to know about how their local NHS hospital is performing. As a first step, we shall publish hospital-based indicators in the autumn.

Mr. Turner: Does my right hon. Friend agree that it is essential in the modern, dependable national health service that we are seeking to build that patients and GPs should have access to information about the performance of their local hospitals? Should not the right to know be our clarion call?

Mr. Dobson: Yes indeed, I entirely agree with my hon. Friend. It is crucial that the information provided to GPs and local people is accurate, comparing like with like. Providing misleading information would be harmful not just to the hospital and the profession, but to the GPs and patients.

Mr. Tipping: Is it not the case that knowledge and information are power? Extending information to patients empowers them. That must be right, because they not only use the health service, but pay for it.

Mr. Dobson: It is certainly right in principle. People want, and are entitled, to know whether their hospital is performing up to national standards. People do not want to go shopping around and travel long distances for treatment, but they want to be assured that their local hospital is up to scratch. The information will help them.

Mr. Pike: Does my right hon. Friend agree that it is important that, when the information is published, on a hospital-by-hospital basis, improvements are made where there has been shown to be room for them? What role does he see for the Commission for Health Improvement in ensuring such improvements in the interests of patients and GPs?

Mr. Dobson: The crucial point is that local management and local doctors should know how their performance compares with national standards. If they are not up to the national standards, they should take steps to ensure that they get up to standard. The Commission for Health Improvement, while not quite a long stop, would not be the first organisation to be involved if the local management and local doctors were seen not to be responding to the information that had been made available. Until now, most of the information has not been available, even to the hospital trust boards.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley (South-West Surrey): I endorse a sensitive approach to providing information on clinical outcomes, especially considering the fact that some of the waiting list targets have been such a fiasco for the Government. What steps will the right hon. Gentleman take to reassure the research community, already affronted by the gratuitous cut in its budget, that a clumsy approach to naming and shaming, and hospital league tables, will not result in defensive medicine, a reluctance to take on difficult cases, and a stifling of innovation altogether?

Mr. Dobson: I shall ignore most of the right hon. Lady's preliminary remarks. On the sensible point that she made about trying to ensure that we do not stifle innovation, it is true that if someone tries a surgical procedure for the first time there will be no standard for it, and it will be a riskier form of treatment than procedures that have been frequently carried out.

I can safely say that at almost every meeting that I have had with doctors on that subject I have tried to emphasise that we do not want rules and standards to be laid down in such a way as to inhibit necessary developments. After all, not long ago the only place in Britain where one could have a hip joint replacement was where John Charnley worked, at the Wrightington hospital in Wigan—

Mr. Lindsay Hoyle (Chorley): In Lancashire.

Mr. Dobson: Yes, in Lancashire; I apologise. I must admit that, as a Yorkshireman, I always did think that Wigan was in Lancashire; it always seemed to be there when it played against Yorkshire rugby league clubs.

Similarly, 20 years ago, Oldham—I know that technically, that is part of Greater Manchester, but at one time it, too, was in Lancashire—was the only place in the world where one could have a test tube baby. We must ensure that any new rules that we lay down do not inhibit wonderful developments such as those that took place at Wrightington and at Oldham general hospital.

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark, North and Bermondsey): At the end of last week there were reports that the use of human albumin for transfusions may not be safe, and today there has been another report that the cervical cancer screening carried out by a London hospital has not been entirely safe. Given that last October Ministers said that we must have a national system of quality assurance for cancer screening, and that in December the Secretary of State announced the need for a Commission for Health Improvement to ensure that the whole country has the highest quality standards, can the Secretary of State today assure women in particular, but also all general practitioners and patients, that we will not have to wait any longer for a national system to ensure that transfusions, screening and all other services are of the highest clinical standard everywhere?

Mr. Dobson: As the hon. Gentleman knows, we are trying—carefully, so as to carry the professions with us, because if we do not, no new system will work—to put in place measures to ensure that standards are maintained.

As for his reference to the use of albumin, I can only describe the article in *The Observer* as a grotesque travesty of the situation. The information was supplied to the Chief Medical Officer; the Chief Medical Officer asked the people who prepared it, after consultation within the Department, to send it to the Medicines Control Agency; the agency considered it; the Committee on Safety of Medicines was informed and also considered it. As long ago as 28 May, the committee concluded that it did not consider that withdrawal of human albumin products was warranted, and advised that an expert working group be set up. That group has met, and decided that withdrawal of human albumin products was not warranted. As Secretary of State for Health, I have to consider carefully the advice of those who have been put in a position to give me advice on such matters; I do not have to respond to hysterical articles by ill-informed journalists in badly edited Sunday newspapers.

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): The Secretary of State will be reassured by the fact that I support what he says at that level, not only about medical advice but about other advice. May I press him to tell us whether, when he deals with the procedures, information will be circulated to general practitioners about new procedures, so that they can guide their patients to places where those are being carried out? May I also express the hope that the statistics will major not on mortality figures, but on successful procedures—and not only clinical procedures, because many other procedures are vital for good health?

Mr. Dobson: I accept the hon. Gentleman's point. Mortality statistics are fairly straightforward, but statistics showing how well people do after an operation—if they have survived—are more difficult to calculate, evaluate and log in any system. We are going to enormous lengths to ensure that our proposals command the support of the profession; indeed, the first figures that we shall be publishing in the autumn command the support of those who are carrying out operations. If we could not carry them with us, the proposal would be absurd.

Waiting Lists

4. **Mr. David Ruffley** (Bury St. Edmunds): What proportion of the increased funding provided to his Department in the most recent public spending allocations will be allocated to reducing waiting lists. [50979]

The Secretary of State for Health (Mr. Frank Dobson): We have already announced an extra £500 million to tackle waiting lists this year, which means that we have spent a total of £2 billion extra on the national health service since we came into office. Under the comprehensive spending review, the NHS will receive a further £18 billion for the next three years, including £5 billion or more for the NHS modernisation fund. We shall ensure that that money is linked to results so that, in the lifetime of this Parliament, we reduce waiting lists by 100,000 from the level that we inherited.

Mr. Ruffley: Will the Secretary of State explain why he and his colleagues conned the British public before the general election by saying that it would cost only £100 million to reduce waiting lists by 100,000?

Mr. Dobson: We did not actually say that. At the most recent Health questions, I said, in response to an excellent question from my hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner), that I was fairly confident that waiting lists had stopped rising in June. I can now say that the preliminary figures show that they fell by about 21,000 in June—what is more, they will continue to fall.

Ms Margaret Moran (Luton, South): I thank my right hon. Friend for the additional £630,000 that Bedfordshire health authority is receiving to cut waiting lists, which is in addition to the £2.8 million that it has already received. The money will help local hospitals to perform another 4,000 operations and will be of enormous benefit to patient care generally as well as to reducing waiting lists.

Is my right hon. Friend aware that part of that money will be spent on a new initiative to reduce the waste of theatre operating time owing to patient non-attendance? What other measures does he intend to take to ensure that valuable health resources are not wasted in that way?

Mr. Dobson: My hon. Friend is right. A substantial amount of time is wasted in hospitals when patients do not show up. We intend, through the new national health service charter—which will refer not only to patients' rights, but to their responsibilities—to draw attention to the fact that if someone does not turn up for an appointment, that harms not only them, but other people; moreover, it makes life difficult for hospital staff. We hope that, by publicising the damage that not showing up does to others, we can change the behaviour of those who have made hospital appointments or have had them made for them.

Miss Ann Widdecombe (Maidstone and The Weald): May I use my first question to ask the Secretary of State whether he will take this opportunity to join me in placing on record a tribute to the Kent air ambulance, which crashed a few days ago with the loss of three lives? Will he pay tribute to the work of Graham Budden, the pilot, and Tony Richardson and Mark Darby, the paramedics? Will he also pay tribute, not only to all those who manned the air ambulance and did such sterling work, but to the entire community in Kent, which raised the money for the ambulance and supported it faithfully throughout?

Mr. Dobson: I certainly join the right hon. Lady in paying tribute to all concerned. I express my horror at what happened and my sympathy for the relatives and friends of those who died while trying to help others.

Miss Widdecombe: I am grateful to the Secretary of State.

I turn now to my main question. In order to get waiting lists down, it will, as the Secretary of State has said, be necessary to increase the number of doctors at general practitioner referral level and at work in hospitals. Does the right hon. Gentleman agree with the BMA that the 7,000 extra doctors that he has announced will be no more than the normal increase?

Mr. Dobson: The 7,000 extra doctors have to be paid for. But for the comprehensive spending review settlement, there would be no money to pay for them. Every year, medical schools produce approximately 3,400 new doctors, and we hope that the schools will continue to do so and that the doctors will find employment in the national health service. If the right

hon. Lady wants to criticise us about the number of doctors available, let me remind her that it takes five, six or seven years to train a doctor. Any criticism of the numbers available today should be addressed to those who were in my office five, six, seven or eight years ago.

Mr. Vernon Coaker (Gedling): Try again matron.

Miss Widdecombe: May I invite the Secretary of State to try again? Just answer the question. Yes or no will do. Will the 7,000 doctors that the right hon. Gentleman has announced be over and above the normal increase, or is that the number that would have come anyway from medical schools and other sources?

Mr. Dobson: The answer is no. Doctors coming from medical schools do not necessarily end up working in the national health service unless someone gives them a contract and pays them. Without the money, there would be no contracts, they would not be paid and they would not be working in the NHS.

Dr. Desmond Turner (Brighton, Kemptown): Does my right hon. Friend agree that while it is important to put money into bringing waiting lists down—I congratulate him on doing so—organisation and sensible management are equally important? One of the most important factors in the driving up of waiting lists under the previous Government was the idiosyncrasies introduced by the internal market system. Does he agree that removing the internal market will go a long way towards smoothing the path of reducing waiting lists?

Mr. Dobson: I agree with my hon. Friend. One of our objectives in getting rid of the competitive internal market is to get rid of the expensive paperwork involved, which is using huge amounts of NHS money that we would deploy to treat patients rather than to buy paper to shuffle around the world.

NHS (Drugs and Treatments)

5. **Dr. Evan Harris** (Oxford, West and Abingdon): How he intends to involve the public in discussions about limits on the provision of drugs and treatments in the NHS. [50980]

The Minister of State, Department of Health (Mr. Alan Milburn): The public will be involved in setting national standards for the NHS through the new National Institute of Clinical Excellence, and in developing national service frameworks. We have also made it clear that local commissioners of services should consult the public to ensure that services reflect local needs and wishes.

Dr. Harris: The Minister will recall that at his last Question Time we dragged from him the admission that postcode rationing exists, particularly for new drugs. It is also recognised that 3.7 per cent. growth across a Parliament will not provide for growth in drug expenditure. Does the Minister accept that the question is not whether rationing exists for treatment for multiple sclerosis, varicose veins, fertility and impotence, but when the Government will admit that that is happening and either fund the health service to avoid it, or engage the public and the taxpayer on how to meet demand for existing resources?

Mr. Milburn: As usual, I am not sure what is the policy of Liberal Democrat Members. There is no question of information being dragged out of this Government. We have acknowledged that treatments and the drugs available vary unacceptably throughout the country. Equally, we have made it clear that we are determined to bear down on those unacceptable variations. We want greater national consistency, based on more informed clinical judgments. The hon. Gentleman argued a few days ago from the Liberal Benches that the NHS needed 3 per cent. real-terms growth in expenditure. We have gone above 3 per cent. and 4 per cent. and for the next three years it will be 4.7 per cent. What does the hon. Gentleman want? Is 4.7 per cent. good enough or not?

Mr. Neil Gerrard (Walthamstow): Will my hon. Friend ensure that debates about the availability of drug treatments focus not merely on the cost of the drugs but on the benefits? I am thinking, for example, of the new drugs for HIV, where there has been much focus on the cost but not as much on the long-term benefits, including the economic benefits of people being able to get back to work. In the argument about whether drugs should be available for a particular treatment, we want to avoid setting one group of patients against another, as has happened in the past.

Mr. Milburn: My hon. Friend makes two good points. On the first point, like previous Health Ministers, we get lots of advice from economists and others who say that we need to bear down on the NHS drugs bill, as though drugs were a bad thing, which is a naive assumption. If drugs mean easier, better and quicker treatment for the patient instead of going to hospital, that is a good thing and if it means growth in the NHS drugs bill, we should welcome it. On the second point, we want a more rigorous assessment of what is cost effective and clinically effective, particularly when drugs come on to the market.

To return to the question by the hon. Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon (Dr. Harris), at the moment assessment of drugs when they are first introduced into the NHS is inconsistent. That is why we are introducing the National Institute for Clinical Excellence to ensure greater consistency throughout the health service. After all, it is supposed to be a national health service, not a series of competing local health services.

Mr. Peter Bottomley (Worthing, West): Hon. Members will agree with what the Minister has said, together with what the Secretary of State said about innovation and making general what has been shown to work. On the limiting of treatments, may I ask the hon. Gentleman, in a non-partisan way, whether he recognises that delays in non-emergency treatment for cataracts and hip operations, for example, affect the elderly in particular? Will he consider publishing for each health authority the instructions to hospitals in their areas on necessary delays for waiting lists? West Sussex has the highest proportion of elderly people and the waiting time is 17 months.

Mr. Milburn: First, on the general point, the hon. Gentleman will be aware—I hope that he and his party

now accept this—that as we bring down waiting lists, which we are doing, waiting times for individual patients will also come down and I hope that he welcomes that. I will look into the situation in his area. I am aware of the problems there because he has seen me about them, in particular the increased demand that can arise from a higher than average elderly population. I will be pleased to look into the specific concerns that he expresses.

Dental Services

6. **Mr. Peter Viggers** (Gosport): If he will make a statement on how national health service dentists are paid for root canal work. [50981]

The Minister of State, Department of Health (Mr. Alan Milburn): Root canal treatments are included as items of treatment in the statement of dental remuneration for which dentists can claim an NHS fee.

Mr. Viggers: Well, I am grateful for that reply, as far as it went. Does the Minister agree that the fees payable to dentists for root canal work, at £24 for an incisor operation and £58 for a molar operation, which takes about two hours, are completely inadequate? Does he agree that dentists can undertake those operations only at a loss to themselves, if they are reputable and competent, and that recent studies show that in many cases dentists are undertaking such operations speedily and unprofessionally, which is resulting in low standards with further operations sometimes being necessary thereafter? What is he going to do about it? Before he replies, may I point out that dentists and patients in my constituency do not want to know what happened last year and the year before, but what will happen next year and the year after?

Mr. Milburn: I am sure that they do not want to know what happened last year and the year before. The hon. Gentleman will be aware that an independent review body deals with fees for procedures performed by dentists. We submit evidence to that body, as other Governments have; dentists submit evidence too, and the body recommends the fees that it considers appropriate. Over the past few years, the doctors and dentists remuneration review body has made recommendations for increases in fees well above the rate of inflation.

Mr. Eddie O'Hara (Knowsley, South): It may come as a surprise—although it should not—to some Opposition Members to learn that the more important question in some parts of the country is whether one can receive root canal treatment on the NHS. What steps is my hon. Friend taking to ensure better availability of NHS dental treatment in the poorest areas to provide such important procedures as root canal work?

Mr. Milburn: The Government have taken a significant step forward on that. My hon. Friend will be aware that we inherited great difficulties with access to NHS dental services in some parts of the country. We have introduced a new investing in dentistry scheme, which is already bringing home the bacon because it is recruiting dentists back to the national health service. As a consequence, 250,000 extra patients now have access to NHS dental services which they would not have had under the previous Government.

Out-patient Consultations

7. **Mr. John Bercow** (Buckingham): What estimate he has made of the number of people awaiting out-patient consultations on *(a)* 1 May 1997 and *(b)* 1 May 1998. [50982]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Mr. Paul Boateng): Information on the number of people nationally awaiting out-patient consultations is not available centrally. However, information on first out-patient appointments shows that at March 1998, 81 per cent. of patients were seen within 13 weeks of general practitioner written referral and 96 per cent. were seen within 26 weeks. That compares with figures for March 1997 of 83 per cent. and 97 per cent. respectively.

Mr. Bercow: At Stoke Mandeville hospital, which serves thousands of my constituents, there has been an 88 per cent. increase in the number of people waiting for out-patient appointments for between 13 and 26 weeks since the Government came to office. What proportion of the alleged fall in waiting lists—which is, as yet, unpublished—is due to an increase in the waiting list to get on the waiting list?

Mr. Boateng: We have made it crystal clear that our targets on waiting lists should not be achieved at the expense of out-patient appointments, and we shall implement that policy. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will give credit to, indeed thanks for, the additional resources that have been made available in his constituency which have provided 51 extra beds, which would not have been available if the hon. Gentleman's party were in government, and 4,280 extra treatments. It is time we received some gratitude from Opposition Members for those resources.

Mr. Andrew Dismore (Hendon): Is my hon. Friend aware that part of the £2 million awarded to Barnet health authority to tackle waiting lists will be used to increase out-patient sessions at Edgware hospital, which the previous Government closed? Does not that show that this Government are trying to restore health services to the area, unlike the Conservatives when they were in government?

Mr. Boateng: My hon. Friend has performed a sterling service for Edgware hospital in his constituency and in north-west London generally. It is good news that the hospital is now delivering the new, modernised health service for which the people of his constituency and many others voted.

Mr. Philip Hammond (Runnymede and Weybridge): Will the Minister acknowledge that what matters to patients is the total waiting time from GP referral to treatment? Will he further acknowledge that reduced numbers on the waiting list for surgery will be a pyrrhic victory if the waiting list to get on the waiting list is getting longer? Will he therefore arrange for data on the total out-patient waiting lists in the UK to be collected and published with in-patient waiting lists in future?

Mr. Boateng: Those data were never available under the previous Government, and they will not be available under

the present one. What counts is that we should shorten waiting lists across all fronts. Out-patients and in-patients alike will benefit from that. They did not benefit in that way under the previous, Conservative-led Government.

Dr. Brian Iddon (Bolton, South-East): According to figures that I have received from the Library, at the end of the financial year 1995–96, the debt owed to the national health service by non-NHS debtors was a staggering £543 million. Does my hon. Friend agree that many of the difficulties that the previous Administration bequeathed to the national health service could be dealt with if some of the debt that they left us were collected?

Mr. Boateng: The previous Administration have a great deal to answer for, and that is a small part of it.

Premature Deaths

8. **Mr. Norman Baker** (Lewes): What research he has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated into the causes of premature deaths each year which can be ascribed to (i) tobacco, (ii) alcohol and (iii) cannabis. [50983]

The Minister for Public Health (Ms Tessa Jowell): The harmful effects of tobacco are well researched and documented—most recently, by the Scientific Committee on Tobacco and Health. An estimated 120,000 people die every year from smoking or smoking-related causes.

The latest evidence on the harmful effects of alcohol on health was analysed thoroughly in the preparation for the 1995 sensible drinking reports, the recommendations of which we have adopted as continuing policy. It is estimated that between 4,000 and 40,000 people die each year from alcohol misuse.

The harmful effects of smoking cannabis—for example, bronchitis, cancers, short-term memory loss and aggravation of existing mental disorders—are well documented. It is estimated that five people have died in the past four years from cannabis abuse.

Mr. Baker: It is interesting that the one illegal recreational drug of the three is the one that, apparently, caused the fewest deaths. However, will the Minister address a problem that many health professionals have identified? There appears to be a beneficial medicinal use for cannabis, yet at the moment it is improper—indeed, illegal—for health professionals to prescribe cannabis for any purpose. Will the Minister reconsider the matter, to discover whether those who would benefit from the medicinal use of cannabis might be enabled to do so without being criminalised?

Ms Jowell: There are perfectly clear procedures for applying to conduct research to establish the medicinal benefits of cannabis. The Government have absolutely no intention of making the use of cannabis legal, but this is an opportunity for Opposition Front Benchers to clarify their position on the issue, and perhaps for the hon. Member for Rutland and Melton (Mr. Duncan) to make clear his position in relation to his recent book, "Saturn's Children", in which he said:

"Nor are drugs a particularly threatening health problem."

The Government disagree.

Mr. Desmond Swayne (New Forest, West): Of the 120,000 people who die prematurely from smoking-related diseases each year, 53,000 are over the age of 75. Given that the Minister's Department has stated that life expectancy for men is 75 years, how can those people possibly be described as having died prematurely?

Ms Jowell: I made it clear that, every year, more than 120,000 people die from smoking or smoking-related causes. I did not identify those who died under the age of 75, but, with life expectancy increasing, it is absolutely clear that, for people who smoke, the chances of dying from tobacco or tobacco-related causes are increased by something like 100 per cent. Half of smokers die from causes related directly to smoking.

Mr. Paul Flynn (Newport, West): Does not my hon. Friend recall that tens of thousands of people in this country who suffer from multiple sclerosis, the effects of chemotherapy and glaucoma take cannabis illegally as it provides the best relief from the serious pain that they endure? Why does she continue to condemn those people to dealing in an illegal market where they cannot guarantee the quality or strength of the product—and can only smoke it, which is the most dangerous method of using cannabis?

Did my hon. Friend see the "Watchdog" programme last night, which presented both sides of the argument? It received a massive public reaction, with some 96 per cent. of people voting in favour of the medicinal use of cannabis. When will the Government get in touch with public opinion and stop maligning the hon. Member for Rutland and Melton (Mr. Duncan) for the four most intelligent pages in his book, which he has withdrawn—although, quite rightly, he has not changed his mind about them? It is about time the House allowed intelligent thought among Front Benchers.

Ms Jowell: I join my hon. Friend in assuming that the failure of the hon. Member for Rutland and Melton to respond to that point means that he has not changed his mind about the legalisation of hard drugs.

Madam Speaker: Order. The hon. Member for Rutland and Melton (Mr. Duncan) is not allowed to respond. He does not have an opportunity to do so; he has had his question. Let us have a little justice.

Ms Jowell: To my hon. Friend the Member for Newport, West (Mr. Flynn), who has long argued the case in relation to people who suffer from multiple sclerosis, I reiterate that those who wish to undertake research into the beneficial medicinal effects of cannabis use may apply to the Home Office for permission to conduct that work.

Mr. Nigel Waterson (Eastbourne): Does the Minister agree that, when examining the use of drugs—recreational or otherwise—we should consider not only premature deaths but ruined lives? Does the Minister agree that the Liberal Democrats' policy of legalising cannabis is both dangerous and irresponsible?

Ms Jowell: I agree.

Ambulance Service (Staffordshire)

9. **Charlotte Atkins** (Staffordshire, Moorlands): What factors underlay the response rate times achieved by Staffordshire ambulance service in the last three years. [50984]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Mr. Paul Boateng): My hon. Friend will be aware that Staffordshire ambulance service has achieved the best response times in England for the third year running. I commend this achievement, which is attributable in part to an innovative system of positioning ambulances on standby close to areas where emergencies are most likely to occur. We need to spread that good practice, which I know other ambulance services are looking at. I congratulate both staff and management of Staffordshire ambulance service on their enterprise.

Charlotte Atkins: What plans does my hon. Friend have to ensure that all ambulance services take advantage of Staffordshire's valuable experience? It appears that nothing has been done in the past three years to ensure that other ambulance services—such as Cornwall, which is at the bottom of the league table—benefit from the Staffordshire experience. The results have been startling and have produced huge dividends for patients, particularly those suffering cardiac arrest.

Mr. Boateng: The Staffordshire ambulance service has already led several seminars that we have organised in order to encourage the spread of good practice. We must make it absolutely clear that we expect all ambulance services to respond to 75 per cent. of life-threatening calls within eight minutes by 2000–01. Staffordshire is so far the only ambulance service to have met that target already, and it is showing the way for others. Clear, strategic business planning has managed to achieve improvements without additional costs. Ambulance services nationwide must learn that lesson, and we intend to ensure that they do.

NHS Trusts

10. **Mr. Tim Loughton** (East Worthing and Shoreham): What meetings his Department held with members or representatives of local authorities prior to the June 1997 trawl for nominations to NHS trust boards; and if he will make a statement. [50985]

The Secretary of State for Health (Mr. Frank Dobson): So far as I know, the only meeting with local authority representatives at which nominations to NHS boards was discussed was an official meeting on 12 May involving myself and other Ministers and official representatives of the Local Government Association.

Mr. Loughton: Will the Secretary of State take this opportunity to confirm that last year's scandal of Labour activists constituting 80 per cent. of board appointments to trusts—as confirmed by the Commissioner for Public Appointments—is a thing of the past? If political correctness is no longer an overriding concern when it comes to appointments in the national health service, can the Secretary of State explain how, although the chairman of the West Sussex health authority recently approved and offered 14 names to fill a vacant board appointment on the West Sussex health authority—all of them male—the Secretary of State managed to appoint a woman?

Mr. Dobson: I will make a start. Following the precedent set by the House of Commons some five or six years ago when we appointed 100 per cent. of the Speaker as a woman, I tried my best to ensure that at least half the appointments to NHS trust boards and health authority boards were women. We have achieved that target and I am proud to have done so. If the chair of the health authority—I forget which one—to which the hon. Gentleman referred could not come up with one woman out of 14 names, he should have his head seen to.

Dr. Phyllis Starkey (Milton Keynes, South-West): Does my right hon. Friend agree that it is extremely important that local authorities and health authorities work closely together if we are to achieve a seamless system of health and community care? I particularly commend to him the experience in my constituency, where the unitary council worked closely with the health authority with regard to the winter crisis money and, between them, effectively reduced the problems in the area and helped a number of elderly people to obtain more appropriate treatment with support in the community. Is it not reasonable that such co-operation between local authorities and health authorities should be reflected in appointments to health authority boards?

Mr. Dobson: It is true that one reason for appointing at least a number of members of local authorities to health boards is to improve the liaison between the two, but elected members and appointed non-executives should not be the main channel for such liaison. Liaison at an official level must be improved, and that is one reason why we propose that, in future, the chief executive of a local authority should be expected to attend and participate in, but not vote at, the board meetings of the health authority. Such co-operation is necessary.

Mr. Christopher Gill (Ludlow): When the right hon. Gentleman addressed the annual meeting of the Association of Community Health Councils for England and Wales on 9 July last year he said:

> "At the General Election we promised that we would make sure that the boards of health authorities and trusts would be more representative of the local communities they serve."

Why then is there no longer a representative of general practitioners on the Shropshire health authority? Why then is there no longer a representative from the Ludlow constituency on the Shropshire health authority? Why is it that 50 per cent. of representatives on the Shropshire health authority are from the socialist stronghold of Telford? [HON. MEMBERS: "Oh!"] There is more to come, Madam Speaker. Why is it that the last two appointments to the Shropshire health authority were Labour councillors? When does the Secretary of State intend to address those problems and reply to my letter of 13 July?

Mr. Dobson: When I set about making the appointments about which the hon. Gentleman complains, I was addressing the problem of significantly unrepresentative boards appointed by our predecessors. In case anyone says that I am justifying myself, the Commissioner for Public Appointments, who was

appointed by the previous Government and served in a senior position in the NHS as an appointee of the previous Government, has endorsed, in his official report, all that we have been doing, and has recognised that we have carried out the obligation that we entered into at the general election to make the boards more representative of local people. That is what we said we would do and that is what we are doing.

The hon. Gentleman raises one relevant point, which is that where health authorities cover a substantial area it is sometimes difficult to obtain representation which covers each part of the area, a matter which I am trying to deal with. It is interesting to note that I am the first Secretary of State to ask for a map of each area showing whence each representative comes. None of my predecessors bothered to look.

Over-medication

11. **Mr. Paul Flynn** (Newport, West): What proposals he has to reduce the incidence of over-medication of the elderly. [50986]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Mr. Paul Boateng): The Department and the national prescribing centre will publish a report on GP prescribing support in September. The document will give many examples of good practice where pharmacists have assessed prescribing for patients in a number of areas, including nursing home settings.

Mr. Flynn: Is the Minister in a position to respond to my letters and the reports that I have sent him from Gloucester, Glasgow and Manchester, which reveal that up to one in five hospital admissions for elderly people is the result of the misuse and overuse of medicinal drugs; and that, of those patients in care homes who show symptoms of dementia, more than half have drug-induced dementia? Will he replicate the splendid review carried out by the department of psychiatry at the university of Manchester, which shows that reducing drug intakes for elderly people makes them more alive, relieves them from the confusion and misery in which they live, saves the health service a small fortune and makes available extra money to spend on care?

Mr. Boateng: I will reply in detail shortly to the points that my hon. Friend raised in correspondence, but I was glad to have the opportunity, on 26 June this year, to give a prize to that self-same department—the department of old-age psychiatry at the university of Manchester—as part of the pharmaceutical care awards. We have learnt from the experience of that Manchester project that where pharmacists go out and about in the community, particularly where they are concentrated around nursing homes, the number of drugs prescribed per resident can be significantly reduced, stays in hospital can be reduced, and, significantly, the number of deaths is reduced. We want that good news and good practice replicated throughout the national health service.

Dr. Peter Brand (Isle of Wight): Does the Minister agree that one reason for over-medication, especially of mentally ill and frail elderly people, is the NHS's withdrawal from respite care, day care and long-term care for elderly people? Does he recognise that the only way in which those people are being contained in the community is by doping them up? Does he agree that, to avoid that problem, we need more resources to support people in the community?

Mr. Boateng: We certainly need to ensure that resources, including any new resources, are applied in ways that complement health and social care being delivered together. By making a wider range of therapies and assistance available to old people we can reduce their dependence on drugs, particularly where we work in contact with the voluntary sector, which has introduced some important and innovative ways of proceeding. We are working on that now.

Announcements on mental health will be made in due course, and the elderly will benefit alongside the young from our new policies in that area.

NHS Direct

12. **Ms Gisela Stuart** (Birmingham, Edgbaston): What plans he has for extending NHS Direct. [50987]

The Secretary of State for Health (Mr. Frank Dobson): The new 24-hour, nurse-led telephone helpline, NHS Direct, will be nationwide in 2000. It is currently being piloted in three areas, and, by the end of this financial year, it will be extended to cover at least 20 per cent. of the population. Three of the new areas to be covered will be Manchester, Birmingham and Cornwall, and the others will be announced in early August.

Ms Stuart: I welcome my right hon. Friend's announcement that NHS Direct will be extended to the country's second city, Birmingham. That is very much welcomed by all my constituents. Has my right hon. Friend analysed the success of the first wave of areas in which NHS Direct was used so that I may give my constituents a clear idea of what benefits they may receive from it?

Mr. Dobson: I am glad that my hon. Friend welcomes the proposed extension of the scheme to cover the great city of Birmingham. It may interest her constituents to know that some 80 per cent. of those who called said that they were following a course of action different from the one that they had intended to follow before making their call. Thus 80 per cent. of people were influenced by the nurse on the end of the helpline. Some 30 per cent. of callers were directed by the nurse to less resource-intensive care and some 25 per cent. were guided towards more resource-intensive care. In other words, when people were told, "Little Johnny has a bit of a fever, but will probably be all right in the morning," no care was provided, whereas arrangements were immediately made for an ambulance to be sent to take people in desperate need of care off to hospital.

The object of the scheme is to provide an additional service which is not available at present. The three pilot schemes clearly showed that lots of people all over the country would not go to accident and emergency, get their

doctor out in the middle of the night or ring for an ambulance, but would ring up for advice, reassurance or, in some cases, urgent treatment.

Mrs. Marion Roe (Broxbourne): Will the Secretary of State confirm that NHS Direct will not be funded at the expense of other nursing-led activities?

Mr. Dobson: Special funding has been made available this year for the pilot schemes, and will also be made available for the additional schemes that are coming on stream. The scheme has an advantage, which we hope will be put to good use. A substantial number of nurses give up nursing because they have suffered back or other injuries which make it impossible to continue normal nursing. We hope that the idea of using their nursing skills on the end of a telephone will appeal to some of them, and that we will be able to bring their expertise and experience back into the national health service—to their benefit, and the benefit of patients.

Points of Order

3.30 pm

Mr. Julian Brazier (Canterbury): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. Would you rule on a point affecting the Parliament Acts 1911 and 1949, which may help hon. Members later this evening? It has been widely canvassed that, if the House decides to drop the amendment relating to the gay age of consent, it may come back in a new measure in the new Session. Would you rule on whether the 12-month delaying power of the other place would be triggered tonight or on Second Reading of any new measure?

Madam Speaker: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving me notice of his point of order.

I read the Parliament Acts as applying to Bills originating in this House, but not to Bills that began in the House of Lords. That is also the view that happens to be taken by "Erskine May" at page 569. Thus, the Parliament Acts do not apply to the Crime and Disorder Bill, but they would apply to a Bill introduced in this House, if that were to follow today's proceedings.

Mr. Owen Paterson (North Shropshire): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. Today, a White Paper on Welsh trunk roads has been published. One copy is available in the Library and 40 copies have been sent to Welsh Members, but no copies are available in the Vote Office. I am a member of the Welsh Affairs Committee and the Welsh Grand Committee. The A483, which is nominated as a priority road, runs straight through my constituency. Would you please clarify what the rules are concerning the availability of that document?

Madam Speaker: If a White Paper has been laid before the House, it certainly should be available to hon. Members in the Vote Office. I hope that those on the Treasury Bench will take heed of what I say.

Mr. Robert Syms (Poole): Further to that point of order, Madam Speaker. I also requested that document, which is a review of the trunk roads of Wales, from the Vote Office, as a Member of the United Kingdom Parliament. I was told that it was unavailable. There is to be a decision later this week on English trunk roads. Would it be appropriate for that document to be available from the Vote Office, for all Members of Parliament?

Madam Speaker: It very much depends on the time and date when documents are laid before this House. These are the procedures that we have always followed: when documents are laid before the House, they should be available for Members. I see that those on the Front Bench have heeded what I have said about this matter.

Organ Donation

3.33 pm

Dr. Evan Harris (Oxford, West and Abingdon): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to provide that the organs of potential donors are available for transplant on death unless the potential donor has previously indicated a wish to the contrary.

There is a crisis in the country. It is a quiet crisis, but nevertheless a tragic one. It results from the mismatch between people whose lives could be saved, or indeed transformed, by the donation of organs—kidneys, for example—and the availability of organs to fulfil the demand.

The latest available Government figures show that more than 200 patients die each year on the waiting lists for liver, heart, lung or heart-lung transplants alone. That figure does not include those waiting for kidney transplants. The number has been increasing in recent years, and is almost certainly an underestimate, as many patients do not even reach the waiting lists when the supply of organs is short.

The figures for kidney donations show that, in 1997, there were 1,635 kidney transplants, but the waiting list stands at 5,732. The number of kidney transplants has fallen for three successive years. The liver transplant waiting list has risen over the past three years, and the number of cadaveric solid organ donations and donors is diminishing—that is, the number of donations of hearts, hearts and lungs, livers and kidneys. It is not clear why the number of donations is falling, but part of the reason may be improved road safety. Nevertheless, there is a problem, and I think that the House should address itself to how that problem can be solved.

It may be useful to look at the current law, which, in the case of cadaveric organ donations, is governed by the Human Tissue Act 1961. The Act allows the person defined as lawfully in possession of the patient's body after death to authorise removal of parts of the body if either the patient has formally expressed the wish for his or her body to be used in that way or, after such inquiries as may be practicable, the person in possession of the body has no reason to believe either that the deceased expressed an objection to removal or that the surviving spouse or any surviving relatives object.

There are already problems with that law, because it does not clearly define who is in lawful possession of the body. It does not state whether it is the hospital authorities, as is currently believed, or whether relatives have a greater claim. It also does not state whether, if relatives establish a greater claim, there is a pecking order in the event of disagreement about authorisation.

If relatives are lawfully in possession, they are not required to allow the organs to be used to save other people's lives; they are merely authorised to do so. If, before death, the patient expressed the wish that his or her organs should be used to save others' lives, it does not automatically follow that they will be. Similarly, if the patient did not clearly express an opinion, the relatives are asked for their opinion. Therefore, relatives have an effective veto in both circumstances.

That is the contracting-in system, which we use in this country. Other European countries use a contracting-out system. France introduced such a system in 1977, under which people can register as being unwilling to let their organs be used in such a way. Since 1988, when the regulations were changed, they have been able to do that by means of a computerised national register.

I think that this country should seriously consider introducing a contracting-out scheme, which could better be described as "presumed consent". There is a moral argument in favour of that. On 30 May, Professor Ian Kennedy—who, as hon. Members will know, was appointed to run the inquiry into the Bristol hospital scandal—published a paper in *The Lancet* on behalf of the International Forum for Transplant Ethics. That paper—of which I was unaware when I chose the long title of the Bill—clearly sets out the philosophical arguments and premises. It states that there is a moral case for changing the law regulating organ donation from a system of contracting in to presumed consent in countries that have not yet done so. That is because it is accepted that, generally speaking, such a system would increase the supply of organs for transplantation. That would improve and save lives, and would be a good measure.

In countries such as the United Kingdom that, since 1990, do not operate a system of presumed consent, the supply of organs and the gap between demand and supply has widened. Some people, such as professionals who, in this country, are split on the matter, argue that public education and measures to simplify the process of donation and retrieval could improve the supply of organs. However, the evidence suggests that that is not entirely clear and that countries that have switched to presumed consent have a better supply.

The methods in various countries are analysed in the Kennedy paper. Of the countries that are considered in that document, only the UK takes organs following the consent of the person who is lawfully in possession of the body, and that is subject to the express objection of the deceased or of the relatives if they are available. An alternative, which operates in Norway and elsewhere, is that after relatives have been informed of the intention to remove organs, irrespective of their consent, donation and retrieval take place. In Italy, that is done when it has been ascertained that the relatives do not object and in Belgium, which I shall shortly deal with in more detail, the process is carried out when the dead person has not expressed a prior objection. When that is confirmed by the relatives, consent is presumed.

People in Britain have said that the differences in the rates of organ donation between countries can be explained by religious or cultural factors, by the rate of road traffic accidents, by gun laws or by the ability of specialist teams in intensive care units better to retrieve organs for donation. According to the Kennedy paper, in Belgium, there is well-documented and convincing evidence that, in 1986, a change in law from contracting in to presumed consent—that is, contracting out—led to an increase in organ supply.

In an inter-country study, the staff of the transplantation centre in Antwerp strongly opposed the new law and retained a contracting-in policy which was accompanied by enhanced public and professional education. They felt that the new scheme would damage people's willingness to donate. By contrast, in Leuven, the new law was adopted. Antwerp's organ donation rates remain unchanged despite the extra education, but in Leuven, they rose from 15 to 40 donors a year over three years. In the country as a whole, organ donation rose by 55 per cent.

There is clear evidence that moving to a presumed consent system would increase the availability of donations and would save lives. However, we must recognise that people have strong ethical and moral concerns about whether that is the appropriate way forward. Nevertheless, the case must be made for moving to a system such as presumed consent under which people have to opt out. It is not clear that relatives are any more disturbed by organs being taken by presumed consent than they are by being forced at a difficult psychological time to make that decision. The Belgian system, under which confirmation is requested of the relatives rather than the relatives being trodden on willy-nilly, is plainly an appropriate system for the Government to consider.

Mr. Robert Maclennan (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Dr. Harris: Yes.

Madam Speaker: Order. I am sorry, but I cannot allow an intervention in such an application.

Dr. Harris: I understand that, Madam Speaker, and I apologise for giving way. I should be happy to enter into correspondence, or to converse with Opposition Members or the Government on this matter because it is important to many thousands of people who are on waiting lists and to their families.

I urge the Government to consider consultation and to create a public debate on the measure so that we can move it forward.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Dr. Evan Harris, Mr. Norman Baker, Mr. Gerald Bermingham, Mr. Bill Michie, Mr. Alan Simpson and Mr. Graham Stringer.

ORGAN DONATION

Dr. Evan Harris accordingly presented a Bill to provide that the organs of potential donors are available for transplant on death unless the potential donor has previously indicated a wish to the contrary: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on Friday 23 October, and to be printed [Bill 242].

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. Following the report on organ donation in the late 1960s, which was chaired by the father of the right hon. Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross (Mr. Maclennan), I tried on eight occasions to bring in a similar Bill to that so eloquently introduced by the hon. Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon (Dr. Harris). On the first occasion that I did so, not only did Health Ministers remain in their places, but such was the importance placed on the subject that the then Prime Minister decided that he would wait and hear what was said.

[Mr. Tam Dalyell]

In the corridor afterwards, the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Sir E. Heath) said to me rather laconically, "I was sympathetic to what you had to say, but I don't think you'll persuade Keith Joseph", and nor did I. Is it not a matter of etiquette on ten-minute Bills that representatives of the Department are present to hear what is said? This is a Parliament point rather than a party point. If the ten-minute Bill procedure—albeit kite-flying—is to be at all meaningful, Ministers should at least hear what is said.

Madam Speaker: I understand the hon. Gentleman's strong feelings on this matter. Ministers have busy schedules, and it is for them to decide whether to be present on the Front Bench on such an occasion. It is entirely a matter for Ministers.

Orders of the Day

Northern Ireland (Sentences) Bill

Lords amendments considered.

Clause 1

SENTENCE REVIEW COMMISSIONERS

Lords amendment: No. 1, in page 1, line 7, leave out (", and one of them shall be appointed chairman")

3.46 pm

The Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office (Mr. Adam Ingram): I beg to move, That this House does agree with the Lords in the said amendment.

Madam Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to discuss Lords amendments Nos. 20, 21 and 23.

Mr. Ingram: These are all Government amendments concerned with the appointment of joint chairmen of the sentence review commissioners. The reason behind the amendments is to ensure that the Secretary of State will be able to satisfy clause 1(3), which states:

"In making appointments the Secretary of State shall have regard to the desirability of the Commissioners, as a group, commanding widespread acceptance throughout the community in Northern Ireland."

The appointment of a chairman is of particular significance, and it is felt that there could be considerable merit in appointing joint chairmen, hence the amendments.

Mr. Andrew MacKay (Bracknell): I rise briefly to say that the Opposition fully support this group of amendments. To prevent us from wasting further time on the Bill, I can tell the House that we agree with all the other amendments. It has been extremely helpful for the Government to have improved and modified the Bill in the other place. We are grateful to them, and we appreciate the trouble that the Minister has taken.

Mr. Phil Willis (Harrogate and Knaresborough): The Liberal Democrats support all the amendments, which are clearly improvements to the Bill. We support the Government on all the amendments tabled.

Madam Speaker: May I collect the voices on all the amendments?

Mr. Kevin McNamara (Hull, North): No, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Sorry, on amendment No. 1. Do you wish to speak, Mr. McNamara?

Mr. McNamara: I thought, Madam Speaker, that you were suggesting that our voices should be collected on all the amendments. I want to get advice from the Minister about the content and meaning of the new clause. I would be delighted if you wanted to take amendments Nos. 1 to 15.

Madam Speaker: I cannot. I must take them individually. I shall first collect the voices on amendment No. 1.

Lords amendment agreed to.

Lords amendments Nos. 2 to 15 agreed to.

New clause

Lords amendment: No. 16, after clause 12, to insert the following new clause—*Interpretation: terrorism—*

". In this Act "terrorism" means the use of violence for political ends, and includes any use of violence for the purpose of putting the public or any section of the public in fear."

Mr. Ingram: I beg to move, That this House doth agree with the Lords in the said amendment.

This amendment would add a new clause giving a definition of "terrorism" that is the same as the definition contained in the Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act 1989. The Government consider that it would be of value to have such a definition to avoid any possibility of ambiguity or a suggestion that the term might be used in a different sense in this Bill than in other legislation.

Mr. McNamara: I was interested to know why the new clause was necessary when there was a definition of "terrorism" in the Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act 1989 and the Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Act 1991, under which people covered by this Bill had already been sentenced. I could see no reason why that definition was not being used when it was the definition under which they were sentenced.

We now have an explanation from my hon. Friend the Minister, for which we are grateful. I thank him for it.

Lords amendment agreed to.

Lords amendments Nos. 17 to 24 agreed to.

Crime and Disorder Bill *[Lords]*

Lords Reasons for disagreeing to certain Commons amendments considered.

New clause

REDUCTION IN AGE AT WHICH CERTAIN SEXUAL ACTS ARE LAWFUL

Lords Reason:

The Lords disagree to amendment No. 14 made by the Commons for the following Reason:

Because it fails adequately to protect vulnerable young people.

3.53 pm

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Jack Straw): I beg to move, That this House does not insist on its amendment to which the Lords have disagreed.

Madam Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to consider the Lords reasons for disagreeing to amendments Nos. 98, 107, 108, 140 and 237.

Mr. Straw: These amendments relate to amendments tabled at the House of Commons Report stage in the name of my hon. Friend the Member for Brentford and Isleworth (Ann Keen), to equalise the age of consent for homosexual and heterosexual activity at the age of 16. *[Interruption.]* Madam Speaker, shall I continue?

Madam Speaker: Yes; I am listening intently. There is a lot of difficult procedure for us to follow, and I am listening very carefully.

Mr. Straw: If it is acceptable, Madam Speaker, it will take me about 10 minutes to explain my position. I was anxious that you should not spend the whole of that time sitting on the end of the Chair.

Madam Speaker: I was not specifically waiting for something—although I am always prepared.

Mr. Straw: I know that you are always prepared, Madam Speaker—like a good girl guide.

Madam Speaker: Brownie.

Mr. Straw: Or a brownie. We had better not go down that path just now.

On 22 June, on a free vote, the House backed the amendments by 336 votes to 129. My hon. Friend the Member for Brentford and Isleworth was supported in her amendment by my hon. Friends the Members for Exeter (Mr. Bradshaw), for Enfield, Southgate (Mr. Twigg) and for Blackpool, South (Mr. Marsden) and by the hon. Members for Oxford, West and Abingdon (Dr. Harris), for Epping Forest (Mrs. Laing) and for Witney (Mr. Woodward)—all of whom have shown great moral conviction on a very difficult issue for all concerned.

The amendments were to the Crime and Disorder Bill, which is one of this Parliament's major measures on law and order, giving effect to 12 manifesto commitments that

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will have a significant impact on the safety and well-being of our constituents. Overall, the Bill has been widely and enthusiastically welcomed by the public and police. It received substantial support on both sides of the House on Second Reading and on Third Reading, both of which were unopposed.

The Bill completed its Committee stage in June. Almost five weeks ago—on 24 June, after its Report and Third Reading—it was sent from the House to another place.

Business managers and I had originally planned that the Commons amendments to the Bill—which began in the Lords—should have been debated at the beginning of July, so that there was adequate time to resolve any disagreements between the two Houses, should any arise, before the end of this month. However, that more relaxed timetable did not prove possible, not least because of the intervention of two sets of Northern Ireland legislation.

For very good reasons—I can go into the matter in more detail if hon. Members so wish—we have always aimed to achieve Royal Assent to the Bill by the end of this week. Apart from those clauses that are due to come into force on Royal Assent itself, a full implementation timetable was due to start on 30 September. The overall timetable contains about 25 separate items in the Bill, including pilots on the Bill's major youth justice reforms, and starting three other linked pilots, all of which have already been chosen, announced and published; crime and disorder partnerships, which will work locally to reduce crime and disorder; and measures to implement the provisions on football hooliganism, which were rightly pressed by the shadow Home Secretary when the matter was dealt with on Report. Unless we have Royal Assent by the end of this week, those provisions cannot come into force before the beginning of the soccer season.

The Bill also contains provisions on sex offenders. As the House knows, there is currently a gap in the law on sex offenders who were sentenced before the Criminal Justice Act 1991 came into force. Under current law, it is not possible for any licence to attach to those offenders once they are released from prison—something which has caused major constituency difficulties for many hon. Members on both sides of the House.

The sex offender order is designed to fill that gap. The police will be able to apply for such an order in respect of a registered sex offender who has previously served a sentence and who is anticipated to represent a threat to public order. If we do not get Royal Assent, we cannot put the sex offenders order into action as quickly as possible. Many other measures will also be deferred if we cannot get Royal Assent by the end of this week.

4 pm

My hon. Friend the Member for Brentford and Isleworth and colleagues who supported the amendment have generously and readily accepted the imperative of achieving Royal Assent for the Bill by the end of this week. I should not have asked them to support our move or asked the House not to insist on the amendment had I not first attempted to develop an alternative approach that could have met the will of this House immediately to equalise the age of consent while also meeting the concerns of the other place to protect vulnerable young people. However, I am satisfied that there is no compromise solution that could be debated and resolved during the rest of this week that would be acceptable to another place and to this House.

Before I come to my proposals for dealing with the will of the House on the issue as expressed on 22 June, it may be helpful if I set out the background to the issue and explain why the Government accommodated an amendment on the age of consent in the Bill.

Mr. Tony Benn (Chesterfield): My right hon. Friend is assuming that the Lords would allow the Bill to go down rather than concede to the overwhelming will of the House of Commons. That is a fundamental issue. Why does he assume that the Lords would succeed, particularly as I understand that the proposal will be reintroduced in the next Session, although the Lords could delay that as well? We cannot assume that the problem will be solved if the hereditary peers go, because the life peers also voted against the amendment.

Is this not another capitulation to an unelected Chamber, comparable to what has happened over fox hunting? Under previous Governments, the leaders of the House of Lords have told Cabinet Committees—including those of which I was a member—not to proceed with certain proposals because they would be obstructed. Is not that the real issue—not the Crime and Disorder Bill, which the Lords could hardly reject, or even gay rights, important though the issue is and one that I have always supported, but whether the House of Commons, particularly on a free vote, is to have its will over a House that, on this matter, is elected by nobody, accountable to nobody and representative of nobody?

Mr. Straw: I intend to set out arrangements by which this House will be able to achieve its will over the other place—by invoking the Parliament Acts 1911 and 1949 if necessary. However, the provisions of the Parliament Act are not available on Bills that begin their journey through Parliament in the other place. Although I fully subscribe to the Labour manifesto pledge to remove the right of hereditary peers to sit and vote in the House of Lords—we shall bring forward proposals in due course to give full effect to that commitment—whether we like the fact or not, even if the hereditary peers had not been allowed to vote, the other place would still have voted down the amendment, so this is not the best issue on which to challenge the authority of the other place. That can be done in a different way.

On the two significant crises about the authority of this place over the other place, the issues were Government legislation. The situation is made more complex by the fact that we are dealing with a free vote in both Houses.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North) *rose—*

Mr. Straw: If my hon. Friend will allow me, I should like to expand on a further point.

I do not know what the outcome would be if we went in for ping-pong with the other place, but we would certainly not get Royal Assent by the end of this week. That would not be satisfactory. Even if we abandoned the idea of Royal Assent by the end of this week, there is no certainty that the other place would decide to concede the point made by this House on 22 June. The net result could be that, unless we took other steps, the whole Bill,

which has been supported on both sides of the Chamber, would be aborted. I do not believe that it is either appropriate or necessary to take that risk.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): Will the Home Secretary give way?

Mr. Winnick *rose—*

Mr. Straw: I must give way to my hon. Friend the Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick) first; then I shall give way to my hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow. (Mr. Dalyell).

Mr. Winnick: I regret, of course, the decision made last week, but I agree that the Bill must go ahead. Does my right hon. Friend agree that, if the House of Lords, or whatever it might then be called, were elected, it would have as much electoral credibility and legitimacy as the elected House of Commons, and that, bearing in mind how the life peers voted, such an elected Chamber would still have been likely to come to the same decision? Is that not a danger to the authority of the House of Commons?

Mr. Straw: That is an important point of view to be weighed in the balance when we deal with stage two of the manifesto proposals in respect of the other place. However, I happen to believe that other issues, too, will probably arise in which the question of clashes between the House of Lords and the House of Commons will come into play.

Mr. Dalyell: The Home Secretary and his officials have surely had brought to their attention the letter in *The Times* from a number of distinguished Law Lords, including Lord Ackner and Lord Wilberforce. What is the answer to their question why the amendment was not introduced at a much earlier stage? Why was it brought into the Bill at such a late stage? As one who has taken a view different from that of many of my colleagues, I am curious to know the answer to that question.

Mr. Straw: I shall explain in a second, why the amendment was introduced; the reason relates to proceedings before the European Court of Human Rights. As for the time scale, it was always judged that it was appropriate for the matter to be debated in this House first, before it went to the other place. Had it not been for the intervention of Northern Ireland legislation, there would, in my judgment, have been ample time for the matter to be batted backwards and forwards between the two Houses.

The debate took place on 22 June, the Bill came out of Standing Committee on 11 June, and our original plan was that it would come out of Committee in, say, early June, complete its Report stage by mid-June and, if possible, be considered by their lordships by the end of June. There would then have been ample time for further consideration.

I also make another point, to which I shall return in due course—that the issue of the age of consent, although very important, is a simple one. The question raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Bassetlaw (Mr. Ashton) is more complicated, but the age of consent is a simple issue that has been discussed on very many occasions in the past. With great respect to their lordships, I thought that their least persuasive argument in favour of the position that the majority in that House took involved the late stage in the proceedings at which they had to deal with the issue. It is not as if the issue had not been for many years a well-known question, on which people had been able to form rather settled conclusions.

It would be helpful if, before turning to my proposals for dealing with the amendment, I set out the background and explained why the Government accommodated an amendment on the age of consent within the Bill before us.

Hon. Members may be aware that Mr. Euan Sutherland and Mr. Christopher Morris, with the backing of Stonewall, the gay rights organisation, took the United Kingdom Government to the European Court of Human Rights to argue that we were in breach of the European convention on human rights in setting a differential age of consent for homosexual and heterosexual activity.

We learned last summer that the European Commission of Human Rights was about to issue a preliminary finding in favour of Mr. Sutherland. Our legal advice was that it was nigh on certain that that finding would be confirmed by the full court in due course. Such a court ruling would in practice have obliged the United Kingdom Government and Parliament to legislate for an equal age of consent.

Because we thought—correctly, as it happened—that on a free vote an overwhelming majority of the House of Commons would favour setting the age of consent at 16, we judged that to contest the preliminary ruling would serve no purpose whatever, and would waste much public money on legal costs. We therefore sought an agreement with Mr. Sutherland, Mr. Morris and Stonewall by which they would stay their proceedings in the European Court of Human Rights on the basis of undertakings that we would provide.

Those undertakings, which were collectively agreed by the Government, were contained in a document lodged with the European Court on 21 October 1997. A copy of the full text of the undertakings has been placed in the Library—they are a matter of public record.

The undertakings have two principal components. First, we undertook at the "earliest appropriate opportunity" to have a free vote in the House of Commons on the equalisation of the age of consent. That is why we accepted that the Crime and Disorder Bill could be used for that purpose, although the scope of the Bill—which was already amending the law on offences—was such that, irrespective of whether the Government had agreed to include the issue in the Bill, it was rightly for the House to decide whether to amend it as some hon. Members sought to do.

Secondly, the undertaking said that, if a majority of the House of Commons voted in favour of a reduction in the age of consent for homosexual acts to 16,

"the government will bring forward legislation to implement the will of Parliament, such legislation to be introduced in time for the consideration of such legislation to have been completed by the end of the next Parliamentary session"—

that is, 1998–99—

"at the latest."

Against that background, I invite hon. Members, albeit very reluctantly, to accept the decision of the other place and to remove the age of consent provisions from the Bill. As I explained to my right hon. Friend the Member for

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Chesterfield (Mr. Benn), if the House rejected their lordships' amendments and sent the Bill back to the other place, there is every prospect that that House would again reject the amendments. That would prevent any prospect of Royal Assent until the spillover in late October.

Even in the spillover, there would be no guarantee that amendments to equalise the age of consent would be carried by the other place. In that event, their omission from the Bill would still have to be accepted by the House of Commons as the price of Royal Assent for the rest of the Bill. As the Bill is Government legislation that gives effect to manifesto commitments that all hon. Members of the governing party supported, I am not willing to play poker with it and risk all its provisions.

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): Does the right hon. Gentleman accept that the amendment could have been detached from the fate of the Bill if the Lords had been prepared to accept an amendment in lieu, which introduced an order power whereby the provision would not come into force except under an affirmative resolution of both Houses of Parliament? If the Lords had allowed the Bill to proceed on that basis, it would have remained open to them to make their decision later. Certainly a number of hon. Members, including me, who voted for the amendment would have felt happy that the provision was at least on the statute book, even though the Lords would still have had the power to determine whether the provision was implemented.

Mr. Straw: I accept that. Indeed, if the right hon. Gentleman does not mind me saying so, that useful suggestion came from me—it was one of the proposals that we considered in some detail. However, it became clear that it would not be acceptable to the supporters of the majority position in the other place, so, in the circumstances that we faced, it was not, frankly, a runner.

As I have explained, the provisions of the Parliament Acts cannot be invoked, as the Crime and Disorder Bill began in another place. In any event, we could not countenance a year's delay in gaining Royal Assent for the Bill as a whole even if those provisions could be invoked.

Mr. Benn: I have listened carefully to my right hon. Friend's arguments; the House may decide to accept his advice. Meanwhile, young people between 16 and 18 may be prosecuted by the police in circumstances totally different from any that have hitherto obtained—the elected House of Commons will have voted for the amendment and the Government will have given a solemn commitment to the European Court that they intend to legislate within a year to change the law. Can my right hon. Friend say whether he intends to indicate to the police that prosecutions in this category ought not to be proceeded with, given the two considerations of a treaty obligation and a free vote of the House of Commons? If that is not so, we shall get into a difficult and dangerous situation.

Mr. Straw: I regret to say that I cannot give such an undertaking. Bills are Bills, and they are mere proposals for law until they become Acts of Parliament. I see no way around that. We seek to give effect to both the letter and the spirit of the undertakings that we entered into last October.

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Inverclyde): The kind of prosecutions mentioned by my right hon. Friend the Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn) rarely, if ever, take place in Scotland. The Home Secretary talked about his reluctance to accept the decision taken by the other place. He should also be talking about the profound regret and anger in this place, where more than half of hon. Members voted for a measure that unelected people have rejected.

4.15 pm

Mr. Straw: Speaking personally, I share the anger and regret of my hon. Friend and of many right hon. and hon. Members on both sides of the House. My position in favour of an equal age of consent at 16 is long standing and well known. I can provide some reassurance for my right hon. Friend the Member for Chesterfield by saying that recent parliamentary answers from the Minister of State, Home Office, my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth (Mr. Michael), said, to my recollection, that the number of prosecutions is about three a year.

Dr. Evan Harris (Oxford, West and Abingdon): I hope to catch your eye later, Madam Speaker, but I did not want to lose the point made by the right hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn). I raised the same matter in an early-day motion this morning, and I have tabled questions on whether the Government, through the Lord Chancellor or the Attorney-General, have any discretion over decisions to prosecute. Such decisions are taken by the Crown Prosecution Service, but the level at which decisions are taken could be subject to direction. Does the Lord Chancellor have any remit to give sentencing guidance in the interim period while a unique position exists? According to answers that I have had from Ministers, there were 14 prosecutions for people involved with people under 16, although the data are not clear on whether that relates only to the relevant sections of the Sexual Offences Acts, or to other sections.

Mr. Straw: I have no discretion over prosecutions, and it would be entirely inappropriate if I did. Prosecutions are in the hands of the independent Crown Prosecution Service. It is accountable to the Attorney-General, but he must exercise his judgment entirely independently, and that is exactly as it should be. It is constitutionally important that, as long as the law is the law, it stands to be enforced, and enforcement is a matter for the prosecuting authorities. There can be no dubiety about that.

Mr. Joe Ashton (Bassetlaw): I do not want the Attorney-General to receive the wrong message from the House. I accept that there should be no prosecution of boys aged between 16 and 18, but I hope that we do not bring about an amnesty for older men and child abusers who take advantage and think that they will get away with it.

Mr. Straw: I have made it absolutely clear to my hon. Friend and to the House that there is no question of the law, or prosecuting policy, being changed in advance of

any change in legislation. There can be no dubiety about that. To do so would be to render risible our procedures for bringing draft laws to be considered at length by the House before they are passed into law. The debate should not drift down what will be an inevitable cul-de-sac.

I have already explained why we cannot risk the Bill in ping pong before the end of the Session and why the Parliament Act does not apply. Even if it did, we could not risk making use of it as it would delay Royal Assent for a further year.

I propose instead—in return for the House accepting the Government's proposition that we reluctantly accept the decision of the other place—that we should detach the issue from the Bill and deal with it in separate legislation in the next Session. Therefore, the Government will honour the second of the formal undertakings given in the Sutherland and Morris case, by producing legislation on the matter in 1998–99. In doing so, there will be, as before, a free vote on the age of consent so far as the Government are concerned.

The Government are neutral on the matter. That arrangement follows a number of precedents, for example that of the Shops Act 1996, when the Government produced the legislation, provided a menu of alternatives and allowed free votes. The new legislation will be introduced first into this House, to ensure that it has the benefit of the Parliament Act should that prove necessary.

Finally, Madam Speaker—this is my last point in case you want to get back on the edge of your Chair—in the debate in the House on 22 June, my hon. Friend the Member for Bassetlaw moved amendments relating to breach of trust and the protection of vulnerable 16 and 17-year-olds. Although his amendment was defeated by 40 votes, we have never discounted the strength of the argument that he deployed in this House or that deployed in the other place.

The equalisation of the age of consent is a simple issue of removing a basic inequality in our law. It is an issue on which there are strong feelings and diverging views, but it is not technical or complex in itself. That was why we were content for it to be inserted at a relatively late stage in the passage of the Bill. I think that it is generally accepted that abuse of trust is not a simple issue in the same way; we discussed that at some length on 22 June. There are complexities in the definition of abuse of trust, in the behaviour, which is dealt with, in the interlocking with non-statutory safeguards that are already in place, such as professional codes, and in the relationship with current criminal law, under which any coercive sexual activity is already against the law and carries criminal sanctions.

As a consequence of those complexities, but also in recognition of the concern felt by hon. Members regardless of their opinion on the age of consent, the Minister of State, my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth, announced on 22 June that I had set up a review group to look into abuse of trust. The group's first meeting will be on 30 July and it will report by the end of the year—hopefully, earlier.

The review will concern both young men and young women, and in a non-discriminatory way. We will take account of the group's decision on whether legislation is necessary. I assure hon. Members that there will be no delay. I have asked the working group to deal with abuse of trust as its first priority and to come up with proposals as quickly as possible. Any right hon. or hon. Members on either side of the House who wants to meet my officials to discuss the matter should write to me, and I will ensure that arrangements are made as quickly as possible. Precisely because the matter is complex, it is to the advantage of the House that we proceed by consensus, if possible.

Mr. Dalyell: On a Scottish point, can my right hon. Friend say whether, since a reserved power is concerned, the review group will also cover considerations of Scottish law?

Mr. Straw: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that excellent question, and I wish that I immediately knew the answer. I am being given a variety of advice by my hon. Friends on the Treasury Bench, and I will try to give him definitive advice, hopefully before the end of the debate.

The position of young people in residential settings is to be a particular concern of the review group, as those young people have least recourse to outside help and advice. The review will consider the protection needed by both young men and young women, on the basis that both sexes should be treated equally.

I know that many hon. Members on both sides of the House will be disappointed that we have not been able to secure an equal age of consent in the Crime and Disorder Bill. I share that disappointment, but to insist on the amendment now would serve no useful purpose. It would not win round the other place; it would only delay the implementation of the Bill or risk its not being passed, which would be a grave disservice to our constituents.

To those who are, as I am, impatient to equalise the age of consent, I repeat that, next Session, we shall introduce legislation to ensure a conclusive resolution of the issue on a free vote and remove the unjustified discrimination that has persisted for too long. On that basis, and with great reluctance, I urge hon. Members to support the motion.

Sir Norman Fowler (Sutton Coldfield): I shall be very brief. I agree with the Home Secretary's advice that the House should agree with the decision of the other place. He cut it so fine in coming to the Dispatch Box that I thought that I might have to move the motion in his stead. As I voted and argued against the amendment in the first place, my reasons for agreeing with the other place are rather different from those put forward by the Home Secretary.

There are two main reasons why we should agree with the Lords on the amendment. First, like other hon. Members, including the hon. Members for Bassetlaw (Mr. Ashton) and for Exeter (Mr. Bradshaw), I took the trouble to listen to part of the debate in the other place. No one can complain about the general quality of the arguments. The House was packed and the different arguments were cogently put and listened to with care.

[Sir Norman Fowler]

By any standard, there was a cross-section of speakers, including two bishops, a former chief rabbi and an ex-Labour member of the former Wolfenden committee.

Mr. Ben Bradshaw (Exeter): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Sir Norman Fowler: I knew that I should not mention the hon. Gentleman. He can rarely resist the temptation to intervene, so I shall allow him to do so.

Mr. Bradshaw: I want to put the record straight. Indeed, bishops were present for the debate, and the Bishop of Bath and Wells made the best speech of the evening. However, having spent my first long period in the Lords since coming to this place and having been inculcated with the idea that the Lords was a centre of wisdom, I can say that I have never in my life heard so much ignorance, bigotry and bile. My opinion of the views that were expressed and the way in which they were expressed is very different from that of the right hon. Gentleman.

Sir Norman Fowler: Strangely enough, I did not expect that the hon. Gentleman and I would agree in our assessment of the House of Lords. I expect that we can conceivably edge towards common ground in agreeing that a cross-section of views was expressed in the other place, that the arguments were listened to with care and that the Lords was absolutely packed from the beginning of the debate to the end.

Mr. Edward Leigh (Gainsborough): Before we leave the subject of the House of Lords, I have a question for my right hon. Friend. The right hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn) said that the other place is unrepresentative of the British nation. Has my right hon. Friend noticed the Gallup poll in *The Daily Telegraph* today, which shows that only 25 per cent. of the population want to lower the age of consent for gay sex to 16 and does he agree that the House of Lords therefore showed last week that it is in touch with the nation?

Sir Norman Fowler: I was not thinking of leaving the subject of the House of Lords, and I should like to return to the important point that my hon. Friend makes.

The debate in the other place was conducted as one would have hoped that a debate in any second Chamber would have been conducted. A cross-section of speakers took part. There was a free vote—not on party lines. As anyone who listened to the debate knows, that point was vigorously made, not by a Conservative peer, but by Lord Stoddart of Swindon. *[Laughter.]* I know that old Labour is very unfashionable—it must be very sad for old Labour—but I do not remember that, in my time as a Minister, Lord Stoddart was one of my greatest supporters when I laid measures before the House. He said:

"This is not a party political issue. It is a cross-party political issue. There are people of both parties, and none, who take differing views on the amendment."—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 22 July 1998; Vol. 592, c. 964.]

It is incorrect to say that the issue was carried by the hereditary peers. Life peers predominated among those who contributed to the debate and those who voted. In the Division Lobbies, a former Labour Prime Minister, Lord Callaghan, voted against the change alongside the former Labour Northern Ireland Secretary and Defence Secretary, Lord Mason, while Tories such as Lord Newton and Lord Tugendhat actually voted in favour.

4.30 pm

Dr. Harris: The right hon. Gentleman suggests that the House of Lords is a broad cross-section, but what does he feel was the average age of those taking part in the debate? I believe that, if he considered that, he would recognise that one need not be young—obviously, hon. Members throughout the House share my view on that, and vote accordingly—to believe in human rights on the basis of sexual orientation, but the House of Lords shows that it certainly helps.

Sir Norman Fowler: I do not know. Lord Callaghan may be over 60, or over 70—I cannot remember his age—but I would say, with some humility, that he has a dear sight more experience than even the hon. Gentleman.

People are starting to debate whether, if we are to have a second Chamber, it should be appointed or elected. There is an interesting conflict on the subject. I heard what the hon. Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick) said. One must expect that, whatever type of second Chamber we have, it will disagree with the House on occasion, for perfectly sensible reasons. Moreover, as my hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough (Mr. Leigh) said, at least two opinion polls have shown that the House of Lords more accurately reflects current public opinion on this subject than did the vote in the House of Commons.

Mr. Benn: In my opinion, this is about not the House of Lords but equality. I listened to bishops who believe that it is all right to join the Army and kill people at 17, but not to have sex with someone at 17. I heard Members of the House of Lords say, "Young people are not fit to make the judgment"—but they did not say, "Whatever age you are, you are not fit to elect us, because we are here for life."

This is about democracy; and democracy in Britain is more important than a delay to the Crime and Disorder Bill or even—dare I say it—than the issue that we are discussing, on which I am wholly committed. We should not mock the idea of an elected second Chamber. My hon. Friend the Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick) said that, if we had two elected Chambers, they might disagree; but, if he thinks about it, he will realise that, if we had held elections to two elected Chambers last May, the public would have elected the same sort of Members to both.

That is the issue that we are discussing—democracy. I hope that the right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield (Sir N. Fowler) does not mock the idea just because *The Daily Telegraph* commissions an opinion poll which tells us that people agree with the tabloids, when they are whipped up to do so.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): Order. Nevertheless, the debate will be in good order if it remains within the substantive context of the amendments.

Sir Norman Fowler: I was about to make the same point, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I believe that the right hon.

Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn) has now made his speech, in any event. His major argument seems to be with the hon. Member for Walsall, North, not with me. In no way am I mocking democracy, but I do say that the case for changing the House of Lords has not been proven and that, even in this short debate, the divisions on what might replace the House of Lords have become apparent. I am perhaps not as concerned as the Home Secretary may be when he advances the Government's proposals—if they have any—in this area.

Sir Teddy Taylor (Rochford and Southend, East): Does my right hon. Friend agree that there is a danger in getting too excited about this issue? Observing that prosecutions are simply not taking place following consideration of the matter by the European Court of Human Rights, will my right hon. Friend explain what possible difference it will make to anyone whether we say yes or no to the proposition?

Sir Norman Fowler: It makes a difference because the law sets out what is legal and what is not. My hon. Friend has put that point to me several times and I understand from where he comes—it is not an entirely unexpected position. However, I think that it makes a very substantial difference whether we make this change. My hon. Friend will no doubt wish to make his point in a moment in his usual inimitable fashion.

I shall deal now with the second reason why I believe that it is right to accept the Lords amendment. When we debated the matter in this Chamber a few weeks ago, I made the point—to which the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) also alluded—that the effect of introducing the amendment at such a late stage was to present to the House a more or less "take it or leave it" proposition. We did not have time to scrutinise properly any amendments that might have protected young people, whether boys or girls. That concern was expressed in the debate, and the amendment moved by the hon. Member for Bassetlaw (Mr. Ashton) received wide support. Wide concern was also expressed about the report of Sir William Utting on the abuse of young people—I emphasise again that we are talking about boys and girls.

If the clause had been in the Bill from the start, proper consideration could have been given to the issues. It is a great pity and a great sadness that that was not the case. *[Interruption.]* I do not know whether the Minister of State, Home Office, the hon. Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth (Mr. Michael) wishes to intervene—he did so last time, but it was not a spectacular success and I advise him not to do so again.

The Home Secretary now says that new legislation will allow the House to consider properly any safeguards that are proposed. We shall have the time and the opportunity to do that. To be frank, I should prefer there to be no Bill and I oppose the change. I made my views clear on the last occasion. However, if there is to be legislation, the Home Secretary's proposal seems to be the right and proper way to proceed. We must not insert a clause into the Bill at a late stage because that does not allow many important issues to be considered properly.

I shall vote to accept the Lords amendment and I welcome that part of the outcome that the Home Secretary has advanced. However, I also congratulate the House of Lords on performing its traditional and valuable function of making the House think again.

Ann Keen (Brentford and Isleworth): I assure my right hon. and hon. Friends and other hon. Members who supported the amendment that the right approach was taken. The House voted to recognise and value all young people in this country, regardless of their sexuality. The House does not wish to criminalise young people in a democracy, and the overwhelming vote on 22 June ensured that that would not occur.

I, too, reluctantly accept what has happened in another place. I have some pleasure in doing so because it means that we shall not be sending the amendment back to the other place where the facts may be distorted yet again and the noble Lords may again use offensive language in presenting their cases. They have done much damage within a short time to many young people and their families in this country. For that reason, if for no other, it is right not to send the matter back and for us to enjoy some aspect of democracy at the end of this Session.

I thank my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary for the way in which he has conducted the matter and for his undoubted assistance and help in, and commitment to, equalising the age of consent. I shall be proud when the Government introduce a Bill in the next Session and, if necessary—I hope that it is not—evoke the Parliament Act 1911, so that the democratically elected Members of this House of Commons can present their case, at the end of which the law will be changed.

Mr. Beith: The Liberal Democrats support the Crime and Disorder Bill. Although its claims have been somewhat exaggerated, we, too, want to see it on the statute book quickly. There was a free vote in both Houses on the issue which is the subject of the amendment. I was one of the large majority of my right hon. and hon. Friends who voted in favour of the amendment. That was not a view at which I arrived lightly, and some of my constituents do not share it, but, on grounds of equality of rights and of the general uselessness and unhelpfulness of applying the criminal law in the area of teenage behaviour, I felt it right to vote as I did.

Despite my disagreement with its conclusion, it is perfectly reasonable that the other place should invite the House of Commons to think again about the matter. However, it is not reasonable that its view should prevail over that of the elected House on an issue of fundamental principle and rights. It is part of the second Chamber's job to invite us to think again. It is doing so in circumstances, not perhaps of its choosing, when we appear unable to insist on our right without imperilling the Bill to which the matter has been attached.

This House would usually be saying to the other place in our response to its view of our amendment that we have thought again about its proposition, but that we are still of the same mind and wish the view of elected Members to prevail. We might have said that we had thought again about the matter and believe that the concerns of the other place might be addressed in various other ways. It is notable that its reason for rejecting the Commons amendment related to the vulnerability of young people.

[Mr. Beith]

It was apparent in the vote on the amendment tabled by the hon. Member for Bassetlaw (Mr. Ashton) that that concern was shared to a significant extent in the House—not to a sufficient extent to allow it to be carried but to such an extent that, even among those who did not vote for it, the Government rightly set about some work to determine whether it could be carried into law in a non-discriminatory way and would usefully add to the protections that already exist in the law for vulnerable young people. I certainly take the view that that work is valuable and I hope to see some result from it.

We could have told the other place that we would think about what it had said, but that we still believed that our view should prevail. Other things being equal, that is what I would expect the result of a free vote to be, but we are not in a position to do that without derailing the Bill.

The Government could have introduced another Bill and taken it quickly through the House, but that could lead to the other place arguing that it is not right that it should be expected to agree with a Bill that had been rushed through so rapidly. Another option, which I raised in an intervention and which would have been helpful if those in the other place who are pursuing the matter were prepared to accept it, would be to separate the matter from the Bill by means of an order-making power so that this part of the Bill would come into effect only when both Houses had voted to allow it to do so. The rest of the Bill would have proceeded into effect and the other place would have had that key for the lock and, without its turning it, the measure would not have come into effect. By the time that it had that opportunity, some progress could have been made on the concerns that the amendments with regard to the vulnerability of young people and those in positions of trust are intended to address.

The Government considered those options, but chose another—that of introducing a Bill in the next Session of Parliament, to which, in any case, they are committed by the nature of their undertakings in response to the situation created by the European convention on human rights. They gave undertakings, it was necessary that they should do so, and those undertakings will have to be carried out. I understand why they reached that conclusion and I in no way seek to disrupt the process of effecting that. However, some points have to be made clear.

First, the Bill must be a Government Bill. It would not be reasonable to hand the problem over to a co-operative Member at the beginning of the next Session of Parliament. That would be to expose it to all the risks that are attendant upon private Members' legislation and to deny it the protection that Government legislation has in its timetabling. It would be to invite yet another constitutional crisis whereby the Government have to consider whether to depart from their usual practice and give extra time to a private Member's Bill.

The spirit of what the Government have said seems to show that the Bill to be introduced in the next Session should be a Government Bill and that its ability to proceed should be protected in the usual way of Government business, while the issue remains a free vote issue for Labour Members as for Liberal Democrats.

The measure should not be tacked on to some sexual offences provision. It is about not paedophiles or marauding sexual offenders, but young people being treated differently according to their sexual inclination, despite being the same age as those who face no legal penalty for actions which, however ill-advised or however much their elders might advise them against, are not against the law.

4.45 pm

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): Will the right hon. Gentleman clarify exactly what he is saying? Is he saying that there should be a Government Bill which would relate only to the question of the age of consent and that it should be whipped through the House?

Mr. Beith: It is my suggestion, and I understood this to be what the Home Secretary said, that the Government introduce a Bill at the beginning of the next Session and that, as in the case of the Shops Bill, there should be a free vote on the central issue, in this case of whether the age of consent should be equalised at 16. I see Ministers nodding assent that that is their position.

Once the principle has been decided, as someone who has been a Member of the House for a long time, I would expect the Government to ensure that the legislation was enacted and was not subject to mere delaying tactics over a long period to prevent that from happening, and that, when the matter was again put to the other place, perhaps with some of their concerns having been addressed in the meantime, it will accept that that is the will of this Chamber.

Some secondary issues, which may clarify my reply to the hon. Lady, relate directly to the content of such a Bill. For example, if we merely change the law on the age of consent without doing anything else, it would be technically possible for some to have their names on the sexual offenders register for some years for something that is no longer a criminal offence. That is not acceptable, and it is a detail that could reasonably be remedied in the Bill. Even those who take a different view from me on the issue would not feel it right for someone to be labelled as a sexual offender when what he had done was no longer a criminal offence. Such matters could be dealt with in the Bill.

The Home Secretary referred to the amendments tabled by the hon. Member for Bassetlaw and the concerns that they raised. That will clearly need separate legislation because the matter is non-discriminatory in its intended scope. That was the hon. Gentleman's intention. Only the proceedings of the House tied him in framing the amendment. He was clear that his intention was to protect vulnerable young people, male or female, from sexual predation from males or females. I share much of his concern on that point and I hope that we shall make progress on that, but I think that it will require separate legislation to deal with it.

When we have, as we have here, an issue concerning the widening of liberty, after due consideration the will of the Commons should prevail and the Government must provide the opportunity to make that possible. On that basis, I encourage my right hon. and hon. Friends to accept that the Government are taking a reasonable way forward in the matter.

Mr. Ashton: I welcome the Home Secretary's decision to bring the new clause back as a separate Bill so that it

has better scrutiny, because there is no doubt whatever that the unusual way in which it was introduced left much to be desired.

We were told as long ago as last November that the Government would introduce the measure as part of the Crime and Disorder Bill. I tabled a question to the Home Office asking whether it would be part of the Bill, and was told that that was not the intention at that stage. I am not saying that the Home Office was not telling the truth; that was its intention at that time. I was asked to appear on television programmes such as Panorama, the presenters of which were absolutely certain that it would be part of the Bill.

At that stage, it was impossible to get hold of a copy of the Bill, which had not even had its First Reading. Indeed, as late as January, it was difficult to get hold of a copy. The question was always whether the provision would be in the Bill or not, and there was no definite answer.

I kept my eyes open to see what was happening with the Bill. I asked people in the Lords, whom I had known for many years in this House, whether the new clause would be tabled in the Lords. It was not. The Lords did not debate the matter and it was never put to them. It was simply tacked on to the back end of the Bill.

Although I have great respect for my right hon. Friend the Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn), whom I have known for many years, I am sure that, if other legislation had been put before the House in that way, he would not have found it acceptable. He has often said that war can be declared without the House debating it, and he is right; but effectively that is what happened with the new clause. There was no Second Reading or scrutiny in Committee. I kept an eye on it, wondering what would happen once the Bill came here from the other place. I shall tell the House what happened.

On Friday 12 June, the new clause was tabled, but not a soul knew about it. Although there was speculation that it was to be part of the Bill, it appeared in none of the Saturday or Sunday newspapers but was tabled quietly and discreetly on Friday 12 June, on a day when most hon. Members had gone home. That was done because, as everybody knows, there must be two weekends between tabling a new clause and debating it. The debate was then fixed within the absolute minimum time—a week the following Monday. That was a day when the football was on the television—[HON. MEMBERS: "What rubbish!"] Nothing happens by coincidence in this place. I have been here for 30 years, in which time I have been a Whip and on the Front Bench. I can tell my hon. Friends who have not been here for quite as long that this place functions like an efficient machine.

It was impossible even to see the new clause until Monday 15 June. When I saw that the subject was to be debated—it was announced at business questions—I rang the Committee Clerk and asked when the new clause would be tabled. He told me that it had already been tabled the previous Friday. I got hold of a copy of it quickly and went to see the Committee Clerk, Mr. Paul Silk—I hope that he does not mind me mentioning his name. Those who say that the amendments are not watertight should be aware that the Committee Clerk drafted them for me and did a magnificent job. However, we could not table the amendments until Tuesday 16 June. Given that the new clause was to be debated the following Monday, that left only Wednesday and Thursday to scrutinise the amendments and get people to sign them.

I am not saying that it was an impossible job. I went to the Susan Hamilton agency, which is on the premises, and had 600 letters explaining the amendments and 600 envelopes typed. Amendments are no longer published every day as they used to be; we have to wait until Thursdays to have them published, so nobody knew that my amendments had been tabled. I sat stuffing letters into envelopes until midnight. A good Christian movement charity called Care asked whether I wanted some help, so Care finished putting the letters in the envelopes—*[Interruption.]* My hon. Friend the Member for Exeter (Mr. Bradshaw) laughs, but I am describing the difficulties of a Back Bencher taking on a Government. My hon. Friend may be in the same position one day and he will then see the difficulties for himself.

Mr. Ben Bradshaw: I do not want to malign Care, but my hon. Friend might like to know that a young girl from my constituency wanted to work for me at the beginning of this Session. It had all been set up, but, at the last minute, Care discovered about my sexual orientation and she was prevented from doing so. We know exactly where Care is coming from. The irony is that my hon. Friend the Member for Brentford and Isleworth (Ann Keen) has a placement from Care in her office.

Mr. Ashton: It is the oldest trick in the book to denigrate by abuse when one does not have a brief. With all respect to my hon. Friend, that is what the media do and what cheap-jack lawyers do when they have no brief—they denigrate witnesses—*[Interruption.]* My hon. Friend the Member for Hackney, South and Shoreditch (Mr. Sedgemore) is an expert on verbal abuse, but let us not get sidetracked.

I am trying to explain to my hon. Friend the Member for Exeter, without being patronising, that when a Back Bencher takes on the Government, he has a job on. The Bill with which my hon. Friend was involved was given time and maximum help by the Government. He was very privileged, because I know of no other Back-Bench issue, whether it is fox hunting or whatever, that has had such a fair wind behind it. That has been his experience; when the situation is reversed and he finds himself taking on the Government without such back-up, he will be glad to accept help from anybody, without examining what he or she has done or not done. I was one Back Bencher taking on the Government.

Let me continue the story. The 600 letters had to be distributed, and I had to get people to sign the amendments. I could have got 100 people to sign them, but I chose very experienced people like my hon. Friend the Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody), who sits on the Speaker's Panel, my right hon. Friend the Member for Ashton-under-Lyne (Mr. Sheldon), who is chairman of the Liaison Committee, and others who have been in the House for a long time. They readily signed the amendments, although I could not get enough signatures because of the shortage of time.

I am trying to illustrate how this Back-Bench provision was railroaded through the House—"railroaded" is the only word for it. Let us look at what happened on the day. We were promised a free vote. We had a free vote on the

[Mr. Ashton]

main clause, but when my amendments were called, the Chief Whip said, "The free vote is off. There is no free vote on your amendment." There was enormous confusion about that. We managed to get the amendment called, although when the Government tabled the new clause, they timetabled it. If Government business is timetabled, it gets three hours and one vote. Thus, the only vote that would have been allowed under the Government's proposal was a vote on the new clause—a Government-backed vote. My amendments could not have been voted on. However, I raised the matter with Madam Speaker and she agreed with the then Leader of the House that my amendments would be called. No end of barriers were put in the way of that so-called free vote.

Mrs. Dunwoody: There was not too much confusion, because Government Whips were standing at the entrance to the Lobby making it clear that it was a Government vote. When I pointed out that it was a free vote, it seemed to come as a considerable surprise.

Mr. Ashton: My hon. Friend is an experienced Member. She came here in 1966 and has seen everything that can happen, so her remarks are of great value.

On the first free vote, which would have been the only free vote had it not been for the Speaker's ruling, there was a majority of 207. Within 15 minutes, that majority had fallen to 40, with at least 50 people abstaining—the Government Whips were telling people not to vote in what was originally a free vote. One Whip even voted against reducing the age of consent to 16 and then had to vote against my amendment because the free vote was taken off.

Mr. Tom Levitt (High Peak): Does my hon. Friend know of an hon. Member who voted contrary to how he or she wanted to vote on that night? I heard no complaints that people were railroaded into voting against their will. Should not the Government have given a new clause that had such strong support in the Chamber the best possible avenues to be debated and to become law? Is not one of the outcomes of that the fact that the Home Secretary has given assurances that the points raised in the amendments will be looked at carefully by the Home Secretary's panel?

5 pm

Mr. Ashton: My hon. Friend makes a wide intervention covering three points—something that he would have been better off doing in the debate. I shall try to deal with them. There was not a free vote on my amendment; people were dragooned against their will. I could name them, but I shall not, for fear of embarrassing them. He can check the voting records—people on the payroll vote were told to vote against my amendment, and did. It still lost by only 40 votes, and at least 50 hon. Members were told, "Stay in the Corridor if you don't want to vote." They were whipped against my amendment.

I am not arguing about that, because that is politics and what the game is all about. All that I am doing is revealing to hon. Members what happened and why there should be proper scrutiny of the measure. It should go through Second Reading, Committee, Report and Third Reading like other legislation, and it is totally unfair that a highly controversial issue affecting everyone in the community was not scrutinised.

The House set up a system of Special Standing Committees. I was a member of the Modernisation Committee, which said that it would sometimes be helpful to have a mini-Select Committee or a Special Standing Committee to which people could give evidence at the start of consideration of a Bill. People in positions of trust or supervision could have given evidence to such a Committee, as could Stonewall, but there has not been even a Select Committee investigation into this matter. That is the essence of democracy. People talk about democracy in the House of Lords, but there is another aspect of democracy, which is the public having a say and being able to give evidence. There was no question of any sort of Special Standing Committee.

I accept that there was a slight problem with my amendment—not a legal problem, but a difficulty in that abusers who are caught are not prosecuted, at any age. Public schools do not want the bad publicity of a prosecution, because parents would take their kids away; councils, as with Islington council, carry such stigma after prosecutions that they go to great lengths to avoid them; and insurance companies put great pressure on councils not to have a prosecution, because they would have to pay compensation to the abused youngster. There is clandestine agreement not to prosecute so that the abuser is sacked, but does not go for unfair dismissal because he does not want publicity, and then rings up the network and moves, for example, from Nottinghamshire to Derbyshire next door.

Those questions should be examined, but there was never any move to examine them or any time given for that. The debate lasted three hours in this place and two and a half hours in the other place.

My amendment would also protect young women aged 16 or 17 who are being harassed at work by their boss. At present, they have to go through the paraphernalia of going to a tribunal, but, under my amendment, they could say to their boss, "Hands off, I'm under age." None of this has ever been examined—it is all being bounced through. That is not democracy, any more than the House of Lords is democracy, which is why I support my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary.

Ann Keen: My hon. Friend is confusing the argument, because the age of consent is a totally separate issue—it is about human rights equality. Many of us find offensive the suggestion that those who agree with equalisation of the age of consent have no care for the protection of all young people, especially the vulnerable. Everyone wants that to be discussed, and we want that law to be enforced properly.

Mr. Ashton: I have never said that, and I said in my opening remarks in the previous debate that gays were not child abusers, but the age of consent is a major deterrent to anyone who is thinking of abusing a young person. They know that is against the law and carries severe penalties. *[Interruption.]* I am being called "crazy"—abuse again.

In 15 minutes, I have raised half a dozen points that were never debated or analysed, or considered by a Committee. They were simply thrown in and bounced

through; that is not democracy, and my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary is absolutely right to say that we should start from scratch with a proper Bill and thorough scrutiny.

Mrs. Jacqui Lait (Beckenham): I am grateful for the opportunity to support the Lords opposition to the Commons amendment and the Government's proposal for a separate Bill, which we will now be able to discuss at much greater length.

The hon. Member for Bassetlaw (Mr. Ashton) brought into sharp focus some of the problems surrounding the change in the age of consent. I support what he said, but would go further, which is why I supported the amendment of my hon. Friend the Member for Reigate (Mr. Blunt) in the brief and heated debate on 22 June. I seek assurances from the Home Secretary that the working group will take on board a point that was brought home to me by the national missing persons helpline, of which I am a trustee. It raised the issue not of youngsters who are abused by people in a position of trust, but of youngsters who have left home and are even more vulnerable.

Such youngsters can sometimes be brought into a life of abuse through the rent boy, or even rent girl, system, where youngsters are almost offered for sale to those who are looking for sex with young people. As the age of consent comes down, the vulnerability of such people increases and the age at which youngsters could be abused also comes down. I accept that there is a law governing that form of abuse, but it is not being used. The staff of the national missing persons helpline regularly have to deal with youngsters who find themselves in such a situation. I am sure that they will take up the Home Secretary's offer to meet him and his officials to discuss the issue, which comes into sharp focus in discussions of any reduction in the age of consent. I hope that the working party will take all that on board.

I am most grateful to the House of Lords for the opportunity to bring this issue to the notice of the House and, I hope, have it dealt with effectively in the new legislation.

Mr. Benn: I shall be brief. There are separate issues here; my hon. Friend the Member for Bassetlaw (Mr. Ashton) raised the abuse of anyone of any age by people in positions of trust. That has nothing whatever to do with the age of consent—a mentally handicapped person aged 45 and in care could be abused.

My hon. Friend talked about things being railroaded into the Bill—I shall come to that in a moment—but if ever there was a railroading it is his amendment, which has nothing to do with the age of consent. There are vulnerable people who need to be protected, and I am sure that my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary, given enough time, will introduce legislation to deal with such protection.

On the question whether we should agree with the Lords, you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, warned us that the debate is about the opposition of the House of Lords to a Commons amendment, but dare I say that the motion states that we do not insist on resisting the Lords opposition? We have to give some attention to the source of that opposition.

There is a history to this matter. The Conservative party likes the House of Lords, because it has always had a Conservative majority. This is not a party matter, but, as Conservative Members know very well, Labour Governments have four years in office and Tory Governments have five, because the Lords can always turn its power of delay into a veto. I have sat in Cabinet many times; as I mentioned in an intervention, I have heard a Labour Leader of the House of Lords say, "I do not think that we should proceed with that—the Lords will delay it and that will wreck our legislation." I have a marked objection to that.

I also have an objection to the authority of the second Chamber. Although I was brought up as a member of the Church of England and should have due respect for the bishops, I know what a bishop has to say to become a bishop. He does not only take an oath of allegiance, like us; he says, "I accept Your Majesty as the sole source of ecclesiastical, spiritual and temporal power." Bishops thus declare that they do not believe in democracy in order to become bishops. That was imposed on them by Henry VIII. When I hear a bishop talking about consent of any kind, I bear in mind the fact that the man got where he is by swearing that he did not believe in what this whole place is about—although, of course, there are good bishops and bad bishops.

The next question concerns accountability. When I was elected as Member for Chesterfield, everyone in Chesterfield knew my view on the age of consent, because I had introduced a Sexual Equality Bill in 1989. People with an interest in the subject have written to me, and I am still writing back to them. The voters elected me, not necessarily because they agreed with my view on sexual equality, but in the knowledge that it was my view. Next time around, they can decide whether they still want me on the same basis. Their lordships, however, are not accountable to anyone—not even the appointed peers. Of course, every hereditary peer is descended from a peer who was appointed, so there is not much difference. A king used to do the appointing; the king has now moved to No. 10 Downing street, but the basis is the same. Hereditary peers are appointed in the same way as life peers.

If I were in an aircraft and the pilot said, "I am not a pilot myself, but my grandfather was a pilot", I would leave the plane at once. If I went to the dentist and he said, "I am not a dentist, but my dad was a dentist in the 1920s—open your mouth", I would not listen to him for five minutes. Now we are told that we must respect their lordships' opinions. I respect the opinions of peers as citizens, but I do not accept that they have a right to frustrate the House of Commons.

I know that the Crime and Disorder Bill is important, but, as I have said, I think that democracy is more important than any single Act passed by a democratic House. I challenge the Lords to throw the Bill out. They have been prattling about law and order ever since I was born. Do hon. Members imagine that they would insist on their amendment and destroy the Bill? Of course they would not; if they did, they would be putting their heads on the block and inviting the abolition of their House.

We should have taken a stronger line, and I am disappointed that we did not. We did the same with the fox-hunting legislation: we ran away from the Countryside Alliance and the House of Lords. We have got into the habit of accepting that that place has merit, has judgment—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I think that the right hon. Gentleman has taken licence enough. Amendments

[Mr. Deputy Speaker]

from the other place, whatever the Bill, are debated not on the basis of whence they came, but in terms of the long title of the Bill.

Mr. Benn: You have been generous, Mr. Deputy Speaker. You have given me a certain licence, because I have had some experience. When my blood turned blue some years ago, I was thrown out of this place—which was a funny thing to happen—but I turned it red again, and came back.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bassetlaw said that the measure had been "bounced". Responding to one of our hon. Friends, he used the phrase "When you have been here as long as I have . . . ". Dare I say the same to him? Homosexuality has been on the agenda of the House of Commons for years. I do not remember Oscar Wilde, but I believe that he was engaged in an activity that the House of Lords would have regarded as entirely undesirable. I remember the setting up of the Wolfenden committee, and the debates on that committee. I remember the debates on clause 28—and, as I have said, I introduced my own Bill. The idea that those poor peers were taken by surprise, finding out that there was such a thing as homosexuality—when they had all been to public schools where it was rife—is ludicrous.

I know that my hon. Friend the Member for Bassetlaw feels that the Bill was not properly handled. If I had been Home Secretary—an opportunity denied to me, alas—I would have put the measure in last October. I am sure that the Home Secretary will follow my advice; but do not let anyone tell us that it was a big surprise to the Lords to discover that such practices are engaged in even by 16-year-olds.

When the Question is put, I shall shout "No" on principle. I do not suppose that it will be possible to find another Teller, but I shall at least have the satisfaction of making my voice heard in support of democracy. I very much hope that everything that the Home Secretary said will prove true—I am sure that he is right—and that, in the autumn, this matter will be disposed of once and for all, along with the Chamber that has caused all the trouble.

Mrs. Eleanor Laing (Epping Forest): I supported the amendment that we discussed on 22 June. I would have preferred the amendment passed by the House of Commons to stand, but—in sharp contrast to the right hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn)—I utterly defend the right, indeed the duty, of the House of Lords, while it is the second Chamber, to ask the House of Commons to think again.

This is not the first occasion on which we have discussed that matter of principle in recent weeks. Having accepted that the House of Lords was right to send back to us, twice, the issue of tuition fees for students from England and Wales at Scottish universities, to be consistent I must also accept—and I do accept, as a matter of principle—that the Lords have a right and a duty to send back this amendment, although I happen to disagree with them.

5.15 pm

I appreciate that—as the Home Secretary explained—if the House disagrees with the other place today, the whole Bill may well be lost. However much hon. Members may care to speculate on the way in which the House of Lords may or may not react if the amendment goes back to it, there is no doubt that it is our duty to protect the rest of the Bill. Conservative Members did not vote against the spirit and general intention of the Bill. Along with some of my hon. Friends, I served on the Standing Committee. We discussed the Bill for many hours, and, although some of us disagreed with the details, we did not disagree with the principle. We do not want the Bill to fall.

The right hon. Member for Chesterfield may agree with this point. The Bill, which we debated so carefully in Committee, abolishes for ever the death penalty for all the remaining crimes to which it still applies. If the Bill is lost, that is one provision that will also have fallen by the end of this week. As in other instances, there is good and bad in the legislation, but—strangely—I agree with the Home Secretary: there is more good than bad in it.

Unfortunately, the Government's business managers—I do not know to whom they are accountable—

Mr. Straw: Neither do I.

Mrs. Laing: I have every sympathy with the Home Secretary. It is a great pity that the Government's business managers did not manage this piece of business rather better. We could have had an opportunity to debate the matter fully, in the House of Commons, in the other place, in the House of Commons again and in the other place again, for however long it took to sort out the way in which this Parliament—as a whole Parliament—was going to deal with the matter. We are now at the end of a Session, however, and although I can blame the Government's business managers, we can do nothing about the legislation at the end of July.

I have heard it said that the Home Secretary has discussed the whole issue with some of the amendment's sponsors. No one has discussed it with me, but I accept that the Home Secretary has undertaken to introduce legislation that would have the same effect as the amendment that the House of Commons overwhelmingly agreed to.

Mr. Leigh: My hon. Friend is an interesting barometer, as a Conservative Member who supports the legalisation for gay sex at 16. Is she aware that various supporters of the legislation—homosexual organisations—want to attach to the new Government Bill other provisions, such as the repeal of clause 28, which banned the promotion of homosexuality in schools? Labour Members shake their heads—but if that were so, would my hon. Friend support a new Bill in the next Session? *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I use this opportunity to apologise to the hon. Lady and to tell her that she should not be tempted to stray into territory that is well outside the scope of the amendment.

Mrs. Laing: I note your warning not to stray, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I never do.

I would not vote to repeal clause 28; nor would I align myself with some of the militant gay rights people who protested outside the other place last week. However, I agree with the sensible and reasonable promoters of the

amendment who have conducted themselves with great honour and dignity throughout. I welcome the Home Secretary's assurance that the Government will present a measure in the next Session, because that will give the House and the other place an opportunity to debate the issue of duty of care, which was mentioned by the hon. Member for Bassetlaw (Mr. Ashton). I supported his amendment of 22 June, and I support the principle that he and the hon. Member for Brentford and Isleworth (Ann Keen) mentioned—that the law should protect young men and young women.

The House has sent a clear signal that it does not approve of discrimination on the ground of sexuality. I have been surprised by the number of complimentary letters and messages that I have received in the past month on this matter.

Mr. Andrew Robathan (Blaby): They were not from me.

Mrs. Laing: I nevertheless received many messages.

Mr. Desmond Swayne (New Forest, West): Is my hon. Friend aware of the recent sheaf of opinion polls, not least the one in today's issue of *The Daily Telegraph*, showing that their lordships are more in tune with public opinion than is the House?

Mrs. Laing: I am aware of that, but I have said many times that I do not believe in opinion polls and do not trust them. I do not know anyone who has ever been questioned by an opinion pollster. At many public meetings, the issue of opinion polls has been raised in the context of their being a measure of the popularity of Labour Members. At those meetings I have asked year after year whether anyone has ever been questioned by a pollster or whether anyone knows someone who has been so questioned. The answer has always been no. I give as much credence to today's opinion polls as I give to any of the others.

Mr. Robathan: I used to take exactly the same line as my hon. Friend and always said that I did not believe in opinion polls. However, on 1 May last year I had to change my mind.

Mrs. Laing: I take my hon. Friend's point, but I still do not believe in opinion polls.

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham): Perhaps we can take the argument a stage further. Would my hon. Friend agree that, even if public opinion opposes the equalisation of the age of consent for homosexual activity, she has a right and a duty to express her opinion as she thinks fit, and to vote accordingly? That is part of the purpose of this place and she need not be embarrassed about it.

Mrs. Laing: I thank my hon. Friend for his wise words. As usual, he is right. As I and other hon. Members have said, it is sometimes the duty of hon. Members to lead, not to follow. If we spent the whole of our parliamentary life simply following opinion polls and bowing to popularity, we would not be doing our duty or fulfilling the purpose for which we have been elected.

Dr. Harris: Rather bizarrely, I find myself in agreement with the hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow). The hon. Lady should be reassured by the fact that there is just as big a majority in favour of equalisation as there is in favour of reducing the age of consent to 16. Since a measure to increase the age of heterosexual consent to 18 would probably be unworkable, opinion polls pose a dilemma for us all. Thank goodness we have our consciences to follow.

Mrs. Laing: The hon. Gentleman makes an excellent point about opinion polls—answers to such polls depend very much on the questions. One of the first rules that an apprentice solicitor or barrister is taught is that he must never ask a question to which he does not know the answer. We would delude ourselves if we assumed that opinion pollsters asked questions without intending to achieve a particular answer. The past five minutes of debate have put opinion polls firmly in their place, even those that appear in *The Daily Telegraph*.

Mr. Robathan: The same goes for focus groups.

Mrs. Laing: I agree with my hon. Friend. I also agree with the Home Secretary and with my right hon. Friend the Member for Sutton Coldfield (Sir N. Fowler). Although they approached the question from different angles, they reached the same conclusion. I urge the House not to disagree with the other place.

Dr. Harris: The Home Secretary's opening speech seems some time ago. I was struck by his sincerity, and no one can doubt that he supports the move to reduce the age of consent. We can all see the reluctance with which he advises hon. Members not to insist on the amendment. If he retains that sincerity and can reassure me on some small points and some rather larger ones, the right hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn) will not get a second Teller for a Division.

People feel strongly about this issue and, as on 22 June, I was again today struck by the eloquence of the hon. Member for Brentford and Isleworth (Ann Keen) who, without notes, delivered a strong speech in favour of the stance that we both hold. She advised the House to accept the Government's reluctant advice not to insist on the amendment. The campaigning records on this issue of the hon. Members for Enfield, Southgate (Mr. Twigg) and for Exeter (Mr. Bradshaw) are far longer than mine. However, there are different shades of view between us on the best way forward and they must be recognised.

The hon. Member for Epping Forest (Mrs. Laing) and I supported the cross-party, Back-Bench amendment. At the enjoyable press launch of that amendment, we spoke passionately about our belief in the equality and respect for human rights that the amendment would introduce. I said that I approached the matter from a human rights perspective. I was attacked at school, although not often, for being a member of a minority because I was the only Jew in the school. I remember with horror the hard time that was given to boys who were thought, usually incorrectly, to be homosexual. I recall with shame that at an early age, I did not distance myself from snide remarks in the playground.

It behoves us all to remember that we are discussing a minority that is still subject to entrenched discrimination of a kind that no other minority has to tolerate. Such prejudice is often based on ignorance or on strongly held

[Dr. Harris]

although misguided religious views. I regret that I was not invited to join the press launch of the compromise agreement that the Government have urged us to support, especially as I withdrew my early-day motion calling on the Government to press for the retention of the amendment because I accept their argument about the need to retain the Bill.

I felt on 22 July that I was following Stonewall's line. It issued a press release on 22 July calling on the Government to do everything in their power to ensure that the House's view would prevail and that the age of consent amendment would be included in the Bill. I now know that Stonewall has changed its view and supports the Government's current plan. We must respect the views of Stonewall: it has campaigned on this issue far longer than I and other hon. Members have. If it had told me of its change of view, I would have withdrawn my early-day motion sooner.

5.30 pm

Ann Keen: I do not know why the hon. Gentleman says that, because we have been in touch on numerous occasions. That contact has been made.

Dr. Harris: I do not want to start a debate about whether contact was made. I asked Labour co-signatories to the amendment whether there was any news about the negotiations, and I was told that there was no news. I contacted the Home Secretary's office twice last week, and I asked at business questions whether the talk in the press of consultation with the signatories to the amendment included all parties. The hon. Member for Epping Forest also made that point. I was not given that assurance at business questions, but the Home Secretary's office told me that he would do his best during this busy period to contact me and ask me for my opinion on the position. Perhaps because of the speed of events and his other duties, especially yesterday, he was regrettably unable to do that.

I was concerned that on "Breakfast with Frost", the Home Secretary said that he had consulted the signatories: perhaps he meant to say some of the signatories. I am taking this opportunity, with your permission, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to ask the questions that I would have asked the Home Secretary had I been consulted on this compromise.

The key point is that, if we follow the Government's advice, it will appear to the outside world that those of us calling for liberalisation and equality in this area of the law have been defeated. Regardless of the motives of those who voted against equality in the other place, Baroness Young's victory in defeating the equalisation measure will be seen—and has been by people who have contacted me both from the gay community and from among the prejudiced—as a victory for homophobia. That is sad, although I do not attach any blame to the Government.

When we consider where to go from here, we must bear in mind the fact that this defeat for us and victory for homophobia will have several effects. First, it will make it more difficult—but not, I trust, impossible—to implement the full agenda for equalisation of the criminal law, including, for example, the decriminalisation of the victim in age of consent matters. I refer to the abolition of the unique provision of this law that makes a criminal out of the victim of an act that is currently a crime, and of the unique provision that makes illegal all gay sex in private with more than two people present. That will now be more difficult to achieve, and we shall have to make greater cross-party efforts to maintain the momentum.

Secondly, we shall also have to face the fact that, in the next few months, there will be more homophobia in society, be it deliberate and malicious, or instinctive and based on ignorance. My postbag on this issue has never been particularly large, but it has changed markedly and is now more homophobic and nasty—that is the only way in which to describe, some of the letters I receive on this subject. I fear that there will be a backlash fuelled by the public defeat of liberalisers, of which the gay community may be a victim. If the Government accept that analysis, they will be very concerned, as will many hon. Members.

Thirdly, I fear that the Lords will be emboldened when this issue is considered again. That makes delay of the next attempt more likely. Next time, the Government must at least threaten to use the Parliament Acts.

Mr. Robathan: The hon. Gentleman accuses those who dislike the amendment that the Lords rejected of being homophobic. He said that it was a victory for homophobia. Does he accept that many of us who believe that the homosexual age of consent should remain at 18, far from having a fear or dislike of homosexuals, happen to believe that the matter is best left to individuals, and that we should protect people between the ages of 16 and 18 from people for whom they may not be ready? We do not have a fear of homosexuality: we think that we should protect young people.

Dr. Harris: I said that it would be seen as a victory for homophobia regardless of the motives of those who voted against equality. Some people may have voted against equality not because of prejudice—homophobia is a prejudice, not fear. The expert evidence from the British Medical Association and the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children shows that there is no physical, medical or social reason for such discrimination: it is discrimination pure and simple. Well-intentioned people may give other reasons for their view, and I would not use such a pejorative term of hon. Members. However, I have received letters saying that homosexuals should burn in hell. It is fair to the hon. Member for Blaby (Mr. Robathan) to make that distinction. The result of the vote in the Lords gives power to, and boosts the morale of, people who hold the nastiest views.

With the benefit of hindsight—and even this all-powerful Government do not have the gift of hindsight—it would have been better not to attempt reform in this Bill, as it was not going to succeed. When the issue is reconsidered, the Government should bear in mind the fact that an atmosphere has now been created.

The nub of the matter is that every effort should be made in future legislation to dissociate this measure for equality from measures relating to child sex abuse and abuse of trust, however important they may be—I believe such measures are important. They are separate issues. I made that point in an amendment to early-day motion 1612, which

"calls on the Government to ensure that in future legislation the equalisation of the age of consent at 16 is not linked directly with the issues of child abuse and abuse of trust which are not directly related to the ending of discrimination against gay men."

It is anathema to people who feel that they are discriminated against to associate actions to bring their treatment in line with our treaty obligations in the European Courts and with decent human rights with action on child sex abuse. Although, sadly, we cannot prevent the association being made in the press, that terrible crime is not associated with homosexuality. It is an abuse of power, and is committed almost entirely by heterosexual men, mainly because they make up a greater proportion of the population.

I have read carefully the letter that the Home Secretary sent to the hon. Member for Brentford and Isleworth. I note that the Government's compromise is the minimum that the Government had to do to fulfil their legal obligations in the European Courts. I welcome the Government's undertaking to fulfil those legal obligations. I received a copy of this letter from a colleague: I was not sent one myself, which is regrettable. It says:

"The Government will honour paragraph 2 of the formal undertaking given in the Sutherland and Morris case, by bringing forward legislation on this matter in the next session (1998/9). In doing so, there will be, as before, a free vote on the age of consent so far as the Government is concerned. . . . The legislation would be introduced first into the Commons in order to ensure the benefit of the Parliament Act if this proves necessary."

The only more minimum minimum action—if that is not a contradiction in terms—would be to use private Members' legislation. Like my right hon. Friend the Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith), I welcome the fact that the Government do not intend to use such a chancy procedure. I also welcome the fact they will introduce the measure in the Commons first, and allow the Parliament Acts to be used if necessary. That may be required to get it through in that Session, and is, perhaps, above the minimum minimum action to meet the legal obligation.

I am concerned about that paragraph in the Home Secretary's letter. It says that legislation will be introduced, and that there will be a free vote on the age of consent. That implies that other legislation may not be on a free vote, and may include measures on other issues as well as the age of consent. A later paragraph in the letter refers to the discussion on the breach of trust, relating to the amendment proposed in June by the hon. Member for Bassetlaw (Mr. Ashton).

The Home Secretary said that he would set up a review group to look at the issue. He also said:

"We will take decisions in the light of the conclusions of the review as to whether legislation will be necessary."

As I made clear earlier, I am seeking some reassurance—which was apparently given at the press conference last night, but is not contained in this letter—that legislation on the age of consent will not be directly associated with, but will be entirely separate from, any measures to deal with child sex abuse or the recommendations of the Utting report, which clearly need to be implemented. If the Home Secretary cannot reassure me on that point, I fear that, over the summer and into the autumn, it will become easier to associate human rights for gay men with child sex abuse.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed, who speaks from the Front Bench on these issues, referred to the need to ensure that people on the sex offenders' register for acts that would no longer be illegal would be removed from that register. The Public Bill Office drafted an amendment with the aim of ensuring that people convicted under the Sex Offenders Act 1997 would not be subject to registration requirements after Royal Assent to a measure that decriminalised their offence. I do not believe that it is difficult for the Government to frame such legislation—it is a consequential amendment to the main measure. It could be introduced without widening the scope of the Bill to include extraneous matters.

I ask the Home Secretary to comment on the undertaking given by the Minister of State, Home Office, the hon. Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth (Mr. Michael), on 22 June, in response to a debate on my new clause 4 about privacy provisions. He said that there would be a review of those measures that appeared to be discriminatory, and I was pleased to hear him say that from the Dispatch Box. He said that there would be a review of discrimination in criminal law, with a view—I hope—to the Government bringing forward legislation if they saw fit to end that discrimination.

In that debate, I mentioned the Labour party's manifesto commitment to end unjustifiable discrimination wherever it existed. I hope that the Home Secretary will confirm that any new Government measure to deal with the age of consent will not prejudice any future Government measure, which I hope will be introduced very soon, to clear out all the discriminatory measures in the Sexual Offences Acts 1956 and 1967. I want an assurance that a Bill to deal with sexual offences will not kick these other issues into the long grass. Without that, there would be a risk of multiple amendments being tabled to that Bill to show the Government how strongly not only the gay community, but many other people—including some Labour Back Benchers—feel about the discriminatory nature of the current privacy provisions of those laws.

I draw the right hon. Gentleman's attention to what I think was an inadvertent answer to a written question from me, when I asked about convictions under the Act. He replied that

"such an act is not regarded as taking place in private if two or more persons are present."—[*Official Report*, 22 June 1998; Vol. 314, c. *358*.]

Hansard should be corrected to read, "three or more persons"; otherwise, people might think that the right hon. Gentleman held a much more illiberal view than that which I believe he holds.

I want to reiterate the point made by the right hon. Member for Chesterfield about the problem of continuing prosecutions and convictions for a consenting victimless act between gay men between the ages of 16 and 18, without there being any benefit to the cause of justice. I do not ask for the law to be changed or for the Government to interfere in the decisions made by an independent prosecution service; I merely ask whether the Attorney-General could request that, in the interim, decisions to prosecute could be made at a high, albeit independent, level within the Crown Prosecution Service. I do not expect the Home Secretary to answer me now; indeed, I intend to table a written question on the matter. The decision should not be left to individual junior prosecutors who may, sadly, be fuelled by the current debates on the issue.

5.45 pm

I recognise the Government's reluctance to ask the House not to insist on their amendment. I urge the Home Secretary to respond to the points that I have raised. I hope that, in future, he will try to retain cross-party Back-Bench support for the views that we know that Ministers hold as individuals, and which are held by the vast majority of hon. Members. We need to get legislation on the statute book as soon as possible.

Sir Teddy Taylor: I feel rather inadequate in this debate, so I simply want to ask the Home Secretary three pedestrian and practical questions. I appreciate that many of my hon. Friends believe that far greater issues are involved. I, like you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, have had the pleasure of listening to rabbis, bishops and former Prime Ministers on the radio saying, in effect, that the whole moral fabric of the country is involved. Others argue that freedom and liberty are involved. The right hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn), whom we greatly respect, said that a great issue of democracy is involved. The hon. Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon (Dr. Harris) talked about something called homophobia. I do not know what on earth it is, but I am sure that there is none of it in Southend. However, it is obviously an issue that some hon. Members think is terribly important.

I do not want to deal with those issues, because we are practical people in Southend. We simply want to know what the effect will be of accepting the view of the other place. The number one question in Southend is, if we do not insist on our amendment, will young men between the ages of 16 and 18, who voluntarily engage in homosexual acts, be prosecuted and perhaps fined or sent to prison? It is a simple question. We have heard some fantastic speeches from hon. Members who feel that great issues are involved, but practical people in Southend want to know the answer to that question. Will we continue to prosecute until new legislation passes into law? Will we continue to fine people or to send them to prison if need be?

Most people would assume that that would be the case, but those who are desperately anxious for a change in law do not seem to be too worried about it. They agree with the Government's decision to put off dealing with the matter until the next Session. Why are they not worried? Will the Home Secretary tell us whether we shall continue to prosecute, fine or send to prison those aged between 16 and 18 who are breaking the law? Will we say to them, "Don't do it—you'll be breaking the law and you could be in terrible trouble"?

My second brief question is based on rumour. Some hon. Members have the advantage of receiving faxes from researchers, from Conservative central office or whatever, but other Back Benchers, such as me, simply hear rumours. My constituents ask me about the rumours. They say, "Teddy, is this actually happening now?" The rumour is that people are not being prosecuted. That may be absolute nonsense and the Home Secretary may be glad to tell me so. However, I have been told that people are not being prosecuted for voluntarily engaging in homosexual acts. If people abuse or attack others, they can still be prosecuted—but they are not being prosecuted for voluntary acts. I said to my constituents, "I'll find out the answer and come back to Southend tonight and tell you."

The Home Secretary has three competent junior Ministers with him who will be able to give him advice. He also has excellent civil servants. My constituents in Southend want to know how many people, over the last six months—no, let us say 12 months, which is quite a long period—have been prosecuted for voluntarily engaging in homosexual acts.

The third question that my constituents have asked me—I hope that the Home Secretary realises that it is terribly important, as he is responsible for the Bill's passage—is what such a provision has to do with the European thing. I asked the Library what it has to do with Europe, and was told, "Teddy, it's nothing to do with the Common Market—nothing at all."

Apparently—I am sure that cleverer hon. Members, especially the Liberal Democrats, will already be aware of it—there are two European Courts. First, we have a thing called the European Court of Justice, which is what is called "the Common Market court". Secondly, we have something called the European Court of Human Rights, which apparently has something to do with the European convention. In the past, if the European Court of Human Rights said something, the British Government could tell it to go and jump. However—as we have a very responsible Government—we normally do not do that. Although we took the view that something to do with security in Northern Ireland was none of the court's business, and told it to go and jump, usually we did not want to do that.

Things have changed. As you will know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, our Home Secretary and other Ministers have very kindly put the European convention on human rights into British law. I do not know whether that is a good thing or a bad thing, as I do not follow such matters, although I should like to know—it is terribly important—whether including it in our law means that we can still disregard the views of the European Court or disregard what is in the convention.

My constituents have basically said to me, "This provision is utterly irrelevant. The MPs are wasting their time". But I suppose that it is not the first time that they have done so. I am sure that you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, have seen hon. Members jumping up and down, shouting about what we can do for the fishing industry, whereas there is absolutely nothing that we can do for it. Hon. Members jump up and down and talk about banning exports of live cattle, whereas we can do nothing about that. I tell my constituents that hon. Members jump up and down and talk about agriculture because there is not much left for us to do, and it is far better to talk about issues that we think require some attention.

The famous Sutherland case was heard, but not completed, in the European Court of Human Rights. I should like to know whether the Home Secretary thinks that Parliament should have the ability, if it so wishes, to establish differing ages of consent. My understanding is that, since we incorporated the European convention into British law, we simply do not have the power to do so, even if we wanted it.

I appreciate that hon. Members feel strongly about the issue. I appreciate that bishops feel strongly, both ways, about it. I appreciate that rabbis feel strongly about it. I heard one rabbi on the radio, and he was getting very agitated indeed about it. I appreciate also that former Prime Ministers get very excited about it. However, I would really

like to know whether what we do will make the slightest bit of difference. I think that, as we have incorporated the convention into British law, there is nothing that we can do about it.

As someone who has been an hon. Member for years and years—hon. Members are probably fed up of hearing me—I think that it is sad and depressing that hon. Members are getting agitated, marching in the street and claiming that they want to do something about an issue, whereas their power has gone and our democracy has essentially been dying.

I therefore hope that the Home Secretary will give me straight and specific answers to three questions: first, will people still be prosecuted; secondly, how many prosecutions have there been in the past year; and, thirdly, do we have the power to establish separate ages of consent for men and women, bearing in mind the fact that the European convention on human rights is now part of British law? If he will answer those questions, I think that my constituents will be reassured. Regardless of whether our freedom and liberty and the nation's moral fibre will be undermined, and regardless of whether homophobia breaks out in constituencies—Liberal Democrat or not—across the country, factual answers to those questions would help greatly.

Mr. Straw: With the leave of the House, I should like to respond to some of the points that have been raised in this cameo debate, as it has become. I should tell my right hon. Friend the Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn) that I have rarely been as entertained by a speech as I was by his.

I should reply first to an important point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell), who asked whether the review group that I have established to examine the issue of breach of trust—which was raised first by my hon. Friend the Member for Bassetlaw (Mr. Ashton)—will also be concerned with Scots law.

The answer to my hon. Friend's question is that the Scottish Office will be represented on the group and will take account of its conclusions, as the matter deals with an area of law that will be devolved when the Scottish Parliament comes into being. Meanwhile, it is theoretically open to the Westminster Parliament to legislate on matters relating to Scots criminal law. However, we would do so only on essential issues, and when it is clear that such changes would have the full consent of the Scottish people. We shall consult with our Scottish colleagues in the light of the review. I hope that that satisfactorily reassures my hon. Friend.

Mr. Dalyell: Thank you very much.

Mr. Straw: That is the first time than an hon. Member has intervened in a speech only to thank me and nothing else.

In his very entertaining speech, my right hon. Friend the Member for Chesterfield asked a question that I should perhaps deal with briefly by telling him of a wholly unexpected duty that I assumed when I became Home Secretary—administering the Oath of Homage that full bishops have to make to Her Majesty before taking their see. Although the oath surprised me, it is not an affront to democracy; it is rather a natural consequence of the Anglican Church being the Church by law established. I am not proposing that the Government should introduce a Bill on that matter to be decided on a free vote.

I tell my right hon. Friend the Member for Chesterfield that the oath is not quite as harsh as he described—it is a little more mellow—although it certainly ensures that there is no ambiguity about new bishops of the Church of England recognising Her Majesty and no one else as the head of the Church. I have had some research done on the oath that I am now required to administer to new bishops, and my right hon. Friend may be interested to know that it was drafted—to my surprise—not by Henry VIII, but by Elizabeth I, in the first year of her reign, in 1558.

My right hon. Friend said that democracy is more important than the Bill. I think that it would be a defeat for democracy if we were to lose the Crime and Disorder Bill. At the general election, every Labour Member stood on a manifesto stating that, if we were elected, this Bill implementing 12 manifesto commitments would be implemented as soon as possible. I tell the House, with respect, that the problem about following any advice other than that which I have offered—a reluctant but temporary acceptance of the Lords decision—is that we would not only delay achievement of Royal Assent, but could entirely put at risk the Bill, which would have obvious consequences.

The hon. Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon (Dr. Harris) asked me two questions, the first of which was whether legislation on the age of consent would be separate from any legislation on breach of trust. The answer—which was implicit in the ante-penultimate paragraph, on page 3, of my letter to my hon. Friend the Member for Brentford and Isleworth (Ann Keen)—to that question is that it remains to be seen. We shall await the outcome of the review to determine whether legislation is required and is the most appropriate vehicle for that legislation. This Bill, a separate criminal justice measure or a separate stand-alone Bill could provide that vehicle. We cannot anticipate the most appropriate vehicle, but will have to wait to see the review's results.

Dr. Harris: I realise that the Home Secretary cannot or will not give an undertaking, and I appreciate the reasons for that. However, does he accept the point that I made—that it will create difficulties for some of us if an amendment to equalise the age of consent and provide equal human rights is directly associated in legislation with issues such as child sex abuse or breach of trust?

Mr. Straw: Many Bills deal with diverse subjects.

Sir Norman Fowler: Like this one.

Mr. Straw: Indeed. The public do not necessarily associate one part of a Bill with another, except in the sense that the whole Bill deals with Home Office criminal law matters. As I have made clear today and in my letter to my hon. Friend the Member for Brentford and Isleworth, the review and the legislation

"will concern both young men and young women and in a non-discriminatory way."

That is an important assurance.

[Mr. Straw]

I understand the point about the sex offenders register. We need to have discussed and resolved that issue before any Bill is brought forward, but it is more complicated than the hon. Gentleman suggests, partly because of the way in which criminal convictions are recorded. I accept the principle of his point, but further consideration is necessary.

6 pm

The hon. Member for Southend, West—or is it Southend, East? I have great affection for both.

Mr. Robathan: Good Tory seats.

Mr. Straw: It does not matter. The Kursaal is the same, whether it is Tory or Labour. I spent many happy days in Southend, usually trying unsuccessfully to impress girl friends.

The hon. Member for Rochford and Southend, East (Sir T. Taylor) asked three questions. First, he wanted to know whether, if we accept my recommendation to comply for the time being with what the Lords have decided, 16 to 18-year-olds may continue to be prosecuted. The answer is yes, they may, because that is the law of the land. As long as the law of the land stands, people are open to be prosecuted. Secondly, he wanted to know whether it was our policy for people not to be prosecuted. The answer is no. Prosecution policy is a matter for the Crown Prosecution Service and the Director of Public Prosecutions, who are, rightly, statutorily independent of Ministers. They are supervised by my right hon. and learned Friend the Attorney-General. In that capacity, Law Officers are also independent of Ministers. That is entirely right.

The hon. Gentleman asked how many people had been prosecuted and convicted in the past year. From the memory of the Minister of State, Home Office, my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth (Mr. Michael)—I hope that he has got this right and it is as well that the reshuffle has come and gone, if he has not—there were six prosecutions in the past year, of which four led to convictions. That is not particularly surprising given that we are talking about acts of consensual sex. The police cannot prosecute unless someone retrospectively believes that they have been victimised and goes to the police.

The hon. Gentleman's third question was about the difference between European treaties—such as those of Rome, Maastricht and Amsterdam—and the European convention on human rights. I think that the hon. Gentleman knows, but perhaps not so many people in Southend know, that there is a difference. The European convention on human rights was drafted principally by two common lawyers, one of whom was David Maxwell Fyfe, a distinguished Conservative lawyer who later became Lord Chancellor for about eight years. The purpose of the European convention was to write into European law the human rights that we have taken for granted in this country. After several years, we are one of the few countries not to have incorporated it. The relevant Bill is still awaiting Royal Assent and will probably not receive it until October this year. Had it become law, we might have avoided some of the problems that have arisen with the European Court of Human Rights.

Mr. Bercow: The Home Secretary has just helpfully told us, from the recollection of the Minister of State, the number of people who have been prosecuted for consensual homosexual activity. May I stretch him a little further and ask how many people were arrested for engaging in consensual homosexual relations, but released without charge?

Mr. Straw: I cannot tell the hon. Gentleman that off hand, but I shall be happy to write to him. If he wants to table a question, I think that there is still time for it to be answered before we rise for the recess.

Dr. Harris: There are still two questions that the Home Secretary has not answered. Perhaps he will just note that he has not answered them and promise to write to me. First, at what level will decisions to prosecute in the interim be made in the Crown Prosecution Service? I accept that that is not his departmental responsibility, but I should be interested to know what he thinks. Secondly, how does the matter relate to the review and possible legislation on other discriminatory matters on sexual offences? The existence of such issues and the possible need of remedy were acknowledged by the Minister of State on 22 June.

Mr. Straw: I have laboured the point about the independence of the prosecutors. I cannot intervene on that. The law is there. The duty of prosecutors is to make their decisions in the light of the evidence presented to them and the code of the Crown Prosecution Service. On the second point, the review will deal with the issue of breach of trust first raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Bassetlaw. There are always arguments about whether the law should be changed in other respects. There may be a wider review of sexual offences.

Mrs. Lait: I hope that the Home Secretary will confirm that his officials will be willing to talk to people from the national missing persons helpline on the issue that I raised.

Mr. Straw: I shall be happy to arrange that. If any hon. Member from either side wants to make representations, I shall be pleased to receive them and to make arrangements for groups of Members to talk to officials involved in the review group, if that would be convenient.

The defeat by the Lords has placed the House in great difficulty. It caused great anger and concern and great upset to my hon. Friend the Member for Brentford and Isleworth and other hon. Friends, as well as the hon. Members for Epping Forest (Mrs. Laing), for Witney (Mr. Woodward) and for Oxford, West and Abingdon, who so courageously and vocally supported her. Speaking personally, not for the Government, I should like to place on record my great admiration for my hon. Friend and her colleagues. I am very grateful to them for their response to my representations over the weekend. My recommendation is the best way forward, preserving the Bill and ensuring that

it receives Royal Assent by the end of the week. The Government are committed to introducing legislation in the next Session to ensure that the House is able to take a conclusive view on the age of consent.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House doth not insist upon its amendment.

Subsequent Commons amendments not insisted upon.

ROYAL ASSENT

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I have to notify the House, in accordance with the Royal Assent Act 1967, that the Queen has signified Her Royal Assent to the following Acts:

Landmines Act 1998

Private Hire Vehicles (London) Act 1998

Northern Ireland (Sentences) Act 1998

City of Edinburgh (Guided Busways) Act 1998

Tamar Bridge Act 1998.

National Minimum Wage Bill

Lords amendments considered.

New clause

Lords amendment: No. 1, after clause 1, to insert the following new clause—

EXCLUSIONS

(" .—(1) If it appears expedient to the Secretary of State, he may, by order made by statutory instrument, provide for the total or partial exemption from the provisions of this Act of—

(a) any area, sector of employment, trade or industry;

(b) undertakings of different sizes;

(c) persons of different ages; or

(d) occupations or categories of persons.

(2) The power conferred by subsection (1) includes power to make such incidental, supplemental or transitional provision as appears to the Secretary of State to be appropriate.

(3) The power of the Secretary of State to make an order under this section includes the power to vary or revoke its provisions or to limit its operation for a specified period of time by means of a further such order.")

6.9 pm

The Minister of State, Department of Trade and Industry (Mr. Ian McCartney): I beg to move, That this House does disagree with the Lords in the said amendment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): With this, it will be convenient to discuss Lords amendments Nos. 5 to 7.

Mr. McCartney: We have no hesitation in asking the House to resist the new clause introduced in another place—but, before doing so, I pay tribute to my noble Friends Lord Clinton-Davis, Lord Falconer and Lord Haskel, who dealt with the Bill in a professional and effective way in that place.

For the life of me, I cannot understand or accept the sight of hereditary peers—the descendants of robber barons and cattle thieves—trying to deny people the national minimum wage. It is even more undignified when the Tories and their Whips arrange for people to come to the House of Lords, probably for the first and only time this year—some did not even turn their engines off while they went to vote before leaving the House again—for one simple reason: to pass a wrecking amendment to try to damage fatally the introduction of the national minimum wage for 2 million of the most vulnerable and lowest-paid workers in Britain. The issue was further complicated by the Liberal Democrats, who should be ashamed of themselves for siding with sweatshop owners and backstreet exploiters.

Let us look at what happened in the House of Lords. We expected the Conservatives to try everything in a last-ditch attempt to get rid of the national minimum wage, and the Government were defeated by 58 votes. Of the 161 peers who voted for the new clause, 84 were hereditary—67 Conservatives, eight Liberal Democrats, eight Cross Benchers and one other. Counting the votes of life peers alone, the Government would have won the vote by 88 to 77—a majority of 11.

[Mr. McCartney]

Some of those who voted against the Government were among the largest landlords and the wealthiest people in Britain. They came in to deny groups of workers the opportunity to have a national minimum wage from 1 April next year.

Mr. Tim Boswell (Daventry): Will the Minister not concede that, whatever took place in their lordships' House with hereditary peers, the amendments now under discussion would not require any derogation from the national minimum wage? They would merely provide the Secretary of State—who is now sitting at his left hand; we are pleased to see him in his place—the power to derogate if he considered it desirable.

Mr. McCartney: The hon. Gentleman talks nonsense; he talks out of the side of his mouth. The amendments would allow a future Conservative Secretary of State—if such a thing ever befell the nation, which I doubt—to exclude areas such as Cumbria, the north-west, the north-east, Scotland or Wales. He or she could also exclude sectors, so all the hairdressers in Britain—the lowest-paid workers in the land—could be excluded from the minimum wage.

A Secretary of State could also exclude firms of different sizes, so all the hairdressers in small companies could be excluded. When we read the amendments in the context of what I am saying, we see that the proposals are designed to wreck the possibility of millions of workers in Britain benefiting from the national minimum wage. For the sake of expediency, at the whim of a Secretary of State and without further reference to Parliament, whole areas of the country could be excluded from receiving the minimum wage.

The clause does not improve the Bill. It does not make it operate better. It will not help a single worker to benefit. The amendments serve only to illustrate the lengths to which the Opposition party—indeed, in the House of Lords, the two Opposition parties—will go to undermine the principle of the introduction of the minimum wage.

Mr. John Redwood (Wokingham): Will the Minister explain why the Minister of State, Lord Simon, did not attend to vote on that occasion? Does that not give the lie to his idea that all the problems arose from Conservative hereditary peers? Surely Ministers in the Department of Trade and Industry could have offered some support.

Mr. McCartney: Surely the right hon. Gentleman can come up with something better than that. My noble Friend Lord Simon, like all Ministers in the Department, goes out and does work on behalf of the Government, and that is what he was doing—unlike the right hon. Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood), who, when he was a Minister at the DTI, spent his time trying to close down British industry. Our job—that of my fellow Ministers, including my right hon. Friend the new Secretary of State—is to rebuild industry and refashion it out of the shambles that the right hon. Gentleman left us after the election.

Mr. Redwood: Can the Minister explain why that vote was treated as so unimportant that the Minister of State did not need to attend to ensure that the Government won it?

Mr. McCartney: Wriggle as the right hon. Gentleman might, the truth is that the Conservatives brought people to the House of Lords in their Ferraris, their Mercedes, or whatever other transport they may have had, to wreck a Government Bill for which we have a national mandate and which the whole of Britain, including two thirds of Conservative voters, supports. The right hon. Gentleman must live with the consequences of the Lords action of inserting into the Bill a new clause that undermines the whole concept of a national minimum wage.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): Why should we complain about Conservative opposition to a national minimum wage? Should we not welcome it, at least from the party point of view, and wrap it around the Tories' necks at the next election?

6.15 pm

Mr. McCartney: I am happy to wrap things around the necks of the Tories between now and the next election. Why miss the opportunity?

The point was made during a recent debate when the right hon. Member for Wokingham and I had a short intercourse on issues relating to—

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham): I think that the Minister means "a short exchange of views".

Mr. McCartney: No, I choose my words carefully.

That evening, the right hon. Gentleman made a fundamental comment about how the Conservatives, in this Parliament and in the run-up to the next election, will deal with the new employment rights that the Government provide for vulnerable people in Britain. He made it clear that he will go into the next election on a policy of the abolition of the national minimum wage. What he is offering millions of people in Britain is, "Vote Conservative and take a wage cut."

The right hon. Gentleman also said that he would review all the other minimum standards and new employment rights that the Government are introducing—with the support, I may add, of large parts of British industry, sick and tired of the Tories' low-pay, low-investment economy, and looking to an ultra-modern economy with good standards of pay, good conditions and investment in the workers, in employment rights and in standards of skill.

In that debate, the right hon. Gentleman had the opportunity to show once and for all that the Conservatives accept the fact that the British people overwhelmingly want good minimum standards in the workplace, and do not expect Her Majesty's Opposition to threaten them with withdrawal of those rights, especially when some of them will have a significant pay

increase under the national minimum wage, because they are now being paid as little as £1.20, £1.30 or £1.40 an hour.

For the right hon. Gentleman—who, for a part-time, two-days-a-week job receives £12,000 a year—to stand at the Dispatch Box and try to deny the minimum wage to low-paid workers is nothing short of a personal scandal. Under no circumstances can he wriggle out of the decision taken in another place—a decision clearly calculated to assist his campaign to ensure that the national minimum wage is not implemented by 1 April next year.

We have no hesitation in opposing the new clause and the other amendments. We were elected to introduce a national minimum wage, and that is what we shall do. We made the Government's position clear in earlier debates, and I shall not weaken now, at the final hurdle. The new clause would provide the Secretary of State with wide-ranging powers to make exemptions whenever he or she felt it expedient. That approach challenges the fundamentals of the policy behind the Bill.

The House will appreciate that the Bill has been designed in a way that rules out the possibility of exemptions according to sector, region, size of firm or occupation. It permits, in specific circumstances, exemptions or modifications according to age. We received recommendations on that from the Low Pay Commission, which we accepted and which we shall implement.

The new clause proposes something completely different from the limited range of exemptions or modifications in clauses 3 and 4, and opposing it presents me with the opportunity to reiterate the Government's commitment to a single national minimum wage that will be universal in its application.

Our approach is diametrically opposed to the direction suggested in the amendment. We want an inclusive policy; we do not want to exclude whole swathes of people. The idea is to provide a floor across the board so that we can get rid of poverty pay. We also want to provide a level playing field, so that companies can compete fairly on the basis of quality, not on the basis of excessively low wages.

Hon. Members know what our inheritance was after the general election. Whether in the regions of England, in Scotland, in Wales or in Northern Ireland, people suffered as a result of endemic low pay—2 million people earned £2.50 an hour or less. Some people, having worked full time for a week, had to suffer the indignity of having to claim additional benefits simply to live or to make ends meet.

Mr. Jim Cunningham (Coventry, South): Is my hon. Friend aware that when, two years ago, one of my constituents raised the issue of his pay—which was £1 an hour—he was told to apply for family supplement?

Mr. McCartney: We know that the Conservative Government encouraged such Arthur Daley employers. We remember the advertisements, such as the one for a night shift security guard job, offering 50p an hour and saying: "Bring your own dog and uniform." That was the reality of Britain under the Tories. They made this country the sweatshop capital of Europe, and they were proud of it. They boasted about it across the world, saying: "Come to Britain and pay your workers £1.20 or £1.30 an hour." Thank goodness inward investors came to Britain for different reasons; they pay their employees good wages and provide good working conditions.

We do not want to go back to the Tory years, in which there was a downward spiral of wages. The Tory policy was not to create an economy of high-quality goods and services, in which people's employability is based on the quality of their training and knowledge. The Tories undermined good companies and good company practice; they made companies compete against one another on the basis of a free-for-all downwards wages spiral.

Tory Ministers at the Department for Education and Employment defended the advertisement of jobs at as little as £1 an hour. The Tory Government, of which the right hon. Member for Wokingham was a member, took away the last vestiges of protection for home workers. The Department of Trade and Industry received evidence that women working for home working organisations were earning as little as 38p an hour. That was not in 1888; it was in the last year of the Tory Government. That is the legacy that the Tory party left this Government to clear up, and we have no intention of allowing the new clause to damage our capacity to do so.

The limitations in clauses 3 and 4—which the new clause would remove—are necessary. They defend the integrity of the national minimum wage. Despite the widespread acceptance of, and support for, our policy from business and from the electorate as a whole, and despite the broad acceptance of the Low Pay Commission's recommendations, I regret to say that the policy still seems to need defending against Conservative Members, who are hanging on to the idea that we in Britain can somehow succeed by paying people as little as 38p an hour. What an outlook for Britain in the new millennium! It beggars belief that the right hon. Member for Wokingham and his colleagues actually ran the economy.

The nightmare years are ended—we shall introduce the national minimum wage, and we shall do so on 1 April next year, as we said we would. We have made it clear several times that variations of rate by sector, region, size of firm or occupation would be unfair and unworkable. The same applies even more strongly to exemptions on those grounds, which is what the new clause would provide a power to make.

There is no doubt about the inevitable unfairness and inequity of the new clause. It is deliberately designed to remove from the Bill's protection the very people whom the minimum wage would most help. The Opposition should be ashamed of themselves, as everybody else is ashamed of them.

The whole purpose of the Bill is to introduce, for the first time in this country, a national minimum wage that is truly national and that will make a difference to the many workers who strive to exist on poverty pay. It marks an historic step to bring rights to British workers that many of their counterparts in other countries have enjoyed for decades.

The Bill's fundamental approach is inclusive, but the new clause attacks head-on that approach and the Government's philosophy, which the electorate fully supported. I urge the House to save the Bill, and to reject the amendments.

Mr. Redwood: I urge the House to keep the very sensible amendments that were made in the other place.

[Mr. Redwood]

Once again, the Minister has been extremely disappointing. He has not listened to any of our arguments in the House or in Committee. He dramatically misrepresents the Conservative position. I have never said that we shall abolish the minimum wage; I have said that we shall review the whole raft of regulations and legislation that we inherit, and then decide what needs changing to create more jobs and more prosperity in our country.

I have never said that we want low pay. We want people to be well paid and to have a good standard of living. It is most important, however, that people are not moved from low pay to no pay—that is the main point that we have urged on the House. The new Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, the hon. Member for Hartlepool (Mr. Mandelson), is well aware of that point.

Mr. Alasdair Morgan (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale): The right hon. Gentleman says that he has not stated categorically that a future Conservative Government will abolish the minimum wage. Will he give a guarantee that they will not abolish it?

Mr. Redwood: Of course not. We shall review it, to establish what is best for the country.

The minimum wage will do most damage on its introduction. That is why we have opposed it. On its introduction, bad employers may decide to sack people rather than to pay them extra. I do not think that the Minister will enjoy meeting people across the country who have lost low-paid jobs as a result of the Bill. Moreover, there may be a wages explosion when the Bill is implemented, as better-paid people will demand large increases to maintain differentials. The Chancellor of the Exchequer warns about job losses arising from wage inflation, yet the Minister is introducing legislation that will trigger it.

Mr. Ian McCartney: The right hon. Gentleman knows that the Government have taken account of economic circumstances, and are introducing the minimum wage sensibly. That is why the overwhelming majority of employers and those involved in British industry support the concept of a minimum wage.

Perhaps the right hon. Gentleman will explain an historical point. Is it not the case that, after the Conservative Government abolished the wages councils, removing basic employment rights that ensured minimal standards and a minimal floor in the labour market, unemployment rose to 3 million?

Mr. Redwood: That is not cause and effect. The Minister's attempt to make an historical point has misfired. Unemployment rose to too high a level at one point under the Conservative Administrations because we adopted the exchange rate mechanism policy that was strongly recommended by the Labour party, even though it was a mistake. The Minister and I have often debated that point, and I think that I should be straying out of order if I went further into the matter.

We are not urging lower standards. We want better pay and better standards of living. The debate is about how that can be achieved. We believe that it can be achieved by more flexible markets, not by more Government. We are certainly not out to deny workers fair pay; we want them to keep their jobs.

In a previous debate, the Minister grotesquely misrepresented my personal financial affairs. I notified him of that privately, in the hope that he would have the decency to correct the record. I live in hope that he will, as it does not do justice to debates in the House to mislead people in such a way.

I am grateful that the hon. Member for Hartlepool is in the Chamber to hear this debate, although I should have liked to hear him, rather than the Minister, move the motion. I offer my hearty congratulations on his appointments to the Privy Council and as Secretary of State for Trade and Industry. His arrival at the Department will be welcomed by many, as many people felt that the outgoing President of the Board of Trade—as the job was known—let down British business in a big way, and came forward with a large number of bad proposals, including the proposal for a national minimum wage. Business is desperately in need of a change of policy.

I had hoped that the new Secretary of State, who arrives at his Department well briefed on the minimum wage because of his active participation in policy discussions in his previous job, would tell us that he welcomed the Lords amendments, which, as we know from leaked correspondence and from his confessions to *The Guardian*, are precisely the type of amendment for which he argued when he was Minister without Portfolio. I imagine him arriving at the Department of Trade and Industry, elated at achieving his life's ambition of joining the Cabinet, clutching his model of the dome—where the Secretary of State goes, the dome goes too—but nervously asking why the previous incumbent had had such a short stay.

We have all read in today's newspapers authoritative briefings saying that the Secretary of State has arrived to win back the business support lost by the previous incumbent. In particular, the trade union and minimum wage reforms proposed by the outgoing President of the Board of Trade must be modified, said the briefings, in order to win back business support.

6.30 pm

Why is the Secretary of State not standing before us to offer proposals that would modify the impact of a Bill that many in the business community think will do more harm than good? Why has he not come to welcome Lords amendments that would give him the very flexibility in his new role that he formerly sought for someone else in all his interesting correspondence?

The House may wish to be reminded of what the hon. Gentleman said when he debated these matters from his previous vantage point. In his letter to *The Guardian*, which explained leaked Government correspondence, he stated:

> "The point I raised in correspondence on this issue with colleagues was a practical one, as to whether the draft Bill as worded allowed ministers sufficient flexibility to refine policy in the light of experience with the actual functioning of the National Minimum Wage."

I open my dealings with the new Secretary of State in precise agreement with him. I find myself urging the very case that he urged when he was Minister without Portfolio.

The Secretary of State's letter went on to imply that flexibility was necessary in case jobs were lost. He said that he wanted a lower rate of pay for young people—in those days that meant everyone under 25, although the age has come down to 18 in subsequent discussions. As Minister without Portfolio, the hon. Gentleman saw the point that young people, those without skills and those who needed further training, might be thrown out of their jobs if the minimum wage were introduced in the wrong way. He felt that it would be better to allow flexibility so that they could get a decent start on the ladder of opportunity and employment, and, if necessary, top up their inadequate remuneration with benefits.

I have often debated that point with the Minister of State, who attacked the previous Conservative Government for saying that low pay should be topped up with benefits. We felt that policy only reasonable, because some rates of pay could not sustain decent family life. Now we discover that the Government have invented a far bigger and more expensive system for doing exactly the same thing—the working families tax credit. On the Minister's own admission, he and the Government propose to subsidise what he calls poverty pay.

Mr. Ian McCartney: Let us get one thing straight. The previous Government proposed benefits instead of pay. We propose a package of measures that make work affordable. There is an important difference. The previous Government drove down pay, first by eliminating people's entitlement not to be paid below a certain rate through their abolition of the wages councils, and, secondly, by manipulating the benefits system and allowing high levels of unemployment. They drove people to take wages lower than £1 an hour in many cases.

That is the legacy that we have had to deal with, and that is why we have introduced a range of measures to make work affordable. The difference between us and the Conservatives is that we want a minimum wage to be part of the package, while the right hon. Gentleman wants no level to be set, and would use the benefits system to subsidise poor-paying employers.

Mr. Redwood: The Minister can rant all he likes, but this Government, like the previous one, admit that there will be people whose pay is not adequate for their family circumstances. We can see from the Chancellor's forecasts that they admit that, even after the minimum wage has come in, large sums will have to be paid as tax forgone or as actual benefits, or as a combination of the two, to top up wages.

The Minister protests too much. There is not as much difference between Conservative policy and Government policy as he pretends. Both major parties know that, in a free-enterprise market, not everyone will get adequate remuneration for their family circumstances for all their working lives. It is a duty of a civilised society that taxpayers should top up or contribute to incomes in those circumstances.

The row tonight is about whether the Minister of State and his new-found hon. Friend the Secretary of State are taking too many risks with too many jobs. We submit that, without the Lords amendments, the risk is too great. The Minister would lose nothing by accepting the amendments. The Secretary of State would be given the power to make a judgment. If he judged in future that my right hon. and hon. Friends and I were wrong, and that no jobs had been lost, he would not need to make a move. If we were right, however, and the amendment was included in the Bill, it would be easier for him to make the changes necessary to avoid the loss of so many jobs.

Mr. Bercow: My right hon. Friend has helpfully reminded the House of earlier contributions to the minimum wage debate by the Secretary of State in his previous capacity as Minister without Portfolio. Does my right hon. Friend agree that if the Secretary of State has a shred of self-respect, he will speak at the Dispatch Box before the debate ends to explain whether he now believes that there is no justification for exemption from or variation in the rate of the minimum wage by age, sector, region or size of undertaking. What has caused the hon. Gentleman suddenly and spectacularly to change his mind? Why has he not felt it necessary to explain his thinking to us?

Mr. Redwood: It is quite extraordinary that the Secretary of State has not done so. It is even more extraordinary in the light of spinning in the press to the effect that the new Secretary of State will be business-friendly in a way in which the outgoing President of the Board of Trade is admitted not to have been.

I trust that the hon. Gentleman did his own spinning. We have not been told whether he remains spin doctor extraordinaire as well as Secretary of State, or whether he will have to rely on others to do his spinning. Whoever did it today, the intention was clear. Downing street has not denied that the Secretary of State is appointed to go to war with his Minister of State, and to overrule him. He is appointed to put a little common sense into the minimum wage and into trade union reforms.

The Secretary of State sits there, looking as if he has not a care in the world, grinning benignly, but quite unable to intervene decisively at the very moment at which he has his last chance to improve the Bill to give him the flexibility that the spin doctors tell us he will need and will achieve. Does he really think it amusing that many people may lose their jobs as a result of the policy that he and his hon. Friends intend to rubber-stamp through the House? Has he thought at all about the wise words—on this occasion—of the Chancellor about wages? The Chancellor has spelt it out to all and sundry that, if wages go up too much over the next two or three years, jobs will be lost.

For once, I agree with the Chancellor, and I suggest that the Secretary of State might do so, too—a rare event. If the Chancellor is right, what action will the Secretary of State and his colleagues take to make sure that people do not put in a large number of differential pay award requests for those on earnings much higher than the minimum wage? How will he sort out the mess that Labour policies are already creating? There is a huge gap between the rate of increase in private sector earnings—up 16.4 per cent. since 1995, and accelerating under the Labour Government—and public sector earnings that have gone up by only 8.5 per cent. in the same time. The gap is growing wider under the Labour Government.

Does the Secretary of State accept that the point will soon come at which public services are short of labour in many parts of the country because wages have fallen too

[Mr. Redwood]

far behind? Will not the minimum wage help to trigger a whole series of differential, catch-up and comparability pay increases as it unravels before us? That will undoubtedly destroy jobs. The golden economic legacy of the previous Government will be frittered away on higher wage inflation, and the minimum wage will partly be the reason.

I therefore urge the new Secretary of State to agree with the Chancellor on this matter, to disagree with the rest of the right hon. Gentleman's economic strategy in the name of st. ding up for manufacturing and business, which are being throttled and killed by the current economic policy mix, and to come to the Dispatch Box before this short debate concludes and say that he still believes what he claimed to believe when he was Minister without Portfolio. I also urge him to be grateful to the Conservative Opposition in another place—for thinking of him and helping him out of the his difficulty by offering him greater flexibility—and to overrule his Minister of State before No. 10 tells him to do just that.

Mr. David Chidgey (Eastleigh): The Minister of State's remarks—I should use a stronger word to describe them—had a touch of "holier than thou" about them as he set out what he considered to be the arguments advanced by the Liberal Democrats. We debated the issues long and hard in Committee and on Second and Third Reading, and while it may be a habit of politicians to rewrite history, it is surprising to find it being rewritten quite so soon. The record clearly shows the arguments that we put forward at great length and with great thoroughness to demonstrate our concern at some aspects of this legislation.

The Minister well knows that we have never disagreed in this place about the principle of a national minimum wage. Our argument has concerned how and where it should apply.

Mr. Ian McCartney: I think that the hon. Gentleman believes in a national minimum age, but does he not accept that it was a gross error of judgment to support a Conservative amendment that would wreck the whole concept? It is one thing to say that one proposes regionalisation and another to put one's name to an amendment that would prevent millions of low-paid workers from getting the wage.

Mr. Chidgey: I thank the Minister for that intervention, as it brings me to my next point. Throughout many weeks of debate in this place and the long, or extended, Committee stage—which, on occasion, ran through the night to the next lunchtime—the Government, who claim to have consulted and to consult all and sundry, have refused to listen to any of our arguments. I think that I am right in saying that, throughout those deliberations, the Government accepted only one amendment.

Is it surprising, then, that, when our arguments for flexibility and variation were totally ignored, they should have been put forward again in their lordships' House to give the Government one last chance to rethink their views? I can understand the frustration that was felt in the other place, which led it to make us deal with those issues again.

One aspect that is so frustrating is that, although the Government claimed to be consulting by setting up the Low Pay Commission, they failed to take on board its full recommendations when it reported. The Government cherry-picked what proposals to accept. As the Minister knows, I asked him time and again, in questions in the House and in interventions, whether the commission would be a fully independent, permanent body, able to monitor and implement recommendations, but he never answered me directly. I am therefore not at all surprised at the frustration that has been felt in Parliament as a whole.

I was glad to see the Secretary of State on the Front Bench. Sadly, he has left us already—perhaps he has already found the task a little too demanding—but nevertheless, he will know, I trust, having done his research and read the reports of our debates on the minimum wage in the months that have gone by, that the Liberal Democrats have long argued for variations and flexibility in the introduction of a national minimum wage. He also knows that we are extremely concerned about low pay, as he is, but we are also concerned about employment. Those arguments are on the record—one does not have to rewrite history, as they are there and they are clear. Our arguments have not been confounded by the Government.

To summarise, we have long argued that the Low Pay Commission should have the freedom to examine the issues. It should be a permanent body, and the Government of the day should listen to it and accept what it says. That is the true measure of consultation and of understanding the concerns of those who seek and deserve decent wages and those who employ them. I shall continue to press the Government to recognise those points and allow us to ensure that the secondary legislation that follows the Bill, which will presumably become an Act, starts to listen to the people who matter.

Mr. Alasdair Morgan: I shall be brief, and I am sorry to take some of the Minister's time for his reply.

Tonight we have simply heard a reiteration of what we heard every day in Committee and on Second and Third Reading. The arguments have not changed—we have merely had Conservative attempts to undermine the fabric and principle of the Bill. We did not get much in the way of argument tonight—at least in Committee, we had arguments ad nauseam. Today, we merely had the bald statement that the minimum wage would cause unemployment, and the Conservatives certainly know all about how to do that.

The arguments that we are meant to accept would drive a coach and horses through the Bill. They would allow a future Conservative Administration—should this country ever be unfortunate enough to suffer again from that—to destroy the Bill piece by piece in every profession and every part of the country.

Mr. Redwood: Is the hon. Gentleman saying that he disagrees with the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he says that higher wages mean fewer jobs?

6.45 pm

Mr. Morgan: I disagree with the Chancellor about many things, as the right hon. Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood) will not be surprised to learn. I certainly concur with the proponents of this Bill that the way to

create employment is not by running a sweatshop economy. Low wages do not create jobs; they mean that we will end up with the sort of economy that we should not be seeking.

The Government's case would have been even stronger had they grasped the nettle and allied any reduced or second rate for young people to training, instead of the compromise that they produced after the Committee stage. That apart, we must reject the Lords amendments. This Session, many unfortunate amendments have been agreed in the Lords, and these, like most of them, should be consigned to the dustbin.

Mr. Ian McCartney: The hon. Member for Eastleigh (Mr. Chidgey), speaking for the Liberal party—

Mr. Chidgey: The Liberal Democrats.

Mr. McCartney: Yes, I do realise that there is a difference, on occasions. The hon. Gentleman cannot get away with arguing, as he has done—he has been defeated intellectually and on economic grounds on each occasion—that certain people should get less than others in another region. He did not set out in any detail why a hairdresser five miles inside one region should be paid less than another hairdresser five miles down the road in another region.

Secondly, the hon. Gentleman gave no indication of what regionalisation would mean for the benefit system and for those in the regions. It is one thing to table an amendment to put one's case, but it is another to sign up to some of the biggest landowners in Britain and their allies, who come to the House of Lords with no mandate and vote to smash this Bill. The hon. Gentleman cannot have it both ways. He has a responsibility to low-paid workers, and his party failed that test in the House of Lords. Tonight, he has a chance to apologise and to reverse that decision, by joining the Government.

Mr. Chidgey: I am grateful to the Minister for giving way, as I know he wants to proceed, but I must remind him that, in Committee, I gave some convincing evidence of the differing costs of employment in different parts of the country. As he knows—it is on the record—independent research has shown the different costs to businesses and small firms of different levels of pay. The argument is sound, and the evidence is there.

Mr. McCartney: The hon. Gentleman tries hard, but his proposals are flawed. Since the publication of the report by the Low Pay Commission, business after business and company after company have supported the recommendations that it put forward and the Government have accepted. Those organisations and companies range from the CBI to convenience stores and those in the hospitality sector. Across the economy, employers in low-paying sectors support the Low Pay Commission's proposals and want to ensure that they are implemented effectively and fairly.

Once again, the right hon. Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood) has shown his true colours. He could not bring himself, even once, to be on the side of low-paid workers. He has pontificated since the election. The debate reveals one simple fact—the Tories have learnt nothing from their defeat and nothing about why they were defeated. One reason why people voted them out is that they are the party of the few, and do not give a damn or a whit about the life style of millions of low-paid workers. Thank goodness the right hon. Gentleman is on the Opposition Benches and we are on the Government Benches, because the Government's motion to disagree with the Lords amendment means that low-paid workers will at last get justice.

Question put, That this House does disagree with the Lords in the said amendment:—

The House divided: Ayes 308, Noes 121.

Division No. 349] **[6.50 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Alexander, Douglas
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Armstrong, Ms Hilary
Ashton, Joe
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Banks, Tony
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, Rt Hon Mrs Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne
Beggs, Roy
Bell, Stuart *(Middlesbrough)*
Bennett, Andrew F
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Boateng, Paul
Borrow, David
Bradley, Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brinton, Mrs Helen
Brown, Rt Hon Nick *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Butler, Mrs Christine
Byers, Stephen
Caborn, Richard
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Canavan, Dennis
Cann, Jamie
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Chisholm, Malcolm
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Colman, Tony
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cooper, Yvette
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Ms Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Crausby, David
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Dalyell, Tam
Darvill, Keith
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Davies, Rt Hon Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, John
Dewar, Rt Hon Donald
Dobbin, Jim
Donaldson, Jeffrey
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Flynn, Paul
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foster, Michael J *(Worcester)*
Foulkes, George
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Gapes, Mike
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Mrs Linda
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce

Grogan, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hanson, David
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Healey, John
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hewitt, Ms Patricia
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Ms Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Ms Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Ms Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Ms Jenny
(Wolverh'ton SW)
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Dr Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Jowell, Ms Tessa
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Kemp, Fraser
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Laxton, Bob
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Love, Andrew
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Steve
McCafferty, Ms Chris
McCartney, Ian *(Makerfield)*
McDonagh, Siobhain
Macdonald, Calum
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKenna, Mrs Rosemary
McLeish, Henry
McNamara, Kevin
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Mandelson, Peter
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury)*
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Marshall–Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Meale, Alan
Merron, Gillian
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffld Heeley)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin
Moffatt, Laura
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moran, Ms Margaret
Morgan, Alasdair *(Galloway)*
Morgan, Ms Julie *(Cardiff N)*
Morgan, Rhodri *(Cardiff W)*
Morley, Elliot
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
Norris, Dan
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
Olner, Bill
Pearson, Ian
Pendry, Tom
Perham, Ms Linda
Pike, Peter L
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pope, Greg
Powell, Sir Raymond
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Raynsford, Nick
Reed, Andrew *(Loughborough)*
Reid, Dr John *(Hamilton N)*
Robertson, Rt Hon George
(Hamilton S)
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Cov'try NW)*
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Salter, Martin
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Rt Hon Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Southworth, Ms Helen
Spellar, John
Squire, Ms Rachel
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stott, Roger
Straw, Rt Hon Jack
Stringer, Graham
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Rt Hon Mrs Ann
(Dewsbury)
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Temple–Morris, Peter
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Touhig, Don
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr George *(NW Norfolk)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Vaz, Keith
Vis, Dr Rudi
Wareing, Robert N
Welsh, Andrew
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
(Swansea W)
Williams, Alan W *(E Carmarthen)*
Wills, Michael
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wood, Mike
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, Dr Tony *(Cannock)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Clive Betts and
Mr. Robert Ainsworth.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Amess, David
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Arbuthnot, James
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Body, Sir Richard
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Mrs Virginia
Brady, Graham
Brazier, Julian
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Burns, Simon
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney
(Chipping Barnet)
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clark, Rt Hon Alan *(Kensington)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth
(Rushcliffe)
Clifton–Brown, Geoffrey
Cran, James
Curry, Rt Hon David
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham)*
Day, Stephen
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Duncan, Alan
Duncan Smith, Iain
Evans, Nigel
Faber, David
Fallon, Michael
Flight, Howard
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam
Gibb, Nick
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Gray, James
Green, Damian
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, Rt Hon John
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archie
Hammond, Philip
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat–Amory, Rt Hon David
Horam, John
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson Smith,
Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, Oliver
Lidington, David
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
McIntosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Mates, Michael
Maude, Rt Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Moss, Malcolm
Norman, Archie
Ottaway, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Prior, David
Randall, John
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Ruffley, David
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Simpson, Keith *(Mid–Norfolk)*
Soames, Nicholas

Spicer, Sir Michael
Spring, Richard
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Swayne, Desmond
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher & Walton)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Waterson, Nigel
Wells, Bowen
Whitney, Sir Raymond
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Wilkinson, John
Wilshire, David
Woodward, Shaun
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mrs. Caroline Spelman and Mr. Tim Collins.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Lords amendment disagreed to.

It being after Seven o'clock, and there being private business set down by direction of THE CHAIRMAN OF WAYS AND MEANS *under Standing Order No. 20 (Time for taking private business), further proceedings stood postponed.*

Lloyds TSB Bill *[Lords]* *(By Order)*

Order for Third Reading read.

7.5 pm

Mr. Eric Illsley (Barnsley, Central): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read the Third time.

I repeat the declaration of interests that I made on Second Reading: I contribute to an insurance policy with the Abbey Life company, which is now wholly owned by Lloyds, and my wife contributes to a pension with the Target Life company, which has now also been taken over by that company. I shall try to make my comments as brief as possible, in view of the previous business of the House.

In December 1995, the TSB Group and Lloyds bank, two of the United Kingdom's oldest and best-known financial services groups, came together in a merger that provides their customers with the largest branch network of any United Kingdom high street banking group and a range of products to match. The promoters' principal intention is to transfer TSB bank customer accounts into Lloyds bank. The Bill will spare 7 million TSB customers the inconvenience of signing forms to effect the transfer.

On Second Reading, it was apparent that the main issue surrounding the Bill was one of pensions. In recent months, Lloyds has again corresponded with many hon. Members on pensions issues. With the blessing of the House, I therefore propose to devote my speech to the pensions issues that have been raised, or were raised on Second Reading and have been the subject of exchanges and meetings between hon. Members and the bank. I add, in passing, that the Bill was unamended when it left the Opposed Private Bill Committee.

I have two general points to make first in relation to the pension schemes. The TSB Group pension scheme is among the best in the United Kingdom in terms of the benefits packages that it provides, and it is in the top 10 per cent. of UK staff schemes. A comprehensive framework of statutory, regulatory and fiduciary protection for scheme members is in place, which accords with best practice among UK occupational pension schemes.

I cannot emphasise too strongly that the issue of pensions is in no way affected by the Bill. The Bill's promoters wish me to reassure the House again that the position of all their pension scheme members remains, and will remain, fully protected. The TSB Group pension scheme, which has been the subject of comment by the group calling itself the TSB Hill Samuel action group, provides one of the best packages in the country. In addition to all that, the promoters are unaware of any pensioners receiving benefits that do not properly reflect their legitimate contractual entitlement.

Mr. Edward Leigh (Gainsborough): My constituent, David Ives, who is a senior former staff member of Hill Samuel, has alerted me to heart-rending stories of pensioners who are living on derisory pensions of as little as £1,000 a year. Naturally, that worries me. I wonder whether the hon. Gentleman can today give a commitment, on behalf of the companies, that pensioners

[Mr. Edward Leigh]

who receive such small pensions will be dealt with satisfactorily by way of regular payment, or at least a satisfactory one-off payment.

Mr. Illsley: I assure the hon. Gentleman that Lloyds will deal with that matter. It is part of my speech, so I hope that the hon. Gentleman will allow me to make progress. If he had been present on Second Reading, he would know that the issue arose then and was debated extensively. The bank has given assurances to Opposition Members about pensioners on low incomes and has undertaken to conduct a review, to which I shall refer later. The average annual pension for members of the Hill Samuel scheme is £11,700. The average pension under the TSB scheme is £7,800, which compares with a national average for occupational pension provision of £4,800.

Both before and since Second Reading, the promoters have been engaged in active and constructive dialogue with a handful of hon. Members on both sides of the House who have raised pensions-related concerns on behalf of their constituents—as the hon. Member for Gainsborough (Mr. Leigh) has just done. Several hon. Members who initially expressed concerns on behalf of their constituents about the pensions arrangements of Lloyds TSB have now withdrawn their names from the blocking motion against the Bill. I hope that I can provide sufficient comfort to those hon. Members whose names still appear on the blocking motion so that the Bill may be permitted to complete its final parliamentary stage.

Mrs. Cheryl Gillan (Chesham and Amersham): Sadly, I was not able to be in the Chamber for the Second Reading debate. However, several of my constituents have raised matters similar to that mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough (Mr. Leigh). One issue is TSB's production of the guidelines. I understand that the guidelines are complex and that the exercise must be comprehensive, but the fact that they have not yet been produced is causing great anxiety to my constituents. Will the hon. Gentleman confirm that those guidelines will be produced? I received an undertaking from TSB today that they will be produced within a week or so, but does the hon. Gentleman have further and better particulars? It is essential that the guidelines are produced as quickly as possible, bearing in mind the undertakings that TSB gave to other hon. Members on Second Reading.

Mr. Illsley: As I said to the hon. Member for Gainsborough, those issues will be addressed in my speech and, if I am allowed to continue, I shall come to them. As I understand it, the guidelines are a matter of negotiation between the Inland Revenue and Lloyds TSB. Once those negotiations have been completed, the guidelines will be available. If I may make progress, I shall address each issue in turn.

Mrs. Gillan: I understand from TSB that the document is in fact with lawyers and trustees of the TSB scheme. Will the hon. Gentleman take further advice on the issue, as I understand from the company that the matter rests not with the Inland Revenue but with the company?

Mr. Illsley: I shall refer to that matter when I come to it in my speech—if the hon. Lady will allow me to make progress.

On Second Reading of the Bill, the promoters undertook to put in place a range of measures and initiatives designed to provide comfort to hon. Members, to their constituents who might have concerns and to any other Lloyds TSB pensioners who might be concerned about their pensions. Lloyds TSB has proceeded as fast as practicable, consistent with achieving a reasonable and sustainable outcome. It has adhered to the time scales to which it committed itself. Equally, Lloyds TSB remains acutely sensitive to the necessity of offering help to needy pensioners where appropriate.

Historically, Lloyds TSB has always attached the highest importance to providing additional assistance to needy and elderly pensioners. That is not something new: it reflects Lloyds TSB's responsible attitude towards assisting those who have helped the company in the past. Lloyds TSB provides that assistance through ex gratia payments and a national framework of dedicated pension liaison officers, whose role is to identify cases of hardship and provide appropriate solutions. In this, I understand that Lloyds TSB is unique among United Kingdom companies. The cost of the activity is borne by Lloyds TSB, not by the pension schemes.

In a letter to the hon. Members for Arundel and South Downs (Mr. Flight) and for Aldershot (Mr. Howarth) on the day of the Bill's Second Reading, Mike Fairey, the deputy group chief executive of Lloyds TSB, confirmed that Lloyds TSB intended to undertake a comprehensive review of the position of pensioners on low incomes. The promoters said that they believed that the review would take up to six months to complete, and they intend to honour that commitment.

I am delighted to report to the House that the promoters have embarked on a detailed and meticulous analysis of pensioner records going back over the past 30 years. As the House will understand, that is a complex and time-consuming process. A dedicated team is undertaking that task to ensure that the promoters can properly and expeditiously reach a view about the options open to them to enhance pension values where appropriate, with the agreement of the Inland Revenue.

Mr. Jim Cousins (Newcastle upon Tyne, Central): My hon. Friend will know that I was present for, and spoke during, the Second Reading debate. I have been informed that the number of very needy pensioners is estimated at at least 700 and that, so far, only 100 individuals have been identified. In the light of the assurances that my hon. Friend and Lloyds gave in good faith on Second Reading, we might have expected far faster progress in dealing with the issue.

Mr. Illsley: As I have said, it is a time-consuming process: a review that dates back 30 years will obviously take some time. The figures cited by my hon. Friend are new to me and they have not been advanced by the promoters. I am aware of the cases that are classed as anomalous—some 200—but I am not aware of those figures.

The issue of representations to the Inland Revenue is particularly important. As I have said, everyone will receive his or her full entitlement from the Lloyds TSB pension schemes. Therefore, it may not be possible for the promoters to enhance the pensions of pensioners on low incomes as appropriate and as they would wish without the risk of breaching the normal Inland Revenue rules on maximum allowable benefits from tax-approved pension schemes. I can report to the House that, since Second Reading, Lloyds TSB has held an initial meeting with the Inland Revenue to see what further latitude may be given.

The Inland Revenue has said that it is not prepared to discuss specific concessions until the promoters are in a position to show more clearly how they would structure possible enhancements to the pensions of individual pensioners or groups of pensioners on low incomes. As the House can imagine, that will be a lengthy and difficult task. None the less, the promoters remain committed to continuing this important and constructive dialogue with the Inland Revenue, with a view to seeking a positive outcome. It is open to hon. Members to make their own separate and parallel representations to the Inland Revenue—it would be helpful if they did so—to encourage it to review its position.

The question of anomalous cases was raised on Second Reading. Lloyds TSB has given an undertaking to the hon. Members for Arundel and South Downs and for Aldershot that it will review any cases of alleged anomalous treatment of its existing and deferred pensioners. The promoters are committed to completing their statement of rules and practices as quickly as practicable, and they intend to publish their review as soon as possible thereafter. To date, they have received 200 letters from pensioners, which represents 0.1 per cent. of the total of 180,000 pensioners. Each case is being investigated as a matter of urgency. I have Lloyds TSB's absolute assurance that as soon as it is possible to provide substantive responses to the pensioners concerned, it will do so. A deadline of 3 September has been set for the receipt of alleged anomalies, which will provide ample time for those pensioners who may have concerns to register them.

The promoters have stated clearly and unequivocally that, if Lloyds TSB is unable to resolve satisfactorily any individual pensioner's concerns, they are willing to go with the pensioner concerned to the pensions ombudsman, whom Parliament has vested with the powers to investigate and decide on complaints relating to occupational pension schemes.

I am happy to confirm, too, that, if, in such circumstances, the ombudsman were to decline jurisdiction—for example, on the ground of the expiry of the three-year time limit—the promoters would be willing to appoint a legally qualified person with pensions expertise to review the complaint, using precisely the same terms of reference as the ombudsman would have employed. Lloyds TSB has said that it would do so at its own cost.

An issue that did not arise on Second Reading relates to a situation in Northern Ireland. As the hon. Member for East Antrim (Mr. Beggs) recently appended his name to the blocking motion, I shall try to reassure him. In addition, the promoters want me to reassure the House and, in particular, those Northern Ireland Members present tonight, that they take seriously the issue of the part-time employees of the TSB of Northern Ireland.

The issue relates to the sale of the TSB of Northern Ireland to Allied Irish Banks by the then TSB Group in 1991. As a result of an administrative error, a number of former TSB of Northern Ireland staff who had transferred their pension entitlements to Allied Irish Banks were subsequently and incorrectly advised that they were eligible for benefits to which they were not entitled. I understand that the matter is now in the hands of the pensions ombudsman. The promoters want me to reaffirm that they regret that error and that they will co-operate fully with the pensions ombudsman.

Mr. Roy Beggs (East Antrim): The hon. Gentleman acknowledges that the TSB of Northern Ireland had more than 100 part-time staff before the merger with Allied Irish. They have been disadvantaged. May I have an assurance that they will benefit from a satisfactory outcome of any review? I am a little surprised that although the matter has been referred to the ombudsman, it has not yet been fully dealt with.

Mr. Illsley: I can assure the hon. Gentleman that Lloyds TSB will fully comply with any decision made by the pensions ombudsman. The issue is outside the Bill, but, in view of the hon. Gentleman's concerns, Lloyds TSB wishes me to raise the matter to try to give some reassurance. If the pensions ombudsman asks Lloyds TSB to reimburse individuals, obviously it will comply with that request.

Concern has been expressed on Second Reading and since by a number of hon. Members about the need to ensure that the position of deferred pensioners is fully protected. I am happy to confirm that, on 19 June 1998, the Lloyds TSB board agreed to the appointment of a deferred pensioner, not only to the board of trustees of the TSB Group pension scheme, but to the board of trustees of the Lloyds pension scheme. The promoters are now seeking to put that initiative in place and the trade unions, the retired staff association and the action group have been invited to put forward prospective candidates.

The deferred pensioner appointee to the TSB pension scheme will be a management rather than a member appointee because, at the moment, a management position happens to be vacant on the scheme's board, providing the quickest way of appointing a deferred pensioner to the scheme. However, I reassure the House that all pension scheme board members represent the interests of all members of the scheme, not just one narrow sectional interest.

The promoters have been keen to ensure that all their pensioners, not just hon. Members, have been kept fully up to date on the various initiatives and activities that they have been putting in place and that I have described this evening. All 180,000 Lloyds TSB pension scheme members have received communications by a variety of means, including pensioner and staff magazines and directly mailed letters.

I hope that the House will feel that the initiatives that I have described provide considerable comfort about the way in which Lloyds TSB has sought to address concerns raised by hon. Members.

Mr. Gerald Howarth (Aldershot): I hope that the hon. Gentleman will excuse me if I do not participate later.

[Mr. Gerald Howarth]

but the Select Committee on Home Affairs is finalising its report. We welcome the board's decision to agree to the deferred pensioner appointment. I know that it has sought to fulfil the undertakings that it gave to me and my hon. Friend the Member for Arundel and South Downs (Mr. Flight), but the hon. Gentleman will know that the action group is concerned that the appointee, whose appointment lies in the hands of the bank, may not be as ruggedly independent as the pensioners would wish. Can the hon. Gentleman assure the House, on behalf of the Bill's promoters, that the bank will appoint a deferred pensioner from management who will be independent? Concern has been expressed that the Banking, Insurance and Finance Union appointments, although BIFU representatives, may themselves be afraid, at a time when the bank is contracting, of being too robust for fear of finding themselves out of a job. Will the hon. Gentleman deal with that?

Mr. Illsley: I am sure that Lloyds TSB will take on board all the comments that have been made about the appointment of the deferred pensioner. As I said, the opportunity arises at this point in time to appoint to the management side of the scheme, simply as a matter of convenience. However, Lloyds asks me to stress clearly that all members of the pension scheme board will act in the interests of all members of the scheme. I am not sure whether that entails anyone acting independently, as the hon. Gentleman would wish, but I am sure that any appointee to the board, because of the rules and duties surrounding trustees, would be obliged to act in the interests of all sides in the pension scheme. Obviously, it remains for pensioners, if they are dissatisfied with the conduct of any appointed trustee, to raise the issue again. I know that Lloyds TSB has given the hon. Gentleman assurances that it will contact him again in future in relation to such matters. The hon. Gentleman will have the opportunity to raise the issue with Lloyds at that stage and to make representations if the appointee does not live up to the assurances given by the bank.

Mr. Eddie O'Hara (Knowsley, South): Is the system proposed by management for the appointment of the trustee not a classic example of advise and consent, and an example of a commitment that could turn out to be worthless? Does my hon. Friend not see that there are some of us who are reluctant for the Bill to be given Third Reading until we have a meaningful commitment? The only such commitment that I can think of would be a commitment to appoint a trustee in the future who would genuinely be an elected trustee of the pensioners.

Mr. Illsley: My hon. Friend makes a fair point, which I take on board. I cannot give him that assurance now, because the issue has not previously been raised with me; I can say only that the opportunity arises for a deferred pensioner trustee at this point in time. As I understand it, few pension schemes in Britain have a deferred pensioner trustee on the board. I am sure that my hon. Friend would agree that, in the short time since Second Reading, Lloyds TSB has gone a long way towards meeting concerns expressed by hon. Members and by the action group.

We should also bear in mind the fact that we are talking about a Bill that basically implements a merger that took place two or three years ago. The pensions issues, although relevant and interesting to those hon. Members involved, are not directly related to the Bill. As Lloyds TSB has assured hon. Members, those issues can be taken up outside the Bill's passage and in the future. The bank has given assurances to revisit the issue in due course and I am sure that, at that time, it will seek to ensure that any appointee to the board acts properly and that it will take on board the fact that that person has been appointed to look after the interests of deferred pensioners.

Mr. Cousins: Does my hon. Friend accept that, on the night of the Second Reading debate, the decisive event that prevented a vote was the intervention by the hon. Member for Arundel and South Downs (Mr. Flight), who brought to the House a concession made by Lloyds TSB—as my hon. Friend rightly said, such a concession was not covered by the Bill—that a deferred pensioner trustee would be appointed? Is it not the case that, as we debate Third Reading tonight, that still has not occurred?

Mr. Illsley: The bank has undertaken to appoint a deferred pensioner as a trustee. As my hon. Friend knows, Second Reading took place on 20 April. The hon. Members for Arundel and South Downs and for Aldershot no longer oppose the Bill. The hon. Gentleman who originally raised the issue in the House has been satisfied by the assurances given by Lloyds TSB in respect of deferred pensioners. As I said earlier, few pension schemes have a deferred pensioner as a member.

Mr. Cousins: As my hon. Friend knows perfectly well, the question of the representation of pensioners—of people with preserved rights to pensions—as pensioner trustees in the operation of pension funds is one of the most lively and important issues in pension fund administration at present; indeed, it goes to the heart of all the discussions about flexible labour markets and changing jobs in the course of one's life. If this is an opportunity to address the issue, why not do so?

Mr. Illsley: I take on board what my hon. Friend says, but, on 19 June this year, Lloyds TSB agreed at its board meeting to appoint a deferred pensioner trustee in accordance with the wishes not only of Opposition Members but of the Hill Samuel action group; thus the bank has dealt with the issue that was raised.

Mr. Beggs: Did not the action group seek to have the trustee elected by ballot, rather than appointed by Lloyds TSB?

Mr. Illsley: As I said earlier, the bank approached the trade unions, the action group and the retired staff association within Lloyds TSB for suggestions on how the issue could be dealt with. I am sure that the action group and the association will make suggestions similar to those that the hon. Gentleman has made, to decide who becomes the deferred pensioner trustee in the future.

Lloyds TSB has acted quickly. My hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, Central (Mr. Cousins) said that there has been insufficient action in the time scale available, but, given that Lloyds TSB has identified a vacancy and sought to fill it with a deferred pensioner trustee, it is moving as quickly as time allows.

Mr. Peter L. Pike (Burnley): Has not the bank given way because it knows that, once the Bill is enacted and it

starts to rationalise its branches, which is what the merger was all about, there will be many more deferred pensioners? It therefore hopes that, because it has conceded a place for a deferred pensioner, it will get the redundancies, closures and rationalisation through. Is that not what this is all about?

Mr. Illsley: I hear what my hon. Friend says, but, as I said on Second Reading, the bank raised those issues specifically with the trade unions involved. The trade unions had a number of discussions with Lloyds TSB about closures and job losses. I met BIFU to discuss that issue before I even contemplated taking the Bill through the House, because I wanted to be assured on the question of job losses and closures. BIFU assured me that it had received assurances that were sufficient to warrant withdrawing its objections to the Bill. I take on board my hon. Friend's comment about the possibility of further deferred pensioners, but Lloyds consulted the action group, the trade unions and the retired staff association about how the deferred pension issue could be dealt with in the future.

The House should be in no doubt about the importance that Lloyds TSB attaches to the need to resolve those matters as quickly as possible, consistent with the complexities of the issues involved. Lloyds TSB is one of the UK's largest and most successful companies. It has a deep historical understanding of its corporate responsibilities. It plays a leading role in welfare-to-work and new deal issues, and supports a wide range of impressive educational initiatives, including the new teacher awards sponsored by the Department for Education and Employment. On Second Reading, I referred to the work of the Lloyds TSB Foundation, which is the charitable arm of Lloyds TSB. It still hands out £21 million a year, which makes it the UK's largest corporate donor. Its work is focused on communities throughout the United Kingdom.

I hope that I have been able to point out that the promoters of the Bill have provided ample evidence of their responsible, sensitive and inclusive approach to the issues that have been raised throughout our debates on the Bill. I hope that the House will now allow the Bill to make progress following the merger that took place in 1995.

Mr. Leigh: I asked this question before, and the hon. Gentleman said that he would deal with it. I have been asked to ask him what figure the company has in mind, as a one-off or regular payment, for the worst-off pensioners? After all this time, it should be possible for the Bill's promoters to reassure the House on this matter, because, once the Bill gets a Third Reading, we shall lose all power over it, and thus all power to help the poorest pensioners.

Mr. Illsley: The bank cannot say how much is available until it has agreed with the Inland Revenue what concessions will be available for low-income pensioners. The negotiations with the Inland Revenue will take some time in view of the points that I raised earlier, but the bank is taking the issue seriously.

7.36 pm

Mr. Howard Flight (Arundel and South Downs): I originally signed a blocking motion against the Bill, but I have subsequently been satisfied that Lloyds TSB has given reasonable undertakings, which were reported on Second Reading and which it is now embarked on honouring.

I appreciate the frustration of the action group, and the points made by other well wishers, that the Bill is an opportunity to encourage Lloyds TSB to deal with the problems, particularly those of low-income pensioners. That opportunity will be lost once the Bill has passed Third Reading.

May I add to the three areas that have been mentioned my perceptions of the outstanding issues? The issue of poor pensioners has involved Lloyds TSB negotiating with the Inland Revenue. The Inland Revenue has required Lloyds TSB to deal with sample cases of some 600 poor pensioners. The bank has embarked on that task with a staff of 12. It has advised me that it still expects to complete its negotiations with the Revenue within the six-month time scale that it agreed in April. I have corresponded with the Treasury on that matter because I hoped that it could be simplified from on high. Although pension scheme rules must be abided by, some form of blanket guidance should be given to the Revenue when very modest pension incomes are involved.

I am satisfied that raising the issue of poor pensioners with the Revenue has not been a stalling mechanism by Lloyds TSB. It has been in earnest and has been negotiating with the Revenue about what can be done. I understand that it cannot give figures about how much it may be able to give, or say what it may be able to do, until it has completed those negotiations.

Mr. Cousins: Why is the hon. Gentleman satisfied and entirely content that Lloyds TSB should have unlimited time within the generous time scale that it gave itself on Second Reading when it has imposed 30 September as the end-date for aggrieved pensioners to make representations?

Mr. Flight: First, the undertaking to address poor pensioners was given in respect of a six-month period. Secondly, the hon. Gentleman has forestalled a point that I want to come to. Lloyds TSB has told me that, although 30 September has been widely advertised by it to invite pensioners who think that they have been treated unfairly and anomalously to write in with their cases, it is not a cut-off date. I am advised that Lloyds TSB will continue to pursue anomalies if it is informed of them beyond that date, which is not a shut-off date, but an incentive for people to submit their cases.

I shall deal with my second point at length.

Mr. Leigh: Before my hon. Friend raises his second point, will he please explain what complex tax arrangements could possibly relate to pensions of as little as £1,000 a year, involve such delays and prevent the company's sponsor, the hon. Member for Barnsley, Central (Mr. Illsley), from giving hon. Members some idea of what the one-off payments would be? On such low pensions, surely those matters are not complex at all.

Mr. Flight: They are relatively complex. Pension funds are bound by two sets of rules—those of the scheme itself and the Inland Revenue rules. The Inland Revenue must make sure that any changes to what is paid out, over and above cost of living adjustments, are in line with its rules

[Mr. Flight]

and with the rules of a scheme and the discretion permitted under it. In respect of the 600-sample survey, I understand that the Revenue wants to make sure that Lloyds TSB's proposals fall within the discretion permitted to the pension scheme.

The second issue is anomalies. Lloyds TSB advertised widely to scheme members for people who felt themselves to have been unfairly treated to put their case. The issue has arisen of the guidelines by which such anomalies will be assessed. Lloyds TSB has had to go back over 25 years to examine the policies on anomalies, and two particular areas present problems. First, if a company is sold, what are the pension arrangements for the staff who go with it? The second problem is in respect of individuals who take redundancy or are made redundant above the age of 50.

A team of lawyers has worked on producing the guidelines on anomalies, the purpose of which is not to enable anyone to put up a complaint, but to allow those who complain about anomalous treatment to know the rules of the scheme. Such people should be sent of copy of the guidelines. My hon. Friend the Member for Chesham and Amersham (Mrs. Gillan) raised this issue and has been assured by Lloyds TSB that the guidelines will be available by the end of this month, and certainly within a week. I put it to Lloyds TSB that some people may have held back because they did not know the guidelines and that it would be unreasonable for them to have only a month or so to submit their cases. I also asked whether 30 September was a shut-off date and was assured that that was not the case.

Mr. Beggs: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that it is a serious anomaly that the Irish Bank Officials Association has had to take up the case of 120 former part-time TSB staff in Northern Ireland? Does he also agree that that should be addressed urgently and that any discrimination against them should be resolved?

Mr. Flight: I certainly believe that any discrimination should be resolved. I do not know the details of the problem with the ex-Irish subsidiary, but I understand that the matter has been referred to the pensions ombudsman and believe that, when that happens, an independent and impartial judgment by him is looked for.

More widely, it is fair to say that, until this April, Lloyds TSB was somewhat slow in addressing those issues and that the blocking of the Bill was designed specifically to encourage it to get a move on. I believe that that has been the case, in good faith. Although the delays in respect of the two United Kingdom issues are frustrating, I believe that Lloyds TSB is not stalling, but is bona fide.

The third issue is the appointment of a representative for deferred pensioners. That practice is extremely important, because the number of deferred pensioners in all pension schemes will grow and they should be well represented. Staff representatives were appointed to the TSB scheme following the passing of the Pensions Act 1995. Three were nominated by the Banking, Insurance and Finance Union, the trade union representative, and one by the retired staff association. As required under the 1995 Act, the appointments were circulated to all members of the scheme, which gave them the ability to object. They did not object; in effect, they endorsed. At present, representatives are nominated by the member representative bodies, but formally appointed by the pension fund trust board.

In respect of the Lloyds pension scheme, there is already a voting situation. Although there are arguments that elections are preferable, Lloyds has offered the slot of a management representative to achieve speedy representation of deferred pensioners and has requested that the trade union representatives, the Lloyds action group and the retired staff association propose candidates.

The current arrangements for all staff representatives run until 2002—appointments are for five years—but, given that the Lloyds scheme has an elective basis, it may be better practice and more consistent for Lloyds to consider moving the TSB scheme to an elective basis for all member representatives, as well as for the deferred pensioner representative, by that date. Lloyds has not committed so to do, but it has suggested to me that it will consider the argument and thinks that it may be desirable to move to a consistent basis in this matter for the Lloyds and the TSB pension schemes.

Mr. Cousins: I remind the hon. Gentleman that his intervention at a similar point in the debate on 20 April led us to believe that a deferred pensioner trustee would be appointed. From the assurances that he gave, not on behalf of TSB but in a speech similar to this, we had every expectation that that would be the case. Now, that is not the case, and his response is to give us a further set of assurances that some no doubt highly desirable things may happen by 2002.

Mr. Flight: With respect, I do not think that the hon. Gentleman quite understands what I am saying. Lloyds TSB will appoint a deferred pensioner representative: it has agreed to do so, it has asked the representative bodies for nominees and it is waiting to receive from BIFU, the action group and the retired staff association the names of candidates that those bodies would like to be appointed.

We are talking about the issue of appointment versus election. If an election process were embarked on immediately, it would still take at least a year to accomplish, because it would involve the period between getting the election organised and the early retirement of existing staff representatives. Lloyds TSB is taking the speediest route open to it to appoint a deferred pensioner representative.

I think that, above all, the deferred pensioner representative should be able to discharge his or her responsibilities. While the elective principle is desirable in the round, it is particularly desirable for an individual representing deferred pensioners to know and understand the issues and problems affecting such pensioners in regard to pension schemes. I do not think that it is not in the spirit of, or not in accordance with, the undertaking given by Lloyds TSB for it to agree to the appointment of a deferred pensioner representative, and it is now asking the representative bodies involved to nominate such a representative.

Mr. Peter Brooke (Cities of London and Westminster): It is possible that there is a misunderstanding between my

hon. Friend and the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, Central (Mr. Cousins)—although that is not the fault of the hon. Gentleman. The concession given to my hon. Friend on 20 April stated:

"However, in the light of your helpful suggestion, we will also consider the possibility of the appointment of a deferred pensioner to the board of the TSB pension scheme."

I do not know whether my hon. Friend agrees with me, but I think that to have achieved the creation of a job within two months constitutes a pretty honourable fulfilment of what began as simply consideration.

Mr. Flight: I thank my right hon. Friend for making in such a fluent way the point that I sought to make.

Mr. Cousins: It is not the hon. Gentleman's honour that causes me concern; what causes me concern is the progress of events.

Mr. Flight: That is what causes us all concern. My point is simply this. The process of putting a deferred pensioner representative on to the board is being dealt with, and the nominations of representatives is awaited; but there is a separate issue—whether all staff representatives of trustees of the pension scheme should be elected for the purposes of the TSB scheme, as with the Lloyds scheme. Lloyds TSB has told me that it is prepared to consider that for the next round in five years' time.

Mr. O'Hara: Would deferred pensioners ever have an opportunity to object to someone who might be selected by management?

Mr. Flight: I understand that Lloyds TSB is not interested in appointing anyone other than someone with the blessing and support of the three representative institutions. It looks to the unions, the retired staff association and the action group to come up with candidates who have the experience to discharge the obligation, and with whom those representative bodies are happy. It is not thinking of appointing its own candidate.

Mr. O'Hara: Is the hon. Gentleman assuring me, on behalf of the company, that it will not ignore nominations of deferred pensioners and choose someone else to appoint?

Mr. Flight: I am not a representative of the company, but I asked it precisely that question. It gave me to understand that—as I have said—it looks to a nominee from those bodies, rather than intending to appoint its own nominee, or a nominee with which the representative bodies are not entirely happy.

Mr. O'Hara: With respect, "looking to" does not sound as strong to me as a guarantee that that is what Lloyds TSB will do.

Mr. Flight: I repeat that I am not in a position to give guarantees on behalf of Lloyds TSB; but, having been involved in similar situations, I believe that the company wants a deferred pensioner representative who has the full support of staff and the various representative bodies, and has set about organising that. I personally feel confident that that is its good-will intent: I do not think that it wants to appoint some stooge.

Although opposition to the Bill has hastened and encouraged discussion of issues that needed to be addressed, I believe that management is honouring the commitment given to my hon. Friend the Member for Aldershot (Mr. Howarth) and me in April. It has taken time to get where we are now, not because of stalling but because of the complexities of the issues. This is an important day, in that, if the Bill is given a Third Reading, the leverage involved will be lost. Hon. Members must make an important judgment when they vote; but I shall vote for Third Reading. I believe that the way to make progress as quickly as possible is to ensure active co-operation between BIFU, the retired staff association, the action group and Lloyds TSB management. They must be encouraged to get a move on, and to implement the commitments that have been given.

7.56 pm

Mr. Jim Cousins (Newcastle upon Tyne, Central): I regret that we should find ourselves in such an extraordinary situation. The debate should not have been necessary: the matters that were raised in the Second Reading debate of 20 April should have been dealt with conclusively then, or set on a fair course with, demonstrably, no obstacles ahead. If that had happened, this issue would now be being resolved.

Interestingly, during the intervening time other matters directly related to the text of the Bill have remained unclear. For instance, we still do not know how our largest bank network—Lloyds TSB—will deal with the rationalisation of its branches, and the attendant loss of service and employment. We might have hoped for some clarification of that.

Pension issues have rightly dominated this short debate. It is not just a matter of detail affecting a particular group of people; it is a matter of fundamental principle. Whose property is the pension fund surplus? Who is the source of the power that should direct pension funds and their distribution? That will be a fundamental issue in other debates on pensions, and it goes to the heart of tonight's debate.

As the hon. Member for Arundel and South Downs (Mr. Flight) rightly said, one of the few opportunities that Members of Parliament have is to impose blocks to try to force conclusions, and it is regrettable that we have not been able to do that tonight. Before this debate, it occurred to me to wonder how matters such as this came to be dealt with at board level.

Mr. H. R. Freedberg was the leading light in Hill Samuel and was a former director of the TSB. He received £290,461 in compensation for loss of office as a director of the Hill Samuel bank. In addition, £657,000 was paid from a separate fund to enable him to obtain a pension on his earnings that exceeded the maximum pensionable salary allowable under the TSB Group pension scheme. That information is contained in the annual report. Mr. Freedberg did not have to wait. Nobody said to him, "We cannot do anything for you. We have to sort it all out with the Inland Revenue."

Mr. Freedberg's treatment contrasts with the cases that have been brought to me and to other hon. Members. I shall not give names. Mrs. M. had a deferred pension

[Mr. Jim Cousins]

of £375 a year for 17 years full and part-time service. Mrs. N., who is a single parent, received no pension for 15 years' service. Miss F., who was aged 83, was below the poverty line after 29 years' service and was sent to the Bankers Benevolent Fund for a hearing aid.

According to the annual report, Sir Nicholas Goodison, who was the chairman of TSB, received a payment that was equivalent to 22.5 per cent. of his salary. That was in line with Inland Revenue guidelines. He was caught by the guidelines, but not unfavourably, it seems. That payment was to enable him to contribute to a personal retirement annuity plan. If the plan does not provide Sir Nicholas with a pension at the age of 65 that is equal to two thirds of his final salary, the company has undertaken to make up the difference, subject to a maximum annual payment by the company equivalent to 31.67 per cent. of his final salary.

The treatment of some of those who directed TSB affairs, therefore, contrasts with how ordinary pensioners with preserved rights, some of them made redundant many years ago, have been treated. The point of our proceedings is to close that gap and force equity of treatment. The debate should not be necessary because these matters should have been dealt with already.

Mr. John Hayes (South Holland and The Deepings): I am impressed by the passion with which the hon. Gentleman presents his case. He has presented the purpose of our proceedings. Will he go further and say how the Government should be involved? He describes cases, and rightly calls for equity of treatment. Surely the Government have a specific responsibility to bring some of the fat cats that he describes into line. I hope that the Minister will comment on that.

Mr. Cousins: I cannot join the hon. Gentleman in saying that the pension review should state how we should address the gap between the pension of Sir Nicholas Goodison who, regrettably, may not achieve two thirds of his final salary even with the extra top-up and may need a further top-up from the company equivalent to 31.67 per cent. of his final salary, and the pensions of others. Sorting out his problems should not be a priority for the Government in considering future stakeholder pensions. Perhaps, though, he provides some kind of benchmark, which I understand is the art term that we are allowed to use when discussing such matters, for judging the treatment of other pensioners.

It was clear on 20 April that legal action was in hand to protect members of the Irish Bank Officers Association in their representations on behalf of former part-time employees of the merged bank. The House was not told about that at the time and the matter came to light only within the past few days. It is regrettable that it, too, has not been addressed.

Lloyds TSB has not stated the figure that it has in mind for a one-off payment to the worst-off pensioners. Some hon. Members, myself included, have been told the likely sums. Perfectly properly, we have been asked not to share that information with the House. However, by now the suggestions and figures should be public knowledge so that the beneficiaries know where they stand.

We still do not have guidelines. We are told that the matter is complicated and that teams of lawyers are working on it, but we are debating one of the greatest of our financial institutions. In heaven's name, if it cannot produce guidelines for a relatively small section of its business and a small number of people over such a period, that is a poor comment on the institution.

Mr. Brooke: It has been my understanding, although I realise that the hon. Gentleman has been in frequent touch with the bank, that the guidelines deal with the manner in which the pension scheme has evolved over the past 25 to 30 years, and that they would enable shareholders to determine whether they have sustained anomalies on which they should claim. That is quite different from the review of low-income pensioners.

Mr. Cousins: Perhaps significantly, the right hon. Gentleman speaks of shareholders when he means pensioners. That confusion is significant because, in a sense, it goes to the heart of our debate.

Mr. Brooke: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for picking up a slip of the tongue, if I made one. However, he did not answer my question.

Mr. Cousins: No, I did not—and I made a brief debating point for which I hope the right hon. Gentleman will forgive me.

Mr. Leigh: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Cousins: Of course.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Lord): Order. The hon. Gentleman must deal with one intervention before he starts another.

Mr. Cousins: I accept your guidance, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

I shall deal with the guidelines. There are a number of pension schemes with different rules. Although pension schemes have not come together, the organisations that support them have joined together over the years. I do not dispute that there may be some intricacies in that, but it is extraordinary that one of our greatest financial institutions cannot resolve these matters even though they have been brought to its attention over many months. I accept that there may be difficulties, but they should not require so much time to resolve; and still we have been given no sign of when they might be resolved. That is extraordinary.

Mr. Leigh: Interestingly, the hon. Gentleman said that he had been given some intimation of the one-off payments. He rightly added that he could not share that information with the House. Much has been made of the fact that negotiations are continuing. However, it is not clear why they should be so complex. The Treasury has relaxed its rules on augmenting low pension schemes and presumably it would save money if people could be removed from social security. Could the hon. Gentleman put pressure on his Treasury colleagues to speed matters up; and could he ask why there has so far been no answer?

Mr. Cousins: The hon. Gentleman makes a fair point. It is extraordinary that we have had no information on what the sums might be. Such information would

illuminate discussions with the Inland Revenue. Evidence from correspondence shows that the Revenue wishes to resolve this matter.

From the Government's standpoint, this is an absurd situation. TSB pensioners are receiving income support and other state benefits, whereas, if this deal were struck, they could be receiving pensions from the pension fund to which they contributed earlier in their working lives, and the Department of Social Security would not have to meet their expenses.

Of course, the Government will not stand in the way of a deal, and there are clear signs that the Inland Revenue is willing to co-operate. The reference to the Inland Revenue is, frankly, an obfuscation. Even if there were continuing administrative difficulties with the Inland Revenue which might not have been resolved, I do not understand why an intimation could not have been given to the pensioners who were the likely recipients. They would then be able to make representations, if they so chose, through their Members of Parliament and to the Inland Revenue.

Mr. Brooke: The hon. Gentleman picked me up on the use of the word "shareholder." If the dilemma for the bank is whether ex-gratia payments should be made from shareholders' funds or from the pension fund, which, in turn, is affected by the Inland Revenue's reaction, it seems reasonable for the bank to wait and see what the Inland Revenue's view is. The pensioners might be a great deal better off if the money came from the pension fund.

Mr. Cousins: The entirely theoretical point that the right hon. Gentleman makes cannot be resolved until actual figures are known by actual people, who can then arrive at a decision, by themselves or with their advisers, about the proper course of action. The House is entitled to argue that the figures should have been known. On Second Reading, the House was told that they would be known very shortly. We now find, three months later, that there are still no figures.

I am looking at the clock, as I do not want to test the patience of our new regime in the Whips Office unduly. I shall therefore refer quickly to the matter of the deferred pensioner trustee. That issue has been dealt with extensively in the debate, including in my interventions and those of my hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley, Central (Mr. Illsley). Plainly, we are not satisfied, as the matter could not have been dealt with in good faith. We accept that it would have been a management pensioner trustee: that would have been the form. None the less, it would have been possible to achieve, even within that form, far greater progress towards the selection of an individual, on the basis of consensus, who would have been satisfactory to all the interests concerned. That would have met the needs of Lloyds TSB perfectly properly, because it would have contributed one of its management trustee places. I do not deny the necessity to satisfy Lloyds TSB on that point.

The hon. Member for Arundel and South Downs referred to the assurances given. I do not seek to burden him with an obligation to deliver on those assurances, but it is extraordinary that further progress cannot be made.

To whom do these pension funds belong? That is the fundamental point. How can we protect the interests of pensioners with preserved rights who may have been part-time employees for only part of their working lives? Such people will become increasingly common in the pension fund discussions of the future.

Lloyds TSB, which is a great financial institution, may be thoroughly irritated by the fact that it has to go through a parliamentary procedure during which it is criticised for the delays—I am sure that it feels a certain loss of dignity—but the House is entitled to say that these are important principles, and that before we pass this legislation we should be entirely satisfied. If we cannot be completely sure that everything has been done and dusted, we should be sure that it is clearly on course to be done and dusted. Sad to say, that is not the position tonight.

8.14 pm

Dr. Vincent Cable (Twickenham): I shall just say a few words, because many of the key points have already been made, particularly in the speech of the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, Central (Mr. Cousins) and in some of the exchanges. I spoke against the Bill on Second Reading, and for a while acted as a block on it. I have been briefed and counter-briefed by the two parties, and, like many hon. Members, I have sometimes found it difficult to judge what is fair and reasonable in the progress that has been made.

I have some residual concerns, which have been increased by the fact that the public's interest in this matter—especially my constituents' interest—grows as the delay continues. Until Second Reading, I had received no representations from constituents: I was passing on thoughts from colleagues' constituents. However, within the past 10 days, two difficult cases have shown the importance of the delay that the House has achieved.

The issues have already been dealt with very well, but a few points have not been made. On low-income pensioners, the hon. Member for Barnsley, Central (Mr. Illsley) summarised the state of discussions with the Inland Revenue. It is not clear why, in other cases, such as that of British Coal staff, it was possible to achieve considerable enhancements of benefits for low-income pensioners with the full support and co-operation of the Inland Revenue.

Mr. Illsley: The hon. Gentleman referred to the enhancements of benefits under the British Coal superannuation scheme. They were within the rules of the scheme. The Government received a half share of the surplus of that scheme because, at that time, they owned the surplus. They were the employer, having taken over from British Coal after privatisation. Those enhancements to pensions were made under the rules of the scheme.

Dr. Cable: I thank the hon. Gentleman for that clarification. One category is particularly disadvantaged by the current arrangements and needs some attention. We are talking not only about low-income pensioners but about older pensioners, particularly people who retired before 1972, which was the crucial date. Some of those people apparently have no pension whatever. A significant number of them need particular attention, and I should be grateful if the hon. Member for Barnsley, Central clarified that point when he replies to the debate.

Mr. Flight: This is a much bigger issue than merely Lloyds TSB. It was only in 1973 that the law changed

[Mr. Flight]

to require the preservation of pension rights. Most company pension schemes and individuals employed by government in its various forms who left before pensionable age suffer from this problem. The question is whether the big issue of preserved rights pre-1973, which applies to all pension schemes and is separate from the more particular issues, can and should be addressed.

Dr. Cable: Surely the bank had the option of dealing with this issue generously—and had the surplus to do so.

Mr. Cousins: It is perfectly true that the law changed in 1972, and some companies have addressed the problems. Lloyds TSB, with a pension fund surplus of many hundreds of millions of pounds and a pension contribution holiday of 20 years, has elected not to do so.

Dr. Cable: That is precisely the point.

Secondly, there are the anomalies. The bank argues that it had a limited number of anomalies, and that it is grinding through them and taking them seriously. There is a circularity in the argument. The banks ask, "If there is such a big problem, why aren't there more anomalies?" The trouble is that many of the people who are on the threshold of difficulty do not know whether they are the subject of an anomaly. That is why there is a search for clarity and a need for guidelines. Unless there are guidelines, many of the anomalies will not surface because people are not conscious of them. Although I accept what the right hon. Member for Cities of London and Westminster (Mr. Brooke) said about the inherent difficulties of producing guidelines and about the long and complex history involved, if we are to get to the bottom of the matter the bank must be a little more forthcoming.

A third point, which we have debated across the Chamber, is the deferred pensioner representative. The issue is no longer the fear that the bank may put up a stooge, but that it may put up someone who, although he may act independently, has been nominated and can therefore be removed if he asks awkward questions. Several hon. Members have made that point. The election process, although more cumbersome, is not only more democratic but would help to lance the boil and deal with the bitterness that lies, at least in part, behind the argument.

My final point relates to what the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, Central said—it is partly an issue of principle and partly a point of law—about members of the fund having an interest in the surplus and how that interest is to be guaranteed. I understand that legal judgments have already been made which define the extent to which members of pension funds have an interest in the surplus, but it is difficult for pensioners to pursue that. This is not an academic point; it is a legitimate one, because the bank may make new acquisitions and changes. There are press reports, which may be false, to the effect that the bank has been circling around the Nationwide building society. If there are to be changes that will have a major impact on the pension scheme and its surplus, it is important to make the interest that members have in the fund more concrete.

As a new Member, I very much value the opportunity to exercise a limited but important power, which in this case has achieved a substantial objective by bringing the two parties closer together and advancing the cause of pensioners—although I am not fully satisfied that everything that could be done has been done. However, we have achieved something from our combined efforts.

8.22 pm

Mr. Eddie O'Hara (Knowsley, South): I shall be brief and try not to cover too much of the ground that has already been covered. I declare a sort of interest as I have been a customer of Lloyds bank for almost 40 years and I have many accounts and arrangements with it.

My concern is for my constituents who are pensioners. It has been said that the question overhanging Third Reading has provided a momentum to the resolution of certain issues. However, as my hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, Central (Mr. Cousins) pointed out, there is all the difference in the world between having assurances—no matter in how much good faith they are given—and having matters buttoned down. I am not satisfied that, if the Bill is given a Third Reading, the momentum will not cease; I am not satisfied that the assurances, commitments and concessions will come to fruition. Much hangs on the granting of Third Reading tonight.

The two issues interrelate and I do not think that I need to say more about the issue of the poor pensioners and the anomalies that must be addressed. I would prefer to be able to say that they have been addressed, rather than that they are being addressed, because that would make all the difference in the world.

The pension fund is very buoyant—£1 billion—with 20 years' contributions stretching up to about 2015. The treatment of the victims of anomalies and the poor pensioners is dependent on the future health of the fund. No one is suggesting that the group will raid the fund, but it is vulnerable to weakening and dilution through being merged with the funds of companies that are taken over by the group. There is also concern that the TSB pension fund, in particular, may be managed in the interests of the shareholders rather than the pensioners. That is why the issue that I have raised several times during the debate is crucial.

The pensioners have been assured that their interests are protected under the 1995 Pensions Act. However, if they wish to defend their interests in law, that may involve litigation that is far beyond their means, especially if it is resisted by the bank, with all the resources at its disposal. Therefore, it is crucial that their interests are protected by the trustees. They cannot be confident of that if the trustees are management appointees and current employees—who, as has been suggested by some hon. Members, might feel vulnerable. That is why the appointment of the pensioner trustee is so important.

I shall not repeat my continuing concern about the basis on which the pensioner trustee is to be appointed. I have made my views clear a number of times during this debate. I do not feel able to vote for Third Reading until all the assurances are much more buttoned down, rather than given in good faith.

8.28 pm

Mr. Edward Leigh (Gainsborough): Like other hon. Members, I come to the debate because constituents have raised the issue with me. I was chided by the hon. Member for Barnsley, Central (Mr. Illsley) for not having

taken part in the Second Reading debate. I apologise for that, but just because someone does not take part in Second Reading does not mean that he or she is not entitled to take part in the Third Reading debate—especially when constituents have raised the issue.

I come new to these matters, like many hon. Members. We are dealing with a large company, and a large and buoyant pension fund of some £1 billion. I was horrified by the appalling hard luck stories of people who had given a lifetime of service, but were receiving derisory pensions, which is why I decided to come here and try to put the company on the spot. As has been said, this is our last opportunity to do that.

It is an important issue, especially for Conservative Members, because although we believe in capitalism and in management being given adequate rewards—I do not want to follow the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, Central (Mr. Cousins) in criticising the top management because no doubt it has been instrumental in building up a successful company and fund—we also believe in the principle of morality. We believe in looking after people who are not part of the top management and who have very little power to wield, but who look to us to protect their interests. It was the appalling stories that provoked my interest in the matter.

I came here tonight with a simple question—will the hon. Member for Barnsley, Central explain the nature of the one-off payment? When he said that that was a fair question, but that difficult negotiations were continuing with the Inland Revenue, I was satisfied. I assumed that those were terribly complex matters which would delay the Treasury for some time. However, the more that I have listened to today's debate, the less I am convinced by those arguments.

The Second Reading debate was on 20 April; we are now at the end of July. I have been informed that the company went to the Inland Revenue only in June to discuss the matters. I am worried that there has been some dragging of feet, although I may be wrong about that. Perhaps the hon. Member for Barnsley, Central can reassure me that that has not happened, and that the company immediately started discussions once the commitments were given in the Second Reading debate. Why did the company even have to wait for the Second Reading debate before starting discussions? Surely the matters must have been considered long ago. Surely Parliament has been considering the Bill for the best part of a year.

Why—at this last gasp—are we still waiting for the figures? The hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, Central has informed the House that he and other hon. Members have been given some intimation of the figures. I have been told by those who briefed me on behalf of the action group that my hon. Friends the Members for Aldershot (Mr. Howarth) and for Arundel and South Downs (Mr. Flight) also have been given some intimation of them. Hon. Members on both sides of the House now tell us, "Of course we cannot share those figures with you." Why is that so? Although I realise that it would be invidious to mention individual cases—people by name, what they receive now and what they might receive in future—I can discern no clear reason why the figures should not now be shared with the House.

We are debating the Bill's Third Reading. Once the Bill is passed, we will have no more power over those matters. Why cannot the information be shared with us now?

Why have the negotiations been so complex? I am very conscious that the Paymaster General is in the Chamber and presumably will be replying to the debate. He thoroughly understands the matters that we are debating and is well-respected for that knowledge. As I said in earlier interventions, we are talking about pensioners receiving very small sums under fairly easy-to-understand schemes. We are talking not about great complexity, but about saving public money by getting people off of social security.

The British Coal point was made by the action group in its briefing for hon. Members. The hon. Member for Barnsley, Central dealt with that point, saying that the British Coal scheme was a different type of scheme and that the rules were, therefore, not so complex. However, surely there must have been many other schemes that are similar to the one that we are debating now. Surely similar negotiations have been held in which it has been fairly easy to resolve similar matters.

It is very important that, when the Minister replies to the debate, we should put him on the spot and discover who is delaying a resolution. I have been told that, when Lloyds TSB was asked whether Inland Revenue consent was the only condition precedent to an additional payment for the worst-off, it was stated that it was not, and that the Lloyds TSB representative—the deputy chief executive, Mike Fairey—was equivocal about what other issues he had in mind.

Either the company should have been able to give us the figures today, but for the fact that the negotiations were continuing, or there have been other reasons why they cannot be given to us. One of those must be right. If there are other reasons, they have not been shared with the House today, which is greatly disappointing.

I very much hope that, in the short time left in this debate, we shall hear from the Minister that the negotiations are progressing satisfactorily and that the Treasury is not in any shape or form delaying them. If the hon. Member for Barnsley, Central is allowed to reply to the debate and catches your eye to speak, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I hope that he will be able to give us some information—before we pass the Bill into law—about how those very worthy people who have given a lifetime of service can be helped by the company.

8.34 pm

Mr. John Hayes (South Holland and The Deepings): My hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough (Mr. Leigh), as ever, has been excessively modest and excessively moderate. He was really saying—I think that this needs to be said, as the context of the debate is important—that, as the Minister knows perhaps even better than my hon. Friend, unbridled and unfettered capitalism is a harlot.

The debate is really about small, ordinary people against the big battalions. The House is at its best when it articulates the needs of small, vulnerable people. What greater or more noble goal can there be for hon. Members than to articulate the needs of the most needy and the case of those who are least able to make their own case? Surely that is the most noble role to which hon. Members can aspire.

There have been unacceptable delays in the matter. I join the debate not because of a specific interest in banking or mergers, but because of a particular interest in

[Mr. John Hayes]

the needs of individuals who have approached me, as they have approached hon. Members from both sides of the House, with very painful stories. Hon. Members on both sides of the House have told us some of those individuals' very distressing stories, which—although it would be wrong to repeat them in detail—have moved many hon. Members to take a specific interest in a subject in which otherwise they might not have taken such an interest.

Some specific questions have to be asked. It is all very well to talk about the difficulties of implementing ex gratia payments—I respect the judgment and knowledge of my right hon. Friend the Member for Cities of London and Westminster (Mr. Brooke) on the matter—but some notional figures or estimates could have been given and a firm timetable could have been offered. Such information has not been forthcoming since the Second Reading debate.

The Government have a critical responsibility in the matter. I ask the Minister to give three specific assurances.

Mr. Illsley: The hon. Gentleman and other Opposition Members might be under a misapprehension about the Government's role in the Bill's passage. The Government play no role and have no locus in private Bills. It is, therefore, unlikely that the Minister will respond to the issues that the hon. Gentlemen are raising.

Mr. Hayes: It would have been helpful if the hon. Gentleman had waited for me to articulate the specific points before he stated the Government's responsibilities. Ministers do have a responsibility to give us a view on the more general issues aired by the specific matter dealt with in the Bill: ownership of pension funds.

Mr. Illsley *rose—*

Mr. Hayes: I shall not give way again, because I want to speak only briefly. It would be surprising if the Minister did not deal in a reply with this general matter, which has been mentioned by so many hon. Members speaking in the debate.

Who is responsible for the delay? We have heard about protracted negotiations with the Revenue, but why were those negotiations so protracted? As my hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough said, one might have thought that the negotiations should be relatively straightforward for some of the individuals involved. We certainly deserve more than the brush-off of claiming that there are private matters upon which the Government should not take a view.

We have to receive from the Minister at least some commentary and observations. I am not suggesting that the matters are directly within his competence, but I certainly presume that he will want to make known his and the Government's views on them. If he does not do so, it will not bode well for the Government's reputation among the many pensioners who are very appropriately and reasonably seeking redress and answers to queries.

I come to the debate in that spirit, and hope that the assurances that various hon. Members have given will come to fruition. I hope also that we will use this matter as an opportunity to explore the wider and broader issues. I hope that the matter throws some light on those issues, and that the problems will not be repeated in similar situations.

8.38 pm

Mr. Desmond Swayne (New Forest, West): I come to the debate late. I must confess that my eye has not been on this ball over the past few months and that my mind has been exercised by other issues. However, I have been alerted to the problem by constituents in recent weeks. As a consequence, I have been in correspondence with Lloyds TSB and had conversations with colleagues on the issue. I have found this evening's proceedings enlightening.

However, I am still in the dark on a fundamental question. I hope that the hon. Member for Barnsley, Central (Mr. Illsley) and those on the Front Benches may cast some light on it. What great injustice is to be avoided by giving the Bill a Third Reading and what great public good is to be lost—what opportunity is to be missed—if the Bill is denied a Third Reading?

Mr. Illsley: The issues that we have discussed on pension enhancement and anomalies will not be addressed. If the Bill is not passed, what incentive is there for Lloyds TSB to address those issues again?

Mr. Swayne: I am thoroughly mindful of those issues. I want an explanation of that and of what is to be achieved by the Bill. I am in the dark about the primary purpose of the Bill. I should like that to be explored in the winding-up speeches.

8.40 pm

Sir Geoffrey Johnson Smith (Wealden): I do not want to go over the ground that has already been covered expertly by hon. Members on both sides. I do not have the deep knowledge of some on the problem. I have been alerted by a distinguished constituent who was a public servant for many years and, on his retirement, became an employee of Hill Samuel. He has written to draw my attention to his case and that of a woman who served Hill Samuel in a more humble capacity for more than 20 years.

While serving with Hill Samuel, the gentleman paid the maximum allowable amount of additional voluntary contributions. When he retired, he was advised that those AVCs should be used to ensure that his pension was index-linked. As his Hill Samuel pension has been upgraded to meet the cost of living increases under the terms of the scheme, it has not been necessary for the trustees to draw on his accumulated AVCs. He considers that he was wrongly advised when he retired at the end of 1991 and requests that the mistake be rectified. It seems straightforward to request that the AVCs should be used to increase his pension, as intended.

My constituent understands that those who retired from Hill Samuel received enhancements to pensions. He has written more than once to find out the basis on which the enhancements were made and why he was not included. That is a legitimate question. Like many who have spoken in the debate, he does not know the reason for the delay.

My constituent's secretary worked at Hill Samuel for 20 years until she was made redundant in 1992. She received a lump sum, but no pension, because she had not reached the age of 50. I do not have the figure of the lump

sum, but my distinguished constituent believes that it was not generous, given her long and faithful service. He wants to know why the initial figure that was quoted to her orally was later reduced for no apparent reason. The lady in question has been unable to get a satisfactory answer.

Those two cases—one involving a gentleman who received a pension from his previous service and then another one for which he paid AVCs; the other involving a lady who was employed in a more humble capacity—show that something has gone wrong with the company's pensions.

8.43 pm

Mr. Peter Brooke (Cities of London and Westminster): I declared my interests on Second Reading. I shall not declare them again. We agreed on Second Reading that the Bill did not have specific relevance to pensions, although we were allowed to discuss the issue. The concession letter of 20 April to my hon. Friends the Members for Aldershot (Mr. Howarth) and for Arundel and South Downs (Mr. Flight), to which frequent reference has been made, was an imaginative lubrication to the Bill's passage, but it did not speak to the tone and text of the Bill.

I should like to add a personal note to the comments of the hon. Member for Twickenham (Dr. Cable). He and I blocked Third Reading initially with a cry of, "Object." In that respect, we have played some part in bringing this evening's proceedings about.

I would have dwelt on the issues raised by the hon. Member for East Antrim (Mr. Beggs) had he still been here. I have taken the trouble to verify the actuality in the case of the part-time former employees of TSB in Northern Ireland, and satisfied myself that the company has behaved properly. I shall not detain the House on that.

We are addressing three issues, relating to those on low incomes, those with anomalies and the deferred pensioner trustee. I shall dwell on each of those briefly.

Like many great companies, Lloyds TSB has a team, consisting mostly of former employees of the company, who go round visiting pensioners to verify that their conditions are satisfactory. The team reports back on the conditions of those pensioners. Before the Hill Samuel action group was created, Lloyds TSB visited the Inland Revenue to verify whether there were ways in which it could augment those pensions, provided that that augmentation would not be treated simply as a substitute for social security payments. which would be reduced pari passu with the extra pension. The Inland Revenue politely showed the Lloyds TSB team the door, and said that no action could be taken.

The visit of Lloyds TSB to the Inland Revenue in June, which was brought forward, was a response to the commitment to conduct a full review of all those on low incomes. Lloyds TSB said that that would take six months. We were told on Second Reading how long the review would be. With the debate taking place on 20 April, it would go through to 20 October. The Inland Revenue said that there was no point in discussing the issues unless Lloyds TSB came back with its proposals. The Revenue said that it could not discuss anything without specific proposals to consider.

We may feel that fate is being unfair and the Inland Revenue is being unimaginative, but Lloyds TSB is doing its best to deliver in line with the Inland Revenue's request. That request goes back to the issue of ensuring that what is given by Lloyds TSB is not taken away by the Treasury to return to the Department of Social Security.

I may be the only Member speaking tonight who does not know the figure that Lloyds TSB has in mind, so there is no need for anyone to intervene on me to ask what the figure is. I see the hon. Member for Barnsley, Central (Mr. Illsley) saying that he is in the same position.

I should tell those who are concerned that the process should be accelerated that, when Lloyds TSB is in a position to know the outcome of its review, it will in all courtesy want to discuss that with the unions that represent 58,000 people before going public on it, so that the issue is agreed. The hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, Central (Mr. Cousins) said that people have to know what they might be given before they can make up their minds, but that is not the issue. The issue is what the Inland Revenue rules will be. Until Lloyds TSB knows the Inland Revenue rules, it cannot come forward with a proposition, because it does not know from which pocket of its coffers it would be paying.

As for the anomalies, there has been some criticism about the length of time it is taking to produce the guidelines, although some charity has been exercised in recognising the complexity of the matters concerned. One problem is exactly the same as exists in the context of pensions mis-selling: when pensions were originally granted or arranged, the law of the land did not require the holders of pension funds to keep much of the information that is now required. An enormous amount of archival work therefore needs to be done to examine what circumstances applied to particular individuals at the time. That affects the time it takes to produce guidelines.

My best understanding of the timetable for the issuing of the guidelines marches with that of my hon. Friend the Member for Arundel and South Downs—that, although they are now before the lawyers, they still have to be run in front of the chairman of the pension fund. We are talking about weeks, and I am confident that, although 30 September is the deadline by which people should raise their anomalies, if Lloyds TSB fails to produce the guidelines before the middle of August so as to allow a further six weeks for anomalies to be brought forward, we can expect the company to be flexible. However, I have no direct authority for saying that.

We are all saying that Lloyds TSB is being impatient in terms of the deadlines that it is setting, but it is worth reminding the House that the Hill Samuel action group first approached the bank in November, but did not produce details of a single anomaly before Second Reading. On the Friday—17 April—it sent through the mail a list consisting of a couple of hypothetical anomalies that Lloyds TSB might wish to consider, but those did not reach the company until after Second Reading.

It therefore cannot be said that, in the period leading up to the proceedings on the Bill, the action group was like Blücher rushing towards the field of Waterloo. By 15 May, two anomalies had been submitted; by 25 June, 80 had been supplied; and I understand that, by yesterday, there were 200. The number is accelerating, and I have no doubt that Lloyds TSB will have a lot to look at by the end of September.

The Hill Samuel action group said that it had written to its members on 11 May because Lloyds TSB would not take action itself. However, to be fair to Lloyds TSB,

[Mr. Peter Brooke]

in the concession letter, with reference to what was agreed with my hon. Friends the Members for Arundel and South Downs and for Aldershot, it said:

"We agreed that the HSAG"—

that is, the Hill Samuel action group—

"would be asked to write to its members requesting those who consider there to have been anomalies in their treatment, to write to a designated person at Lloyds TSB setting out full details of their concerns."

So the basis of the concession letter was reasonably straightforward.

Lloyds TSB had a lot to do in sending circulars to everybody, and by 15 May it was

"finalising our communications programme to 180,000 members of the pension schemes within the Lloyds TSB Group".

I am going over ground that the hon. Member for Barnsley, Central sketched. Over the next month or so, the bank said, it would

"be communicating with pensioners through the Group pensioner magazine *Stable Companion*, to members of staff through the staff magazine *Frontrunner*, and to deferred pensioners with their annual statements which are due to be dispatched shortly."

I find that quite a comprehensive programme to have mounted in 60 days.

Mr. Cousins: I should like to be clear in my mind what the right hon. Gentleman is saying. I accept that again, as on 20 April, assurances are being given by Conservative Members, no doubt in perfectly good faith—but not on behalf of Lloyds TSB itself. Is the right hon. Gentleman telling us that Lloyds TSB will circulate all its pensioners, produce the guidelines by the middle of August, and, if the guidelines are not produced by that time, the 30 September date will be suspended—and that, in any event, if people come to light after 30 September, their cases will be individually dealt with in good faith?

Mr. Brooke: As always happens with such a Bill, the only person who can give an assurance on behalf of the promoters of the Bill is the hon. Member who is handling it. However, I, like various other hon. Members in the Chamber tonight, including the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, Central, who has been assiduous in his attention to the issue, have been involved in quite a lot of hard work on behalf of people who have written to us—a fair number have written to me—and in terms of conversations with the bank.

In the end, we have to make our best judgment of what will occur. In the specific terms of the question that the hon. Gentleman has asked me, the sending of circulars has already occurred; as I said, it was foreseen on 15 May. I also said that my own reading was that, if the guidelines were delayed beyond the middle of August, the 30 September deadline would slip.

Mr. Illsley: On behalf of the promoters, I can give an assurance in the terms outlined by my hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, Central.

Mr. Brooke: I am extremely grateful to the hon. Gentleman for that intervention. Interventions are not always those that one would have sought, but the hon. Gentleman's intervention on this occasion was almost divine.

I shall now deal briefly with the deferred pensioner trustee. I received the first letter on this subject on 23 March from a constituent of mine who was once a household name in corporate finance. He wrote me a long and reasoned letter, including the words:

"Our primary concerns are (1) to (4)",

after which he listed four concerns. He was writing on behalf of the action group, and, at that time, his primary concerns did not include a deferred pensioner trustee.

Therefore, the conversation that my hon. Friend the Member for Arundel and South Downs had with Lloyds TSB on the day of Second Reading, which produced a suggestion by Lloyds TSB that it would consider the appointment of a deferred pensioner trustee, was somewhat incidental. It was part of the lubrication that I have mentioned, but it was not a central part of the Hill Samuel action group's original proposals.

I finish with a further quotation from my constituent, who wrote to me on 5 May:

"It is a very good scheme, and well run: but inevitably with the benefit of hindsight, some people are not properly covered—and they are often the ones who don't like to complain."

That, and our concern about such people, is exactly the issue with which many hon. Members have been engaged in our debates.

As I said earlier, with the hon. Member for Twickenham, I played a fulcrum role. Indeed, I took longer to remove my block than he did his. I am now satisfied that the company will honour its obligations. For what it is worth, despite my role in the blocking motion, I am, as I said on Second Reading, the Member of Parliament for the constituency in which the headquarters of the institution are situated. In that capacity, I shall myself be concerned that the commitments be met, and I would be astonished—not least in view of the amount of coverage that the events have had over the two debates—if a bank of such a standing did not meet those commitments in a manner of which all of us who have taken part in the debates can be proud.

8.58 pm

Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (Cotswold): I did not intend to speak in the debate, but I rise because a number of anomalies need to be clarified. A number of my constituents—concerned pensioners of the Hill Samuel group—wrote to me, so I added my name to the blocking motion. I did my duty by my constituents: I met Mr. Fairey, the deputy chief executive of the Lloyds TSB group, to seek a number of assurances.

The law on pensions—this has not been mentioned tonight—is one of the most complicated areas of the financial services industry. The Pensions Law Review Committee, whose findings eventually led to the Pensions Act 1995, examined in huge detail the ownership of surpluses in pension funds. Having heard and reviewed a huge amount of complicated evidence, Professor Goode, the chairman of the committee, concluded that a pension fund surplus belonged exclusively neither to the pensioners nor to the employers who had contributed to the fund—it belonged to them both jointly. Trustee deeds show what the trustees are allowed to do in each individual pension scheme.

Mention has been made of the pre-1975 pensioners who were in schemes for fewer than five years and so did not qualify for a pension. The law was changed in 1975 by the then Government to entitle those who had served for fewer than five years to a pension, but that did not apply retrospectively. Indeed, I believe that it would have been improper for the trustees to apply that decision retrospectively; if they had, the matter could have been subject to judicial review.

Ever since I have been a Member of Parliament, I have had to deal with cases in which constituents have asked me, after pension law has changed, to request the Government to apply the new law to the state pension scheme retrospectively; in each case, the Government—of whatever colour—have refused to do so.

Interestingly, the Hill Samuel pensioners did not complain when their pensions were taken over by the TSB group, as the reserves of the TSB pension scheme were substantially larger than those of the Hill Samuel scheme. Only now that the TSB pension scheme is being taken over by Lloyds, whose pension scheme has fewer reserves, have the complaints begun to emerge. However, as far as I am aware, those complaints are being made by only 200 or so members of the Hill Samuel action group out of the tens of thousands in the combined TSB and Lloyds scheme. Although the case of even one pensioner who is in any way deprived should be considered, the trustees have a duty to act in the interests of all their pensioners.

The matter of low-income pensioners is far from simple. Someone who has served a similar length of service on a similar salary may seem to be entitled to a similar pension, but that person may have taken a lump sum on retirement, which would considerably affect the payable pension. Alternatively, someone may have retired at an earlier age than someone else who had served a similar length of service; again, that would affect the pension that was eventually payable.

I have investigated this complicated matter at some considerable length—I have corresponded with my constituents and with Mr. Fairey—and I believe that a reasonable balance must be struck between the interests of those pensioners who may be affected and the interests of the pensioners as a whole and of the shareholders. I do not think that the Bill will adversely affect any pensioner over and above what they might have expected in any case under the law of the land.

I have asked Mr. Fairey, the deputy chief executive of the Lloyds TSB group, to examine in particular the case of my constituent Mr. Jones-Bateman, who was a regional director of the Hill Samuel group. Mr. Fairey has full details of the case, and he has undertaken to consider it sympathetically and in detail—I have no doubt that he will keep his word. On the basis of my investigations, I am satisfied that a fair balance has been struck between all the different pensioner groups that are affected by the merger, so I shall not vote against the Bill.

9.3 pm

Mr. Illsley: With the leave of the House, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I shall respond briefly to an interesting debate. As on Second Reading, there have been some remarkable contributions, and we have heard some excellent tours de force on pensions law and pensions issues. They did not much relate to what is in the Bill, but they were interesting all the same.

I am grateful to the right hon. Member for Cities of London and Westminster (Mr. Brooke) and the hon. Members for Arundel and South Downs (Mr. Flight) and for Cotswold (Mr. Clifton-Brown) who originally blocked the Bill, but have withdrawn their blocking motions and favour progress of the Bill. As the hon. Member for Cotswold said, pensions law has been dealt with by the Goode committee, which dwelt at length on the ownership of surpluses. The hon. Member for South Holland and The Deepings (Mr. Hayes) made the same point. It is a complicated area, but it is not within the remit of the Bill. Perhaps there should be a debate in future, but, the matter having been so recently addressed by the Goode committee, it may be some time before pensions law is further amended.

Let me tell the hon. Member for New Forest, West (Mr. Swayne) that the Bill's purpose is to facilitate the merger that took place two or three years ago between Lloyds and the TSB. All the pensions issues that we have discussed fall outside the Bill. There are anomalies, and there are lower-paid pensioners, but every member of the scheme is being paid his or her entitlement. The bank has given repeated assurances that those issues will be addressed.

My hon. Friends the Members for Newcastle upon Tyne, Central (Mr. Cousins) and for Knowsley, South (Mr. O'Hara) have asked why it is taking so long for the Inland Revenue and Lloyds to reach agreement, but, as the hon. Member for Cotswold said, there are many different reasons why pensioners have low entitlements. Under the TSB scheme, pensioners were obliged to take 50 per cent. of their pensions as a lump sum. That reduced on-going payments, which meant that those people were lower-paid.

The pre-1975 pensioners would have had contributions returned if they had been members for not longer than five years. That is another area in which there will be no payment, and it has come to light only during our debate. Every pension depends on length of service in the scheme, and final salary.

Mr. Swayne: Setting aside the anomalies, which I accept are not the subject matter of the Bill, can the hon. Gentleman say what the consequences would be for the merger if the Bill were lost tonight?

Mr. Illsley: Lloyds and TSB would have to find a different way to do business in future. The reason for the Bill, as with any bank Bill, is to facilitate the merger without the bank's having to take into account the wishes and views of every account holder and customer, which would be impossible, as there are several million of them. It would be an extremely heavy burden on the banks if they were asked to contact every member for permission for the merger.

I have answered the point made by the hon. Member for Gainsborough (Mr. Leigh) about different categories of people whose pensionable service will have left them with a low-paying pension. Lloyds has addressed that issue. I am not sure whether the hon. Gentleman was in the Chamber when I assured the right hon. Member for Cities of London and Westminster that guidelines will be produced shortly. I hope that the 30 September deadline will be flexible, and that the issues will be addressed.

[Mr. Illsley]

I take on board the points made by the hon. Member for Twickenham (Dr. Cable) who made a comparison with the coal industry's pensions schemes, but that issue relates to the Goode committee and pensions law, and it falls slightly outside the remit of the Bill.

After a longer debate than I had expected, and after considerable debate on Second Reading, I hope that hon. Members will give the Bill a fair wind, and a Third Reading, without the need for a Division.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill read the Third time, and passed.

National Minimum Wage Bill

Lords amendments again considered.

Clause 2

DETERMINATION OF HOURLY RATE OF REMUNERATION

Lords amendment: No. 2, in page 2, line 11, leave out ("and times at which,") and insert

("times at which, or the time for which,").

9.8 pm

Mr. Ian McCartney: I beg to move, That this House does agree with the Lords in the said amendment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael J. Martin): With this, it will be convenient to discuss Lords amendments Nos. 3 and 4.

Mr. McCartney: The amendments deal with a specific technicality, which became apparent following the Low Pay Commission's recommendations and initial work on drafting the regulations. The general effect of the three amendments is to extend slightly the flexibility of the power to calculate the rate. We want to be absolutely confident that the clause provides us with the power that we need to deliver through the regulations what the Low Pay Commission has recommended regarding the treatment of home workers who are paid by the piece.

Let me remind the House how clause 2 works. Hon. Members should note that it deals with the determination of the hourly rate of remuneration. The clause was drafted flexibly to enable us to reflect, as far as could be envisaged, whatever the Low Pay Commission might recommend in its report regarding the calculation of the hourly rate for national minimum wage purposes. Basically, it is a technical clause, but one which is important to the flexible operation of the Bill. It provides the flexibility for a wide range of possible permutations in determining what elements of pay can be included or excluded—for example, overtime, bonuses, benefits and holiday pay. It enables a wide range of working situations to be taken into account, including piece work, payment of standard wages at a regular rate and payments on commission or at different rates over different periods.

Since receiving the report, we have been considering the practicalities of putting into effect the Low Pay Commission's recommendations. In particular, we have been considering those workers who work away from the office and are paid by output, rather than time worked. For that particular case, it has become apparent that the clause may not be quite flexible enough. In particular, the commission's recommendations suggest that piece workers should be entitled to the hourly minimum wage for every hour worked regardless of the piece rate, and that employers of home workers should be able to demonstrate that piece rates have been evaluated to confirm compliance. The fairest and least bureaucratic way to do that is to ensure that there can be agreement between worker and employer about the maximum hours to be worked and the output expected. We need to ensure we have the vires to do that under clause 2. Therefore, we are proposing three amendments to the clause, the third of which is purely consequential.

Lords amendment No. 2 deals with subsection (3), which relates to how working time is to be treated for minimum wage purposes. The amendment ensures that the regulations can prescribe those times for which a worker can be treated as working. The amendment is a technical rewording to ensure that we have the vires to prescribe in regulations that, where piece workers work at home with no agreed hours, the worker and employer may together agree the maximum hours that are to be worked and claimed.

Lords amendment No. 3 deals with the same subsection and makes explicit the power to prescribe that an agreement may be reached regarding the maximum or minimum time that a person shall be treated as working. As with Lords amendment No. 2, that change is necessary in the case of the piece worker working at home with no present limit on the hours to be worked. In the interests of legal certainty, it ensures that we have sufficient flexibility to implement the Low Pay Commission's recommendations regarding piece workers and home workers through the regulations.

The clause was drafted flexibly, but needs to be supplemented by means of those technical amendments to ensure the practical implementation of the LPC's recommendations on piece workers working from home. I ask the House to support the amendments.

Mr. Boswell: I am grateful to the Minister for tabling the amendments and explaining them. Indeed, his explanation was consistent with—or almost precisely in the same terms as—that of his noble Friend and former colleague in another place. It is almost six months to the day since the Minister of State—who we are glad is still around to conclude these proceedings—my colleagues and I locked horns in a couple of momentous all-night sessions in detailed consideration of the Bill. The need for detailed consideration remains and it is right that we should study some of the amendments and not merely pass them on the nod. I do not want to agitate the hon. Gentleman unduly by suggesting that it will be necessary to continue our deliberations all night, although it is fair to say for the record—particularly as I suspect that my colleague from the Whips Office would want me to be shown to be earning my keep—that 32 of the 36 amendments under consideration emanate from the Government.

The whole message of the Bill has been that, although the concepts have been relatively simply, the devil is inevitably in the detail and it is extremely important, in the interests of employers and their employees and of the Government and Ministers, that they get it as right as is humanly possible.

That brings me to consideration of the amendments. I shall not advise my hon. Friends to object to them, unless a new point arises beyond what the Minister has said. First, I am slightly concerned in one respect about what the Minister said and what his noble Friend said in another place. The Minister emphasised that the amendments provide greater flexibility. That is entirely consistent with the arguments for flexibility that my hon. Friends and I were advancing throughout the Committee proceedings. I do not understand from the Minister's explanation in which direction the flexibility will operate. He said in response to the Low Pay Commission that piece workers should be entitled to the hourly minimum wage for every hour worked, regardless of the piece rate, and that employers of home workers should be able to demonstrate that piece rates had been evaluated to confirm compliance. He said that that would have to be achieved by agreement between employers and piece workers.

Agreement might be reached, but what would happen if the agreement did not coincide with the facts? For example, piece workers might work all the hours that they claimed to have worked but not produce the number of pieces that they agreed to produce. Conversely, piece workers might turn out more pieces than had been agreed but not receive greater remuneration. There are potential problems in those cases.

I take it that the Minister is saying that, in the interests of legal knock for knock, there should be a functional arrangement and the two parties should come to an agreement. I do not object to that in principle, although, given the points that the Minister made so vigorously in response to my right hon. Friend the Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood) about the lot of piece workers—I share some of the Minister's concern for their position—it is not always clear that such an agreement would be made on all fours between equal parties. I presume that the amendments concern a privilege that the Minister will want to monitor carefully.

My second concern for the House is that the proposal for a more flexible agreement needs to be considered alongside the provisions for what might loosely be termed the normal cases of employers and employees who are paid by the hour, week or month. The Low Pay Commission, whose report we did not have in our deliberations in Committee, considered all those points carefully. It came to a conclusion on the pay reference period that the Minister said is highly technical, but which exercised us because of the potential for error. The commission's recommendation is that

"the averaging period for the National Minimum Wage should be the normal pay period, as agreed between worker and employer"—

so the element of agreement is included—

"up to a maximum of one calendar month. We believe this is long enough to capture most fluctuations in earnings."

The report goes on to say that there could be a case for low-paid workers who are covered by annualised hours arrangements. For the sake of completeness, I remind the House of the point that I made about my employee who works on my farm. He is salaried and receives an even rate whether he works for long hours during harvest or for shorter periods in the middle of winter. The commission's recommendation for a one-month maximum could lead to average hourly pay for employees working the longer hours pattern falling below the national minimum wage. The commission recognises that

"in such circumstances employers and workers may need to . . . restructure their pay systems."

That precisely encapsulates the concern which we expressed in Committee that, for all the efforts to reproduce the flexibility and complexity of economic arrangements and systems for the payment of remuneration in this country, inevitably, the introduction of the national minimum wage would create a need for some systems to be changed, even if they were the most sensible form of payment for the parties concerned.

In concluding my remarks on the clutch of amendments before us, I tell the Minister that I may not need to intervene on all the groups of amendments, but I wish to raise several points on later groups.

[Mr. Boswell]

We understand that home workers are an especially sensitive group. We understand that piece workers—who are not necessarily exactly the same as home workers but have some similarities—will need to be given some flexibility in working out their pay in relation to their output and the number of hours worked, and thereby in working out whether the employer or the employment arrangement complies with the national minimum wage. However, that requirement must not provide an inside track, giving those workers a privileged flexibility that is not available to other, perfectly reasonable, employers and employees who wish to make arrangements that are consistent with the spirit of the Bill.

In a sense, one vital card is still unplayed; until the Bill becomes an Act and for a time afterwards, the Minister will be unable to give us draft regulations to explain how matters will be dealt with in the normal case. Only then shall we get flesh on the bones of other situations and know whether the provisions are sensible and flexible enough.

It is right to put down those markers now. Obviously, they have nothing to do with the principle of the Bill, but they are designed to ensure that it operates fairly. I would welcome the Minister's response.

Mr. Chidgey: I am sure that the Minister would agree that the amendments—which I am sure are eminently sensible—try, to a degree, to clarify what we mean by "working time". I therefore ask him to clarify a specific point.

Shortly, legislation implementing the working time directive will come before the House. I should like the Minister, if he can, to clarify whether subsequent legislation on the working time directive will use the definition of "working time" used in the Bill, or whether we may have two definitions in two pieces of legislation.

Mr. Ian McCartney: I thank the hon. Member for Daventry (Mr. Boswell) for his kind remarks. I thank him also because I understand that he petitioned the Prime Minister to ask for me to remain in this job—as did the Confederation of British Industry, the Institute of Directors and the Federation of Small Businesses. They are all behind me. The hon. Gentleman's personal warmth and appreciation of my being here is taken in the spirit in which it was intended. The hon. Gentleman and I have spent a considerable part of the last year of our lives dealing with these issues. In Committee and on the Floor of the House—despite our sometimes rumbustious debates—I have welcomed the fact that he has often been more than fair in the way in which he has drawn attention to issues. The questions that he asked tonight were well made and well intended.

The agreement would concern the hours worked and to be claimed; it would not be about the rate, because the rate will be effected in regulations. We are trying to ensure that there is some capacity for the employer, at the outset of the work to be carried out, to have an agreement with the worker that gives some clarity about the hours and the nature of the work to be carried out within a time scale. That is important because, if we are to give—as we shall do—the right to be paid the minimum wage for all hours worked, it is important that the employer does not have an open-ended arrangement by which someone gets paid for 13 hours' work when there is only two hours' work to be done.

It is important that flexibility works in two ways. There must be good practice, which is not always the case with piece workers or home workers. Employers may turn up and say, "Here is the work to be done; we will come back in the morning and, if it is not completed, we may or may not pay you the following rate." The legislation will ensure good practice and it will mean that the employer must reach an agreement with the employee at the outset about the nature of the work and the hours of work. That will protect the employer from a totally open-ended commitment and from having to pay for work that was not done.

It will also create some clarity for the employee, who will have an absolute guarantee of receiving at least the national minimum wage. It may mean a different calculation at the end of the reference period. For example, if a worker is entitled to be paid £3.60 an hour and, at the end of the agreed reference period, the piece work is calculated at £3 an hour, the employer must make it up to £3.60 in order to ensure compliance with the minimum wage. It is important that the proposals before us are approved in order to introduce some certainty into the system.

The hon. Member for Daventry asked what would happen if there was disagreement about the work to be done and the duration of that work. That is a matter for dispute resolution; it is not a matter for these regulations. It is a matter of employment practice between the employer and the employee. I hope that that hon. Gentleman will accept that that is the Government's intention in that regard.

It is intended that the introduction of both the national minimum wage and the working time directive will impose minimum burdens on business and that they will be enforced effectively. They will be matched as closely as possible, but they do not always measure the same thing. Time worked for health and safety reasons is different from the calculation of time for pay purposes. There may be differences in some cases when considering hours worked for national minimum wage purposes. As far as possible, we shall ensure that the minimum wage and the directive match. However, different issues must clearly be catered for.

Mr. Chidgey: I acknowledge the Minister's answer—I have probably thrown him a bit of a googly, and I accept that he is doing his best. Does he accept that, with the forthcoming working directive and the minimum wage legislation, employers and employees could have difficulty in trying to meet different requirements for measuring working time?

Mr. McCartney: I have said clearly that we have conducted extensive consultation on the working time directive. It deals with two issues. The first is health and safety and how we can make sure that entitlements under legislation dealing with health and safety in the workplace are calculated for the purposes of ensuring compliance. The second issue relates to ensuring that people do not suffer any detriment when claiming their rights under the working time directive. There are two regimes within the directive: the first ensures that health and safety

standards are maintained or improved, and the second ensures that no employee is sacked or suffers some form of discipline for clearly exercising his or her rights under the directive.

The hon. Member for Eastleigh (Mr. Chidgey) raises a simple matter. We cannot consider health and safety matters in the same way we consider whether someone has received the proper minimum wage for the hours worked. For example, under the working time directive, employers will be required to keep records in order to ensure that night-time workers are not forced to work more than the number of hours set out over the reference period. In addition, the employer will be required to ensure that medical checks and health assessments are carried out from time to time to make sure that the employees' working hours are not detrimental to their health. We are measuring different things and the regulations will be applied differently. That is the sensible way to approach the issue.

The hon. Member for Eastleigh has not really thrown me a googly. That is rather a nice English phrase. It is not a phrase that you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, or I, would recognise from Glasgow. Other phrases would go well with it, but I shall leave them for another day. However, I get the hon. Gentleman's point. When the Bill is enacted, we will move as quickly as we can to put into the public domain the draft regulations and the consultation. I welcome the opportunity for participation that that will give Conservative Members. It is important to us, as it is to anyone in favour of the minimum wage, to ensure that the regulations work effectively and that employers realise that they are not burdensome while allowing proper compliance with the legislation.

Lords amendment agreed to.

Lords amendments Nos. 3 and 4 agreed to.

Lords amendments Nos. 5 to 7 disagreed to.

Clause 11

FAILURE OF EMPLOYER TO ALLOW ACCESS TO RECORDS

Lords amendment: No. 8, in page 8, line 36, leave out ("subsection") and insert ("subsections (8) and")

9.30 pm

Mr. Ian McCartney: I beg to move, That this House does agree with the Lords in the said amendment.

This is a technical amendment made on Third Reading in the other place to complete and improve the Bill. It came to our attention only at that late stage, for which I apologise, but such things are inevitable on occasion.

The amendment affects clause 11(1)(a), which provides a justified ground for complaint about access to records if the employer has

"failed to produce some or all of the relevant records in accordance with subsection (9) of section 10 above".

Clause 10(9) sets deadlines for the time within which records must be produced. Failure by the employer to meet the requirement therefore provides ground for complaint.

Counsel has noted that subsection (8) is also a requirement-setting provision, stipulating the place where records must be produced. However, failure to produce records at one of the places specified is not currently included in clause 11(1)(a). The reference there is only to subsection (9), not also to subsection (8). In other words, there is an omission because the Bill creates two requirements but provides a remedy against only one of them.

The amendment therefore adds a reference to clause 10(8); and I ask the House to support it.

Mr. Boswell: I read with some interest the debates in the other place on the keeping of records. In the spirit of the Minister's conciliatory remarks a moment ago, we recognise that he wishes to consult on the details and that there will be proper consultation on the record requirements themselves. We welcome that and hope that industry and, if necessary, hon. Members will participate in it.

One other point before I come to the specific amendment is a touch more critical, but we recognise the pressures under which Ministers and officials are working at this time of year. In preparing for today's debate, I noted a number of references in the other place to correspondence with my noble Friend Baroness Miller on certain technical aspects. That correspondence has not been vouchsafed to Conservative Members or to me, and I should be grateful if it were in due course.

Mr. McCartney: I offer my apologies to both the hon. Gentleman and the hon. Member for Eastleigh (Mr. Chidgey). I have always had a process of maintaining correspondence and meetings. It is an oversight, and I take responsibility for it. I shall ensure that copies of the correspondence are sent to the hon. Gentleman and that I respond to any additional item that he raises this evening to which I do not have an immediate answer.

Mr. Boswell: I readily respond with thanks to the Minister of State because he is, as ever in these matters, most generous and helpful.

We are dealing with the production of records and I have the impression that, even if the Minister does not have the style, he would rather like to join me in playing around at being an amateur lawyer. He explained the draftsman's thought process extremely eloquently. However, we should pause for a moment to ask whether there really is a failure to deliver the records at a particular place. The records must exist, unless they have been wilfully destroyed. The offence arises from the inability to deliver within a particular time the records to the worker who has requested them.

If there is a "failure of place"—the point that the tidy-minded draftsman has tried to pick up—and the records are not offered in the worker's place of work or any other reasonable place, or such place as may be agreed between the worker and the employer, the records will not have been produced at all. They exist, but they have not been made available. I do not argue that that provision should not be in the Bill, but perhaps the draftsman's first instincts were better than his second, because the important point is that the records should be practicably available to the worker within a reasonable time.

The fact that, for information, the Bill suggests a number of places where the records could be produced does not by itself create an offence because if they are not produced in one of those entirely sensible places, I doubt

[Mr. Boswell]

whether they have been produced at all. Of course, they still exist, but records are of no use to a worker who wants to see them if they are sitting in somebody's filing cabinet or have been hidden behind the mantlepiece.

This is not a matter over which we should go to the stake. My instinct may be wrong, in which case there is no need to make a fuss about the matter. However, it is at least worth pausing to think about it.

Mr. Philip Hammond (Runnymede and Weybridge): I, too, am delighted to see the Minister in his place. I awaited tonight's debate with trepidation in case he were not there because it would seem inappropriate if, after six months or so, we were to discuss the Bill without seeing his familiar face.

I find it surprising that, given the extensive work that was done in Committee, we have not discussed this point before. I heard what the Minister and my hon. Friend the Member for Daventry (Mr. Boswell) said. My hon. Friend referred to the possibility of records having been wilfully destroyed or concealed. Will the Minister assure us that, in dealing with a complaint under this clause, an employer could defend himself by pleading that the records had been inadvertently destroyed or were unavailable as a result of accidental destruction?

Mr. McCartney: I did not catch the hon. Gentleman's last question. Will he repeat it, so that I do not forget to answer it?

Mr. Hammond: I shall gladly repeat it. I should like to be reassured that, under the clause, it would be a defence that the records had been inadvertently destroyed as opposed to wilfully destroyed or concealed. My hon. Friend the Member for Daventry referred to the wilful destruction of records, but records could have been inadvertently destroyed, or destroyed by fire or some other form of misadventure.

Another point was discussed in Committee and I am disappointed that the Minister has not taken the opportunity of the Bill's consideration in another place to correct it. There is a lack of symmetry between the requirement on employers, and the need for some employees, to produce and keep records. To an extent, we are going over old ground, but this is an important point that is not in any sense intended to undermine the principles of the Bill. There will be occasions, especially in relation to piece work, on which the employer will be unable to defend himself against a claim that he has failed to pay the minimum wage unless the employee has kept appropriate records in his workplace, which may be his home.

Mr. Boswell: It is nice to have my hon. Friend back in our deliberations. Does he recall the sensitive issue of spouses who may disagree? The employer—the husband, typically—may be required to keep records, but a disaffected spouse may assert that such records have not been kept or that the hours worked in a family business were much longer than he is prepared to concede.

Mr. Hammond: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. As he knows, I have argued throughout consideration of the Bill that, whatever else may be right or wrong, it is clearly wrong to bring businesses that are effectively husband-and-wife operations within its remit. That would bring the full force of the law into the everyday relationship between a husband and wife who operate a small business together.

My specific point to the Minister is that there is no requirement for employees to keep appropriate records. What defence would an employer have if he were faced with the claim that he had failed to pay the minimum wage in respect of the number of hours worked by a piece worker in his own home when producing a certain amount of work? How would such an employer prove that the claim was not valid if he had no power to require the employee to produce records of the hours that had been worked?

Mr. Bercow: My hon. Friend is making a powerful case. Given that many self-employed people keep and provide records to the people for whom they work as a condition of their payment, does he agree that there can be no reasonable objection under the Bill to requiring them to do precisely that in future?

Mr. Hammond: My hon. Friend is precisely right. It would not be at all onerous for employees to keep simple records, where appropriate. That would not be appropriate for an employee who clocks on when he arrives at the factory, does his day's work and goes home. In such circumstances, it is appropriate that the whole burden of record keeping falls on the employer, but it was common ground in Committee that the difficult cases will arise in situations other than the conventional employment situation in which work is done in the employer's workplace.

Mr. John Hayes (South Holland and The Deepings): My hon. Friend's point is made more profound because flexible working—home work and distance work—is on the increase and likely to grow, not diminish. The traditional model of the workplace is not disappearing, but it is becoming less common.

Mr. Hammond: My hon. Friend is entirely correct. I am asking the Minister not to impose some additional and unreasonable burden on employees, but to say why he has not considered it appropriate, in suitable cases where it is relevant, to require employees to keep relevant records and to give employers the right to see those records so that they can defend themselves against claims.

Mr. Ian McCartney: I welcome the hon. Member for Runnymede and Weybridge (Mr. Hammond) to the debate. I understand that he has been promoted to the Front Bench since we debated the minimum wage in Committee, so attempting to hold me up for all those hours has worked well for him. I do not want to overexcite him by going through that process again, but I hope that he gets a further leg up the greasy pole. We are not really discussing the amendments, which are about plugging a little technical gap in the Bill. I must tell him that the Bill is clear—the employer has a duty to keep records.

The hon. Member for Daventry (Mr. Boswell) said that he and I might like to be amateur lawyers; indeed, many people may say that one of us, at least, has been a barrack-room lawyer on occasion—or even a Philadelphia

lawyer. It does not take a lawyer to get the point made by the hon. Member for Runnymede and Weybridge, and I cannot give any succour in that regard. It is a pretty weak excuse to say, "I inadvertently got drunk last night and drove the car home and smashed it up". Equally, it is a pretty weak excuse to say, "I inadvertently burnt all my records, and it is therefore impossible for me to establish whether I paid my home workers the national minimum wage". We cannot allow a coach and horses to be driven through the principle of employers' duty to maintain good records.

9.45 pm

Mr. Boswell: Even if the Minister did not climb the greasy pole, we are glad to see him in his place.

The Minister, perhaps typically, chooses the delinquent employer as his example, but is there not an equally serious problem? I refer to the employer who acts in good faith, but whose records may have been destroyed. Surely the regulations must provide for a workable distinction between the two.

Mr. McCartney: No doubt genuine accidents happen. No doubt places are burnt down in such circumstances. I am sure that Inland Revenue representatives and VAT men are tearing their hair out every week when they visit premises that may have been inadvertently burnt down, or burnt down in entirely innocent circumstances—or, occasionally, even burnt down as a result of an attack. I am sure that such one-off incidents will be seen for what they are, but we are not talking about that; we are talking about compliance with a requirement for good record-keeping, which must be an employer's defence against any unfair, unacceptable or unsubstantiated allegation of non-payment.

The worker's right of access to records, and clauses 9, 10 and 11, are very important. The amendments are not about the principle of the clauses; they are technical.

In the Bill, we decided that the burden of proof should be on the employer. That is important, especially given the inability of low-paid workers—home workers, for instance—to establish a balanced arrangement. That was a principled decision by the Government, and it has been accepted in good faith by employers during our debates on the Bill. I therefore ask the House to accept the amendments, on the basis of their technical nature.

Lords amendment agreed to.

Clause 13

APPOINTMENT OF OFFICERS

Lords amendment: No. 9, in page 10, line 2, after first ("any") insert

("Minister of the Crown or")

Mr. Ian McCartney: I beg to move, That this House does agree with the Lords in the said amendment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to discuss Lords amendments Nos. 10, 12 to 16, 32, 33 and 35.

Mr. McCartney: The amendments concern ministerial transactions relating to information obtained. They are essentially technical, and are designed to maintain the status quo in respect of the enforcement arrangements envisaged in the Bill. Their purpose is to ensure the continuation of the policy to leave open the option of appointing agricultural wages inspectors in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland to enforce the minimum wage specifically in the agriculture sector. If the amendments were not made, that option would be closed in relation to agricultural wages inspectors in Scotland.

We had considerable discussion in Committee about the interface between agricultural wages and the minimum wage, and agreement was established. We simply want to get the technicalities right.

Mr. Boswell: I want to accept the Minister's assurances, but I should like to be clear about one point. I understand that, when records are compiled for one purpose, for example for the purpose of the agricultural wages inspectorate—as the Minister will know, I am familiar with such operations—they remain the records of that inspectorate, and are available for its purpose. For the purposes of the legislation, they are, if I may produce a non-legal term, transferred to the minimum wage legislation to determine whether that has been complied with. The Minister spoke about agricultural wages legislation in Scotland. Was the case that he quoted an example or is he trying to cover the whole class with this sheaf of amendments?

Mr. McCartney: The hon. Gentleman is right about the proposals. The amendments will secure the correct interface in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, and ensure a smooth operation between the two arrangements for agricultural wages and the minimum wage.

Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (Cotswold): Perhaps the Minister would clarify one point. I declare an interest, as recorded in the Register of Members' Interests, in agriculture. It is increasingly likely that farmers will pay their workers in euros in future, particularly if payments from Brussels to farmers are in euros. How will the Minister interpret the legislation in relation to euros?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Perhaps the hon. Gentleman will write to the Minister. His question has nothing to do with the amendment.

Lords amendment agreed to.

Lords amendment No. 10 agreed to.

Clause 15

INFORMATION OBTAINED BY OFFICERS

Lords amendment: No. 11, in page 11, line 36, at end insert—

("(6A) Subsection (2) above does not affect the title or rights of—

(a) any person whose property the information was immediately before it was obtained as mentioned in subsection (1) above; or

(b) any person claiming title or rights through or under such a person otherwise than by virtue of any power conferred by or under this Act.")

Mr. Ian McCartney: I beg to move, That this House does agree with the Lords in the said amendment.

[Mr. Ian McCartney]

The amendment touches on what the hon. Member for Daventry (Mr. Boswell) alluded to on an earlier amendment. I thank him for co-operating with us on this matter.

The amendment is technical, and it affects clause 15(2) which deals with information exchange. The subsection provides that information that is covered by the clause is vested in the Secretary of State. The information in question is that which an enforcement officer has obtained, for example, from an employer or worker about working hours or pay.

The current formulation of clause 15(2) might be taken to affect the rights and title of other owners of that information. The amendment makes it clear that the vesting of the information in the Secretary of State for this purpose does not affect others with the title or rights to the information. That is to say, the ownership of the information does not change hands: it is exchanged only for the purposes of the minimum wage legislation. I hope that the amendment clarifies the facility in clause 15.

Mr. Boswell: I have one short question. If information is disclosed by the inspectorate or by the Secretary of State in an unauthorised way that is outwith the purposes of the statute—I do not suggest that that will occur, but accidents happen—will the office that is responsible for the disclosure, if it gives rise to legal action or a claim for damages, bear the cost even if the information is jointly owned by the two parties?

Mr. McCartney: The hon. Gentleman makes an interesting debating point and I shall reflect on what he has said. The purpose of the measure is to ensure clarity in the process of obtaining information, the purposes of the information, who can use it and who has good title to it. If the clause is operated effectively, the issue that the hon. Gentleman raises should not arise. However, the point is well made and I shall ensure in discussions and by regulation that there is good professional practice in all those matters.

Mr. Hammond: I welcome the amendment, which clearly improves the clause. The Minister may recall that in Committee we had a heated debate about precisely this matter. He assured us that, as the clause was originally drafted, there would be no doubt about who had title to the intellectual property in the information to be transferred. He rubbished our arguments, so I am pleased that he has had second thoughts. The provision will be welcomed, if only for the avoidance of doubt.

Will the Minister clarify whether the provision will give any additional cause of action to an employer who finds that information has been wrongly used and has been transferred outwith the provisions of the Bill? The clause provides that "any relevant authority" that obtains the information may use it

"for any purpose relating to this Act."

Should officials of the Inland Revenue or of Customs and Excise be empowered to collect information for the purposes of the legislation, their organisations would have to have Chinese walls.

On the face of it, the amendment would strengthen the position of the rightful owner of the information—the employer who had the information. Will the Minister confirm for the record that that would give the employer an additional cause of action or additional security?

Mr. Ian McCartney: I do not remember having a row on this matter. It must have been one of those early morning activities, so I apologise. I shall not go over ground that I cannot remember.

I was probably robust with the hon. Gentleman because it was never our intention that the clause would change the ownership of the information. The Bill sets down clearly the purpose for which the information can be used and who is responsible for it. Any action taken that is outside the scope of the legislation would be outside the employer's legal powers. I have no doubt that there would be a remedy in those circumstances. I am trying to clarify the position—to put it in an armlock—to ensure that the original intention of the clause is absolutely clear.

Mr. Hammond: I thank the Minister for that reply. May I press him on a further point? Information may be wrongfully supplied to another agency or used by an agency that had lawfully obtained it for a purpose beyond the scope of the Bill. Is it correct that such information could not be produced in court as evidence?

Mr. McCartney: That is a hypothetical case. I have made it absolutely clear that, under the Bill, information can be used only for the purposes of the national minimum wage. Anyone who used it in any other way would be acting outside the scope of the Bill and would be exceeding his powers. The answer that I gave a few moments ago is the same as the answer that I am giving the hon. Gentleman now.

Lords amendment agreed to.

Lords amendments Nos. 12 to 16 agreed to.

Clause 19

POWER OF OFFICER TO ISSUE ENFORCEMENT NOTICE

Lords amendment: No. 17, in page 14, line 21, at end insert—

("(9) The powers of an employment tribunal in allowing an appeal in a case where subsection (8) above applies shall include power to rectify, as the tribunal may consider appropriate in consequence of its decision on the appeal, any penalty notice which has been served under section 21 below in respect of the enforcement notice.

(10) Where a penalty notice is rectified under subsection (9) above, it shall have effect as if it had originally been served as so rectified.")

Mr. Ian McCartney: I beg to move, That this House does agree with the Lords in the said amendment.

The purpose is to cut unnecessary red tape, and to prevent enforcement from being weakened in a particular area. Currently, under clause 19(8), an employment tribunal has the power to correct an enforcement notice on appeal, for example if the officer got the amount of the national minimum wage underpayment wrong but an underpayment nevertheless remained due.

The tribunal may also correct the subsequent penalty notice, which can be issued pending an appeal against the enforcement notice under clause 22(5). There is a technical difficulty—without the amendment, the tribunal would have the power to correct the penalty notice only if a separate appeal against it had been lodged. Therefore, an employer would have to ensure that he made two appeals, on a just-in-case basis, against both the enforcement notice and the penalty notice.

The amendment would cut red tape by providing that, when an appeal against the enforcement notice was partially successful and the notice was corrected by the tribunal, the tribunal would have the power to correct the penalty notice accordingly, even in the absence of an appeal against the penalty notice. I hope that hon. Members will accept that the amendment is about ensuring—

It being Ten o'clock, the debate stood adjourned.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 15 (Exempted business),

That, at this day's sitting, the Northern Ireland (Sentences) Bill, the Crime and Disorder Bill *[Lords]* and the National Minimum Wage Bill may be proceeded with, though opposed, until any hour.—*[Ms Bridget Prentice.]*

Question agreed to.

Lords amendments again considered.

Question again proposed, That this House does agree with the Lords in the said amendment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Does the Minister wish to continue?

Mr. McCartney: I am happy to sit down, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Boswell: The Minister is trying to be helpful. I have a procedural question, which is whether arrangements will be made for the tribunal to ensure that there is in the papers a box to tick, or some other way to enter the fact that a penalty notice has been served, so that the tribunal may look at both automatically and simultaneously, rather than finding out by accident that a penalty notice has been served. We must remember that there are relatively unsophisticated employers who may not be aware of double jeopardy. Is the Minister nodding or is he reflecting on that point?

Mr. McCartney: I assure the hon. Gentleman that I will take on board what he has said. It is important in the good employment practice followed in these cases that we should make it as easy as possible for both the employer and the tribunal to ensure that such matters are covered.

Mr. Boswell: I am grateful to the Minister.

On the more general points, the Minister's explanation has been helpful, but I should like him again to confirm two matters. The first is that the enforcement notice and the appeal against it are free standing and that the penalty notice and the appeal against it are also free standing. They could happen separately. I have not quite thought through the implications, but the tribunal could come to different conclusions in different cases. We need to ensure that no one's rights are removed.

The second matter relates to financial penalties for non-compliance. Although the tribunal will take an interest in the calculation—if that is brought to its attention because, for example, the employer says that the sums have been done wrongly—it is not empowered to rewrite the level of the penalty, other than for a mathematical mistake, if a liability has been imposed. Nor will it look at degrees of culpability as between employer and employee in reaching its conclusions.

While having regard to the worker's interests, these cases are very much ones where the employer will appeal against enforcement and, in particular, against the financial penalty. Clearly, the worker is enjoined in that and will want to have a say in it, but the case is very much about ensuring that the employer is treated fairly. The enforcement notice comes after due process, from either the employee or an officer acting on his behalf.

I am trying to get the flavour of the issue. The Minister has it broadly right, but it would be helpful if he could comment on it.

Mr. Ian McCartney: The answers to the hon. Gentleman's first two questions are yes and yes. On his third question, I think that he—not for wrong reasons—is rather overcomplicating the matter. If there has been an error, the tribunal will ensure that it is corrected.

Lords amendment agreed to.

Clause 23

THE RIGHT NOT TO SUFFER DETRIMENT

Lords amendment: No. 18, in page 16, line 40, after ("will") insert ("or might")

Mr. Ian McCartney: I beg to move, That this House does agree with the Lords in the said amendment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to discuss Lords amendments Nos. 21 and 22.

Mr. McCartney: When I started work on this Bill, I was 6 ft 6 in tall. I am told that I should just rest a bit on this Box.

This is an important group of amendments, the purpose of which is to ensure that there is no loophole in protection against dismissal or detrimental action for workers and employees who would be entitled to the full rate of the national minimum wage or who were about to qualify for a higher rate, even when no rate has yet been set in the months following commencement of the clauses.

I am sure that the House will agree on the principle behind the affected clauses. They will protect workers and employees against dismissal or detrimental action on the grounds that they qualify or will qualify for the national minimum wage or for a particular—higher—rate of the national minimum wage. We want to ensure that workers have that protection during the interim—between commencement of the clauses, after Royal Assent and subject to Parliament's will, and the setting of the national minimum wage in the ensuing regulations.

[Mr. McCartney]

By adding the word "might" in each case, the amendments are designed to remove any doubt about whether workers are protected in that manner during that period. I trust that the House can accept these linked amendments.

Mr. Boswell: I think that we have to stop for a moment on this group of amendments. There is nothing wrong with the Minister's intentions, and I do not wish to suggest that we want people to take action by way of detriment against employees who in future

"might qualify . . . for the minimum wage".

I have used the phrase that the Minister has included in his amendment, but, in so doing, I express some doubt about it.

Circumstances defined in the relevant clause—clause 23(1)(c)—include those in which

"the worker qualifies, or will qualify, for the national minimum wage or for a particular rate".

That should be a fairly clear evidential test. Is there an employment when the wage is in force? Is the appropriate rate for the national minimum wage being paid? Is there an employment when the national minimum wage comes in on the appointed day after the conclusion of regulations? If so, is the person being sacked ahead of the introduction as a way of getting them out of the way? I understand those cases. However, insertion of the word "might" creates the types of uncertainty that the newspapers are so good at exploiting.

There could be a story saying, for example, who "might" today become Government Chief Whip. That is the type of story that the newspapers write. The Government "may be" having second thoughts about inclusion of the armed forces in the National Minimum Wage Bill. That story was spun around until there were second thoughts.

The word "might" is imprecise. I might have no employment relationship. As an hon. Member, I am self-employed, at least for some purposes, but I might qualify for the national minimum wage. I do not know whether I do. To use "might" is to open the doors to some uncertainty.

Although I have no particular penchant for drafting, I should have preferred as the test "either that the worker qualifies, or, provided that his current employment contract is maintained, he will qualify"—not "he might qualify". I am not sure that, in the interests of trying to be fair, the Minister has chosen the right wording. I wonder if he might reflect on the point.

Mr. McCartney: I have been reflecting on what the hon. Gentleman has said and I disagree with him. I know that that was a pretty quick reflection, but we debated at great length in Committee the importance of the principle of protecting people from being detrimentally affected during employment when they are entitled to the minimum wage, and of preventing an employer from sacking an employee who is coming up to the qualifying age for the minimum wage.

In the interim between Royal Assent and the application of the minimum wage, an employer should not be able to dismiss an employee or affect him or her detrimentally. The word "might" is not imprecise. It relates to the period leading up to when people might qualify for the minimum wage and should be protected from an employer seeking to sack them to avoid paying the minimum wage. That would not be acceptable. We are being precise.

Mr. Hammond: My hon. Friend the Member for Daventry (Mr. Boswell) and I agree that in relation to the transitional period the use of the word "might" could be seen as precise. My hon. Friend was pointing out that, once the transitional period is over, the word becomes rather imprecise. Would it not have been better to deal with the problem by putting a specific transitional provision in the Bill?

Mr. McCartney: We could go round the houses on that. I think that we shall just have to disagree. I have made our reasons clear. The provision is for the transitional period leading up to the full implementation of the minimum wage. It will remove the loophole that would allow someone to be sacked on the basis that he might qualify for the minimum wage.

Lords amendment agreed to.

Lords amendment: No. 19, in page 17, line 2, after ("by") insert

(", or by virtue of, any provision of")

Mr. Ian McCartney: I beg to move, That this House does agree with the Lords in the said amendment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to discuss Lords amendment No. 20, Lords amendment No. 25, Government amendment (a) thereto and Lords amendments Nos. 28 and 34.

Mr. McCartney: Amendments Nos. 19 and 20 are tidying up amendments aimed at ensuring consistency and correctness of drafting. Clause 23 protects workers against a detrimental action for asserting their right under the Bill. Amendment No. 19 adds the words "by virtue of" in subsection (3)(a) to ensure that the rights to which the protection provided by the clause applies include rights conferred by other legislation that applies for minimum wage purposes by virtue of the Bill—for example, the legislation covering the agricultural wages regimes or regulations made under the Bill—as well as rights conferred directly by the Bill.

I hope that hon. Members will not feel short-changed by my shortened version of the reasons behind the amendments and will accept them as minor technical amendments.

Mr. Boswell: I rise not in retaliation for the Minister's foreshortening of his explanation, but to seek an explanation on amendment No. 25. I fear that I am ignorant of the nicer points of the arrangements for Orders in Council and drafting. Clause 42(3) provides that

"An Order in Council under this section—

(a) may make different provision for different cases".

The Minister has vehemently resisted the thoughtful provision inserted in another place for some general powers of exclusion, which we debated earlier. We are now dealing with a more precise shrinking of his area of

discretion by not allowing an Order in Council—in the context of offshore employment—to make different provision for different cases.

The only conclusion that I can produce by way of explanation is that Orders in Council probably cannot make provision for different cases—or, to put it another way, if the cases differ, differing Orders in Council need to be made for them. As I am puzzled on that score, it would be helpful if the Minister would clarify what is going on.

Mr. McCartney: I shall assist the hon. Gentleman. He is talking about the effect of clause 42(3), which provides that

"An Order in Council under this section"—

applying to offshore workers—

"(a) may make different provision for different cases".

Counsel has pointed out that that is unnecessary because clause 51(1) provides that

"any power conferred by this Act to make an Order in Council . . . includes power . . . to make different provision for different cases".

We are therefore deleting paragraph (a) of clause 42(3), thus removing a duplication. I apologise for including such a duplication in the first place, but now we are taking it away. Better late than never.

10.15 pm

Mr. Hammond: Can the Minister turn his attention to Lords amendment No. 28 and explain why it is proposed to leave out the words "in writing"? It seems to me normal that a Secretary of State would give notice in writing, and I cannot envisage a situation in which he or she would want to give notice other than in writing.

Mr. McCartney *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Before the Minister replies, may I suggest that hon. Gentlemen should allow the Minister to finish a reply before rising to their feet. It is tidier and gives a better flow to what is said.

Mr. McCartney: I think that the hon. Gentleman has raised an issue not covered by the amendments. However, in the interests of people who are following the Bill, I shall read what he has said in *Hansard*, reflect on it and write to the hon. Gentleman.

Lords amendment agreed to.

Lords amendments Nos. 20 to 22 agreed to.

Lords amendment: No. 23, in page 20, line 30, at end insert—

("(6) The Department of Economic Development may by order repeal subsection (5) above and this subsection.")

Mr. Ian McCartney: I beg to move, That this House does agree with the Lords in the said amendment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to discuss Lords amendments Nos. 26, 27 and 36.

Mr. McCartney: I hope that we can deal with the group quickly. The purpose of these highly technical amendments is to reflect changes in the treatment of dismissal procedure agreements made by the Employment Rights (Dispute Resolution) Act 1998 as they affect the protection of employees in Northern Ireland against unfair dismissal for asserting their rights under the Bill.

Lords amendment No. 23 provides a power, in a new subsection (6) of clause 26, for the Department of Economic Development in Northern Ireland to make an order to repeal subsection (5), as well as the new subsection (6) itself. That will ensure that employees in Northern Ireland are protected against unfair dismissal for asserting their rights under the Bill.

Mr. Boswell: Why does giving a Government Department power to repeal a piece of legislation help to safeguard employment rights? Given that the legislation in question is supposed to protect employment rights, a power to take them away seems a little odd. I am sure that there is a legitimate explanation, but I should like to hear it.

Mr. McCartney: All that we are doing is keeping consistency throughout the Bill as it relates to other parts of the United Kingdom. The hon. Gentleman knows about the special nature of Northern Ireland, and the amendment takes account of that—no more, no less.

Lords amendment agreed to.

Clause 38

HOUSE OF LORDS STAFF

Lords amendment: No. 24, in page 25, line 17, leave out ("contract of employment") and insert ("worker's contract")

Mr. Ian McCartney: I beg to move, That this House does agree with the Lords in the said amendment.

Amendment No. 24 relates to clause 38, which applies the Bill to staff of the House. Before the amendment, clause 38 applied only to such staff who are employees—staff with a contract of employment with the Corporate Officer of the House.

I should say at the outset that the amendment has the same effect as a similar amendment tabled by the Opposition in another place, but then withdrawn. Both amendments reflect concern raised by some Opposition Members during consideration of the clause in Committee. I have no hesitation in acknowledging that fact—it is nice to welcome, and act on, constructive comments when we receive them.

The clause was originally drafted to reflect the current reality, confirmed by the House authorities, that all staff in the other place have employment contracts. However, partly in the light of the views expressed in another place, the Government have reflected further on the clause. In particular, it was considered preferable to treat staff of both Houses equally. It was also considered wiser to ensure that the law not only reflects the current reality, but is capable of being applied to any reasonably likely future arrangements.

I ask the House to support the amendment. I hope that Conservative Members will agree that this is a classic case of great minds thinking alike.

Mr. Boswell: I am always a consensus person, so we are happy to agree with the Minister. We are glad that the point was spotted and we believe that the outcome is good.

[Mr. Boswell]

I have only one concern, which I am sure has arisen simply because of a slip of the tongue by the Minister. As I understand the matter, the amendment relates solely to clause 38, which concerns the staff in another place. Clause 39 applies the same provisions to staff in the House of Commons. We do not like the Bill, but it is clearly important that the provisions should apply fairly.

Lords amendment agreed to.

Lords amendment No. 25 and Government amendment (a) thereto agreed to.

Lords amendments Nos. 26 to 28 agreed to.

Schedule 1

THE LOW PAY COMMISSION

Lords amendment: No. 29, in page 36, leave out line 26.

Mr. Ian McCartney: I beg to move, That this House does agree with the Lords in the said amendment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to discuss Lords amendments Nos. 30 and 31.

Mr. McCartney: The House will be pleased to know that this is the last time this evening that I shall get on my feet—[HON. MEMBERS: "Shame."] I now want officially to announce that I am on my feet.

These drafting amendments are designed to avoid wording that some may regard as offensive. Paragraph 1 of schedule 1 relates to membership of the Low Pay Commission. Paragraph 1(6)(b), unamended, permitted the Secretary of State to dismiss a commission member who was

"incapacitated by physical or mental illness".

On further reflection, I believe that that formulation is best avoided. Instead, the three linked amendments achieve the result that was originally intended—that the Secretary of State can terminate the duties of any member of the commission who, for whatever reason, is unable to carry out his or her functions as a member. I trust that the House will support the amendments.

Mr. Boswell: This is positively my last response. I agree with the Minister's intentions, but I have a slight reservation about their implications, which may go further than he wanted. The amendments will mean that the objective test of physical or mental illness becomes a subjective test in the hands or opinion of the Secretary of State.

I realise that the Secretary of State—who now honours us with his presence—will want to act, as ever, reasonably and sensitively. If a commissioner were to be so incapacitated, I am sure that he would want to handle the case properly. I make that point merely because we should consider the detail of the Bill. There is a slight change in the burden of proof, and we should pause for thought on that point. At this stage of the proceedings, however—I hope that the Minister and his hon. Friends will not be disappointed—I am not disposed to test the will of the House with a Division.

The Minister has promised not to speak again, and it may be that he will not respond to what I shall now say. It would, however, be churlish of me not to conclude by thanking the Low Pay Commission and the Minister, appropriately given that we are discussing mental capacity. I have not previously had an opportunity to thank the commission for reasons that the Minister will appreciate. Indeed, we have occasionally complained about it. We do not like the context of the Bill, and we do not like the Bill itself, but we pay tribute, as has the Minister, to the commission's work. It will no doubt continue to work in future to monitor the Bill.

Secondly, when the Minister moved tonight from the class war that he fought before dinner to the conciliatory tones in which he responded to our probing of the amendments later in the evening, he showed that he has on his modest shoulders a sure head. He also, occasionally, has some sensitivity for the concerns of the Opposition, and we thank him for that.

Mr. Chidgey: I, too, wish the Minister well after the way in which he has conducted the Bill. He has—almost invariably—been courteous, has never gone off the point and has certainly been industrious. He knows of our reservations about the Bill. He has always listened to them, even when he has not accepted them. He knows that we want to see the Bill pass safely through Parliament. We look forward to engaging him again in debate when the Low Pay Commission arises under secondary legislation. I congratulate him on a job well done.

Mr. Ian McCartney: I thank the hon. Gentleman for those kind remarks. I am not so sure that I am a pussy cat. My new Secretary of State has already nicknamed me Joe Pesci. I accept the hon. Gentleman's points.

In response to the point made by the hon. Member for Daventry (Mr. Boswell), I must say that I was precise in the words that I used. The record will show the Government's clear intention to provide non-offensive wording to deal with circumstances that can sometimes be difficult. I am certain that if those circumstances arise—I hope that they do not—my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will deal sensitively with the cases.

I must also say hallelujah, hallelujah to the hon. Gentleman. To hear someone from the Conservative Benches at last acknowledging the tremendous work of the Low Pay Commission is very welcome. I note that the shadow Secretary of State could not bear to be here to hear those words. However, I am sure that he will read them tomorrow. We intend to ensure that the commission plays an effective role in the management of our legislative programme.

I thank the hon. Member for Daventry for his kind words, but they will not help him if he makes a late application to join the commission. The Secretary of State is not quite ready to bend over so far as to allow the hon. Gentleman to be a member. However, I thank him for his kind remarks about me.

The Bill's progress has taken a long 12 months. I am deeply proud that a Labour Government have made so much effort to tackle at last the issue of poverty pay in Britain. I am proud, too, that I, a former low-paid worker, was given the opportunity to do that. Whatever else happens to me in politics, nothing will beat this moment,

at which I sit down in the certain knowledge that the National Minimum Wage Bill will become an Act.

Lords amendment agreed to.

Lords amendments Nos. 30 to 36 agreed to.

Committee appointed to draw up Reasons to be assigned to the Lords for disagreeing to certain of their amendments to the Bill: Mr. Clive Betts, Mr. Tim Boswell, Mr. Tim Collins, Mr. Frank Doran and Mr. Ian McCartney; Mr. Ian McCartney to be the Chairman of the Committee; Three to be the quorum of the Committee.—[*Mr. Betts.*]

To withdraw immediately.

Reasons for disagreeing to certain Lords amendments reported, and agreed to; to be communicated to the Lords.

PETITION

Mr. Nick Centi

10.30 pm

Ms Beverley Hughes (Stretford and Urmston): This is a petition from the family and friends of Mr. Nick Centi, the residents of my constituency and people in the wider locality around Manchester city centre. It concerns the brutal murder of Mr. Centi, an innocent young man who stopped to assist during an argument in the city centre. He was attempting to be a peacemaker, but was killed in a mindless incident of unprovoked violence, which the petitioners believe is all too common in our city centre. So far, 720 people have signed the petition, which reads:

The petitioners therefore request that the Secretary of State for the Home Department brings forward measures to improve the safety of city centres, strong action against those who commit violence on the streets, and tougher laws against violent crime.

To lie upon the Table.

Lloyd's Insurance Market

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Jamieson.]*

10.31 pm

Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (Cotswold): Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for allowing me this opportunity to raise the important subject of the regulation of Lloyd's insurance market. I welcome the new Economic Secretary, the hon. Member for Leicester, West (Ms Hewitt) to her position. I hope that she will have a successful term of office, and that she has received the information that I gave her predecessor and is therefore aware of the issues that I shall raise, as that will make for a more informed debate.

It is estimated that 30 per cent. of the entire capacity of the Lloyd's insurance market is controlled by offshore-domiciled companies, mostly based in Bermuda. Within a year, that could rise to a staggering figure of more than 50 per cent. I shall explore the far-reaching consequences of that rapid trend for the entire future of Lloyd's.

Mr. Stephen Walton, who was then in the Lloyd's directorate of the Department of Trade and Industry, said in an excellent wide-ranging article on Lloyd's in the spring 1997 edition of the "Financial Stability Review":

"Regulations need to ensure that the policy holder protection arrangements at Lloyd's are fully effective, that the regulation system of capital provision works effectively and that the market as a whole, is seen to be a fair and a clean place to do business."

So perceptive and accurate was Mr. Walton that he was rapidly moved onwards and upwards to a new post in the Treasury.

Between 1988 and 1992, Lloyd's lost a staggering £8 billion. More than 30,000 names were disastrously affected, many being stripped of almost all their financial assets, including their homes. However, the majority were given a liferaft by the huge £11 billion rescue—the 1996 reconstruction and renewal reinsurance policy into Equitas Reinsurance.

However, it is increasingly beginning to emerge that names may have been fraudulently enticed into Lloyd's in the late 1980s, when a handful of senior Lloyd's underwriters certainly already knew of the serious long-tail environmental claims, including asbestosis in America. Problems were later compounded by the LMX spiral of multiple reinsurance of the same business. I pay tribute to my hon. Friends the Members for Runnymede and Weybridge (Mr. Hammond) and for North Shropshire (Mr. Paterson), who have been working on the detail of that problem.

There are also queries about whether the DTI, which was the regulator at that time, and the insurance directorate ever received written confirmation of the relevant Lloyd's resolution relating to the creation of Equitas. If it did not, how could the Government have had sufficient information to be able to say with confidence in the DTI press release on 4 September 1996:

"adequate provisions have been made against current and possible future claims and that the minimum solvency margin that was required has been met"?

[Mr. Geoffrey Clifton–Brown]

How could they have said that when they did not know which names had unconditionally accepted the reconstruction and renewal?

It is against that background that I want to raise the current trends in the Lloyd's insurance market. As a result of the enormous losses to which I have already referred, in 1994 the council of Lloyd's voted to admit corporate capital. That was on the understanding that it would be done on a spread vehicle basis, which means underwriting over a number of syndicates. That was done without consultation with the members of the society.

The Lloyd's council amended the rules again, so that those with corporate capital can now form themselves into integrated Lloyd's vehicles, buying up capacity on individual syndicates, which is then not available to the current annual venture Lloyd's names. That has caused concern in some quarters that the end of the individual annual venture Lloyd's name is in sight. Indeed, that was presaged by Max Taylor, the chairman of Lloyd's, who said in the *Financial Times* of 20 June:

"over time the current annual venture form of participation will become a minority part of the whole Lloyds Market . . . and those must expect to bear the costs associated with that form of trading."

The objective of the Lloyd's council, enshrined in successive Lloyd's Acts from 1870 to 1982, is the advancement and protection of the interests of members, who were at all times understood by Parliament to be individuals participating on an annual venture basis in the Lloyd's subscription market. The whole structure of regulation of Lloyd's is on that basis.

Charles Sturge, the editor of Lloyd's league table, is quoted in *Post Magazine and Insurance Week* on 11 June as saying:

"Lloyd's is the best regulated market in the world but once the Names have gone the structure will disappear and it will be turned into a host of mini insurance companies".

That is the fundamental thrust of my speech.

Parliament passed the Lloyd's Acts to allow individual participation in the world's leading insurance market. Now there is a major risk that, next year, 50 per cent. of all Lloyd's capacity will be controlled by overseas-domiciled companies mostly based in Bermuda. A further proportion of the capacity—between 5 and 30 per cent.—will be controlled by UK-integrated Lloyd's vehicles.

If those two predictions are correct, as seems likely, what is to prevent those companies, which will cease to derive any benefit from an overly costly Lloyd's structure, from demanding that Lloyd's council dissolves itself and the society, and redistributes the new Lloyd's central fund, which currently amounts to £144,238,000, to the current underwriting members—or, more likely, ending its support for the central fund altogether?

If that happened, further far-reaching consequences would follow. The joint American trust fund, on which "finality" in the reconstruction and renewal scheme depends, could be withdrawn. That possibility alarms all the 30,000 names who were reinsured into Equitas, and it may well alarm the long-tail policyholders, who may expect to rely on their policies in the United States, and hence the United States insurance regulators.

Importantly, the Treasury, not the Department of Trade and Industry, now has responsibility for regulating Lloyd's under the Lloyd's Act 1982 and the Insurance Companies Act 1982. In the circumstances that I have described, where the control of Lloyd's would pass outside the jurisdiction of this country to a number of large offshore insurance companies, which may be interested not in Lloyd's licences or the mutual society, but only in buying books cheaply, UK plc would lose its balance of payments advantages and, importantly, suffer reductions in receipts from corporate, income and capital gains taxes.

On 22 January 1998, the then Economic Secretary to the Treasury, the hon. Member for Airdrie and Shotts (Mrs. Liddell), in a revealing speech to the Life Insurance Association conference, said on the one hand:

"These arrangements will continue to allow scope for a major role by the Council of Lloyd's in ensuring that Lloyd's continues to be well-regulated."

However, she must have considered that that was improbable, because she continued on the other hand:

"Policies underwritten at Lloyd's should enjoy the benefits of the same kind of supervisory regime as those with policies issued by other insurers . . . I intend that the Financial Services Act will have . . . much more extensive supervisory powers in relation to Lloyd's . . . enhancing powers of intervention . . . authorisation of managing agents . . . direct authorisation and supervision of the Members . . . capacity auctions will be overseen."

In other words, she had in mind a very tough regulatory regime, which she would have had in mind only if she did not believe that the current self-regulation of Lloyd's was working properly.

The comments by the then Economic Secretary sit oddly at variance with today's announcement of the closing of the Insurance Brokers Registration Council, without the announcement of any statutory replacement. That is one of the most important things that I shall say tonight. We have just had the publication of the Financial Services Bill, a huge Bill extending to more than 250 clauses. It is unlikely, therefore, that the Bill will be passed into law for at least a year. By that time, it may well be too late—the Society of Lloyd's, as such, may by then be sliding into oblivion, along with the protection of past and present names and corporate capital. In the regulatory vacuum, many agents will make fortunes at the expense of their principals.

My crucial question to the Minister tonight is: in the vacuum before the Financial Services Act comes into force, should not urgent action be taken to protect the future of the Society of Lloyd's, and to address the balance of advantage between past and present individual names in relation to the dedicated corporate capital increasingly being employed at Lloyd's?

I hope that the Minister will acknowledge that those are serious, profound and far-reaching issues, which will affect not only the regulation of Lloyd's and the Society of Lloyd's but the insurance market in the City of London, and which will have further knock-on effects. I hope that she will be able to give me some interesting answers tonight. I look forward to hearing what she has to say.

10.43 pm

The Economic Secretary to the Treasury (Ms Patricia Hewitt): I thank the hon. Member for Cotswold (Mr. Clifton-Brown) for his kind remarks and his welcome to me at the Dispatch Box. I also thank him for raising this extremely important issue in the House tonight, and I congratulate him on his success in obtaining

the debate. I am especially grateful to him for giving me notice of the points that he wished to raise; that is especially helpful to a new Minister. I appear to be the first new Minister in the current round of Government changes to speak in an Adjournment debate.

I also take this opportunity to pay a very warm tribute to my predecessor, my hon. Friend the Member for Airdrie and Shotts (Mrs. Liddell). She was, if I may coin a phrase, tough on pension mis-selling and tough on the causes of pension mis-selling. I shall follow her excellent example. I wish her well—as do all my hon. Friends—in her new portfolio.

I turn to the extremely important issues that the hon. Gentleman has raised. Reform of the regulation of Lloyd's is long overdue. Lloyd's itself has recognised the need for stronger independent oversight, and the Government announced in January their proposals to provide that oversight through the new Financial Services Authority. Those proposals, like the rest of our reforms, will create a modern and flexible system of independent statutory regulation, capable of coping with the radical changes that will affect all financial markets. We will publish the financial services legislation, in draft, later this week and consult extensively on that draft legislation. I have no doubt that the hon. Gentleman and his colleagues will wish to comment during that consultation period. The hon. Gentleman referred to Stephen Walton, who is now a member of the team that has been preparing that legislation.

As hon. Members will know, for most of its long history, Lloyd's has been a successful part of this country's financial services industry, making an important contribution to the economy and the balance of payments. Indeed, only a few weeks ago, I had the pleasure of meeting Eric Hammouthe and his colleagues at a very helpful briefing that was arranged for relatively new Members of Parliament to inform us about the Lloyd's position. I was obviously not aware then that I would be rising to respond to this Adjournment debate so soon after that briefing.

As the hon. Gentleman said, in the late 1980s and early 1990s, Lloyd's was hit by an unprecedented financial crisis, suffering losses of £8 billion between 1988 and 1992. The causes of that crisis have been well analysed. They were primarily a combination of both natural and man-made disasters, but they were certainly exacerbated by some bad underwriting decisions and practices. I am aware that some names have made allegations of fraud. The Serious Fraud Office has reviewed very substantial amounts of material put forward by those names, and has found no evidence to support their allegations. If the hon. Gentleman or other hon. Members have any new evidence, I shall of course be happy to pass it on. I am conscious of the fact that many names were hit very hard. The vast majority shouldered their losses honourably, and I am pleased to say that the legitimate claims of policyholders have continued to be met in full.

Lloyd's responded to the disastrous losses with its reconstruction and renewal plan, which involved the creation of a new insurer, Equitas, to reinsure the old liabilities. Equitas's provisions for future claims were set after a massive exercise by consulting actuaries, and this was reviewed in detail by the Government Actuary's Department before Equitas was authorised to begin operations. Nothing has happened since then to suggest that the provisions were inadequate; nor does the funding of Equitas depend on any annual contribution from Lloyd's. In the almost two years since it began operations, Equitas has made extremely encouraging progress—although of course there is still a long way to go.

Since reconstruction and renewal, Lloyd's has shown considerable vigour in returning to profitability and renewed financial strength, as shown by the ratings that it has received from major independent agencies. As the hon. Gentleman has pointed out, that has been accompanied by some quite profound changes at Lloyd's. Corporate capital has been admitted, and now accounts for 60 per cent. of Lloyd's capacity. Some of that represents names converting to trade with limited liability, but some is from overseas, including the major insurance centres of the United States of America and Bermuda.

The involvement of overseas capital providers with Lloyd's is testimony to the continued strengths of the market and there is every sign that they wish to maintain and develop those strengths. One strength of the Lloyd's market is the common security for all Lloyd's policies that is underpinned by the central fund. The council of Lloyd's has reaffirmed its commitment to common security, which is the basis for the system of licences that Lloyd's holds to trade in world markets.

As hon. Members will know, Lloyd's has been largely self-regulating under the Lloyd's Acts. As the hon. Gentleman rightly said, the Treasury supervises its solvency under the Insurance Companies Act 1982, but less extensively than for insurance companies. Nevertheless, one requirement of that Act is that all premiums have to be paid into trust funds, with deeds approved by the Treasury. There is no question of the joint asset trust fund, or any other trust fund, being wound up without the Treasury's approval, and I can confirm that no such proposal has been made to us.

Since the crisis, Lloyd's has greatly improved its own regulation, which today is generally acknowledged to be in good shape, but we need to ensure that that standard is maintained. More fundamentally, we need to build a modern system of regulation, with proper statutory oversight, capable of responding to whatever future lies ahead. Regulation must be one step ahead of change, not one step behind, and Lloyd's, like the Government, believes that businesses that are well regulated, and seen to be so, will be in a better position to compete in global markets.

The first priority of all insurance regulation is the protection of policyholders. As the Government announced in January, we believe that holders of policies written at Lloyd's should enjoy the benefits of the same kind of supervisory regime as those with policies issued by other insurers. That is why we intend to give the FSA much more extensive prudential supervision powers over Lloyd's. Those will be more like the powers that it will have for insurance companies, including checks on key individuals and comparable powers of intervention and discipline. They will also include a requirement for FSA authorisation of managing agents, the people who are responsible for running underwriting syndicates. We also intend that the FSA should be able to authorise and regulate Lloyd's members direct, if it considers that necessary in the future.

Those powers are intended to give the FSA flexibility to cope with whatever may be the future shape of Lloyd's in a rapidly changing global financial services

[Ms Patricia Hewitt]

marketplace. If Lloyd's were ever to become simply a group of insurance companies, with no common security, each one could be regulated like a normal insurance company—something with which all insurance regulators are familiar. If a diverse market continues, with common security, that will be reflected in its regulation. Whatever happens, we are determined that the security of policyholders should not be compromised.

I come now to capital providers. Members' agents advise members of Lloyd's in which syndicates they should participate. Their activity—advising names and potential names—is very like that of financial advisers, and we therefore propose that they should be authorised and regulated by the FSA. That will give increased protection to members of Lloyd's, some of whom have suffered from bad advice in the past.

Of course, the main risk to members is the risk to which they are exposed through the contracts of insurance which they underwrite. The enhanced prudential supervision arrangements which I mentioned should help to reduce those risks, but insurance is inherently about risk, and those who choose to trade in it must accept that. We do not intend to provide protection against underwriting losses, over and above that needed to give security to policyholders.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: The thrust of my whole speech was that the time lapse between now and when the FSA comes into operation could be a year or more. Meanwhile, matters need to be investigated under the present regulatory regime. Will the Minister undertake to have a thorough look at all the issues that I have raised this evening? Will she assure us, in particular, that if an application is made to wind up the society of Lloyd's, the Government will not allow the joint American trust fund to be wound up until the names under reconstruction and renewal have been properly and adequately considered?

Ms Hewitt: I thank the hon. Gentleman for that intervention. I was about to deal with his point about the transition period before the new Act comes into effect. My officials and the FSA are already in active discussion with Lloyd's about how the new regime will work and how the transition should be managed. All those concerned are aware of the danger that regulatory attention might slip in the transition period, and will work closely together to ensure that that does not happen. I shall happily undertake to write to the hon. Gentleman in more detail on the points that he raised. Clearly, if a proposal were made to wind up the joint trust fund, we would have to look at it, but, as I said, no such proposal has been made.

I should like to say something about capacity auctions, in which the hon. Gentleman is interested. Participation in a syndicate recently moved from being a privilege to a right, with the result that a market has developed in trading capacity on different syndicates. That market currently operates through a series of auctions run by the corporation of Lloyd's. In some ways, that market is similar to markets regulated under the Financial Services Act 1986, and I propose that the FSA should have new powers over Lloyd's.

Questions have been raised recently about whether advice given to names wishing to sell their capacity in the auctions has been wholly impartial and in the best interests of names. I am reassured to see that Lloyd's own regulatory division has taken up the issue and reminded agents of their duties and obligations in giving best advice and avoiding conflicts of interest.

An important feature of the Lloyd's market is the part played by the Lloyd's broker, who acts on behalf of a client in helping to obtain insurance. I should like to touch briefly on insurance broker regulation. The hon. Gentleman mentioned today's decision on the Insurance Brokers Registration Council, which was set up by the Insurance Brokers (Registration) Act 1977. As he knows, we have consulted the industry, Lloyd's and the IBRC on whether there is a continuing need for that form of regulation. He will see from the draft Bill that we are building on the consensus that has been arrived at that, although the IBRC has provided a valuable service in the past, circumstances have changed and regulation needs to change to reflect that and to build on the IBRC's work.

The arrangements that I have described, which will be set out in detail in the draft Bill, will continue to allow scope for a major role for the council of Lloyd's in ensuring that Lloyd's continues to be a well-regulated, successful and important part of the UK's financial services industry. That industry is an important part of wealth creation, and we are determined, through effective, flexible and modern regulation, to ensure that Britain's financial services industry, particularly the City of London, remains pre-eminent within the rapidly changing global market.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: If more than 50 per cent. of underwriting capacity is controlled by offshore, Bermuda-based companies, how can the Minister be so confident that she will be able to regulate and maintain the Lloyd's market in London?

Ms Hewitt: It is not for the Government to tell Lloyd's, or any other business, how it should raise capital. Our responsibility, which we take extremely seriously, is to ensure that there is good regulation which provides proper security for policyholders and advice of an appropriate quality for capital providers.

As the hon. Gentleman said, the financial services marketplace is global and changing rapidly. I hope that it is not the policy of the official Opposition that we should venture into some kind of protectionism in financial services or any other industry.

Mr. John Burnett (Torridge and West Devon): On behalf of Liberal Democrat Members, I congratulate the Minister on her appointment. I am diverting the question slightly, but, in hindsight, would the hon. Member for Cotswold (Mr. Clifton-Brown) have chosen to be a Lloyd's name with limited or unlimited liability?

Ms Hewitt: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his kind remarks, but his question should be addressed to the hon. Member for Cotswold. Happily, it is not an issue on which the Government have to advise him.

The arrangements that I have set out, which we shall implement through the Act after consultation with Lloyd's, will ensure the strong and successful regulation of Lloyd's. In that regulation, we shall reflect the special role of the council of Lloyd's in controlling the affairs of the society and the powers available to it in doing so.

My officials, and their colleagues in the FSA, are in active discussion with Lloyd's about how those arrangements will be operated in practice to deliver strong and cost-effective regulation. As a Government, we are committed to reform—

The motion having been made after Ten o'clock, and the debate having continued for half an hour, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *adjourned the House without Question put, pursuant to the Standing Order.*

Adjourned at one minute past Eleven o'clock.

House of Commons

Wednesday 29 July 1998

The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Adjournment (Summer)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Kevin Hughes.]*

9.34 am

Mr. Jimmy Hood (Clydesdale): I am grateful for the opportunity to raise the issue of dignity at work before the House rises for the summer recess. I wish to put down a marker, and I give notice that I shall return to the matter after the recess. I should also mention the good work already done in another place by the noble Lord Monkswell on bullying at work.

Bullying at school is usually our first taste of the cowardly and thuggish behaviour of individuals. The perception of a bully is usually male—someone who picks on those smaller than himself—and his actions usually involve petty crime, such as stealing or demanding money. What I have just described happens, but the crude thuggery of bullying away from the school yard is commonplace in the workplace. It is often perpetrated through psychological abuse—often by women against women—and does not get the publicity it should. We often hear about sexual harassment at work, but there is substantial evidence of harassment by someone of the same sex.

Another form of bullying can best be described as career assassination. Let me cite a constituency case in Lanarkshire involving a woman boss in charge of a dozen other women in an education department caring for children with special needs. I shall not name my constituent, but Mrs. X, as I shall call her, is a middle-aged, well-qualified, professional educationist. She is an excellent worker, conscientious and caring, and, because of her confidence in her own ability, she is the ideal caring professional whom we would all want to care for our own children if they needed her special care.

However, because Mrs. X was popular and respected by her fellow professionals, her newly appointed boss saw her as a threat, and began undermining, demeaning and intimidating her. My constituent decided to deal with the problem by ignoring it, hoping that it would resolve itself when her new boss had got her feet under the table—but that did not happen. Unfortunately, Mrs. X's attempts to ignore her boss only made her all the more unreasonable, vicious and sly, and the psychological abuse continued.

How can we deal with bullying? Perpetrators of such behaviour are usually sick. Their cowardly actions suggest that they have a form of mental illness.

As a result of prolonged intimidation and psychological abuse, my constituent became ill, and took time off work. An expert in a profession where her skills are at a premium has been off work for a considerable time, has lost thousands of pounds in earnings and her services to children who need her special care have been lost.

The House may think that that is an extreme case—I should like to think so, too—but I suspect that such abuse is quite common. I suspect that every hon. Member present could give some example of similar bullying in their constituency. I therefore welcome the Dignity at Work Bill, promoted by Lord Monkswell, which was given a Second Reading on 4 December 1996. I give notice of my intention to persuade the Government to include protection for employees against bullying in the workplace in their legislative programme. I am pleased to have been successful in raising this important issue. I know that right hon. and hon. Members want to raise their concerns on other issues, so I will soon conclude.

I was proud to be raised in a working-class home in a mining community—a humble background to some, but a very proud and particularly character-building experience for me. My parents instilled in me an ethos of always being considerate and respectful to others. One should be respectful to others if one wants to be treated as an equal. The right to dignity is not just about good manners, or even buzz words such as "good practice". It is a human right which should be available to all. The right to dignity at work is a human right, too.

Employers—and, on occasions, some politicians—may indulge in such abuse. They could be called control freaks. Control freaks use many tools, such as the tools of patronage—a posh word for rewarding obedience. Careers are controlled by the carrot and stick of political patronage. Career assassination is viewed in this place not as a dastardly act, but more as an occupational hazard.

The carrot takes many forms: a position in the Government—if it is a big carrot—a promise of a seat on a quango, or even a trip to Mauritius or some such exotic place. If everything else fails, the occasional knighthood or peerage has been known to thaw strong resistance. This week, some of my right hon. and hon. Friends who have had a lifetime of political carrots experienced a wee bit of the stick. A part of me thinks, "What did they expect?"

I close my contribution by making a proposal that will send shivers down the spines of some of my political colleagues. If we are to protect and extend to our citizens the democratic process, we must open up government to them. Transparency, scrutiny and openness should be our three watchwords. When we talk of an inclusive process, radical constitutional change, and honour and integrity in public service, let us, in the words of the Prime Minister, say what we mean and mean what we say. If we are to do that, we must look radically at how the House of Commons and its whipping system operate. At best, the whipping system must be reformed—although there is a good democratic argument for abolishing it.

9.44 am

Mr. Patrick McLoughlin (West Derbyshire): The hon. Member for Clydesdale (Mr. Hood) may have been referring to the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry—the post previously held by the Leader of the House—when he talked of character assassination. The right hon. Gentleman has been well known for some time for the character assassination of several of his colleagues. The hon. Gentleman has focused our attention on some of the events of the past few days.

[Mr. Patrick McLoughlin]

I welcome the Leader of the House to her new post. She and I represent neighbouring areas in Derbyshire. As Leader of the House, I expect that she will become Chairman of the Modernisation Committee, and therefore provide a lead on several important decisions in the not too distant future.

The hon. Member for Clydesdale talked of character assassinations, of which we have seen some interesting examples this week.

Mr. Hood: I do not want the hon. Gentleman to misunderstand my point—and I certainly do not want him to mislead the House. I talked about career assassinations, not character assassinations.

Mr. McLoughlin: I stand corrected—although, given the machinations of the week, the two could be linked. We saw the departure from the Government of the right hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field), the former Minister for Welfare Reform, who was originally asked by the Prime Minister to "think the unthinkable". Perhaps he did, and that was why he could not stay in the Government for very long. Perhaps we shall now be able to hear those thoughts expressed in the Chamber.

My main reason for catching your eye,in this short debate, Madame Speaker, is to raise the issue of the proposed closure of magistrates courts in Derbyshire—particularly West Derbyshire. I want to do so because, as it happens, this morning I received a letter from the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, in which he explained to me that decisions on such matters are usually made within three months of the receipt of objections. For objections to be considered by the Lord Chancellor, the county council must first object to the proposals. Derbyshire county council made such an objection on 16 June. Given the three-month procedure for determining appeals, we may expect the Government to make an announcement before the House returns.

There is, without question, a need for a magistrates court to serve West Derbyshire. I support the retention of the three magistrates courts in Ashbourne, Bakewell and Matlock until a magistrates court is built solely to serve West Derbyshire. If that long-term objective were proposed, I would consider a possible reorganisation of the courts structure in West Derbyshire.

It is vital that justice is administered locally, and is seen to be so. It is a fundamental tenet of the system. The 1989 Le Vay report included the following nationally accepted definition:

"the function of magistrates' courts is the delivery locally of local justice by local lay people. Justice in a given locality should be administered by lay people from among that community, who can bring to their judgements in court a knowledge of the area and an understanding of the community's values."

Particularly in rural areas, people are concerned that more remote benches will not understand the rural way of life and the importance of the matters being brought before them. Furthermore, there are particular problems with rural accessibility contained in the proposals submitted by the magistrates courts committee in Derbyshire.

Nor does local justice stop at the court itself. The editor of the *Ashbourne News Telegraph* said in a recent article:

"I know from experience that many defendants fear publicity more than the sentence. It would seem extremely unlikely, unless Ashbourne area cases had their own specific day for hearing, that we would travel to Chesterfield day after day in the hope of picking up a case involving a local defendant."

However, it is accepted that blame and shame have a notable effect on local offenders and their victims.

In coming to its decision, the magistrates courts committee suggested a travelling time of

"60 minutes by public transport and within 15 minutes' walk from the nearest public transport node".

It shows a marked lack of understanding of rural transport to assume that it is possible to travel via public transport from Sudbury, Hartington, Youlgreave, Fenny Bentley and many other villages throughout my rural constituency—which the Leader of the House knows well—to Chesterfield or Derby within an hour. I would argue that it is only just possible to do so in one's own vehicle in an hour, and that is in good weather. In winter, it would take considerably longer.

If the proposals go forward, magistrates have said that there will be

"a high probability of non-attendance and increased adjournments, adding to the usual list of excuses for non-attendance. Sophisticated bailees will simply wait for the Police to collect them."

I received a letter the other day from one of the local magistrates who serves West Derbyshire. It pointed out West Derbyshire is not only a huge geographical area, but is one of the most visited parts of the United Kingdom, with more than 20 million visitors every year. The letter said that the magistrates court committee's proposal to split the division and to take the court work to Chesterfield and Buxton

"was rejected after considerable public outcry, and in July 1995 the Committee stated then that 'Commitment should be given to provide a court in the West Derbyshire division in the long term.'

This commitment was short-lived."

We now have the proposals that the Government are considering.

The magistrate's letter continued:

"The Committee has also produced figures of court-hours to justify their proposals for the sitting of the courts. In 1995, the Home Office Courts Service Inspectorate severely criticised the Committee for the poor state of maintenance of the courts and lack of secure facilities, and instructed them to provide the latter. Their immediate response was to move West Derbyshire custody cases to Buxton and Chesterfield. Moving cases causes inconvenience to victims, defendants, witnesses, lawyers, police, probation and social services. There is also a considerable increase in expenditure in travelling, subsistence, and increased legal aid costs.

There is a point that the magistrate particularly wanted me to make. The letter said:

"Significantly it alters the court-hours differential between the 'losing' and 'receiving' court by a factor of two. A court hour added to Buxton or Chesterfield and lost from West Derbyshire becomes two hours for the purpose of comparison of court needs for the area."

The magistrate added that, during 1995 and 1996, many custody cases were moved from West Derbyshire:

"The Bench were assured that these hours would be credited back to them, but this does not appear to have been done, and the Bench have not been able to obtain any figures, or access to court registers."

The magistrate said that a new dock and secure facilities were installed at Bakewell for 1997, and added:

"Suggestions which would have enabled all West Derbyshire youth cases to be heard there, thus ensuring that young people were dealt with as near to their home as possible, which is the legal recommendation, were ignored. Youth Courts in West Derbyshire were cancelled, or held irregularly, and on some occasions, magistrates, staff, solicitors, co-defendants, police and social workers . . . waited in vain for the return of young offenders who had been improperly taken to Chesterfield and dealt with there. Some young defendants travelled from Clay Cross to Matlock (for Matlock offences) to a court which had been cancelled, as did a young defendant with a social worker who had travelled from secure accommodation in another county."

At the same time, the youth court sittings at Buxton were increased from 25 to 38 days for the year, and a policy of adjourning all youth cases to the first available venue, regardless of the site of the crime, was instituted, without any consultation with the West Derbyshire members of the joint High Peak and Glossop panel.

As one of the venues has 38 sittings and the other 12, the outcome is apparent; youth work has been taken to Buxton and Chesterfield from West Derbyshire. That is very expensive for social services. Time and money are being wasted on transport and waiting, and a day can be spent on one youth. The committee failed to make use of the facilities at Bakewell, provided at a cost of £18,000 from public funds.

It seems that the committee has neglected to provide basic facilities for a large area of Derbyshire. When it was reprimanded, its reaction was to remove cases from that area to other courts. The committee has used the hours generated by those moves to increase the apparent need for courts in the receiving areas. That ensures that courts are built in the receiving areas, which already have reasonable court facilities, and the people of West Derbyshire are denied the facility for which they are paying.

This may be a familiar subject to you, Madam Speaker. On 20 May—in a debate before the Whitsun recess—the hon. Member for South Derbyshire (Mr. Todd) raised the subject of magistrates courts in South Derbyshire, and I agree entirely with his comments near the end of his speech. He said:

"Clearly, the proposal is ill founded and I very much hope that the paying authorities, Derbyshire county council and Derby city council, will not endorse it when they decide their position. The project will also be expensive—this is not a PFI that will save us a lot of money."—[*Official Report*, 20 May 1998; Vol. 312, c. 884.]

The issue has moved on since the last time the House debated it, and both Derby city council and Derbyshire county council have now objected. The proposals are now before the Lord Chancellor.

I accept that the Leader of the House will not be able to comment in detail on the proposal before the Lord Chancellor, but I hope that she will assure me that my comments this morning will be brought to the Lord Chancellor's attention, so that, when he comes to make his final decision, he will be aware of the strong misgivings—shared by hon. Members on both sides of the House—about the court relocations. I hope that he will decide to reject the proposals, and to keep open the magistrates courts in West Derbyshire, and in other parts of Derbyshire which have made a similarly good case.

9.57 am

Mr. Lawrence Cunliffe (Leigh): First, may I record my appreciation and gratitude to the Leader of the House, my right hon. Friend the Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett), for her radical and remarkable tenure in office during the past 15 months or so? Following the reallocation of her duties, she will inspire the House with her leadership in terms of the programming of the House in the future.

The subject I wish to discuss is the state and the future of the British horse racing industry. I must record my interest—not a pecuniary one—as the senior chairman of the renowned and famous bloodstock and horse racing group, Lords and Commons. Horse racing has been known as the sport of kings, but it is very different now. Satellite and terrestrial television bring sporting activity into our living rooms.

What used to be a sport a couple of hundred years ago is now a major industry. The racing and betting industry involves 100,000 jobs, with an annual turnover in off-course betting of £4.6 billion. The Exchequer is always around to cream something off: £300 million in taxation and another £150 million for racing and breeding. That is no small change. When Chancellors are looking for a bob or two, they make statements that frighten the industry.

Regular attendance at racing has topped 5 million. That is the highest figure since the 1960s. Obviously, with a Labour Government in office, there are a few more shillings to be spent, and more pleasure and adaptation to leisure to be had. After the world cup, racing is the most televised sport on terrestrial television.

Despite its popularity, the industry is in turmoil. The new chairman of the British Horseracing Board is slugging it out with the director general of the Betting Office Licensees Association. The Horserace Betting Levy Board is, in my view, an unnecessary stratum of administration, and it is rowing with the National Association of Bookmakers. There is constant verbal jousting, which is not improving the industry's image or public relations. The family is at war in the racing industry.

Unfortunately, the bookmakers cream off substantial amounts that should go to the levy board to be ploughed back into maintaining and improving the standard of British racing. One would not have said this as a Labour Member of Parliament some years ago, but I believe that Government should get out of the industry, which should stand on its own two feet, as it is no different from the chemical industry or any other.

The Government are forced to adjudicate between the bookmakers, the British Horseracing Board and all the other organisations. My right hon. Friend the Leader of the House, who used to be Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, must know all about it. The industry needs to be competitive and to sell its product. The new BHB chairman, Peter Savill, would want to find the highest bidder and plough the money back into the industry. We could have open competition, rather than the three monopolies that we have at present.

As my right hon. Friend well knows, the Ladbroke-Coral issue is entirely clear. She referred it to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission. I must talk to her successor, because, when the commission reports

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back, it will be for the new Secretary of State to make the decision. It is an interesting scenario, and we shall want to see what happens.

I have made it clear to all the major figures in the industry that the poor old punter is stuck in the middle. Off-course betting in local betting shops accounts for 96 per cent. of the money. The poor old punter pays 9 per cent., and certainly does not get value for money in the sporting odds offered by bookmakers.

The Exchequer takes £300 million a year, and the bookies make £100 million profit and are the majority shareholders in the satellite services company, which is a lucrative cream-off, yet the racing industry makes only about 1p in every £1 bet, which is the lowest proportion in the world.

The BHB financial plan, drawn up by Peter Savill, is to be welcomed. The racing industry never had a strategy before. There are arguments about the money. The plan is for £25 million to be raised by the sport itself, and, it is hoped, for £80 million to come from the Government; but there is no way that will happen. The money must come from the industry itself, and, frankly, the bookmakers should be targeted. They should put more money back into the industry, and give a fairer share to both the industry and those who patronise it: the punters.

Four separate Departments are involved in the racing industry: the Treasury, because of the huge tax contributions; the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, because it is a sport, although it should really be considered an industry; the Home Office, because of licensed betting; and the Department of Trade and Industry, because it is an industry. How many other industries have so many different Departments to deal with them? It is ludicrous.

Bureaucracy in the sport must be reduced. The levy board is like a middleman. It collects and redistributes the money as it sees fit—I suppose there are criteria—although it is bound by regulation and bureaucracy. To be honest, it is an unnecessary stratum of administration. The distribution of money should be put under the auspices of the British Horseracing Board. Having one board to deal with the whole industry would be far more sensible. In the coming year, there will be a reduction of £5 million in the levy takings going back to the industry.

My right hon. Friend knows very well about the merger I mentioned. I opposed it, and made a submission to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission, because I believe that it would be against the public interest, especially for the punter, and that competition would go out of the window.

I pay tribute to the Tote. Under Peter Jones, a determined and dedicated chairman, it has advanced no end in a short period. It gives efficient service, and distributes the money back to those who have put it in. Nobody plays around, creaming off profits here and there. It makes a remarkable investment back into the industry. I commend the initiative taken by the Tote, and hope that it will be successful. I hope that the Monopolies and Mergers Commission allows the Tote to buy the 830 Coral shops that are for sale.

I applaud the BHB plan and hope that it will be successful. It would create 9,000 new jobs immediately. I commend the Racecourse Association. Remarkable improvements have been made at Haydock Park, a beautiful racecourse which lies between Liverpool and Manchester. The initiative that has been taken means that families can go nearly any day of the week to enjoy not only racing but other leisure activities.

The industry needs total deregulation, so that it can function like any other competitive business, offering the best services, standards and quality to the public and those who sponsor it. If we do not reform racing, more top racing and top owners will go abroad. We will lose our lead in the racing world, along with the revenue and prestige that the horse racing industry has always brought to the United Kingdom.

10.10 am

Mr. Paul Burstow (Sutton and Cheam): I want to discuss two issues that concern my constituents. The first arises from a visit to my surgery by Mrs. Gladys Peckham. She is widow of 85 who lives in a council flat. She feels very alone. Her only companion is her chihuahua, whose name is Penny. Gladys has a friend who lives a considerable distance away in Cobham. She wants to move nearer to her friend so that she does not feel so lonely, and she sought a transfer to sheltered accommodation. She received what at first seemed like a positive reply from the local authority involved, but she read on and found that she was being told that she would have to make alternative arrangements for her pet. She would not be allowed to keep Penny in the residential accommodation.

The bond between people and their pets can be strong, especially with older people who rely heavily on their pets for companionship. Sadly, the emotional importance of pets to older people is not taken seriously enough by many local authorities and housing associations. In some cases, official indifference can result in heart-breaking consequences. More than 140,000 pets are taken to vets or animal sanctuaries each year because their elderly owners are moving to alternative accommodation, and 38,000 of those pets, are put down.

It cannot be right for older people to be forced to choose between ensuring that they can keep their pets, the prospect of their beloved pets being destroyed or placed in other care and rehomed if they are lucky, and the desire to move into more appropriate sheltered or residential accommodation.

I hope that more local authorities and housing associations will, in the first instance, take voluntary action to review their policies and practices, consult older people and draw up and develop pet-friendly policies. There is much good practice in the voluntary and housing association sector and local government. My local authority has good practice, but that is no help to Gladys, because she wants to move to another area.

I am grateful to those hon. Members who have signed early-day motion 1573 on this issue. I hope that local authorities and housing associations that have not yet examined good practice will do so. If they are reluctant, I hope to persuade Ministers not to legislate but to advocate, persuade and be more active on the matter.

Pet-friendly policies should include entitlement to own a pet if the resident can care for it and it is no danger or health hazard to others. If the pet dies, it should be possible to replace it. Residents must take responsibility for the health, safety and welfare of their pets, and ensure

that they are kept under proper control. If a pet must be rehomed, the housing provider must advise an appropriate animal welfare agency that can help. Social services departments should keep registers of private and public sector residential care providers with such policies. The worst thing is for older people to go to housing or social services departments only to be told that they must get rid of their pets, rather than being able to examine the available options.

I hope that the Leader of the House will tell her colleagues in the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions that this issue affects not only my constituent but many people who feel that having to abandon their pets to get appropriate housing is unacceptable.

The second issue goes wider than my constituency. If we are honest, standard spending assessments are a mystery to most of us, and probably even to the officials who have to deal with this science, if one can call it that. A recent paper by the Association of London Government deals with some changes that are being considered by the DETR and the Department for Education and Employment that seriously affect the resources available to London boroughs and thus the services that they provide.

Three changes are being considered: to the additional educational needs index; to the area cost adjustment, which was the subject of numerous inquiries at Environment Question Time; and to the children's personal social services formula. The main changes affect additional educational needs and children's personal social services.

For AEN, it is proposed to drop lone parents, income support claimants and ethnic minorities from the index used to allocate funds. As a result, the index will under-predict inner London's unit costs for providing education services by about 10 per cent. Over the next three years, a council such as Tower Hamlets could lose up to £50.7 million from its education budget. My local education authority in Sutton could lose about £9.5 million.

The second big change affects children's personal social services. If the new methodology had been used in 1997-98, London would have lost about £88 million, with 12 London boroughs losing more than 25 per cent. of their children's personal social services SSA. Over three years, that would cost London social services, and thus the services provided to children, around £300 million. The Health Committee has rightly identified that inadequate resourcing has been a major cause of failure in children's services, but we face the prospect of a reduction in funding for those very services in the capital. We know that, in parts of the capital, those services are already failing, and need greater investment and support to do their job properly and effectively.

Taken together, the three changes could cost London and London services up to £1.5 billion over the next three years. Those resources are vital to the delivery of services. The welcome additional investment in resources for services by the Government has raised expectations that there will be improvements to services and standards. The changes will undermine the Government's efforts to raise standards in education and social services.

To put that figure of £1.5 billion another way, if councils were allowed to raise their council tax to bridge the gap—it is certain that they would not be allowed to do so—approximately a 70 per cent. increase in council tax would be required, which would add £485 a year to the average band D council tax across London. That is far too much, and would have a devastating effect on many of those who rely on the services. I hope that the Leader of the House will communicate that concern to the Department.

I understand that this subject was to have been raised in an Adjournment debate later this week, but that, sadly, hon. Members will not now have that opportunity to raise their concerns. However, the Association of London Government, Labour leaders of many councils and many of my colleagues who lead London councils are seriously concerned about the impact on children's services and education. Therefore, I hope that, before final decisions are made, our representations will be taken into account.

10.20 am

Mr. Tom Cox (Tooting): First, I join other hon. Members in congratulating the President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons, my right hon. Friend the Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett) on her appointment. I am sure that her new responsibilities will be both varied and interesting, and I wish her great success.

In this Adjournment debate, I shall talk about Cyprus. At the outset, I declare that I am chairman of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association Cyprus group, to which hon. Members of all political parties in the House belong.

I shall not go over in detail the events since the Turkish invasion of the Republic of Cyprus 24 years ago, because they are well known, as are the efforts made, year after year, to try to reach an honourable settlement, and the United Nations resolutions on Cyprus which have repeatedly called for a settlement. All hon. Members who belong to the CPA Cyprus group want an honourable settlement that recognises the rights and security of Turkish Cypriots just as much as Greek Cypriots; and we want a Cyprus in which all its people can live in peace and share in the development and prosperity of their country.

As many hon. Members know, this country's links with Cyprus go back well over 100 years. It is a Commonwealth country, and we are one of the guarantor powers for Cyprus, yet Cyprus is today the only European country that is divided by a wall and barbed wire. A great deal of its territory is occupied by a foreign army, that of Turkey. There is a so-called "independent state" in northern Cyprus, which was set up in 1983; but, after all those years, the only country that recognises it is Turkey. The United Kingdom, the European Union, the Council of Europe, the United Nations and the United States of America all refuse to recognise that so-called independent state.

For some time, the Republic of Cyprus has sought membership of the EU, and it is widely supported by many countries in that endeavour. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs has left no one in any doubt of the UK Government's support for that application, and I warmly welcome that clear commitment.

Despite that support, and despite President Clerides of Cyprus having made Turkish Cypriots a constructive and generous offer of a meaningful role in the discussions on membership, which has been refused, threats have been

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made that, if the application continues and is successful, Turkey will annex northern Cyprus into its mainland; and Turkey has insisted that it should be admitted to the European Union before Cyprus. Those threats are totally unacceptable.

I serve as a member of the British delegation to the Council of Europe. At the assembly meeting of the socialist group in Strasbourg in June this year, I opened a debate on Cyprus. The chair of the political affairs committee of the Council of Europe, Andras Barsony of Hungary, commented on the attitude of Mr. Denktash, the spokesman for the Turkish Cypriots, and on Turkey's attitude towards Cyprus's right to seek membership of the EU.

I subsequently asked the House of Commons Library about the British Government's view; a reply dated 3 July stated a clear commitment. The Library wrote to me as follows:

"The Foreign and Commonwealth Office have supplied the following statement in response to my inquiry about the Government's position on the Treaty of Guarantee in relationship to Cyprus' application for European Union membership:

Her Majesty's Government does not believe there is any legal obstacle to the accession to the European Union of the Republic of Cyprus. The Governments of the other 14 member states of the European Union, and the Legal Services of the European Commission and the Council, all share this view. We consider the Government of the Republic of Cyprus to have acted legally in submitting its application to join the EU, and in pursuing it."

I warmly welcome that clear statement. I hope that Turkey and Mr. Denktash are made fully aware of the Government's view.

To my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House I say that I hope that the UK will now work actively with our colleagues and friends in the Austrian Government, who currently hold the presidency of the European Union, to continue that commitment to Cyprus. There can be no doubt that membership will benefit the whole of Cyprus, both Greek and Turkish communities. It will also bring security and prosperity to Cyprus. That is what I want, what many hon. Members want, and, indeed, what many Turkish Cypriots want. Regrettably, Mr. Denktash continues to refuse.

As I said, Cyprus has had a long association with this country. Cyprus threatens no one, but it is now repeatedly threatened. I have here a cutting from *The Daily Telegraph* of 21 July, which states that the Turkish Prime Minister, Mr. Yilmaz, renewed threats of force against Greece and the Greek Cypriots on the 24th anniversary of Turkish military intervention on the island. We know of the presence of more than 30,000 Turkish troops in the north of the island of Cyprus; and we know that those troops have some of the most modern and sophisticated weaponry in the world. For years, President Clerides has called for the full demilitarisation of the island, and he has outlined proposals on that subject, but they have been rejected by Mr. Denktash and by Turkey.

Every Member of the House knows of the crucial role played by Cyprus in the eastern Mediterranean. Yet Cypriot airspace is repeatedly overflown by Turkish military aircraft. Turkey has repeatedly threatened to annex the northern area of Cyprus. Now the Republic of Cyprus is discussing the establishment of missiles in the south of the island.

I should much prefer that there were no missiles, but every country has a right to protect its territory from aggression. That is why the issue is so important, and all efforts need to be made to try to resolve it. Certainly, the Republic of Cyprus, the United Kingdom, Greece—which is another guarantor power for Cyprus—the United States and the United Nations all want a settlement. Turkey can undoubtedly play a major role in working towards such a settlement.

Turkey talks about its future European role and its wish to be a member of the European Union, and I am in no doubt that it will, one day, join the European Union. However, it must begin to understand that, unless it changes its record on Cyprus and on human rights in Turkey, its action against trade unions and the press in Turkey and its treatment of Kurdish communities, it will make little progress towards achieving a role in Europe. Turkey must be told that, clearly and firmly.

As I said, 24 years ago the Republic of Cyprus was invaded. Some 30 per cent. of its territory is still occupied. No UK Government can say, "That is sad, but it is not up to us to find an honourable solution." For the reasons that I have given, it is up to us. That is why I and many hon. Members on both sides of the House will repeatedly return to the issue of Cyprus until there is an honourable settlement for the island that will benefit all the people who live there, whether they are Greek or Turkish.

I realise that my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House may not be in a position to respond in great detail to my comments, but I am sure that she will convey them to my right hon. Friend the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary.

10.32 am

Mr. David Maclean (Penrith and The Border): I also welcome the Leader of the House to the Dispatch Box. Perhaps she belongs to the modernising faction in the Labour party, but I am sure that she will have a deep respect for the traditions and customs of the House, and an open ear for Madam Speaker's entreaties not to wreck some of the cherished procedures of the House in a frantic drive to over-modernise.

I want to address a few issues that worry us in Cumbria, which the House ought to consider before it rises for the recess. I am also prompted by the comments about pet animals by the hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam (Mr. Burstow)—who, sadly, is no longer in his place—to make a few introductory remarks to bring the House up to date on exciting developments in the puppy farming business.

I am the right hon. Member who poked his head above the parapet and said that the Breeding and Sale of Dogs Bill was flawed, and I blocked it. That caused outrage from the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals. I discovered that the Petcare trust, the National Canine Defence League, the Blue Cross, the Kennel Club, the British Dogbreeders Council and Justice for Dogs also had concerns about the Bill, and thought that it could be improved. I chaired meetings of those organisations, which wanted to work for a better Bill.

I am pleased to tell the House that the RSPCA and the British Veterinary Association have now joined that working party, which is working to draft a better Bill that it hopes to have ready for an hon. Member who, in November or December, may be willing to

introduce it. I am delighted that I was the catalyst for that Bill, but I thought that it would be best if I backed out in favour of someone who is seen to be totally independent. The noble Baroness Wharton has taken over the chairmanship of that group, and is now working with all those animal welfare organisations, the Kennel Club and the British Dogbreeders Council to draft a better Bill.

Compromises must be made, but I am certain that, when the group has drafted the Bill, with Government help in due course, it will represent a wider coalition of interests than the one drafted only by the RSPCA, which satisfied almost no one.

My concerns about Cumbria relate, first, to the county council. For some extraordinary reason, it has decided to reorganise itself into what I can only describe as a politburo structure. We have passed no legislation saying that county council structures are improper or not working, but Cumbria county council heard a speech by the Prime Minister and assumed that, if it did not totally change its organisation, it would be attacked or criticised for not being modern enough.

The council has come up with a structure that practically rules out the contribution in proper debate and scrutiny of Labour, Liberal, Conservative and independent council members, and concentrates all decision making on a little politburo of eight "cabinet ministers" and eight executives who will meet in closed session to decide the whole council policy. That has been described as a much more executive form of decision making. It will cut out many council committees and some bureaucracy, but I am afraid that it will also cut out much accountability to the electorate.

That is a foolish move, which council members will one day regret, because their constituents, of all political persuasions, will find that the councillors cannot represent them because they cannot stand up in a committee or full council and make points on their behalf.

I want also to make a point about education. The Queen Elizabeth grammar school in Penrith is working side by side and hand in glove with Ullswater high school. A few years ago, there was tension between the schools, mainly because the county council wanted to close one or other of them. I chaired meetings of staff, headmasters and governors, and they worked out a good working relationship. The Government then sensibly extended the scope of Ullswater high school so that it could offer A-levels, and of the grammar school so that it could take in younger pupils. The schools offer complementary courses, and are working together well.

That is all in danger of being overturned by the decision of the Secretary of State for Education and Employment to extend the voting procedure determining the status of grammar schools to catchment schools which may or may not send pupils to the grammar school. That doctrine of the franchise will create instability in a market town of 12,000 people which has two schools, both of which are centres of excellence. There is now no stigma for pupils attending Ullswater high school, because it is a centre of excellence offering courses different from those at the Queen Elizabeth grammar school. It is unfortunate that that should be destabilised in a frantic bout of political correctness.

I suggest that the Leader of the House examines the guidelines that have been issued by the Secretary of State for Education, in which the procedure for voting on school status is an extension of voting powers to people who have no legitimate say whatever in how a school is run. That procedure can be used to bring about a settlement for schools that is motivated by politics rather than local practicality and need.

Another cause of concern in Cumbria is transport, which is vital to us in the far north-west of England. I know that many colleagues have long distances to travel, and there is always tremendous sympathy for Scottish colleagues who may want to go home on a Thursday evening. I have no sympathy for them. The last plane may be the Glasgow shuttle, which leaves at half-past 8—[HON. MEMBERS: "Eight o'clock."]—the 8 o'clock shuttle—[HON. MEMBERS: "Nine o'clock."]—the 9 o'clock shuttle to Glasgow, Edinburgh or Inverness. It is a tremendous distance. Those hon. Members will be home by 8 o'clock, 9 o'clock or 10 o'clock. The last train for Cumbria leaves at half-past 6. There is a slight extension in the summer—remarkably, we have Mr. Branson to thank for that. Currently, the last train for Cumbria leaves at half-past 7.

That is not a personal sob story. I do not mind; I have become used to it over 15 years. I am merely illustrating the point that, whereas colleagues in other parts of the United Kingdom may live further from London, the transport links are infinitely better than those with Cumbria and the north-west. To reach our nearest airport, we must cross the Pennines to Newcastle or travel south to Manchester. We therefore depend fundamentally on motorway links and rail links, and on the forthcoming improvements to the west coast main line.

Today I wish to focus on more parochial issues—well, not parochial, but not mega-stuff such as the £2 billion investment in the west coast main line. I wish to talk about the need to close the Cumberland gap—the last remaining stretch of dual carriageway at the top of the M6 before we hit the M74 and the improvements being made to it. That short stretch of dual carriageway is a death trap, because there is motorway either side.

The contracts for upgrading that stretch of road to dual carriageway standard were ready a year ago last May. It is a private finance initiative thing, on which, naturally, the general election brought the shutters down. One cannot let contracts with an election in the offing. Then, unfortunately, we were caught up in the roads review.

It is a small contract. Everyone knows that the work must be done. I expect that the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions will announce it today. I should be appalled if it were not announced today. We have wasted 15 months because that small contract was caught in the roads review. Although it was right for the Government to review their road strategy, it was unfortunate that such a small, necessary thing was caught in it.

I do not know what announcement the Secretary of State will make about the A66 today. I merely say, as someone living in the north-west of England, in Cumbria, that, whereas some parts of the United Kingdom may have decided that they do not want more bypasses or roads, and that they are anti-transport, we have not. There is quite a list of roads that need improvement in the constituency of the hon. Member for Barrow and Furness (Mr. Hutton), in Workington and in my constituency—especially the A66.

[Mr. David Maclean]

We would all welcome that funding. I ask the Leader of the House to convey to the Deputy Prime Minister the message that, if the Government announce today that they plan improvements to the A66, the A69 and other roads in Cumbria, no protest groups will lie down in Cumbria, saying, "No road improvements, thank you." If Mr. Scrumpy, Mr. Swampy, Mr. Stumpy, or whatever his name is, comes to Cumbria—he can bring some scrumpy to Cumbria—he will not be made welcome. Although we desperately care for our wonderful lakeland environment—for our Pennines, the Solway plain and all the other wonderful areas of Cumbria—we depend on road improvements, and we shall welcome them if the Government care to spend money on them.

We are also worried about the Territorial Army. Following the strategic defence review, the Government announced in the White Paper that the Territorial Army would be cut from 56,000 to 40,000, and that the cuts would be concentrated in the infantry and the yeomanry. That announcement desperately affects us in Cumbria, because the only real Territorial Army units in Cumbria are infantry.

The Fourth Battalion King's Own Royal Border Regiment has a company each in Carlisle, Workington and Barrow, and headquarters in Lancashire—as the Leader of the House knows, all Labour-held constituencies. It also has two platoons in Kendal. I believe that 24 per cent. of the members of that Territorial Army regiment are unemployed. It is a vital source of employment to young men and women in Cumbria. Each year, about 100 of them enter the Regular Army.

It is a mistake to cut the Territorial Army infantry. They can be used even in the modern, high-tech mobile brigades that the Government envisage. A few years ago I, and many other colleagues, were thought good enough, as territorial infantry soldiers, to be part of the First British Corps on the Rhine. When we faced the Soviet Union—which was regarded as the most powerful adversary that the world and the western forces could have—the infantry were not told, "I am sorry; these Russians are too good for you. You people are not suitable." Tens of thousands of us had a role, integrated with the rest of the infantry, integrated with armour, in First British Corps, in a task facing the Soviet forces.

Thank God, that has changed, but now we are told, "Terribly sorry; there is no role now for all you guys who were good enough to be part of the force facing the Russians. We shall have these new air mobile brigades. There will be rapid deployment, with all sorts of new things to do, but there is no role for you." That is wrong; of course there is a role. We do not need the same numbers, but the Territorial Army infantry could be used in the new role envisaged. Ten per cent. of our Territorial Army forces are in Bosnia; they can be used there.

Although I believe that the cuts being made in the Territorial Army are wrong in principle and short-sighted, the White Paper is long-sighted enough to consider two new aircraft carriers—if we ever get them. If we get them, it will be wonderful. I believe that we might reconsider the Territorial Army infantry.

Leaving that aside, we have a problem in Cumbria. If the Government are to make cuts of 16,000, the infantry must bear the brunt, and that could devastate us in Cumbria. I plead with the Government to keep the Fourth Battalion King's Own Royal Border Regiment, or not to cut it so much that it is reduced to a meaningless shell.

We may lose a company in Workington. Presumably Carlisle will have a case to keep a couple of platoons. Lancashire will have to keep something. It would be nice if we could keep something in Barrow. The whole thing may be cut drastically, and the Queen's Lancashire Regiment, to the south, may be cut drastically. The whole thing may be cobbled together to form a new battalion composed of a couple of platoons in Carlisle, a couple in Barrow and so on, which will have no real identity or core, and whose platoons will be unable to train together.

The final point on which I wish to conclude is the plight of rural areas in Cumbria. We are worried about what is happening in the countryside. Undoubtedly agriculture is suffering because of the strength of sterling. Everyone who relies on agriculture is suffering. We are already seeing redundancies among agricultural supply companies, and cuts in a range of rural industries.

Farm incomes fell by 46 per cent. in the year to March 1998, and are likely to fall by at least the same percentage this year. That is an incredible cut in income. We know how devastating it would be if our salaries were cut by 46 per cent. Only when that happens do we begin to realise how many industries rely on agriculture. One then becomes aware of the suffering of industries that one never imagined had such a key input from agriculture, and depended so much on it for their livelihood.

The effects are widespread. Everyone in rural parts of Cumbria is suffering from the effects of the drop in farm incomes. If farm income drops 46 per cent., it is not a few wealthy farmers who are affected: in Cumbria, it is tens of thousands of hill farmers—small farmers. We do not have big grain barons with 10,000 acres. It is all small farmers in the sheep, beef and dairy sectors, and all those sectors are affected.

The effect of BSE and the European beef ban continues to be felt. There can be no confidence in the future of agriculture unless we can find ways to speed up the lifting of that ban and to extract a date from the Commission.

On a further point, we must keep green-top milk. The Government have sensibly kicked this into touch, and I hope that there is not one of those announcements that sneak out at four o'clock, hidden behind other announcements that the Prime Minister may make today, stating that it is abolished. Green-top milk is a small part of the overall milk trade in Cumbria and in the UK. Nevertheless, it is purchased by consumers who know what they are doing. There are adequate warnings, and there must be consumer choice. I am a great believer in labelling products, telling people what the risks are—we know that the risks of green-top milk are negligible—and leaving consumers to make a free choice. I could say that the same applies to beef on the bone, but I shall not go down that route now.

I anticipate that many hon. Members will want to speak in the debates tonight. As I do not expect to get in then, I hope that one of them will mention the calf processing aid scheme, and point out to the new Minister of Agriculture how important it is that that scheme is kept going as a vital lifeline to livestock producers. I am sure that the right hon. Lady and her admirable staff will make sure that that point is conveyed to the new Minister of Agriculture.

I hope that the Monopolies and Mergers Commission will intervene, following a further breakdown in talks between Milk Marque and the dairy trade. Dairy farm incomes alone have fallen 35 per cent. this year, and entire areas of dairying country such as Cumbria will suffer untold damage unless trends are reversed, with milk prices to the farmer rising. I am not making a plea for the doorstep pinta to be more expensive, but there is a widening gap between the price paid on the doorstep or at the supermarket, and the price that the farmer gets. Farmers' income is being cut drastically.

The final point on rural areas—

Mr. McLoughlin: The sixth final point?

Mr. Maclean: Never trust a politician.

The final point on rural areas is our concern about the new regional development areas. The northern part of Cumbria is to be amalgamated with Liverpool. That means that representation from Cumbria, which would have been small in the north-western area, is likely to be even smaller in the combined area of Liverpool and north-west Cumbria.

Ideally, if a county such as Cumbria, which does not properly fall in with the north-east or the north-west, is in the north-west development area, it needs three representatives on the board. It needs someone from the industrialised west country who shares the concerns of west Cumbria and understands the needs there, as well as the industrial needs of Barrow, which are similar; it needs someone from the central lakes and the uplands there, who understands the needs of tourism and England's most important tourist area; and it needs someone from the agricultural areas and the Eden valley, to express the concerns of that part of the county.

It is likely that, for the whole of Cumbria, we might end up with one person on the board. I should hate to have to suggest who, from such a gigantic county, should serve on a regional development agency that covers Liverpool, Manchester, Lancashire and the entire huge and important north-west area. Who in the name of goodness could we get to represent Cumbria, where we have important industries such as Sellafield—the nuclear industry—and England's biggest tourist area, as well as the agricultural areas? I plead with the right hon. Lady to tell the new Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, without setting any quotas, that Cumbria needs three people on the new regional development board, covering skills and disciplines wide enough to represent the whole county.

On that point, which I am sure the right hon. Lady will take on board, I once again wish her success in her new job, and successful and happy holidays, when they come.

10.54 am

Mr. Lindsay Hoyle (Chorley): I shall try not to raise as many points as the right hon. Member for Penrith and The Border (Mr. Maclean), or no other hon. Members will get in.

I welcome the Leader of the House to her new position. She will be sadly missed as President of the Board of Trade.

The topics on which I shall speak are car pricing, vehicle emissions and public transport. There are 24 million cars on the road in the United Kingdom, and the number is rapidly increasing. The UK car industry is extensive.

It is well documented that car prices in the UK are massively different from those in the rest of the European Union. The EU publishes the figures in six-monthly reports, and the UK is consistently at the top of the list for car prices. On 1 May, the European Commission published its 11th report on car prices, which shows that cars in Britain are 58 per cent. dearer than anywhere else in the EU. Of the 74 best-selling models, 60 were dearest in the UK.

The greatest discrepancy involves the Ford Mondeo—the car for the world. That leading model from Ford costs us in the UK a staggering 58.5 per cent. more than elsewhere. The Ford Fiesta costs 44.7 per cent. more in the UK than in Spain. The Rover is built in Britain, but the 214, the 414, the 620 and the Land Rover Discovery models are 50 per cent. more expensive in Britain than in Holland. The Renault Clio, which we see in the advertisements—the sexy car, as it is called—costs 33.8 per cent. more in the UK than in Italy. The list goes on and on.

Why is there such a difference? Why should UK consumers have to pay more for a car than our continental friends? What is good for the EU should be good for this country. We are part of the EU, and we should have the same benefits.

The list price of cars is determined by general market conditions. Manufacturers tend to take account of the tax linked to car purchase. Therefore, it is believed that, in countries where special taxes are due for cars, the manufacturers will ensure that net car prices are among the lowest for any models. That is the case in Ireland, Holland and Portugal. However, where no such taxes are due, as in Britain, pre-tax prices are set at a higher level. That has a knock-on effect, which results in the higher retail price.

Manufacturers argue that factors such as exchange rate differences, differences in specification and discounts offered by dealers account for the variation in price between Britain and the rest of Europe. That is not the case. Even if those factors are taken into account, Britain still pays about 10 per cent. more than other EU countries.

Car manufacturers argue that the costs involved in producing right-hand drive vehicles are higher. That holds little water. In any case, under EU competition laws, all EU countries are required to produce right-hand drive cars. It is still possible to buy such a car on the continent and bring it back to the UK more cheaply than to buy it in the UK. That anomaly must be resolved.

The strong pound has not made foreign vehicles such as BMW, Mercedes, Volkswagen, Renault, Fiat and those from other continental producers any cheaper. The prices are pegged and held deliberately. For example, one can buy a Nissan hatchback from Holland for £10,000. Even after paying VAT and bringing the car to Britain, one will still have made a considerable saving.

Although car dealers are permitted to set their own prices, it is alleged that they are reluctant to lower prices because of agreements with the manufacturers. The manufacturers comprise that great body of people who claim to look after those who buy cars, but that is not the case. Manufacturers have been known to manipulate prices by threatening to remove the franchise from dealers should they lower their prices. Manufacturers are pegging prices, and that is not fair to the consumer.

[Mr. Lindsay Hoyle]

Car pricing was raised at a meeting of EU Finance Ministers at York in March. That initiated an investigation into price disparities between EU markets. I hope that the outcome of that study promotes positive action. Something needs to be done to remedy the problem, as the consumer is already becoming more and more dissatisfied and more and more taken for a ride—if the House will excuse the pun.

We do not want people to be forced to shop abroad for their cars. We should be encouraging people to buy cars from United Kingdom dealers. Personally, I should like to see them buy cars that are built in the UK. An important factor is to introduce measures to lower car prices. I hope that the Government will make that a priority, and take action on this important matter. First, that approach would certainly help UK manufacturing. Secondly, it would help to secure more jobs in that sector.

There is a link between new cars, pollution and emissions. Perhaps, if car prices were lowered, the result would be more new cars with reduced emissions, which would have a beneficial effect on global warming. It would also allow us to get rid of the old bangers—the polluters that we see throughout the country. Lower new car prices would make more emission-efficient cars available to the public, which would be better for the community. Much could be done in that direction. As I have said, the problem of global warming could be reduced through this factor.

I am keen to know whether the Government will assist in promoting the use of more environmentally friendly fuel for vehicles. Already the Government provide funding for energy savings—the powershift programme, which gives grants of up to half the capital cost of converting vehicles to run on alternative fuels. I would welcome that factor being taken on board.

The Government have also conducted research into the use of alternative fuels. Local authority fleets and taxis have been tested. However, it is important to understand that fewer than 1 per cent. of vehicles in the UK rely on an alternative fuel. In 1997, 9,100 vehicles were registered as running on gas. There were 17,400 vehicles running on electricity. I would like to see these numbers increase. With an ever-increasing number of vehicles on the roads, I hope that the Government will continue seriously to consider the environmental damage that is caused by car pollution and all its implications.

I hope that the Government will work on measures to improve the assistance that is given to the public and private firms who wish to convert their vehicles. Perhaps incentives can be offered to car manufacturers to produce more cleaner vehicles for general use.

I recently supported an early-day motion that calls on the Government to look into the possibility of providing incentives to bus and taxi companies to convert their vehicles to liquefied petroleum gas or natural compressed gas. The motion has been supported by about 50 Members so far. Traffic pollution would be significantly alleviated if we set targets for converting vehicles to run on LPG or natural compressed gas.

Vehicles such as buses and taxis run through our cities all day and all night. They are continually polluting our cities and the countryside. There is a golden opportunity for the Government to undertake some radical tests, and to conduct trials to clean up our cities. That would not take much doing. I believe that LPG and compressed natural gas are the ways forward, and we should take that on board.

My hon. Friend the Member for Burnley (Mr. Pike) represents a constituency that is a near neighbour of mine. He will initiate an Adjournment debate tonight on the cylinders that are produced by Lucas in his constituency. They are made for cars that run on LPG or compressed natural gas. Unfortunately, Lucas will close that factory, which is sad. I think that there should be investment to keep production in the United Kingdom. I welcome my hon. Friend's Adjournment debate.

We should not lose sight of the fact that the car has an important role, but there should be an alternative to it, and that is public transport. Public transport must play a part, but it must be more widely available. That is why I welcome the important White Paper presented by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions. We must ensure that public transport is not only available but more welcoming and more efficient, and that applies to bus stations and train stations. They must feel friendly and welcoming to the travelling public as well as safe at night. They must provide facilities.

I shall give an example that shows how bad some companies are. Stagecoach, in my constituency, operates the bus station at Chorley, on land owned by the local authority, on a peppercorn rent. The bus station itself is owned by Stagecoach. When Stagecoach took over the bus station, the lease clearly stated that a public toilet must be provided. Everybody would expect that the general public could use that toilet. Stagecoach was taken to court by the local authority to be asked why the toilet had not been opened. Stagecoach objected, saying, "It states in the lease that a toilet must be provided, but it does not say that it should be open to the general public."

That approach will not allow improvements to be made to public transport in bus and train stations. Improvements will not be made if companies do not provide facilities for the travelling public. That approach is not good enough, and it is not the way forward.

I wish to take the view forward that there should be cheaper vehicles, alternative fuels, better public transport and better facilities for those who use public transport.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Lord): Order. I wish to say before I call the next speaker that a number of hon. Members are seeking to catch my eye. If contributions are reasonably brief, it will be possible to call most hon. Members who wish to speak. If contributions are not brief, many hon. Members will be disappointed.

11.5 am

Mr. Nigel Evans (Ribble Valley): I shall heed what you have said, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and try to keep my remarks to within about five minutes.

I welcome the right hon. Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett) to her new position of Leader of the House. I wish her well in her arduous duties, particularly at a

time of constant change. The right hon. Lady will certainly receive support from the Opposition for sensible change.

As we enter the holiday season, and for us at Westminster the summer recess, with I am sure a short holiday somewhere along the line, it is appropriate to raise the subject of quarantine laws. I am pleased to see my hon. Friend the Member for Southend, West (Mr. Amess) in his place. I know that he has introduced a ten-minute Bill on this subject and has worked extremely hard in trying to ensure that we have sensible changes in our quarantine laws. I hope that he, like me, will be pleased very shortly by some announcements that the Government may be making. An announcement is long overdue.

There are 12 million pet owners in this country. Between 1972 and 1995, 170,000 pets were put into quarantine. During that period 2,500 of those pets died.

People go abroad for many reasons, not only for holidays. Some do so by force of work. Indeed, the hon. Member for Tooting (Mr. Cox) mentioned Cyprus, where we have air force bases. One person came to my attention. He was forced, when he finished his three-month stint in Cyprus, to return to this country. His dog had to go into quarantine for six months. That is a long time. If someone is in the armed forces, he might be moved somewhere else fairly shortly after returning to this country. Quarantine law is something that we should consider.

A former Member, David Waddington, became governor of Bermuda. He took his dog with him. In due course he returned to this country and the dog went into quarantine. Unfortunately it died when in quarantine.

The question that must be asked is whether there is room for sensible change. I know that a committee of experts is currently examining these matters. It is to be hoped that shortly it will make some recommendations. We would like early recommendations to come forward because there are many people who would delay holidays while waiting for an announcement while others would not take holidays: because they do not want to be separated from their pets, going abroad is completely alien to them.

There are variable kennel standards within the United Kingdom. However, people do not want to be separated from their pets for six months, even if their pets are in the best kennels.

None of us wants to see rabies introduced into this country, or even the threat of that happening. That applies to any other diseases for that matter. However, we must look at the facts. If there is a sensible alternative, which I believe there now is, particularly with the introduction of new technology and such things as passports for pets, we could take a sensible step and ensure that people could go abroad with their pets without being separated from them for six months.

In 1995, the Select Committee on Agriculture recommended changes for cats and dogs and passports for pets. If we carry on with the current quarantine laws, some people will take their pets abroad illegally and smuggle them back into this country, which will be a problem. Between 1988 and 1995, 769 animals were detected and officially reported as being smuggled back into this country, so one can only imagine how many more pets were brought back in—they are a real threat.

We need a properly regulated system under which we know that pets have been properly inoculated and have in their necks microchips which can be properly scanned. That would ensure that pets are clean going-out and clean coming back in. Now that new technology is available, we can do that. Some people will be deterred from the introduction of passports for pets by the expense, but putting pets in quarantine is extremely expensive. The cost is reckoned to be between £800 for cats and £1,500 for dogs, but that is not the only issue. People are concerned about the emotional separation of the pet from the owner.

National Opinion Polls conducted a poll on the subject in 1996, and 86 per cent. of the sample said that they would prefer sensible change, if available. A sensible alternative is available. Will the Leader of the House take on board the fact that some people—for example, the blind, who have guide dogs—have no choice? They are unable to go abroad because the quarantine laws state that they would have to be separated from their guide dogs when they returned.

If we cannot have an early announcement about quarantine laws generally, may we have one for those who rely on their dogs, such as the blind, so that they might at least have the opportunity to go abroad? Passports for pets are backed by the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, and 12 million pet owners are waiting to hear what the Leader of the House has to say about them.

11.11 am

Mr. David Kidney (Stafford): I have abiding memories of a speech of some urgency made recently by my hon. Friend the Member for North-East Derbyshire (Mr. Barnes), who spoke strongly about an escape of acid gas in his constituency. I echo the pleasure expressed by Madam Speaker at my hon. Friend's reappearance in the Chamber last Friday, following a recent stroke. I send him my best wishes for a full and speedy recovery.

This issue has been pursued for some years by a constituent, Mr. G. Badley, of Stafford, who has pressed successive Home Secretaries and even petitioned the Queen on a subject about which he feels strongly. I support my constituent, a retired prison officer, on the issue of introducing a long service medal for prison officers. There were calls for such a medal in the previous Parliament and, for completeness, I should say that hon. Members also spoke of its covering good conduct and bravery. Although those are commendable criteria for recognition, I shall confine my remarks to a long service award.

There has been a prison in my constituency for hundreds of years. Stafford prison is currently a category C training prison with a prisoner population of more than 600. I last visited it in March and, although some facilities are clearly not up to modern standards because of the prison's age, the regime is excellent, with reasonable but firm control by prison officers. A good job is done in demanding circumstances. Budgetary matters were raised with me by the management, and I took them up with the Home Office. I also canvassed serving prison officers about a long service medal, and there was overwhelming support for its introduction.

The Imperial Service medal, which was introduced in 1903 for junior grades of civil servants in this country and abroad, is available to prison officers. It is a silver medal with the sovereign's crowned head on the obverse and the inscription "For Faithful Service" on the reverse. I asked

[Mr. David Kidney]

prison officers for their comments about it. One said, "Some staff are recommended for it after retirement and it appears to be awarded in an haphazard way." Another said, "Numerous staff are recommended for the award, but only a few receive it". A third member of staff wrote that

"as it is only awarded after completion of service, the pride of wearing it on our uniform is not there."

That is an important point to bear in mind in respect of the call for an award given during service.

Other regular and volunteer services have long service awards. Perhaps the best example is the police service, whose current long service award was instituted in June 1951. The basic qualification is 22 years' service. I was reminded that the police have a long service award during the dispute between the Home Secretary and the Prison Officers Association about recognising the right to industrial action. Part of the Home Secretary's argument was that prison officers are office holders, not employees, and should not have such a right, just as the police are office holders and have no such right. Could not prison officers be like police officers and have a long service award?

Curiously, my research about medals led me to the Colonial Prison Service long service medal, which still exists. It was instituted in October 1955 for 18 or more years of service in colonial prisons. It is odd that there should be such an obscure and backward-looking award, but not one that is modern and relevant.

For several months, I have been asking the Prison Service and the Home Office to support my constituent's call for such an award. In January 1998, Mr. Richard Tilt, the Director General of the Prison Service, told me in a letter that the question has been under consideration for a number of years. It was kind of him to say that that consideration had been prompted from several sources, including Mr. Badley. Mr. Tilt confirmed that the Imperial Service medal was awarded for more than 25 years' service and only on retirement. Officers can of course be nominated for the OBE and the MBE.

I have continued to press for a new long service award. In April, the then Minister of State, Home Office, my hon. Friend the Member for Gateshead, East and Washington, West (Ms Quin), wrote to me that, although the Home Office was willing for such an award to be created, the decision was in the hands of the ceremonial branch of the Cabinet Office. I am told that discussions have been going on for some time, but, at that stage, there were still outstanding concerns.

I wrote again. The latest letter from my hon. Friend, which arrived in June, said that the Home Office was still willing to create a Queen's prison service medal to recognise long service, but was still waiting for news from the Cabinet Office. Interestingly, the letter also said that the future of the Imperial Service medal was under consideration, so the time is clearly right to consider introducing a new medal.

I hope that this airing of the issues will speed a decision to institute a new long service medal for serving prison officers. To prepare for the debate, I read the Prison Service annual report for 1996-97, which was the most recent that I could find. If I have totalled up the columns correctly, assaults on staff in that year totalled 2,531, so it is fair to say that they bravely carry out a tough job and fulfil part of the necessary task of maintaining public order. Prison officers deserve the recognition for which I am calling.

11.19 am

Mr. Andrew Stunell (Hazel Grove): I add my congratulations to the new Leader of the House on her appointment, and wish her well in the work that she will be doing to serve the House. Our congratulations are tinged with a little regret, because the precise timing of her appointment may lead to some delay in the much-needed work of the Modernisation Committee. It was something of an irony that 18 years of Conservative rule led to a thorough overhaul of every public body and institution in the land, except Parliament. I am sure that the new Leader of the House, when she reflects on her former role at the Department of Trade and Industry, will remember that she has not merely accepted, but often welcomed, the moves that the previous Government made, to improve the responsiveness, effectiveness and accountability of public bodies. I hope that, as the new Chairman of the Modernisation Committee, she will want to press ahead with reform of the House.

I counsel the right hon. Lady not to listen to the right hon. Member for Penrith and The Border (Mr. Maclean) when he asks her to slow down the pace of reform. Were he present, I would remind him that he was an active supporter of a Government who believed that reform of public institutions should be undertaken vigorously, regardless of the special pleading of those who held office in such bodies.

My regret about the delay is not because the new Leader of the House has shown any unwillingness to continue with reform, but because on Monday of this week the Committee was due to meet Madam Speaker and we were unable to do so because of the timing of the right hon. Lady's appointment. I well understand the reasons for that, but the projected report of the Committee will not now be available before the recess. In all probability, it will not be feasible to debate the report in the spillover session in October. I fear, therefore, that none of the proposals will be implemented in time for the new Session starting in November. We hope that the right hon. Lady will pick up the baton and run with it as vigorously as possible, and that she will help us to make up for the unavoidable lost time.

The Modernisation Committee has been privileged to receive a great deal of material, including many letters from Members, encouraging us to go further and faster. We have also received the timetable for the Parliament in Canada. I can tell hon. Members, if they are interested, when the Canadian Parliament will rise for the Christmas recess in 2003, but I cannot tell them whether we shall be sitting in the first week of November 1998. That contrast between the capacity and ability of legislatures in other parts of the world to come to terms with the modern age; our reluctance and inability to do so are at the heart of my argument.

If the Leader of the House wants to encourage us to adjourn for the summer recess, I hope that she will assure us that her commitment to pressing ahead with her predecessor's urge to reform and modernise the House and bring it into the 20th if not the 21st century is undiminished.

I remind the right hon. Lady that a distinguished former Member, Mr. Belisha, gave the country his beacons, and that another distinguished former Member, Kenneth Baker, now in the other place—*[Interruption.]* Perhaps there is some dispute about the qualifying adjective that I used. He has given every school staff room of the country Baker days. The new Leader of the House has the opportunity to give us Mrs. Beckett's calendar, and I hope that she will do so.

11.23 am

Caroline Flint (Don Valley): May I join my colleagues in congratulating my right hon. Friend on her appointment as Leader of the House? I am sure that, as the former President of the Board of Trade, she will bring experience in dealing with employers, who often do not want to consider change. When she addresses the issue of modernisation, and compares it with her task at the Board of Trade, she will realise that people in the House are a much harder bunch to crack than some of our major employers.

I want to continue on the same theme as the hon. Member for Hazel Grove (Mr. Stunell), and specifically to deal with the issue of child care and family-friendly policies in the House, not just for the 659 MPs but for the many thousands of employees who work here every day for MPs and for the House. In the past 15 months, as a new Member of Parliament, I have tried not to rush in and suggest ways in which the House could improve and modernise. I have got involved in my work in the Chamber and in the Select Committee on which I am proud to serve, and I have thought about how my work has been affected and have listened to other hon. Members who are more experienced than I am. I have come to the conclusion that there is room for change.

More than 300 of my constituents have visited the House in the past year, and, whenever possible, I have guided them round. In preparation for that, I have learnt about the building and its history. I have been struck by how much this place has changed. It has accommodated parliamentary reform: the people who are elected to the House have changed, and the enfranchisement of the population has brought about changes. The building has been adapted and modernised to accommodate the changes. Change has unfortunately sometimes been necessary as a result of fires or bombs. I hope that we do not have to resort to such drastic measures before the Modernisation Committee recognises that we can develop and change the building while maintaining the traditions that my constituents enjoy and like to see when they visit the House.

My constituents enjoy learning about the history of the struggles for democracy in the United Kingdom and about the traditions of the House, as do I, being a history graduate. However, they are bewildered by our legislative procedures and by the working lives of MPs and those who work with them. The Modernisation Committee could take the lead on this issue, and could make ground-breaking progress towards making the House fit for the 21st century while respecting its traditions. It must be a modern place of work.

We need fully to consider how this place can become a family-friendly environment. We must remind ourselves what the Government are asking employers outside the House. In their Green Paper, "Meeting the Childcare Challenge", they said:

> "Employers have a vital role to play in delivering the strategy. We want to encourage and enable more employers to support childcare and adopt family friendly employment practices to help their employees to balance work and family life."

If we face that challenge in the House and improve the opportunities for staff to combine family life and work, we will send out a good message to employers throughout the country. If we can find solutions in this place, they can certainly be found in other places of employment.

I welcomed the Administration Committee's decision to conduct a survey of the child care needs of staff and MPs. However, I was disappointed with the outcome of that survey, as were the hon. Members who signed my early-day motion 1556. Rather than being a springboard for further debate on this important issue, it drew a line in the sand and said that we now needed closure.

The Administration Committee pointed out that only just under 300 people said that they would be keen to use a child-care facility on site. The Committee considered that a poor response, but I think that it was pretty good when one considers that people were responding to a survey in a situation where there are no child care facilities on site. Having established two workplace nurseries, my experience is that demand increases once a facility is established. The number using such facilities would be greater once they were provided and staff could plan their child care better. Many probably already have to look elsewhere for such provision.

It is interesting to note that of those who replied to the survey, 79 per cent. were in favour of child care and, of those, only 23 per cent. had children aged 12 and under. That is important because it demonstrates that staff, whether or not they have children, recognise that family life is important and that they could support better child care provision to help their colleagues with young families.

If we started with a blank sheet it would be easy to improve facilities in the House, and outlooks and attitudes. I have high hopes that the Scottish Parliament and the Welsh Assembly will address such issues from the outset. For us, the challenge is greater. We must stretch our imagination to envisage a different way of organising things.

My hon. Friend the Member for Lancaster and Wyre (Mr. Dawson) has tabled an amendment to my early-day motion. As someone who is concerned about issues relating to children who are looked after, I respect his opinion, but I challenge his statement that

> "the payment of childcare vouchers allows parents to choose high quality childcare closer to home in a more child-centred milieu than the Palace of Westminster."

In addressing the child care needs of people in this place, rather than presenting them with something which they have to accept, we must offer diversity and variety.

It is important to remember that child care initiatives have developed in the most unusual places. During the second world war, child care was much in demand when women had to service industries while men were away at war. That challenge was taken up by creating child care in the factories and workplaces, enabling women to work so that we could win the war.

If we look outside the House, which it is important to do, we find imaginative schemes have been established by employers, sometimes on their own and sometimes in partnership with others, in order to develop imaginative

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solutions to their employees' child care needs. The European Parliament has already established a nursery. Therefore, we should not be too constricted by the need to provide a child-centred facility. What is important is that what we provide should be of good quality and accessible. As I have said, the building has adapted many times during the centuries and can adapt again.

The Administration Committee made several points in objecting to considering child care in more detail. One point that it made was that it is unreasonable to expect the taxpayer to subsidise child care in this place. That is a bit rich because the taxpayer subsides many facilities in the House, whether catering, staff or offices. Facilities are subsidised in all sorts of ways to create a good working environment so that staff and Members of Parliament can do their job, and child care should be no exception. Child care provided for employees has been proven to go some way towards retaining skilled staff while helping people to cope with family life and work. That argument by the Administration Committee was a bit below the belt and did not fit in with all the other facilities subsidised by the taxpayer in the House.

Just down the road in Whitehall, Departments are addressing child care issues and family friendly policies: the Administration Committee and others concerned with the issue have plenty of examples in their search for advice and other options.

Most disappointing was the fact that the Administration Committee, having conducted a survey, which I welcome and applaud, and having received the report from the organisation which conducted that research, refused to hear from anyone else. My early-day motion asks the Committee to invite others with an interest in the area, perhaps employers who may be able to show by example what can be achieved, to contribute in order further to open up the debate.

I am chair of the all-party group on child care, which, after the recess, is looking forward to hearing a representative from the Department of the Serjeant at Arms speak on child care in the House. I welcome all hon. Members to that meeting.

It is vital that child care is one part of a modernising agenda and that we recognise that if we cannot find solutions it is difficult to ask others to do so elsewhere. I invite the Administration Committee to think again about the matter and allow the debate to be opened up once more.

11.35 am

Mr. Bob Blizzard (Waveney): It is said that politicians develop thick skins, but, in health terms, we often do not think too much about skin. We tend to concentrate on the health of our internal organs, eyes and limbs, but not on our skin—until people suffer burns. People with serious burns need skin grafts or skin transplants. Skin can be taken from other parts of a patient's body, but when a person suffers extensive burns, that is not possible. Other people's skin has to be used. Therefore, it is important that Britain has skin-banking facilities. Skin transplants are permitted under the Human Tissue Act 1961, but we do not have a national skin bank and that is one of the deficiencies of our health service.

We do, however, have one purpose-built skin bank, at Queen Mary's hospital, Roehampton—the Stephen Kirby skin bank. It is the only dedicated establishment in Britain where skin can be retrieved, treated and stored. Its very existence is the result of a tragic but remarkable story that is dear to the hearts of people in my part of the country.

In May 1994, Stephen Kirby and his family were taking a camping holiday in France when, in the early hours of one morning, their tent caught fire. Stephen helped his wife and daughter out of their tent but, sadly, his five-year-old son died. In rescuing his family, Stephen suffered 90 per cent. burns, and his daughter 25 per cent. burns. Stephen's wife, Kim, was devastated.

Stephen was taken to the burns unit at Queen Mary's hospital, but his family were told that without skin he would die within three days. At that time, there was no facility to provide a supply of skin, so 12 members of his family and friends donated skin. Skin was removed from their bodies under general anaesthetic, but their recovery was extremely painful. Stephen's eventual death gave them even greater pain.

Stephen's wife Kim decided that something must be done, so, with the help of a family friend, Nick Brighouse, they persuaded the *Eastern Daily Press*—the daily paper serving our area—to launch an appeal, with a view to establishing the first skin bank in the United Kingdom. That appeal captured the imagination and the hearts of people in Norfolk and north Suffolk and the target of £100,000 was reached in 14 weeks. Schools throughout the area, including the one at which I was teaching at the time, vigorously supported the appeal, and pupils found all sorts of ways of gathering money.

Eventually, £250,000 was raised, and the Stephen Kirby skin bank was opened in March 1986 by Kim Kirby and Simon Weston—who, hon. Members will remember, was the officer who suffered appalling burns during the Falklands war. When he performed the ceremony he said that, had a skin bank existed then, he would have been saved 28 operations.

Today, the skin bank stands as a memorial to the late Stephen Kirby. It is the first purpose-built dedicated skin bank in the country and it stores skin from cadaver donors. No other replacement for skin is as effective as skin itself, which prevents infection and loss of blood, encourages healing, reduces pain and can reduce the length of time spent in hospital. The Stephen Kirby foundation has established a research facility continually to refine and improve methods of storing, processing and using donated skin.

Each year, numerous people sustain burns, many so extensive that those people have not enough of their own skin to replace the burnt skin. Burns units throughout the country must therefore obtain donated skin, and they can do so only from the Stephen Kirby skin bank—although skin is sometimes brought in from Holland and other countries. The Stephen Kirby skin bank is successful: this year there were 40 donors, and the bank is continuing despite the transfer of the burns and plastic surgery units to Chelsea and Westminster hospital under the current trust reconfiguration. The Stephen Kirby unit will remain on the Roehampton site, and the company Smith and Nephew is to use it as a service base for tissue culture work later in the year.

Nevertheless, we do not have a proper skin bank system with nationwide cover. Two developments are needed for that to happen. First, we need more skin. I feel strongly—as do the supporters of the skin bank—that skin should feature on donor cards. The position of the Department of

Health, as set out in various letters from Ministers in the last and the present Governments, is that it is reluctant to allow that.

A study conducted in 1995 revealed that people were put off the idea by the belief that taking skin from bodies after death would mutilate them. That is not the case. Nick Brighouse, whom I mentioned earlier, suffered a further tragedy when his wife died. He gave me permission to tell the House that, according to her wish, nearly all the skin was removed from her body for use in the skin bank. Having seen her body after the skin had been removed, he said that no one would have any idea that it had been removed. That is the most compelling piece of evidence that the use of skin for donor purposes does not mutilate a deceased person.

I ask the Department to repeat its research, but to include a "priming" question making it clear that the process does not mutilate the body. I believe that those who support the idea of organ donation would then be keen for skin to be included on donor cards.

I understand that the Department plans to improve publicity relating to organ transplants, that a committee has been formed and that a campaign will be launched in the autumn. My friend Mr. Brighouse would welcome the opportunity to be involved in the committee.

Some people fear that, if the idea of skin transplants is taken up with too much enthusiasm, skin will be sold and donors exploited; but that is prohibited by the Human Organ Transplants Act 1989. Our second problem, however, is that there is no national network or national funding for skin transplants. At present, the Stephen Kirby skin bank supplies eight burns units countrywide, in areas as diverse as Glasgow, Belfast, Dublin and London. As the bank's work and produce becomes increasingly recognised, the number of burns units involved is expected to increase. It seems that the present collection of units may be "rationalised" into larger supraregional units, but at present they are having to be fed, and the whole system relies on one hospital trust. I think that it is too much to expect one trust to support a national system.

I want a system of national funding, which would realise the full ambition of Stephen Kirby's widow and friends, and that of the people of East Anglia who supported the cause. The Government have an opportunity to make an innovative advance in the health service at very little extra cost—just a tiny drop of the £21 billion. That would be a credit to the party that founded the national health service.

Mr. Ian Bruce (South Dorset): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I am sorry to interrupt the House's proceedings on important matters, but this morning I have been trying to table questions to the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster. The Table Office is unclear about what title that Minister will use when answering questions after the recess. Will it be "Minister for the Cabinet Office" or "Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster"? I am not sure what the Minister's responsibilities will be.

The Leader of the House is present. I could not ask her this question outside, and I hope that she has heard my point of order. Surely we should know exactly what we can ask the Minister, whose title may well have changed by the time we return after the recess.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: That is not a matter for the Chair, but no doubt the Leader of the House has heard what the hon. Gentleman has said.

11.45 am

Mr. David Amess (Southend, West): I join others in congratulating the Leader of the House on her appointment, and wish her well for the future.

This is my fourth Parliament. During my time here, I have found that this place has been devalued. We all have different perspectives. I listen carefully to the cry of "modernisation", but I feel that, in certain respects, modernisation may be the problem rather than the solution.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Tooting (Mr. Cox) on his splendid speech about Cyprus. He was right to draw our attention to the issues that he mentioned. I also congratulate my right hon. Friend the Member for Penrith and The Border (Mr. Maclean). I agreed strongly with what he said about grammar schools. One hon. Member—not a Conservative, sadly—benefited from a grammar school education in my constituency. I was concerned to learn of the arrangements for ballots; we have four splendid grammar schools in Southend, and I hope very much that we will keep them.

I also agreed with what my right hon. Friend the Member for Penrith and The Border said about roads. One reason why I was not present at 9.35 am is the disgraceful length of time that it has taken for the A12 to be improved between the Leytonstone and Gants Hill roundabouts. The fiasco that originally involved Swampy, or whatever he is called, has now been going on for more than five years, and there has been so much delay that the sign announcing the opening of the new road has been taken away.

I agreed with what my hon. Friend the Member for Ribble Valley (Mr. Evans) said about quarantine measures, and I hope that the Leader of the House will take it on board.

I want to make four points. The first concerns the fire service. All hon. Members praise the fire service, but it seems to have gone unnoticed that there is already a strike in Essex, and there is shortly to be another in Surrey. I am rather concerned about that. No doubt the Leader of the House will say that it is not the Government's business to become involved, but there is growing anxiety about the disruption.

In 1997, the average amount spent on the fire service in England was £25.77 per head. In Essex, we delivered a service on £23.92 per head. In 1997, the 38 Essex control-room staff handled about 40,000 calls, a 50 per cent. increase since 1988. The speech of the hon. Member for Waveney (Mr. Blizzard) showed how much we owe the fire service. I am not taking sides in the dispute, but I represent my constituents, and we want an end to it.

The chief fire officer has made five pledges. He has said that there will be no compulsory redundancies; that the number of pumping appliances will not be reduced; that no fire stations will be closed during the year—certainly I will not allow Leigh fire station to close—that minimum standards of fire cover will be unaffected; and that public and firefighter safety will not be adversely affected. The Fire Brigades Union disputes all five points; it is very upset. I do not wish to be political, but there is some confusion in the House. Essex county council is not Conservative controlled: nothing can be done without the agreement of the Labour and Liberal parties. The fire authority has a Labour chairman and a Liberal deputy chairman. The Fire Brigades Union is rather upset by the

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fact that no formal meeting has taken place. I hope that the Leader of the House will consider asking Ministers to assist.

Secondly, I should like to raise a matter that concerns the Minister with responsibility for school standards. We all salute the efforts of teachers and head teachers, but I am becoming increasingly concerned about some practices. Some teachers and head teachers take early retirement on grounds of stress. That is understood, but it is a little surprising that some of them return rather quickly to the classroom. Another extraordinary practice relates to school inspectors. A minority of teachers and head teachers whose schools have been critically inspected seem to retire early and become inspectors. I took the matter to the Secretary of State for Education and Employment who passed it to the chief inspector. He does not necessarily disagree with me, but says that his legal advice is to the effect that a poor teacher or a poor head teacher will not necessarily be a poor inspector.

All hon. Members know about the nightmare that teachers go through when a school is inspected. It can be a traumatic experience and it will not fill teachers with confidence when they realise that some inspectors may have been poor teachers or head teachers. The legal advice is barmy, and perhaps the Leader of the House will have a quiet word with her right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Employment and ask him to check it. School inspection is a serious matter. Teaching is a vocation, and a school inspector's job should not be a soft option. The House should take the matter more seriously.

My third point relates to pre-school playgroups. Each year hon. Members attend a splendid tea party in the Members' Dining Room. We like to have our photographs taken as we make fools of ourselves drawing matchstick figures. We say that pre-school teachers are marvellous, but that seems to be as far as we go in supporting them. All my children have benefited from pre-school playgroups, but the modern trend towards nursery education pre-empts the role of the pre-school playgroup. The groups are right to be concerned about the way in which they are being undermined. Over the past 37 years, 20 million children have benefited from pre-school playgroups. They do a splendid job. Southend has 87 groups serving 3,500 people; the children are aged two, three and four.

In some respects, the growth of nursery education is destroying the value of pre-school playgroups. The Government made a rather clever announcement at our most recent tea party, but I am not sure that all practitioners were convinced. Do the Government value the work of such groups? There is no doubt that all hon. Members witness the consequences of inadequate parenting, and pre-school playgroups have a valuable role in supporting parents. They introduce young children to activities that will later help them to make a success of their schooling.

My final point for the Leader of the House, who is the former Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, concerns consumer protection. There are many senior citizens in my constituency, which, in that context, ranks 33rd in Britain. Some people whom I would describe as odd job men are exploiting the slight confusion of some senior citizens who want home improvements. Those elderly people are being hoodwinked. I salute an organisation in my constituency that is addressing the problem. Two outstanding gentlemen, one of whom has had nine years experience in the Prison Service, have set up an organisation called the Official Consumer Protection Company to supply a service to homes and businesses and for vehicles. The company is checking on some of those odd job people.

A classic example of one of the company's success stories is that of a local man who was tricked into paying £7,000 in advance for a conservatory. The company to which the money was paid vanished, leaving the job uncompleted. The man is 83 years of age, has suffered a severe stroke and has other health problems. That splendid protection company successfully negotiated with one of its member companies to finish the job free of charge. The Government should encourage such organisations.

11.55 am

Mr. John McDonnell (Hayes and Harlington): I shall try to deliver my speech in five minutes. I congratulate the Leader of the House on her appointment. I was one of those who supported her in her bid to become deputy leader of the party—never mind Leader of the House.

I again draw the House's attention to the case of Diarmuid O'Neill. Some hon. Members will recall that, on the morning of 23 September 1996, radio and television news bulletins reported that an IRA suspect had been shot dead in west London. As the news developed, there were reports that the man had been shot in a gun battle and that there had been a bomb factory in the house. The man was Diarmuid O'Neill. It later transpired that Diarmuid was not armed; that no weapons were found on the premises; that the shots had come only from police weapons; and that there had been no explosives on the premises.

The case raises many serious questions about the role of, and reasons for, police media briefings. It also transpired that Mr. O'Neill had been shot six times; that CS gas canisters had been fired at his back; that, with blood pouring from him, he was dragged down the house steps; and that he was denied medical treatment for 25 minutes. Curiously, a similar operation had been carried out at another house that morning, the O'Neill family house, where his brother Shane was arrested, although he was later freed. There were no shots fired at that house and no one was injured. The matter was referred to the Police Complaints Authority and is still with it.

When the issue was raised in the House, my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary reported that the progress of the inquiry had been delayed by court proceedings which were about to take place. Those proceedings were held in October, and at them taped evidence confirmed that Diarmuid O'Neill and the people who were with him were seeking to surrender while they were being shot. Six bullets were pumped into Diarmuid O'Neill, although the taped evidence made it clear that his hands were up and that he had informed the police officer that he had no weapons.

The tape-recorded evidence draws out questions that need to be considered by the Police Complaints Authority. For example, why were six bullets pumped into Mr. O'Neill? Why was the action allowed to continue after the officer in charge had left the premises? Why was

there no deputy in command of the operation? Why was it decided to shoot Diarmuid O'Neill, and who was responsible for the decision? Why did the police give a false briefing when it was quite clear that morning, soon after the house was examined, that there were no arms or weapons on the premises? Why was Mr. O'Neill carried into the street for medical treatment when paramedics were on hand outside and could have treated him where he lay? Why was medical treatment delayed for so long? Why was it decided to effect the arrests in the manner that has been described, and who was responsible for that decision? Why was CS gas used in breach of the operational plan to use it only to cover withdrawal? In fact, it was used almost as an offensive weapon. Another key question is this: why did a marksman of—as we now gather from the trial—seven years' experience shoot Diarmuid O'Neill six times?

There are questions about the Police Complaints Authority inquiry itself. Why is it that the Metropolitan police itself constitutes the inquiry team? Why is it examining its own actions? That is unusual for a PCA inquiry. In addition, why has there been such a huge delay? PCA inquiries have a service standard: they should report 120 days after an issue is first referred to them. It is now nearly two years since the issue was first referred to the inquiry on 24 September 1996. Why was the officer originally carrying out the PCA inquiry selected when he was about to retire, the discovery being made that he would have to be replaced?

We have now discovered that the PCA team has not so far interviewed the officers who were also in the house at the time of the arrest. This inquiry, the inquiry in relation to my constituent Mr. Ricky Reel and the Lawrence inquiry demonstrate the need for the PCA system to be reviewed. We should go towards a new system of separate professional inquiry teams that produce public inquiries and public reports. I hope that the Leader of the House will be able to take that matter back to the Home Secretary.

12 noon

Sir Patrick Cormack (South Staffordshire): I welcome the right hon. Lady to her new position as the Leader of the House and, in doing so, echo many hon. Members in all parts of the House. She is not entirely unacquainted with that responsibility, although the previous time, she was the shadow Leader of the House. During the time that she held that office, she showed that she had a high regard and affection for this place and we look forward to enlightened leadership under her.

It would also be remiss of me not to pay a brief tribute to the right hon. Lady's predecessor, who is now the Government Chief Whip, a rather interesting transition. It is a bit like going from being lord of the manor to gamekeeper, but I am sure that she will bring great distinction to her new role; she certainly brought distinction to her previous one. I know that I speak for hon. Members in all parts of the House in paying tribute to her for the way in which she sought to discharge what is, by any standard, a very difficult job.

I have referred to it before as a schizophrenic job because the Leader of the House is the Leader of the House of Commons and, in that sense, has a responsibility second only to the Speaker, but, at the same time, the Leader of the House is also a pivotal member of Her Majesty's Government with responsibility to get legislation through. To balance the two duties is not easy. Although we were, from time to time, critical of the previous Leader of the House, I think that, without exception, we felt that she discharged her duties with good faith and real conscientious endeavour.

I hope that the summer Adjournment debate, which is a feature of our proceedings, will never be modernised out of existence because it gives hon. Members in all parts of the House an opportunity to raise matters of particular concern to them. Today, we have ranged from a pet called Penny to Cyprus, an issue of great global importance. Indeed, the speech of my right hon. Friend the Member for Penrith and The Border (Mr. Maclean) was an omnibus speech in itself. He has just about snatched the Amess award for omnibus speeches. He certainly supplied enough headlines for his local paper to last him through the recess.

Mr. Maclean: That was the object of the exercise.

Sir Patrick Cormack: My right hon. Friend certainly discharged it very faithfully.

I refer, alas not in great detail, to each of the speeches that we have heard. The hon. Member for Clydesdale (Mr. Hood) talked about dignity at work and the problems of bullying. He raised many a wry smile when he talked about career assassination in the context of some of this week's developments, but he made a serious point point I am sure that the Leader of the House will wish to address, if not in detail today, at least in correspondence later. Whether she will wish to deal, especially bearing in mind what has happened to her predecessor, with his call for the abolition of whipping is another matter entirely, but, in the spirit of bonhomie at this time of the year, if the Government do decide to abolish whipping, we shall carefully consider whether we can do the same.

We then had a very good speech from my hon. Friend the Member for West Derbyshire (Mr. McLoughlin), the shadow Deputy Chief Whip. He raised what has happened to the man charged with thinking the unthinkable. All I will say is that we look forward to many distinguished contributions from the Back Benches from the right hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field); there is no more distinguished Member of the House.

My hon. Friend's main argument was a powerful plea for the retention of magistrates courts in those delightful Derbyshire towns of Ashbourne, Bakewell and Matlock. As one who also comes from a largely rural area where we have magistrates courts, I say that this is a serious matter. I hope that the Leader of the House will draw the attention of the Lord Chancellor to my hon. Friend's speech. I hope that the Lord Chancellor will, in turn, take those points carefully into account and, as he does so, bear in mind the origin of the magistracy and how important it is that it should have a local base.

The hon. Member for Leigh (Mr. Cunliffe) is a great expert on horse racing. He made a powerful plea that Ladbrokes and Coral should not be allowed to merge. He talked about the need for total deregulation, but, throughout his speech, he was casting himself in the role of the punter's friend. I am sure that the punter could have no better friend, other than, perhaps, the Foreign Secretary.

The hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam (Mr. Burstow) was eloquent on the subject of the chihuahua called Penny and talked about pets and old people. All I will say is that

[Sir Patrick Cormack]

he made an important point and I hope that it will always be regarded with sensitivity, but there are issues, such as hygiene, which those who have charge of local authority dwellings and other such places must always take carefully into account.

The hon. Member for Tooting (Mr. Cox)—I am glad to see him here—who has worked indefatigably for the Cypriot cause, made a speech that was no surprise to any of us, but was none the less powerful. The underlying tensions in Cyprus are crucial to NATO as a whole. The thought of having two NATO countries at war with each other should fill us all with grave foreboding. It is crucial that efforts to achieve an honourable settlement in Cyprus, as he called it, should be pursued. We must all hope that that honourable settlement, which has so long evaded those who have pursued it, will be reached sooner rather than later.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Penrith and The Border made so many pleas that I cannot refer to them all, but I was interested in his talk about the politburo in Cumbria. I totally support his general lines on grammar schools and on the Territorial Army. I hope that the Fourth Battalion King's Own Border Regiment is indeed reprieved and that it will not be reduced to the sort of numbers where it can supply merely the three members that he wanted for the rural development board.

My right hon. Friend talked of the many needs of rural areas and made a powerful point about the loss of farm incomes—46 per cent. down—and the particular plight of hill farmers. They cannot have a more doughty champion than him.

The hon. Member for Chorley (Mr. Hoyle), a veritable chip off the old block of his noble father, talked about the car industry and raised the point about the incredible discrepancy in price. His plea should certainly elicit a good response from the right hon. Lady. We are told that the Labour party was elected by Mondeo man and as the Mondeo is apparently 58 per cent. more expensive here than in any other country, the right hon. Lady will wish to respond positively, if only to maintain the garnering of votes.

My hon. Friend the Member for Ribble Valley (Mr. Evans) talked about the need for passports for pets and quarantine laws. None of us should lose sight of the crucial importance of making sure that the United Kingdom is rabies-free. However, few hon. Members are not persuaded that there is an extremely strong case for careful reconsideration and I hope that we shall soon have a definitive announcement from the Government.

My neighbour, the hon. Member for Stafford (Mr. Kidney) talked about the need for a long service medal for prison officers. As one who also has an important prison in his constituency, I echo his request. For some time, I have paid a quarterly visit to Featherstone. Indeed, I have been visiting that prison since before it had any inmates and I am always impressed by the dedication of the staff. There is no more difficult job than being a prison officer, and the plea that prison officers should have a long service medal similar to that for the police should not fall on deaf ears. I trust that we shall have a sympathetic response from the right hon. Lady and that she will add her considerable powers of advocacy to the plea made by the hon. Gentleman.

The hon. Member for Hazel Grove (Mr. Stunell) would doubtless support that plea as he is a distinguished holder of the OBE. Today, he talked about modernisation. I understand his impatience, but I hope that he will not hassle the right hon. Lady and that she will have a chance to look at the papers. In particular, I hope that she will have the chance to take most carefully into account the considered comments of Madam Speaker on the recent proposals by the Modernisation Committee.

The comments of the hon. Member for Don Valley (Caroline Flint)—who could not be bewitched by her appearance or her arguments?—should be taken carefully into account, but she was a little dismissive of the thoroughness with which the Administration Committee has looked at the issue that she raised. Although she is right to campaign for something in which she believes so strongly, she should realise that hon. Members have looked at the matter sympathetically, as was demonstrated by the report of the Administration Committee.

The speech of the hon. Member for Waveney (Mr. Blizzard) made classic use of the debate in an eloquent and moving plea for the establishment of proper skin banks. Nobody listening to his speech could fail to have been deeply touched by the account of the tragedy that afflicted the family of Stephen Kirby. Although I had never considered the donor card point that he made, I hope that the Secretary of State for Health will consider it carefully.

My hon. Friend the Member for Southend, West (Mr. Amess) was not quite up to his mammoth performance before Christmas when his speech ranged from world peace to the palace of varieties at Southend, but still contrived to raise four or five subjects and to make passing reference to two others. I was interested in what he said about standards in schools and the qualifications needed for school inspectors. His points about pre-school playgroups and consumer protection are also important.

The hon. Member for Hayes and Harlington (Mr. McDonnell) raised a disturbing case. I could not begin to comment as I am not familiar with it. Although it would be uncharitable to hope that the right hon. Lady could give a definitive response, it is perhaps a subject that would lend itself to a specific half-hour Adjournment debate when we return in the autumn, and I would advise the hon. Gentleman to apply for one. Obviously, it is important that a Home Office Minister should have a proper opportunity to place on record the official response to the disturbing questions that he raised.

We are approaching the end of a fairly long, gruelling time—not the end of the Session because we have a spillover period in the autumn—and it is good that, once again, we have had the opportunity of this debate. As I said at the outset, I very much hope that it is a tradition that will be maintained under the right hon. Lady's leadership of the House.

Finally, I hope that right hon. and hon. Members on both sides of the House will take a little time off from the constituency duties that inevitably occupy us for most of the recess to have a good holiday and I wish you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and all in the House a very pleasant summer.

12.14 pm

The President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mrs. Margaret Beckett): I thank right hon. and hon. Members for the kindness with which

they have welcomed me back to the Dispatch Box in a slightly different capacity. As the hon. Member for South Staffordshire (Sir P. Cormack) said, it is one in which I have had experience earlier in my career, albeit in opposition. As a result, I am aware of the value of debates such as this one to right hon. and hon. Members on both sides of the House and I am very conscious of the importance of preserving it, whatever steps may be taken to modernise the House, as has been the pattern of our development down the years.

Like the hon. Member for South Staffordshire, I shall endeavour to touch on the contributions of the 14 right hon. and hon. Members who have spoken, raising a rich variety of subjects. However, if I inadvertently omit something or do not have the time to cover all the points, I shall write to the hon. Members concerned.

My hon. Friend the Member for Clydesdale (Mr. Hood) raised the important issue of dignity at work and the difficulties that can be involved. He and all hon. Members will know that the Government are determined to encourage the new culture of co-operation and understanding in the workplace that has been developed voluntarily over recent years as many employers realise that it is the way to bring about innovation and to run successful modern companies. I certainly share my hon. Friend's view that we need to spread that culture of co-operation and partnership much more widely. I fear that I would not go so far as to agree with him that abolishing the Whips would contribute to that. Indeed, I do not think that I would dare do that. Perhaps I could gently remind my hon. Friend and the House that, despite what is at times a difficult role, the Whips are very much part of the management of the House and if we were to abolish the present system, I have absolutely no doubt that we should have to find a different way of managing the affairs of so many right hon. and hon. Members with many different concerns, as the debate has shown.

The hon. Member for West Derbyshire (Mr. McLoughlin) also said a little about the Modernisation Committee, but mostly spoke about the concerns that he and other Derbyshire Members including my hon. Friend the Member for South Derbyshire (Mr. Todd), have raised before, about the proposed closure of magistrates courts there. I am sure that my right hon. Friend the Lord Chancellor will have taken on board the concerns that have been expressed widely in the locality and in the House. I certainly undertake to draw them to his attention. In particular, I know that he will take on board the observations that the hon. Gentleman made about the concerns of those in rural areas as to whether or not they have what they see as secure access to justice in the locality.

My hon. Friend the Member for Leigh (Mr. Cunliffe) made a most distinguished speech, drawing on his long experience and involvement with the horse-racing industry. He said that his interest was not a pecuniary one. I shall not stray into the comments by my hon. Friends as to whether or not that was because he was not as successful as he might be in the hands of the tipsters, although I am confident that, if he takes the advice of my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary, he will not go far wrong. Certainly, he will know only too well that, even now, I am unable to comment on issues of merger policy. The House will understand his strong defence of the punter in horse racing and of the work and value of that industry, and, indeed, share his view that it is very important that the industry continues to thrive and prosper.

The hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam (Mr. Burstow) gave us a flavour of the rich variety of a Member of Parliament's postbag, case load and concerns. I understand, as I am sure does the whole House, the concern of people, particularly of elderly people, who have pets and who value their relationship with them. I shall draw his concerns and his constituent's anxieties to the attention of my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister.

The hon. Gentleman raised a separate issue about the potential impact of different methodology on standard spending assessments. I hope that he is aware that such issues are under review; no decisions have been made. It might have been possible from the flavour of his comments to assume that decisions had already been made and announced. That is of course not so. All such issues are under consideration. His comments and the concerns of the different local authorities that he quoted are certainly being taken into account and will be taken into account before any announcements are made.

I have a long-standing relationship with my hon. Friend the Member for Tooting (Mr. Cox), which goes back, if I recall correctly, to our previous occupancy of the Whips' Office when things were a little different, since the Government then had no majority to speak of. It was a close, comradely and successful relationship—because it had to be. I know that he has long taken an interest in Cyprus and has long been a strong and powerful advocate of the people of that divided island. He is entirely right to say that it is very important to pursue an honourable settlement. The Government strongly agree with that. We shall do everything that we can in a variety of ways to assist and promote such a settlement.

The right hon. Member for Penrith and The Border (Mr. Maclean) raised a rich variety of issues—I counted seven. I shall touch only very lightly on some of them. He mentioned, for example, balloting on schools—as did other hon. Members—and how those issues are decided. A casual listener might not have understood that consultation is taking place on how such ballots should be carried out. One might also not have entirely understood from his remarks that those who participate in such ballots are not a random selection of people who are entirely unconcerned with the fate of schools, but local parents. I understand his concerns; no doubt they will be taken on board by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Employment. The issue is under continuing discussion and we hope and believe that we can get a satisfactory answer.

The right hon. Member for Penrith and The Border also referred to the closure of the Cumbrian gap and the fact that announcements about the roads programme may be made a little later this week. The House will have to debate the issue that he raised concerning the Territorial Army in due course, as it will the wider issue of rural affairs. He will not expect me to comment on the restructuring of Cumbria county council, which is of course a matter for the council. I was certainly glad to hear, as I am sure that the House and country will be, that he believes that a satisfactory outcome to legislation on puppy farming may be within everyone's grasp. I know that there was considerable concern at the loss of the previous legislation.

[Mrs. Margaret Beckett]

I was reading this morning comments about political dynasties, to which my hon. Friend the Member for Chorley (Mr. Hoyle) referred. I am not sure how he came to be omitted from those comments. He is certainly following in a fine tradition not only as an hon. Member but in pursuing the very interests so frequently pursued by his distinguished father. He drew starkly to our attention the important issues raised, particularly in "Panorama". Material raised in that programme has been passed to the Director General of Fair Trading. My hon. Friend may know that, following an approach by the Government, the European Commission is also investigating price disparities in different European Union markets. He also spoke of the need to save energy and to use less-polluting materials. He will be aware that the Government have done what we can to provide fiscal incentives on the matter, including funding for the Energy Saving Trust's powershift programme, which we shall continue to pursue.

The hon. Member for Ribble Valley (Mr. Evans), who was courteous enough to let me know that he had a meeting and would not be able to remain in the Chamber for the winding-up speech, raised the very important issue of quarantine laws, which concern many. I must admit that I flinched slightly when he warned me in stentorian tones that 12 million pet owners would be hanging on my every word. I fear that I cannot at this moment give him the answer that he sought, but I assure him that I shall ensure that his concerns are drawn to the attention of the proper authorities.

My hon. Friend the Member for Stafford (Mr. Kidney) raised the important and interesting issue of the lack of a long service medal for prison officers. Like the hon. Member for South Staffordshire, I believe that those people provide a little-sung and much-needed public service and do not always receive the support and sympathy that they deserve. Let me assure my hon. Friend that there is undoubtedly a growing consensus on the merits of a proposal of the kind that he raised. Consultation is under way. I shall ensure that his concerns are drawn to the attention of my Government colleagues.

The hon. Member for Hazel Grove (Mr. Stunell) expressed support for modernisation of the House and hope that the slight change that occurs whenever there is a reshuffle will not significantly delay the Modernisation Committee's work. I am grateful to the hon. Member for South Staffordshire for his comments on the point. Of course, there may be some slight delay—I wish more deeply to familiarise myself with the issues in my new capacity—but it will be only small. I look forward to continuing to work with the hon. Member for Hazel Grove and other colleagues on the Select Committee on Modernisation of the House and hope to continue the good work of my right hon. Friend the Member for Dewsbury (Mrs. Taylor), who previously held my post.

My hon. Friend the Member for Don Valley (Caroline Flint) raised several important issues about child care. I understand the strength of her case, which she expressed so firmly and clearly. I shall certainly ensure that her views and concerns are brought to the attention of the Administration Committee. I was interested to hear that the Department of the Serjeant at Arms will be represented at a meeting in the overspill period. I am confident that that will assist in taking forward the debate in the way that she sought.

My hon. Friend the Member for Waveney (Mr. Blizzard) made a most moving and deeply serious speech on the availability of skin. I think that everyone in the House felt deep sympathy for the family whose appalling tragedy led to the foundation of the skin bank to which he referred. I shall draw his views to the attention of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health. My hon. Friend made an interesting point on record—so that will get wider publicity—about how the statement on the donor card may deter people from donating skin. Everyone will have heard and understood his important points and will, I am sure, take them seriously and take them on board.

The hon. Member for Southend, West (Mr. Amess) also raised the issue of grammar schools; I have dealt with that. He raised several other points, including the issue of Essex fire service. I am aware that Her Majesty's inspectorate has suggested that the proposals for reform of the Essex fire service have some sound foundation. The inspectorate is also looking at proposals for Surrey. Although it is of course regrettable that a dispute has arisen over the proposals for Essex, I express the hope that it will be readily resolved. He also made comments about teachers taking early retirement and then returning to work, which I shall pass to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Employment, as I shall his remarks about pre-school playgroups. He asked whether teachers are valued in this House. I recall occasions in the previous 18 years when they suffered blows and knocks. However, I can assure him that this Government value their work, as we do the work undertaken on consumer protection—another important issue that he raised.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hayes and Harlington (Mr. McDonnell) raised a serious case and asked a number of extremely pertinent and detailed questions, which I know he will wish to have brought to the attention of my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary. I undertake to do so. I have little doubt that, as the hon. Member for South Staffordshire said, it is an issue that will be aired in the House again.

A point of order was raised regarding questions to my right hon. Friend the Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham). His responsibilities will be set out in detail shortly.

I join the hon. Member for South Staffordshire in his regards to the Parliamentary Secretary to the Treasury, my right hon. Friend the Member for Dewsbury, who previously occupied this post. Her service was distinguished and was warmly welcomed and applauded in the House.

Railway (Lewes-Uckfield)

12.30 pm

Mr. Norman Baker (Lewes): I am delighted to have the opportunity to raise the important question of the possible reopening of disused rail lines, and the Lewes-Uckfield line in particular. The debate comes at an opportune time, following as it does the publication of the Government's White Paper on transport.

The last time I secured an Adjournment debate was on the subject of Newhaven port. On that occasion, the Minister, the hon. Member for Hampstead and Highgate (Ms Jackson)—who I am pleased to see has not been shunted anywhere—confidently predicted that I would be pleased by the contents of the White Paper. I am happy to say that she was probably correct. At last, after so many years, the country is moving towards a sensible transport policy. As part of that, the train is at last emerging from the tunnel.

As an aside, I was particularly pleased to see that the Government have at last put a stop to the sale of so-called redundant rail land. During my last Adjournment debate, I raised that issue on the basis that if I did so often enough, I might get what I wanted. The Minister on that occasion called it a drip, drip approach. Buoyed by the success of that tactic in respect of redundant railway land, I am hoping that perseverance on my part can bring a similar result in respect of the Lewes-Uckfield railway line.

The line was closed in 1969 after more than 100 years of operation—not by the Beeching cuts, which destroyed so much of our rail network, but by East Sussex county council. The council wanted to put a new road bridge into Lewes and forced the line to close, effectively, to achieve that. That was an act of stupidity and environmental vandalism. Although none of the officers or members involved are still connected with the council, I believe that that body has a moral responsibility to try to make amends and help to secure the reopening of the line. I am pleased to say that it is now doing so.

The Lewes-Uckfield line can and should be reinstated. That statement is born not of romanticism but of a hard-headed view that it makes economic, social and environmental sense. Almost as soon as it closed, a campaign was begun to secure the reopening of the line. The Wealden line campaign—as it is known—has consistently put the case for the reopening and has helped to keep the issue in the local papers for years. I congratulate those involved on their diligence and commitment in that respect.

A cursory glance at the map shows how illogical it is that there should be no railway between the two towns. A line straggles down from London to Uckfield, and then there is a seven-mile gap between there and Lewes, the latter a major rail junction with access to Brighton to the west, Newhaven and Seaford to the south and Eastbourne to the east.

North of Uckfield, on the London line at Eridge, there is an even shorter network gap between there and Tunbridge Wells. I should say that the evaluation for reinstatement which is taking place—and to which I shall refer in more detail later—is considering what is called the central rail corridor in total.

There are essentially three parts to the central rail corridor. The first section, from Tunbridge Wells to Eridge, is held by a preservation society, and the track bed and tracks are intact. The logistical problem of how to reconnect with the existing services at Tunbridge Wells has been solved by the consultants looking into the feasibility of reopening that stretch of the corridor.

The second section comprises the existing Eridge to Uckfield railway line, currently operated by Connex South Central. The third section is a seven-mile gap south to Lewes. Here the track bed has been protected from Uckfield southwards, even through the new industrial estate, although much is now in the private ownership of farmers and the like.

One section near Isfield continues to operate as a preservation railway, now called the Lavender line. Because of the new road bridge into Lewes, a reinstatement on the original alignment would be hugely expensive—perhaps even impossible—but there are two other solutions which could be put in place at much less cost. One is to follow the route of the track bed down to Hamsey just north of Lewes and then to create a new short stretch eastward to join the existing Lewes-London line. The other, more expensive, option is to create a new stretch westwards from the track bed to provide a new station at Ringmer, a fast-growing village in my constituency, and then to join the Lewes-Eastbourne line near Glynde. I happen to think that the first option is the more practicable.

In the past two or three years, there has been a renewed momentum from the local authority sector in particular to push for the reinstatement of the link. The county council, not long after killing the line, adopted a structure plan policy that is still in place today, protecting the track bed from development so as not to prejudice possible reinstatement. That has been mirrored by the Wealden district and Lewes district local plans.

In 1996, the county council commissioned a feasibility study into what it calls the East Sussex rail corridor which considered not just the Lewes-Uckfield line but another short stretch from Eridge to Tunbridge Wells. The Minister may recall that I presented her with a copy of the report when she was kind enough to meet me last year. The report, by Mott MacDonald, concluded that it was perfectly feasible to reopen the two closed lines and ended:

> "In summary, it may be concluded that at a reinstatement cost of £20-25 million such a long-term infrastructure facility (which might substitute for more expensive investment in road infrastructure elsewhere) might be considered a relatively cheap option."

Since then, the county council and other local authorities—with some financial support from Connex South Central—have commissioned further work on a business case. That work is due to be finished shortly and will be discussed with Connex and Railtrack. I would like to present a copy to the Minister as soon as possible, if I may.

Let there be no doubt that the matter is being treated seriously. The draft report confirms that there are no engineering and operating problems that cannot be overcome. Illustrative timetables have been produced to confirm the operational feasibility of a through line from Lewes to Tunbridge Wells, connecting with the London line at Eridge, and integrating with Connex South East services at Tunbridge Wells, and Connex South Central services at Eridge and at Lewes. These are based on a 30-minute frequency service, with a journey time from Lewes to Tunbridge Wells of around 50 minutes.

[Mr. Norman Baker]

Financially, the business case has been developed using a local demand model based on travel times and costs for cars and public transport using the corridor. The results from that model have been validated by comparison with independent forecasts produced using Opraf's own regional planning tool, called Planet.

Provisional assessments suggest that it will be possible for the route to cover its operating costs but not necessarily the capital costs of reinstatement. That, in effect, is the same conclusion as the one reached by Network SouthEast in 1986. It is worth mentioning that, in 1986, the then director of Network SouthEast, Chris Green, ordered a serious review of the case for reopening, and inspected the disused line personally in February 1987. British Rail at the time indicated that it was minded to allocate £1.5 million towards the estimated cost of £6 million, but no other sources of funding were forthcoming at that time.

There has been interest from the rail operators for a long time, and it is worth drawing to the Minister's attention the fact that even in the Beeching days, British Rail recognised the value of the line. When the road bridge idea was first mooted, British Rail went so far as to secure parliamentary approval in the 1965–66 Session for a new route into Lewes—the same route used between 1858 and 1868—which would have kept the link open.

In the event, the permission was allowed to lapse. I am sure that the right hon. Member for Wealden (Sir G. Johnson Smith), who is here today—and who represents the Uckfield end of the line—will remember that point, as he was in the House at the time.

Why do we want the line reinstated? It would make considerable sense from an integrated network point of view as it would link existing rail infrastructure at relatively little cost by means of new short stretches. That would improve the viability and profitability of the lines to which it connected, as journeys previously impossible suddenly became viable propositions. For example, many who drive from Uckfield to Brighton might now take the train, thereby improving the use of the existing Lewes-Brighton line. Two members of my staff live in Uckfield and commute each day by car. They would prefer to use the rail line. There are many in that situation.

The reinstatement would provide an important alternative line to London from Brighton and Lewes. There is a bottleneck on the current network north of Haywards Heath, so there are no more paths for trains despite the considerable potential for increased passenger numbers to London, and for freight movement to Newhaven.

Connex South Central tells me that its figures show an increase in passenger numbers of about 12 per cent. over the past year, but the numbers cannot be pushed up further without an alternative route, because of the lack of train paths. Congestion has become so bad that Connex has to join trains at Haywards Heath to maximise use of the paths, leading to delays. Furthermore, if there is a problem on the London line, the nearest alternative routes north are via Hastings or Littlehampton: a very long way in either case.

The line would provide a real alternative for those who currently pour into Lewes, or indeed Tunbridge Wells, every morning on the A26, as well as being a speedy means of reaching key towns such as Brighton for those without access to the private car. A third of people do not have access to private cars, and their needs must be considered.

The White Paper commits the Government to working to get people out of cars and on to public transport. Here, in my view, is an example of how that might be achieved. Uckfield, stranded at the end of the present line, is, I understand, the fastest-growing town in East Sussex, and there is no question in my mind but that there is considerable potential custom for a reopened line. I hope that the right hon. Member for Wealden will be able to speak about that.

The line would provide rail access for communities currently not served by rail, such as Barcombe in my constituency, again helping to take cars off the road. By providing an alternative means of accessing Lewes, where many come to work in the public sector, the line would also help to protect from further damage by the motor car what is accepted as one of the top 50 heritage towns in the country.

I was pleased that the Minister said that the Government were prepared to invest public money, where necessary, in rail capital projects. In a parliamentary answer to me, she wrote:

"Such proposals could include new or enhanced local rail services, better facilities for passengers and re-opening of disused lines."—[*Official Report*, 23 July 1998; Vol. 316, c. 679.]

For some years, we have had the ludicrous situation of a huge roads programme being funded directly by the taxpayer while railways have been told that they have to fund their own improvements, with a requirement that they show an 8 per cent. rate of return—which is ridiculously high—when no such barrier has been applied to roads.

The Government have said that they want to consider transport corridors, and it is absolutely right to take that view. Any sane assessment of the A26 transport corridor north of Lewes will conclude that rail investment makes much more sense than spending more money on roads, as is the case in many areas.

A few years ago, the county council spent £1.5 million—probably borrowed from, or with the permission of, the Government—on straightening a couple of bends on the A26 north of Lewes. A similar amount pledged at that time would have matched the investment that Network SouthEast was prepared to put in, and might have been the catalyst for reopening the line. Too often in the past, the county council and the Government of the day were prepared to improve marginally an existing road facility rather than creating a brand new rail facility for the same money. We must not make such mistakes again.

Might the Lewes-Uckfield line, and indeed the central rail corridor project as a whole, qualify for capital investment from public funds, under the terms of the parliamentary answer that I quoted? I appreciate that the Minister has not yet seen the business case, and I will be happy to give that to her as soon as it is ready, but I would like an in-principle answer.

The line has considerable public support. I have with me a petition carrying 3,400 signatures, presented to me by George Yerby of Friends of the Earth, which I will hand to the Minister after this debate, if I may. I know that she is familiar with the project, and I hope that she

will agree that the time has come to forge again the link between Lewes and Uckfield. If the Government are looking for a relatively cheap rail project to demonstrate their new transport priorities, which I support, to symbolise what can be achieved by rail investment and to show that the reopening of rail lines has a part to play in the future, I can think of no better example.

12.43 pm

Sir Geoffrey Johnson Smith (Wealden): I am most grateful to the hon. Member for Lewes (Mr. Baker) for raising this important matter, especially in the light of the recent transport White Paper. Unfortunately, this debate comes in the shadow of the franchising office's refusal to extend Connex South Central's franchise, but the company has a strong determination to reapply in 2003 and to go ahead with electrification. There is no doubt that the line needs modernising.

It was most certainly a great mistake to break the link. I thought that the whole line was to be closed, but my strong protest and that of many others at least retained the line to Uckfield. In the years during which I have been a Member of Parliament, since 1965, there has been an enormous increase in the population, and there will be great development in Uckfield in the near future. No road infrastructure could make it easy for people to travel by road from the south of Sussex to the places where the jobs are. The job increases have been along the coast and up in south Croydon, so there is a crying need for a rail link.

A truly integrated transport system must include not only modernisation of the line running north but the link between Uckfield and Lewes. I am happy to support everything that the hon. Member for Lewes said.

12.45 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (Ms Glenda Jackson): From the remarks made by the hon. Member for Lewes (Mr. Baker) and by the right hon. Member for Wealden (Sir G. Johnson Smith), it is clear that there is cross-party unity on the necessity for a properly integrated transport strategy. That is the Government's informing policy for the coming years.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Lewes not only on securing this debate but on ending the Session as he began it: he has consistently presented his constituents' concerns in a most detailed and informed way. The proposal to reopen the Lewes-Uckfield line is but one such concern. On the previous occasion when we spoke across the Chamber, I said that his policy was drip, drip; the energy, commitment and detail with which he presented his argument today are more of a gush, gush.

There is strong support for the reinstatement of a rail link between the Hurst Green-Uckfield line and Lewes, not only from the hon. Member for Lewes and the right hon. Member for Wealden, but from those who live and work in the area, as I learned from my visit to Lewes before the general election. The hon. Gentleman has written to me on the subject on several occasions and I have answered his questions in the House.

Last week, we announced our plans for the future of public transport in our White Paper, "A New Deal for Transport". I thank the hon. Gentleman for the welcome that he gave that document, which reiterates the great emphasis that the Government place on the role that the railway can play in achieving a properly integrated transport policy. We also set out our proposals for the establishment of the strategic rail authority and the future arrangements for regulation of the railway in our response to the Environment, Transport and Regional Affairs Committee's report.

Those statements demonstrate our commitment to public transport enhancements at national, regional and local level, to the benefit of all sectors of our community. The functions of the strategic rail authority will include promoting the use of the railway within an integrated transport system; working closely with local and national organisations to promote better integration; and participating actively in the development of regional and local land use planning policies to ensure that, as far as possible, decisions on the provision of rail services dovetail with those policies.

The White Paper is not the first initiative that the Government have taken concerning our railways. In November last year, we issued the franchising director with new objectives, instructions and guidance, dealing with the real issues that matter most to passengers. The objectives require the franchising director to facilitate investment in the railway, and to that end we approved—also in November last year—interim planning criteria for the reallocation of financial support, in order to provide an effective framework for developing and implementing worthwhile rail investment. The criteria will be revised in the light of "A New Deal for Transport" to take account of the development of multi-modal appraisal techniques that establish a level playing field between the transport modes.

We also required the franchising director to produce an assessment of the sort and level of services that the railway network should provide. He is drawing up that assessment, having consulted widely with the rail industry, local authorities, passenger representatives and other parties, and will submit his conclusions to Ministers shortly.

The hon. Member for Lewes referred to an answer that I gave which said that the Government could find new funding for capital investment in our railways in some instances. I am pleased to reiterate our announcement in the White Paper of two new sources of investment funding for the railway. More than £100 million will be made available over the next three years. The infrastructure investment fund and the rail passenger partnership scheme are aimed at supporting new investment proposals that produce significant wider benefits for integrated transport and a modal shift to rail that could not be taken forward without public sector financial support. Railtrack remains responsible for funding investment in rail infrastructure where there is a commercial case.

The infrastructure investment fund is a new fund to support investment projects aimed at addressing capacity constraints at key infrastructure pinch-points on the rail network. As the hon. Member for Lewes said, such difficulties are already being experienced by Connex South Central. The rail passenger partnership scheme is a private-public partnership designed to encourage and support at regional and local level innovative proposals that develop rail use and promote modal shift. It will support innovative proposals to develop rail use, for example, by improving interchange with other modes, improving passenger security or accessibility, enhancing

[Ms Glenda Jackson]

local rail facilities, or introducing new local rail services. Funding for the scheme will be awarded through open competition, with financial support channelled through franchised train operating companies. I hope that that answers the hon. Gentleman's question about that.

I encourage local authorities and others to present to the franchising director proposals consistent with the strategies set out in the White Paper. The new schemes will be co-ordinated with other Government programmes to ensure overall coherence in the provision of publicly supported rail services and ensure that proposed new schemes are complementary to existing ones. We will announce further details of both schemes in the autumn.

There need to be partnership and accountability in developing the railways as part of an integrated transport system. The Government are determined to play their part in creating an effective public transport network that people will choose to use, but local authorities and the private sector, whether operators or developers, also have a vital role. Private sector initiative is already bringing some welcome improvements to our railways. For example, the franchisee for Chiltern Railway, and Railtrack, have taken forward a multi-million pound scheme to double-track capacity between Princes Risborough and Bicester North, where there were 19 miles of single track—a victim of the Beeching era. Half-hourly, rather than hourly, services have been introduced between Princes Risborough and Banbury, and the number of services to Birmingham Snow Hill has been increased. The introduction of new 100 mph trains has permitted a reduction in journey times of up to 18 minutes.

Another example is the construction of a new Parkway station to serve Luton airport. My Department is providing £2.8 million of transport policies and programme funding, with Railtrack funding the remainder—the bulk—of the project. When complete, the new station is expected to divert car journeys from the existing station in the centre of Luton, increase the percentage of people accessing the airport by public transport, and divert some London-bound M1 car journeys by providing an attractive alternative rail option into the capital.

We anticipate further initiatives between the private and public sectors, as well as closer liaison between central and local government on local transport planning. To that end, we will give the new strategic rail authority obligations to work with local authorities and regional planning authorities on local transport planning and integration.

We are clear that local authorities have a fundamental role in initiating investment in local schemes, whether or not they involve support from the Government. Local authorities have a responsibility under the Transport Acts for planning and arranging public transport services in their areas, and they have a role in working up schemes with operators and third-party investors that will benefit passengers in their areas.

Sponsors of schemes that may require financial support from the franchising director's budget should prepare a business case in consultation with the relevant train operator and Railtrack. The business case would allow the franchising director to estimate the likely level of public sector funding required to support the scheme. He could then decide whether that funding was available from his budget, and whether the proposed expenditure represented value for money. I understand that East Sussex county council is considering the viability of a scheme to reinstate the Uckfield-Lewes line.

The franchising director's interim planning criteria provide guidance to any party putting a proposal to him for changes to the passenger rail services for which he provides financial support. Under those criteria, he would look for genuine value for money and a real passenger benefit from schemes that he is asked to support. The Government expect him to undertake the appraisal of any proposal that is put to him objectively and to give fair consideration to all the proposals for new services that he receives.

The franchising director has powers under the Railways Act 1993 to grant experimental status to new passenger services where they are operated over lines not previously served by passenger trains, and to new or reinstated stations. Experimental status can be granted for up to five years and enables the viability of a new service to be tested without the need to exercise the statutory closure procedure if it is decided to withdraw it. In certain circumstances, experimental designation could provide a disincentive for investors to open new services, so the franchising director can use his discretion not to designate a new service as experimental to ensure that it will remain an integral part of the rail network unless an application for closure is approved.

The hon. Member for Lewes was concerned about the need to preserve the track bed that would permit reinstatement of the line from Uckfield to Lewes and about the implications of a possible redevelopment of the original Uckfield station site. I understand that it remains structure plan policy to restrict development that would significantly prejudice the possible reinstatement of the line. As Railtrack has no plans to reopen the line between Uckfield and Lewes, and in the absence of a financial commitment from the county council, I understand that the local authority felt that a land use policy to restrict development around the former route could not be justified and thus was not included in the local plan. I understand that any development of the original Uckfield station site is subject to the condition that the station buildings be retained and refurbished, as the local authority rightly considers them part of the town's heritage.

It is open to the rail industry, the local authority or third party sponsors to propose investment in reinstatement of the Lewes-Uckfield line. The hon. Member for Lewes will, I am sure, continue to make his case to interested parties and will no doubt press the county council for an early statement about whether it believes that there is a case to support the reopening of the line. I am sure that the right hon. Member for Wealden will support his actions.

I assure the House that the strategy and commitments that the Government announced in the White Paper "A New Deal for Transport" will serve generally to benefit rail passengers and facilitate worthwhile investment in new schemes, through partnership between Government, regional and local authorities and private sector operators and sponsors. Where there are genuine local needs, the local authorities—and the service providers—have the avenues to seek to address them. We want the railway to play its part in shifting traffic from

roads to rail, as no doubt do the constituents of the right hon. Member for Wealden and the hon. Member for Lewes.

I will most happily accept the petition to which the hon. Member for Lewes referred. We all have an interest in enhancing the overall availability and quality of public transport options in the integrated transport network.

Concessionary Television Licences

12.58 pm

Mr. Peter Bradley (The Wrekin): I welcome my hon. Friend the Minister to the Dispatch Box. While this is her first engagement in her new capacity, I am sure that she will grace the office for many years to come.

It is one of the few privileges of a Member of Parliament to have the opportunity to air the grievances that have accumulated over a lifetime. I first encountered the concessionary television licence scheme and the anomalies that go with it more than 10 years ago, when a resident of Glastonbury house, a tower block of 160 flats not far from here, contacted me to ask why, although she and about 155 other tenants of those flats were of pensionable age, because of the presence of a handful of people below pensionable age, neither she nor her neighbours could qualify for a licence concession. For many years since, that anomaly, the lack of logic in the system and the injustice caused to so many have nagged away at me.

It is clear from recent early-day motions that other hon. Members, of all political persuasions, share my concern. Early-day motion 1483 standing in the name of my hon. Friend the Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick) has already gathered 177 signatures. A second early-day motion currently circulating in the name of my hon. Friend the Member for Rugby and Kenilworth (Mr. King) has collected 52 signatures. The sense of grievance is felt not only by Members of Parliament, local councillors and council officials, but by pensioners who are excluded from the scheme. It is impossible to quantify the resentment that many pensioners feel. A previous Minister from the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, the Minister for Arts, my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent, Central (Mr. Fisher), said that the Department receives more correspondence on that issue than on almost any other issue that comes within the Department's control.

The scheme's history is complicated. It was first introduced as a somewhat ad hoc arrangement by officials at the Post Office who, I believe exercising their discretion, granted concessions to some pensioners living in residential homes. The first statutory scheme was introduced in 1969, but it contained anomalies which, despite the passage of time, remain the cause of considerable grievance. More experienced Members of Parliament than me have tried to grapple with those anomalies. My hon. Friend the Member for Walsall, North has been a champion in the campaign for many years: he proposed that concessions should be extended to all pensioners and promoted a private Member's Bill as long ago as 1987—which, surprisingly, was the last time the issue was debated in the House.

Successive Governments have tried to improve the scheme, but each option that they have considered has given rise to a fresh batch of problems. It is my strong conviction, however, that the fact that it is difficult to right something that is wrong is all the more reason to seek to do so. The problem with the current scheme is that no one understands the regulations; no one believes that they are just; no one believes that they fulfil their

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purpose; and no one thinks that they provide value for money. A letter to me from TV Licensing set out the details of the scheme, saying:

"It is available to people living in

(i) Residential homes; or

(ii) Sheltered accommodation which

(a) forms part of a group of at least four dwellings within a common and exclusive boundary (though up to 25 per cent. of units in a scheme can be properties purchased under the 'right to buy' legislation); and

(b) is specially provided for occupation only by disabled people, people with learning disabilities or retired people of pensionable age; and

(c) is provided or managed by a local authority or a housing association; and

(d) has a person whose function is to care for the needs of the residents (eg a warden) and who either lives on site or works there for at least 30 hours a week."

It is a fitting irony that the new regulations were introduced on 1 April 1997.

The problem is that the scheme is not linked to individual need—although it does at least try to address that need—but, to quote the letter again, it is linked

"to the kind of accommodation occupied and the way that it is provided or managed."

The limitations of the scheme are clear: it is solely for narrowly specified groups whose accommodation must be run by a local authority or a housing association, and must contain at least four homes; and residents must have the services of a warden for at least 30 hours a week.

I am indebted to the National Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux, which in March this year published its report, "TV Sinners", which included several examples of the anomalies which occur under the scheme. I shall quote three. First:

"A CAB in Hertfordshire reported [an] elderly woman living in sheltered accommodation. The client had been paying the reduced rate . . . licence fee of £5. Residents were informed that the warden's hours were being reduced from 35 to 20, and that as a result they would all become liable to pay the full fee."

Secondly:

"A CAB in Norfolk reported two pensioner clients living in sheltered accommodation. The housing association responsible for the development began to provide housing to single homeless people in addition to elderly people, and as a result elderly residents lost their . . . concession."

Thirdly:

"A CAB in Essex reported a man aged over 60 who was living in sheltered accommodation and paying £5 for a . . . licence. The housing association responsible for the accommodation took a decision to lower the qualifying age for residents to 55. This meant that the development was no longer exclusively available to pensioners, and TV Licensing decided that the concession could no longer apply. The client was therefore required to find the full fee."

Mr. Martin Salter (Reading, West): Does my hon. Friend agree that it is an absolute disgrace that those anomalies remain and that this country does not have a comprehensive concessionary TV licence scheme specifically targeted on pensioners? Will he give examples of other nations—especially European nations—that treat their old folk a little better than we do?

Mr. Bradley: My hon. Friend is quite right, and I should pay tribute to his long-standing commitment to the cause. For a number of years, both in the community and in this House, he has served his constituents very well in respect of this issue. Although the proposals that I shall put forward later in my speech might not meet fully the needs that he has identified, I can tell him that several European nations recognise the importance of caring for their pensioners. Austria, France, Finland, Germany, Hungary, Switzerland and Ireland are just a few of the countries that grant a full concession to pensioners. Several other European nations make similar concessions to people with disabilities, whether they are blind, deaf, or suffer from impaired mobility.

The anomalies in the existing UK scheme mean that, while many are targeted by the spirit of the regulations, many more are excluded by the letter. Currently, 651,000 pensioners receive concessions, but about 10.5 million do not. Many people benefit who do not need to benefit because they have sufficient income to pay the full licence fee, whereas many of those who are not in receipt of the concession are on low incomes. It is not difficult to see the source of the resentment that has accumulated over the years.

The next problem is the cost of the scheme to the BBC. Currently, it costs £60 million a year. If the £5 licence were to be extended to all pensioner-only households, the cost would rise to £437 million. The problem with such a universal solution is that it would apply equally to those on relatively high incomes as to those on relatively low incomes. Therefore, the large majority of members of the other House would qualify for a concessionary licence—although it might be argued that they would be better off at home watching "Men Behaving Badly" than coming here and ensuring that life imitates art. It would be difficult to sustain the argument for a concession that covered those who had no particular need of it.

Extending the concession in that way would add £28 per annum to the cost of the licence fee. A free licence for all pensioners would cost about £628 million and result in a £36.50 increase in the price of a licence. That would severely affect those on low incomes who do not happen to be pensioners, and it was rightly rejected as a solution by the Secretary of State as recently as last November.

There have been several proposals for change. As long ago as 1977, the Annan committee criticised the lack of relationship between cost and need, and recommended the phasing out of the current scheme. In 1986, the Peacock committee proposed that pensioner households on income support ought to receive a concession in recognition of their low-income status. Sadly, the previous Government rejected that proposal and said that the best way to meet need was to increase the level of pension. Most Labour Members—it is interesting to see that no Opposition Members are present—would agree with that proposition. The problem is that, far from increasing provision to pensioners, the previous Government cut it year on year.

In the last debate on this matter, on 16 January 1987, David Mellor, then a Home Office Minister on his way up the slippery pole down which he more speedily descended, criticised Labour Members for raising the issue and proposing to extend concessionary licensing. He accused them of the "cynical exploitation of pensioners". The payroll vote on that occasion ensured that the Free Television Licences for Pensioners Bill,

which was a private Member's Bill in the name of my hon. Friend the Member for Walsall, North, was defeated by just 21 votes.

This Government can do better and I welcome the Department's proposal to review the licence fee beyond 2002 and the fact that the review will include consideration of the concessionary scheme. I should like to contribute by making a proposal. We should return to the basic principle of need, both income related and dependency related. There are people who rely on television not only for entertainment or information, but for company, and they are not exclusively pensioners. I urge the Government to include in the scheme people on low incomes and on benefits, and people who are housebound and dependent. The problem at present is that those people are not targeted.

Not all pensioners would benefit from that scheme because a third of pensioners are in the upper half of the income bracket, but many people would benefit, including those who are of non-pensionable age, but who suffer from disabilities. I have tried to quantify those who would benefit, the costs of introducing the benefit and the practical means of offsetting those additional costs. I am indebted to a number of sources for the information on which I draw. The House of Commons Library has been helpful; answers to parliamentary questions have been illuminating; the BBC has co-operated and I am grateful for advice received from Age Concern. I have tried to be fair but practical in my proposal because although it is right that the scheme should be improved and more people should benefit, it is also right that the costs should be contained.

Mr. David Drew (Stroud): I welcome the debate on this important matter, during which my hon. Friend has put forward an excellent case. One anomaly that he has not mentioned, and about which I receive many letters, is the example of bungalows in a shared complex which may be connected by a joint alarm scheme, but which are excluded from the concessionary licence arrangements. That is unfair because many people living in such bungalows are on low income and feel particularly discriminated against. Will my hon. Friend comment on that?

Mr. Bradley: My hon. Friend illustrates an important anomaly within the scheme. Another example was given by NACAB in its excellent report, which said:

"A CAB in Greater Manchester reported a man over pension age who came to the bureau to ask why he had to pay the full licence. The client was living in accommodation fitted with an emergency alarm, and was identical to neighbouring properties. The properties were not classed as sheltered accommodation, and the client therefore had to pay the full price for his licence. However, because his neighbours had enjoyed a concession since before 1988, they continued to qualify for a concessionary . . . licence."

That is not an isolated incident, but one of the many anomalies caused by the scheme's flawed provisions which affect people throughout the country. If I listed all the others, we would probably be here well into October, and I am sure that Members would dwindle in number. There are still no Opposition Members present—my reputation has obviously preceded me.

My proposal is to phase out the existing scheme and replace it with a concessionary scheme that would require beneficiaries to contribute 25 per cent. of the fee. That is reasonable because it would enable the scheme to include many more people. That would be a weekly payment of 50p, which is not unreasonable for people who enjoy full use of their television set. I propose that the scheme be extended to pensioners on income support, all those on disability living allowance and attendance allowance, and the registered blind and deaf.

On that basis, I calculate that while 651,000 people currently enjoy the scheme, about 4 million would benefit from my proposals. That includes the following groups: 1.5 million pensioners on income support, at a cost of £84 million; 1 million pensioners on attendance allowance but not income support, at a cost of about £38 million; 1.2 million non-pensioners on disability living allowance, at a cost of £76 million, and the blind and deaf, at a cost of £16 million. The total cost would be £214 million.

As I said earlier, the current scheme costs £60 million, so there would be a significant but containable increase. It would be containable because the costs could be reduced by ending the concession to hotels, which currently pay only for the first 15 rooms that contain a television set and then for each set of five rooms. If that concession were ended, the BBC estimates that an additional £31.5 million would be raised.

If we went further and required offices and commercial premises to license individual sets, we could expect to raise a sum so significant that the BBC, with which I discussed the issue this morning, could not quantify it. It is not unreasonable to suggest that the figure would be at least equivalent to the £31.5 million raised from abolishing the concession to hotels. In the Palace of Westminster and surrounding parliamentary buildings, there must be at the very least 1,000 television sets. I understand that the privilege of the Crown means that we pay for only one, which seems a little absurd.

If we included that additional revenue, we could expect to bring down the cost of the new regime that I am proposing to £150 million or less compared with the current cost of £60 million, which would be phased out. I should say at this point that those who currently enjoy the benefits of the scheme should not be deprived of them. Their rights should be reserved.

The Government have introduced welcome concessions to pensioners. The winter fuel payments go a long way towards meeting need, and the national travel scheme, announced last week by the Deputy Prime Minister, will be extremely welcome in my constituency and elsewhere. The concessionary television licence scheme should in future be administered not by the BBC, but through the benefits system. That will have a number of advantages. It will preserve the BBC's integrity by removing any suggestion of the Government paying subsidy to the BBC to finance the scheme. It will relieve pressure on BBC budgets and, as the BBC will no longer have to bear the cost of the scheme, the full licence fee could be cut by about £3.50.

Those proposals may or may not prove attractive to the Treasury or the Department, but I have another specific plea which I hope will receive a positive response. At present, 34,400 blind people who have a television set receive a concession of £1.25 on the £97.50 licence fee. That is a scandal. The amount has remained the same since 1965; it equates to the radio licence fee, which was phased out in 1971. Generously, the Government of the

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day ensured that blind people would continue to enjoy the benefit of the £1.25 concession. It has not been increased since. That is shameful and utterly unjustified. It is the worst of the penny-pinching anomalies in the scheme. Surely it must end.

The Government must devote urgent attention to the needs of blind people currently in receipt of a licence. They surely must enjoy a fairer deal. I calculate that the cost of abolishing the cost of the licence for those 34,400 people would be little more than £3½ million. If the cost were transferred to the full licence payer, it would be equivalent to about 19p a year on the licence—a cost which I am sure that the people of this country would be happy to bear. I hope that, if nothing else, the Minister will say that that petty injustice will be ended.

I hope that these proposals, although imperfect, may at least help to refuel the debate and inform the thinking of Ministers, who must agree that the current scheme is not only inefficient and inequitable, but unsustainable.

1.20 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Janet Anderson): I thank my hon. Friend the Member for The Wrekin (Mr. Bradley) for his well-timed congratulations, and I congratulate him on securing the debate. I also pay tribute to my hon. Friends the Members for Reading, West (Mr. Salter) and for Stroud (Mr. Drew), who have campaigned on the issue; to my hon. Friend the Member for Rugby and Kenilworth (Mr. King), who sponsored an early-day motion on the issue; and to my hon. Friend the Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick), who has campaigned on it for many years.

I am sure that most, if not all, Members of the House have received numerous representations about concessionary television licences, not only for pensioners, but for other groups such as the disabled, the unemployed and those on a low income. The subject frequently crops up in my constituency mailbag. My hon. Friend the Member for The Wrekin specifically mentioned the position of people who are blind, and we listened carefully to what he said. As he said, and as the Government are very much aware, the system is illogical. It produces a great deal of resentment and a sense of grievance.

The Government are keenly aware of the importance of television to many people, especially to those who are socially isolated as a result of old age, illness or disability, or who are unable to afford other types of leisure activity. I am only sorry that, for the majority of this important debate, the Opposition Benches have been empty. I can only conclude that Opposition Members do not accord this issue the importance that Labour Members do.

Although we believe that the television licence fee, at 27p a day for colour and 9p for black and white, represents good value for money, we appreciate that it is a significant expense for people on a low income. The difficulty is that, for a large number—in fact, a substantial proportion—of households, a persuasive case can be made for a concessionary television licence. My hon. Friend the Member for The Wrekin has gone some way to make the case for several categories of people.

However, the BBC depends on television licence fee revenue for its home broadcasting grant. The Government's current agreement with the BBC guarantees the licence fee as the mechanism for funding the corporation until at least March 2002. Any broadly based concession at a rate likely to be of real help to recipients would lead to a considerable loss of licence fee revenue. As a result, to maintain the level of the BBC's grant, everyone else's television licence fee would have to rise sharply.

I give a few examples. The provision of concessionary television licences for all pensioner-only households would lead to an estimated loss of £489 million in licence fee revenue, and would require an increase of approximately £29 in the standard licence fee. Free licences for all pensioner-only households with at least one member in receipt of income support would cost an estimated £112 million, and would require an increase of about £5 in the full licence fee—an increase which would also fall on non-qualifying pensioners.

Many non-pensioners may be thought to have an equally good case for a concessionary licence, as my hon. Friend the Member for The Wrekin eloquently argued. An estimated 19 per cent. of households with television have one or more members in receipt of income support, more than 5 per cent. have a member in receipt of disability living allowance and nearly 4 per cent. a member in receipt of attendance allowance. It would be very difficult to justify to a non-pensioner in such circumstances an increase of as much as 30 per cent. in his or her licence fee to provide a general concession for pensioners.

It is sometimes suggested that the solution is for the Government to make good from public funds the cost of any concessionary arrangements. However, for good reason, the arrangements for funding the BBC have always been kept separate from Government spending. In addition to providing the BBC with a secure source of revenue, licence fee funding of the BBC grant preserves the traditional arm's-length relationship between the corporation and the Government. To abandon that arrangement might be regarded as prejudicing the corporation's independence.

The possibility of funding concessions by charging hotels and other businesses a full licence fee for each television set installed has also been suggested. An estimated £33.5 million in additional revenue might be raised by charging hotels a full licence fee for each television set in use. However, no information is held centrally on the number of television sets installed at other business premises. In any case, the Government are not persuaded that it would be right to impose a significant extra burden on businesses to fund concessionary television licences.

Charging a licence fee for each television set, whether for business premises or generally, would at present also require a significant increase in the costs of administering and enforcing the licensing system, which the Government believe would be unacceptable. Such a system may become possible in future, as digital receivers become the norm, but that day is some way off. Nevertheless, I assure my hon. Friends that it is a possibility, and that we shall keep it under consideration.

Many hon. Members are also familiar with problems arising from the existing concessionary television licence scheme. Under that scheme, television licences are available for £5, but only to pensioners and disabled people living in nursing or residential homes, or in

directly comparable sheltered accommodation provided or managed by a local authority, a housing association or a development corporation. Those complications of the present scheme make it very difficult for people to understand how it works.

The Government receive frequent pleas for changes to the concessionary scheme to tackle its perceived shortcomings, usually in relation to specific cases where an individual or a sheltered housing scheme fails to qualify. The concessionary scheme does give rise to many anomalies. Its shortcomings are of particular concern because they directly affect some of the more vulnerable members of our society. Since it was formally established in the 1960s, the scheme has undergone several amendments and extensions. None of them has succeeded in making it more popular, easier to administer or more comprehensible to the layman.

It is clear from the history of the scheme, and from the wide range of criticisms levelled at it, that there is no possibility of resolving its shortcomings by fine-tuning the regulations. The amendments most frequently proposed involve extending the scheme to accommodation that is currently excluded. Examples include sheltered accommodation interspersed with mainstream housing, accommodation without a full-time or resident warden and private sheltered housing. However, such changes would leave out many people who, on grounds of health, social or financial circumstances, deserve a concession just as much.

Another proposal that is often made in relation to the concessionary scheme is that the regulations should be flexible, to allow common sense to prevail in difficult or marginal cases. However, that flexibility would be likely to erode the framework provided by the regulations, increase the number of disputed cases and, in the longer term, make the concessionary scheme impossible to administer.

The Government are by no means complacent about the concessionary scheme. I assure my hon. Friends that we accept that it is less than satisfactory, but we do not believe that changes to the existing scheme would result in arrangements that would be generally acceptable. On the contrary, it is almost certain that pressure for further changes would continue unabated.

As hon. Members know, the Government's current agreement with the BBC guarantees the licence fee as the mechanism for funding the BBC only until March 2002. The agreement provides for a review of the funding arrangements before that date. I give the House an assurance that the Government intend to carry out such a review in good time to allow decisions to be taken before then. We shall use that opportunity to consider in detail not only the future of the existing concessionary scheme, but the wider matter of concessions.

In conclusion, I thank my hon. Friend the Member for The Wrekin for introducing this important debate. We have listened to him and others of my hon. Friends, and we shall certainly take their views into account in our deliberations.

Pig Industry

1.30 pm

Mr. Christopher Gill (Ludlow): I preface my remarks by declaring my interests. My financial interests in the pig industry are recorded in the Register of Members' Interests, of course. I have initiated the debate in my capacity as president of the British Pig Association.

By common consent, the British pig industry is in a parlous state. I shall set out the industry's not inconsiderable achievements, summarise the main problems currently affecting the industry, and suggest how Ministers might help to ensure a viable future. I draw Ministers' attention to the high level of interest generated by the debate, as evidenced by the large number of pig industry representatives in the Public Gallery.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael J. Martin): Order. I would not want the hon. Gentleman to make any reference to anywhere outside the House.

Mr. Gill: I beg your pardon, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

I am pleased that, notwithstanding the awkward time of the day, many of my hon. Friends are present, including my right hon. Friend the Member for Wealden (Sir G. Johnson Smith), who has brought to my attention the problems faced by his pig producers; my hon. Friend the Member for Beverley and Holderness (Mr. Cran), who has a large pig population in his constituency; my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Worcestershire (Mr. Luff), who is the Chairman of the Agriculture Committee and has brought to my attention the unfair competition that pig producers are experiencing as a result of the United Kingdom having higher welfare standards than other parts of the European Union; my hon. Friend the Member for South-East Cambridgeshire (Mr. Paice), who is on the Front Bench; my right hon. Friend the Member for Suffolk, Coastal (Mr. Gummer); my hon. Friend the Member for North Norfolk (Mr. Prior), who tells me that some of his constituents are contemplating, if not already carrying out, the gassing of in-pig sows because the situation is so serious and they see no future; my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Norfolk (Mr. Simpson), who instances pig producers losing up to £25 per head on the pigs that they produce; and my hon. Friend the Member for New Forest, West (Mr. Swayne), who has sent me correspondence from one of his constituents, who says that he is not likely to survive the present crisis beyond September this year.

Mr. Jimmy Hood (Clydesdale): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Gill: No, I shall not give way, as I have much to say and little time to say it.

The hon. Member for West Tyrone (Mr. Thompson) has asked me to instance the acute problems of the Northern Ireland pig industry, which have been exacerbated by the destruction of 40 per cent. of Northern Ireland's pig slaughtering capacity as a result of the recent fire at the Ballymoney pig abattoir.

Mr. Hood: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Gill: No.

[Mr. Gill]

The UK pig industry is not a subsidised industry; nor does it want to be. One of the industry's proudest boasts is that what it has achieved, it has achieved by its own efforts. It has responded magnificently to customer demand for a consistent, healthy, lean and nutritious product. It has adopted the highest animal welfare standards in the world. It has instituted farm assurance schemes to authenticate the welfare and quality standards that customers increasingly demand. The industry itself is auditing those schemes to demonstrate its total commitment to high standards and traceability.

The UK's genetic base makes it pre-eminent in the world as a source of breeding stock, which is exported to the four corners of the globe. In spite of all the difficulties, exports of pig meat this year are likely to be twice the tonnage exported in 1993, which was 100,000 tonnes.

Until now, the pig industry has been a success story, making no demands on the public purse; making the UK self-sufficient in fresh pork and 50 per cent. self-sufficient in bacon; contributing substantially to the balance of payments; and creating employment in the countryside, in the processing industry, in the ancillary industries and in manufacturing industry. Clearly, it is in Britain's national self-interest to keep the industry going, but it is in crisis, and it needs help.

Chief among the industry's problems are the weakness of continental currencies, which self-evidently makes imports highly competitive; the high cost of UK feedingstuffs, relative to other countries that continue to feed meat and bone meal; and the burden of additional costs incurred as a result of adopting the highest possible welfare standards. I remind the House that, from 1 January next year, sow stalls and tethers will be a thing of the past in the UK, but not in continental Europe, which will put us at an increasing competitive disadvantage.

Other difficulties facing the industry are the ever-increasing costs of meat inspection and offal disposal, and the escalating cost of road transport, to which there is no alternative for the meat and livestock industry.

There are various ways in which the Government could help. They could follow the commendable example set by the House of Commons Refreshment Department. I quote from a written answer that appeared in the *Official Report* on 20 July, when the hon. Member for Wolverhampton, South-East (Mr. Turner), the Chairman of the Catering Committee, reported that

"the procurement of fresh meat and poultry"

will be

"only from sources approved under an accredited 'farm assurance' scheme".—[*Official Report*, 20 July 1998; Vol. 316, c. *406*.]

That example should be made applicable to all Government and local authority contracts.

By making all imports subject to the same feed, health and welfare requirements as domestic production, Ministers would strike an important blow for the future well-being of the British pig industry.

The Government could help further by giving encouragement to the rendering of exclusively pig offal in plants dedicated to that purpose, with the end product being exported or sold to the poultry industry, where I understand that it would be welcome. That would create value in a part of the animal which, through no fault of the pig industry, has been made worthless by the offal ban. Offal is banned from being used in animal feedingstuffs because of the problems associated with BSE, but there is no evidence of BSE in the pig herd. It is unfair that the industry is penalised because that offal cannot be used.

The Government should adopt a self-denying ordinance that neither the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food nor any other Government Department, will impose any further cost burdens on the livestock industry, unless it can be clearly demonstrated that imports are bearing the same level of overheads.

As for transport, the new Labour Government have increased the rate of duty on diesel fuel by no less than 22 per cent. since coming into office on 1 May last year. Higher duty in this country combined with much higher vehicle licence fees than those in continental Europe mean that the cost of producing a kilogram of pork in Britain is about 2.6p higher than on the continent. That is purely on account of the higher cost of transport in the United Kingdom occasioned by higher road licence fees and the higher duty on diesel oil.

Equally important, the Government could help the industry by using their best offices to cajole and persuade caterers and retailers to sell only pork and pigmeat products that meet the high welfare and quality assurance standards of home-produced pigmeat. Given that Safeway, for example, has given an assurance that all its pork is United Kingdom-sourced, I trust that it will not prove too difficult to get other retailers to make the same commitment. I would not wish Ministers to underestimate the influence that they can have on caterers and retailers of British pork. I hope that, in responding to the debate, the Minister will undertake that responsibility.

The Government could help also by changing the legislation that prevents products being mandatorily labelled with the country of origin. Many pig producers feel strongly that it would be a great step in their best interests to see all British pork labelled clearly as British. By the same token, it would be helpful if the British public were able to see where pork was not British and from where it was imported. They could then exercise customer choice. As Ministers will appreciate, under the rules of the European Union there is no means by which that sort of labelling can be made mandatory, but it is an area that we need to revisit.

I ask the Government to leave no stone unturned in helping exporters to take advantage of whatever financial assistance the European Union provides in the way of export refunds, export restitution, export credits or whatever. That sort of help would be of positive assistance to the industry. Finally, the Government could help by initiating research into alternative uses for meat and bonemeal, and helping to regenerate the market for tallow.

With the spot price for pigs at its lowest this decade, pig producers are desperate for hope. Hope is an important thing to us all; we need to have hope for the future in whatever career we pursue. All things being equal, I have no doubt—I hope that the Minister has no doubt—that the British pig industry can compete with the best. However, if the industry is to survive, it urgently needs a signal of confidence. The alternative—I know that the message will not be lost on the Minister—is a high-welfare but decimated pig industry, and that would be in nobody's

interests—not those of the country, the industry, the retailers or the consumers. I venture to suggest that it would not be in the Government's interests, either.

Pig farmers stopped producing fat years ago, but I trust that the Minister will recognise that such fat as they had on their own backs has long since gone. Previous years' profits have all been reinvested for a welfare-friendly future, in line with consumer preferences and legislation. The entire industry is now looking to see what Government are willing to do to help, and I look forward to the Minister's response.

1.43 pm

The Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr. Elliot Morley): The situation facing the pig industry is a matter of concern for the Government. I think that that concern is demonstrated by the fact that I have been joined by my right hon. Friend the recently appointed Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and by my hon. Friend the Minister of State. We discussed the situation this morning. As I have said, we are concerned about the situation that is facing the industry.

The hon. Member for Ludlow (Mr. Gill) put the case for the pig industry well and knowledgeably. As he will know, it goes through periodic cycles. It is now in a down cycle, but there is no doubt that, in terms of the down cycles that it goes through, this is a particularly bad one. There is certainly major concern about prices.

The issue is not one for the United Kingdom pig industry alone. It is a European situation. Pigmeat prices have fallen by 25 per cent. on the continent as well as in the United Kingdom.

I whole-heartedly endorse the points made by the hon. Member about the UK pig industry. As he rightly says, it is an unsupported sector of agriculture. It has always operated within its own markets. It has not asked for financial support. It is a very successful industry, which has increased market share within the UK in all sectors of pigmeat. It has been very successful in relation to welfare standards.

We need to pay tribute to what has been done in the industry. The improvement in welfare standards—the phasing out of sow stalls and tethers—is being brought about by UK legislation. I know from my contacts with the industry—I have a constituency interest in the matter—that it wants to go for the highest welfare standards. It has invested at its own cost in high welfare standards, and that deserves to be recognised.

Much attention is focused on the quality of the product. It is a fact that we do not feed meat and bonemeal to pigs in the UK, while it is still legal to do so on the continent. That is something that not many people know about. It is not only an issue of high quality standards but one of high welfare standards. That needs to be recognised.

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall): I entirely endorse the point that the Minister is making, but surely the point is that, in relation to both feed and welfare standards, the improvements that we are seeing in this country, of which the industry is rightly proud—although concerned about costs—are not only not being matched by our continental partners: they are not even moving in the same direction. Does the Minister accept that the speech by the hon. Member for Ludlow (Mr. Gill) could have been made about two years ago in that respect? The sad thing is that the previous Government never tackled the problem of the uneven playing field.

Mr. Morley: There is a great deal of truth in that. However, some continental producers have voluntarily introduced the same welfare standards that apply in the UK. They have been concerned about losing market share in the UK because of the growth of quality assurance and welfare schemes here. I shall touch on that in a moment, because I think that it is important.

I emphasise that support, and reassure the hon. Member for Ludlow—I think that he knows this—that all of us as a ministerial team, at every opportunity in recent weeks, have taken the opportunity publicly to emphasise the high standards of the UK pig industry and the fact that British consumers want those high standards. We know that. They can have those standards and support the investment that has been made by supporting the UK industry through their pockets and their buying policies at the supermarket shelves.

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): Will my hon. Friend therefore lead a campaign to involve supermarkets in country-of-origin marking, which they could do, which would transform the situation and get rid of the surplus of pork?

Mr. Morley: My hon. Friend is right. I shall come to that point, because it is something which I want to address.

The issue is what we can do in supporting the industry. As I was saying, as a ministerial team we emphasise that. I recently held a press conference at the East of England show, in which I concentrated on supporting the UK industry. I drew the public's attention to the points that have been made. I spoke at a seminar on freedom food, which was attended by most of the main retailers in this country. Again, I emphasised that the standards we want to see, and the public want to see, are being maintained by the United Kingdom pig industry, but that they can be undermined by cheaper imports from countries with lower standards. Those retailers have the power to do something about that through their buying policies.

I emphasise that my colleague, Lord Donoughue, recently hosted a successful seminar with the catering industry, which is a big outlet for pigmeat in this country. We want to ensure that the seminar is not the end of our contacts with the industry, or of our efforts to promote them, but the start of efforts to encourage caterers and processors to source more pigmeat from the United Kingdom.

Mr. John Gummer (Suffolk, Coastal): Given that the industry writes so much on menus—everything is "morning picked" and the like—will the Minister ask whether it would be sensible to make clear the ways in which British pigmeat is welfare-friendly? One in four meals are eaten outside the home, so putting that on every menu would remind diners of the advantage of eating British-produced pork.

Mr. Morley: I agree, and hope that the industry notes those comments. They also apply to British veal, which is also produced to high welfare standards.

[Mr. Morley]

I note the particular problem in Northern Ireland, to which the hon. Member for Ludlow referred. The fire at the Lovell and Christmas bacon factory at Ballymoney has caused extra problems for the Northern Ireland pig industry. My colleague, Lord Dubs, rang me this morning to express his concern. He is holding discussions with the industry in Northern Ireland, and is trying to assist it with that problem.

Mr. William Thompson (West Tyrone): May I emphasise the critical situation in Northern Ireland? Many farmers cannot get their pigs away; the backlog is building up, and the pigs are getting heavier and heavier. Those farmers who can get their pigs away are getting a bad price.

Mr. Morley: I understand. The hon. Gentleman draws attention to the problem that is being faced in Northern Ireland; Lord Dubs is talking with the industry, and exploring ways in which it can deal with it.

The hon. Member for Ludlow asked me to consider a list of issues, and I shall deal with them in some detail. First, on buying policy, central and local government can have a significant impact, but they are restricted on sourcing, price and value for money by certain rules, some of which were introduced by the Conservative Government in 1988. That can make it difficult when cheaper imports are available. The hon. Gentleman will know, however, that we have already made representations to the Ministry of Defence, which is a major buyer of beef.

I am glad to report that considerable progress has been made in getting Departments to source more from United Kingdom producers. Local authorities want to do the same, within the restrictions they face. I am sure that the issue will be considered.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned applying similar standards to imported pigmeat. We want welfare, quality and traceability standards to be raised in the European and international contexts, and are pursuing those issues through the European Union. I do not think that the hon. Gentleman was arguing that we should allow imports produced at lower welfare standards to drag us down to the lowest common denominator. He would not want that, and nor would the industry, but imports are a concern in respect of competitiveness, and we take that into account.

Mr. Gill: So that there is no misunderstanding, it is far more important that we drag others up to our standards, so that we can compete on the so-called level playing field.

Mr. Morley: Absolutely—there is nothing between us on this issue. We are pursuing improved standards in the European and international contexts as well as in the United Kingdom context.

On the hon. Gentleman's third point—dedicated offal rendering—I can give him an assurance that I will take his suggestion away for discussion with officials, and within the industry, to discover whether there is any scope for pursuing it.

Fourthly, the Government have to take into account the impact of cost overheads on all agricultural sectors, and all sectors of industry. We do that in the context of our national priorities and decisions. We also support industry: we doubled capital allowances to help all producers who are making capital investments.

We take seriously the hon. Gentleman's fifth point, on urging United Kingdom-sourced meat from retailers. We meet the heads of the retail chains regularly, and I can assure him that we will raise the matter with them. We also want to ensure that there is adequate labelling in that respect. We are pursuing through the EU a new directive on labelling to achieve stronger powers on common standards, which would give consumers more information, especially about the source of meat, when they are making consumer choices.

My hon. Friend the Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody) referred to labelling. At present, supermarkets can voluntarily introduce such standards and labelling. They have introduced quality assurance standards, and some have introduced freedom food labelling. I strongly support that approach, because it benefits United Kingdom producers. Although our producers can meet the high standards that consumers and retailers want, that would be undermined if cheaper, lower-quality and lower-standard pigmeat were imported after we had encouraged them to meet those standards and introduce their own quality assurance schemes through farm-assured British pigs.

That decision is obviously for supermarkets and retailers to make, but I hope that they listen to what has been said in the debate. The Government are saying that our industry has the highest standards in Europe, if not the world, and that should be recognised in terms of sourcing. Consumers need information so that they can make an informed choice and support the industry.

Promotion is an important area. The comprehensive spending review settlement will be announced today, and more money for promotion will be made available to Food From Britain. Its budget was frozen by the previous Administration, but we believe that marketing is important, and we intend to give it increased support wherever we can.

One of the most important things we can do in the short term to assist the industry is to discuss market support with the European Commission. I can tell the hon. Gentleman that we have already asked it to take urgent emergency action because of the crisis facing the United Kingdom industry—and, indeed, the European industry.

I am informed that a decision on what the Commission can do to improve market support is likely to be taken tomorrow. I hope that the announcement will bring some comfort to the pig industry, given the particular problems that it faces, and that the hon. Gentleman realises that we are taking what action we can, within the restrains under which we operate and the limits of our own powers, to support the industry.

I come back to my original point: when the industry has gone through its periodic down cycles, it has never come to the Government with its hand out. It has always invested and planned, identified its own customer base, and been successful. It has also recognised the concerns about welfare standards, and is working with us to improve welfare across the board. We recognise that it is

ahead of European producers in the abolition of sow stalls and tethers; although that is a cost disadvantage, it will not be a marketing disadvantage, as long as retailers keep their side of the bargain and keep faith with the industry, which has invested and constructed itself in the way that I have described.

The attendance today of hon. Members from all parts of the House shows the concern about the problems being faced by the industry. Earlier today, I met a pig industry delegation led by Ben Gill and John Godfrey, and gave assurances similar to those that I have given to the hon. Member for Ludlow. I hope that the industry will survive this down cycle; it certainly deserves to, given its efficiency, its record and the way in which it has succeeded in the past. The people of this country can be proud of its product.

It being Two o'clock, the motion for the Adjournment of the House lapsed, without Question put.

Sitting suspended, pursuant to Standing Order No. 10 (Wednesday sittings), till half-past Two o'clock.

PRIVATE BUSINESS

Committee of Selection

Ordered,

That Mr. George Mudie be discharged from the Committee of Selection and Mr. Keith Bradley be added to the Committee.—[*Mr. Pope.*]

Oral Answers to Questions

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The Secretary of State was asked—

Micro-credit Projects

1. **Mr. Andrew George** (St. Ives): What support she is offering less developed countries to promote micro–credit projects. [51320]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for International Development (Mr. George Foulkes): We strongly support the provision of savings and credit to poor people. Experience shows that the poorest women use such schemes very creatively to enhance their family incomes, and are very reliable at repaying. Our current projects amount to about £60 million, and we anticipate increasing that figure. We are also working internationally to ensure that efforts are co-ordinated, and that we avoid the danger of a spread of badly organised micro-credit schemes.

Mr. George: I am grateful to the Minister for that reply. Does he agree that the guiding principle of micro-credit schemes in less-developed countries is that of empowering the poorest in society, especially women? Micro credit is one of the most effective initiatives available to donor countries and non-governmental organisations. What steps is the Minister taking to establish a programme of partnerships with others, including United Kingdom banks, to build on the good work achieved so far?

Mr. Foulkes: The hon. Gentleman is right about involving women and getting them to participate. We took part in the summits on micro-credit schemes: the first was held in Washington, and the second in New York on 28 and 29 June. We discussed expanding our activity in partnership with non-governmental organisations and banks. There are about 10,000 micro-finance programmes lending to about 15 million people. We want to increase that to 100 million people, so we have a huge task ahead of us, but we are ready to do everything that we can to meet that challenge.

Mr. Andrew Reed (Loughborough): I welcome the announcement of £60 million for micro-credit schemes. That is an increase on the £42 million that was available one or two years ago. Does the Minister agree that micro-credit schemes offer the best opportunity for people to develop their skills, to make money and to assist their local communities? Will he ensure that micro-credit schemes gain from the increase in the aid programme over the next three years?

Mr. Foulkes: My hon. Friend is right that micro-credit schemes are cost effective: the repayment rates are high, and the schemes soon become self-sustaining. But we must not forget our other priorities, particularly health and education. I hope that the Opposition will recognise that, as a result of the settlement in the comprehensive spending review, which the hon. Member for South–West Devon (Mr. Streeter) pooh-poohed at our previous Question Time, we shall be able to do a great deal more in those areas.

Debt Relief

2. **Mr. David Stewart** (Inverness, East, Nairn and Lochaber): If she will make a statement on the spending plans for her Department in relation to debt relief for developing nations. [51321]

The Secretary of State for International Development (Clare Short): The Government's policy is to speed up the implementation of the heavily indebted poor countries initiative and to apply it more flexibly to post-conflict countries. Our aim is that all eligible countries are on track for debt forgiveness by 2000. HIPC debt relief draws on resources not from budgets such as mine, but from the World bank, IMF and export credits. My Department continues to provide resources to help countries to qualify for HIPC and is helping countries committed to poverty reduction to pay debt while awaiting HIPC relief. We will continue to work in similar ways to secure debt relief for poor, heavily indebted countries that are committed to poverty reduction.

Mr. Stewart: I am grateful to the Secretary of State for her reply. Will she give an undertaking to speed up debt relief for heavily indebted countries and make a clear and transparent link between debt relief and poverty reduction in developing nations?

Clare Short: As I have said, we are strongly committed to speeding up the implementation of HIPC. Shortly after we formed our Government, my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer announced at the Commonwealth Finance Ministers meeting the target to bring three quarters of eligible countries on track by 2000. He and I went immediately to a meeting with the World bank and the IMF, but could not reach agreement on that. We obtained that agreement at the G8 summit, so we are having some effect, but there is more to be done. In particular, post-conflict countries do not have the track record that enables them to qualify, so we must be more flexible there. We are doing all that we can not to impose specific new health and education conditions
but, rather, to require a good economic policy to obtain good economic growth to benefit the poor.

Mr. Bowen Wells (Hertford and Stortford): What proposals and initiatives will the Secretary of State put forward for the annual meeting of the World bank and the IMF this autumn to relieve debt?

Clare Short: As I have said, we must now seek to implement the agreement reached at the G8 summit between all the major donor countries to speed up the implementation of HIPC—a shift in the position of a number of countries—and the agreement to be more flexible about post-conflict countries, such as Rwanda, about which the hon. Gentleman and the Select Committee are worried. Rwanda has come out of chaos and does not have the track record over the years that would enable it to qualify for HIPC, but the levels of poverty there were so great that, without help to reduce

poverty, chaos could well return. Therefore, we need more flexible conditions and we shall be working on both fronts at the meeting.

Mrs. Maria Fyfe (Glasgow, Maryhill): This Question Time should not go by without my taking the opportunity to congratulate my right hon. Friend on the large increase in her budget which she won from the Treasury. That will be welcome throughout the country. Will my right hon. Friend soon be able to announce how much more might be able to be done for health and education, given, as she has pointed out herself, that many countries are so heavily indebted that they spend more on repaying their debt than on the health and education of their populations?

Clare Short: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for her congratulations. The Labour party has kept its commitment to reverse the decline in development assistance which went on so shamefully under the previous Administration. Immediately after the election, we announced that we would increase by 50 per cent. our spending on health, education and water in Africa, and that is now being implemented.

I caution everyone involved with debt relief not to see it as the only remedy for poverty. We need debt relief in order to reduce poverty, but there are some poor countries without debt, and debt relief must be seen in that context. We shall be disbursing our increased resources and making announcements in the autumn. I can promise my hon. Friend that a commitment to improve spending on education, health and clean water will be a theme of those.

Mr. Gary Streeter (South-West Devon): I welcome what the Secretary of State has said about the HIPC initiative and wish her well in speeding up that process. Can she clarify the extent to which the Government support and intend to honour the specific aims and objectives of the Jubilee 2000 campaign?

Clare Short: As I have made clear before, we welcome the Jubilee 2000 campaign. In the various cathedrals in Birmingham at the time of the G8 summit, I addressed groupings from all over the country campaigning on debt. I was proud that so many of the British people came to Birmingham to ask the representatives of the richest countries in the world not to forget the needs of the poorest. We are highly committed to making improvements. It depends to which of the demands of the Jubilee 2000 campaign one listens. Sometimes it talks as though all debt should be relieved unconditionally. We do not agree with that. There are countries with high levels of debt that have spent their money on luxuries or have excessive military expenditure. We believe that debt relief should be linked to a commitment to poverty reduction and sensible economic management. We believe in implementing HIPC more flexibly, not in cancelling all debt unconditionally.

Palestine (Development Aid)

3. **Dr. Phyllis Starkey** (Milton Keynes, South-West): What plans there are for future development aid to the Palestinian Authority. [51322]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for International Development (Mr. George Foulkes): We expect to maintain a substantial bilateral programme of development projects that target the poor, promote sustainable livelihoods and encourage good government. We aim to help the Palestinian Authority to build its capacity as an efficient and accountable Government. We are conscious, however, that lack of progress in the peace process is causing increased poverty in the occupied territories. That undermines much of the work.

Dr. Starkey: I thank my hon. Friend for his answer. I have seen for myself the obvious benefits that the Palestinian economy can gain from projects that we, and the European Union, have funded; but, as my hon. Friend mentioned, its ability to benefit is undercut by the obstructions that the Israeli Government are putting in the way of the development of trade between the different parts of the Palestinian Authority, and between the Palestinian Authority and its neighbours. I am thinking particularly of obstruction on the border between Gaza and Egypt, where spurious security concerns are being used to limit the ability to trade. What representations is my hon. Friend making to his colleagues in the Foreign Office with the aim of removing those obstructions?

Mr. Foulkes: I commend my hon. Friend for her sustained interest in this topic following her visit to the area. She has been to see me, and has pursued the matter through questions and by all other possible means. We share her concern, and I assure her that, through officials and Ministers, we are regularly in touch with our Foreign Office colleagues. All the good work that we are doing could be jeopardised—indeed, it is already being jeopardised—unless we receive full co-operation from the Israeli Government. As my hon. Friend has said, we are not receiving it now.

Mr. David Atkinson (Bournemouth, East): Does the Minister agree that, as well as giving aid to the Palestinian Authority and the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for the Near East, the international community will in due course be required to fund the outcome of the final-status negotiations relating to Palestinian refugees, which are due to be completed by May next year? What consideration is the Department giving to the establishment of a new United Nations fund for that purpose—as proposed in the Atkinson plan, which the Council of Europe endorsed earlier this year?

Mr. Foulkes: I do not think we need ask who the Atkinson plan is named after. I am glad that the author of that plan is here to present it to us. I must add, however, that we are not enamoured of the idea of establishing new United Nations funds. We are trying to streamline and improve the efficiency of the UN and its agencies in the delivery of assistance, and I feel that such tasks might be performed better by one of the existing agencies.

Mrs. Louise Ellman (Liverpool, Riverside): Does the Minister agree that it is essential for the Palestinian Authority to develop accountable and democratic institutions to ensure that funds go to those for whom they are intended—the mass of people in its territories?

Does he agree that the responsibility for doing that lies firmly with the Palestinian Authority, and not with the Government of Israel?

Mr. Foulkes: We continue to do a great deal to build up the capacity of the Palestinian Authority. We have been concerned about the financial arrangements, and have given advice in that regard. I assure my hon. Friend that all bilateral assistance given to the Palestinian Authority is used for the purpose for which it is intended: we make sure that that happens.

Mr. Nicholas Soames (Mid-Sussex): Does the Minister agree that, in view of the catastrophic failure of American policy in the middle east and the grave instability that continues to arise therefrom, a special duty now falls on the European Union to assume leadership in the region? Will he talk to his American counterpart to ensure that the Americans follow our very successful programme to help the Palestinians, and that an even-handed approach is adopted to aid in the area? That is the only way in which we can hope eventually to see peace.

Mr. Foulkes: Most of what the hon. Gentleman has said is principally a matter for the Foreign Secretary and the Foreign Office. I assure him, however, that the whole Government—from the Prime Minister downwards, and including the Department for International Development—are committed to making an extra effort to ensure that the peace process is enlivened, so that the money that we spend is used effectively and the Palestinian people do not continue to experience the poverty that they are suffering now.

Cyprus

4. **Mr. Nigel Evans** (Ribble Valley): If she will make a statement on the level of assistance her Department gives to Cyprus. [51323]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for International Development (Mr. George Foulkes): Cyprus is a high-income country with gross domestic product per head of $13,000. Under our small grants scheme, we are completing some education projects valued at about £75,000 in the current financial year. We have no plans for future assistance of this kind. The European Union has allocated £51 million to Cyprus, of which the share attributed to our Department is £8.16 million.

Mr. Evans: The European Union is putting a great deal of money into Cyprus. In the context of those funds, could the Minister ensure that people in the north of the island are recognised? I fully understand why the money has to go through the official Government of Cyprus. Does the Minister agree that if aid is spread throughout the island, people on both sides of it and the two Administrations will have to work and talk together about projects?

Mr. Foulkes: Much of the European Union assistance relates to the accession process. The British preference is for a bi-zonal, bi-communal Cyprus joining the European Union. That process can bring a new impetus to efforts to reach a settlement in Cyprus.

Mr. Robin Corbett (Birmingham, Erdington): Can my hon. Friend assure me that he will do his best to see that the money is used to facilitate contacts and meetings between members of both Cypriot communities? Will he join me in appealing to Mr. Rauf Denktash, the leader of the Turkish Cypriot community, to lift his ban on contacts between those living in the north and those in the south of the island?

Mr. Foulkes: I am wary of entering into issues that are more correctly matters for the Foreign Secretary and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. Our aim is to ensure that money is spent effectively. As I said earlier, accession to the European Union is used as part of a process for getting better agreement between the two parts of Cyprus.

European Markets (Access)

5. **Dr. Vincent Cable** (Twickenham): What action her Department is taking *(a)* with other Government Departments and *(b)* with its EU counterparts to improve freedom of access to European markets for exports from low–income countries. [51324]

The Secretary of State for International Development (Clare Short): During the United Kingdom presidency we worked with other Departments to reach agreement on the European Union mandate for the negotiations for a successor to the current Lomé convention. The UK objective was to ensure that the mandate reflected our commitment, as set out in the development White Paper, to improve freedom of access to European markets for exports from the least developed countries, as well as protecting the current access arrangements for the non-least developed countries. Those objectives were secured in the mandate, and the negotiations themselves will open at the end of September.

Dr. Cable: I thank the Minister for that reply. Does she agree that the considerable value of her aid programme is somewhat undermined by the persistence of trade barriers, notably on agriculture, and also by such measures as were introduced today—the big increase in textile tariffs at the behest of France with the acquiescence of the British Government? Does she further agree that she should take a lead in Whitehall in arguing for a liberal trade regime in Britain's interests and in the interests of low-income developing countries?

Clare Short: I agree with the hon. Gentleman that we must give good trade access to the poorest countries. The least developed countries' share of world trade is less than 0.5 per cent., so we can afford to be generous and build up the frailest economies. It has been agreed that the least developed countries should have zero tariff access to European Union markets, and we hope to entrench that agreement in the World Trade Organisation. I agree with the principle that the hon. Gentleman has expressed. The Lomé record shows that the ability of the African, Caribbean and Pacific countries to take up trade access has been disappointing. Their share of EU markets has fallen during the existence of the Lomé trade concession. Therefore, we need to help countries to build up their capacity to take up trade preferences and use them. We should work on both fronts.

Mr. Tom Clarke (Coatbridge and Chryston): May I warmly congratulate my right hon. Friend on arresting the

decline, year by year, in achieving the United Nations target of 0.7 per cent? On Europe, may I ask her to support sustainable tourism, including the protection of rain forests and greater monitoring of the transportation of dangerous materials?

Clare Short: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend. I pay tribute to him for his work in this area, which I am sure helped to bring about that outcome. On sustainable tourism, I agree that many of the poorest countries are tourist destinations. If we can get high-quality tourism, with good training and good rates of pay for local people, it could be an important asset. Similarly, he will know of the Commonwealth-backed Iwokrama rain forest project in Guyana, which is meant to be an exemplar of good tropical forest management. One of the ideas to make that sustainable is to have high-quality ecological tourism. If we arrange that properly, it could be beneficial to all parties.

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham): Freedom of access to European markets for exports from low-income countries is obviously of the greatest importance, but will the right hon. Lady, in the name of international development, press for global free trade by 2020?

Clare Short: As the hon. Gentleman will probably know, Mr. Ruggiero has called for universal zero tariff access for the least developed countries through the World Trade Organisation and we strongly support that. The hon. Gentleman will also know that another GATT round is coming up in 2000. My Department is doing all that it can to provide access to expertise for developing countries, which make up the majority of WTO members. If they together can decide what they want out of the next round, we could get a beneficial settlement, increase world trade, and ensure that it is equitably distributed and that the poorest countries benefit from globalisation.

Sudan

6. **Mr. Bill O'Brien** (Normanton): What representations she has made to the international community on hardship in the Sudan; and if she will make a statement. [51325]

The Secretary of State for International Development (Clare Short): On 18 May, I chaired a discussion held by EU Development Ministers on Sudan. Since then, I have discussed Sudan with the executive director of the UN World Food Programme, the United Nations Children's Fund and others. I am particularly concerned that the international community should take full advantage of the recently announced temporary ceasefire in the Bahr el Ghazal region of southern Sudan, and that we should seek to build on that to reach a negotiated settlement in Sudan, which is the real answer; otherwise, the war will cause a continuing threat of humanitarian crisis.

I wrote to my EU Development Minister colleagues on 14 July, urging them to make additional resources available, but the situation remains very worrying and it looks as though the famine will continue through this year into next.

Mr. O'Brien: I thank my right hon. Friend for her reply. Like her, I, other hon. Members and people throughout the UK share the concern over the suffering of women and children in Sudan, particularly southern Sudan. What response has she received from other EU Governments to her appeal for more resources for Sudan and what advantage are EU Governments taking of the ceasefire in Sudan to help those people who are suffering, through no fault of their own? Will she give us some indication of what the future is for the people of Sudan?

Clare Short: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. The World Food Programme has said that, for the next couple of months, it has enough resources to deliver the food that is needed in southern Sudan, but let me repeat that 90 per cent. of the spend is going on air drops. That is terrible. People are hungry, and the international community is spending masses of money on aeroplanes. That is why the ceasefire, for which Britain has worked so hard, is so important. It means that we can move in trainloads of food. We are anxious to take advantage of the ceasefire. I have not yet received responses from my EU colleagues, but I stress again that food that is getting in for hungry people is being diverted by fighters. We have to extend the ceasefire. There needs to be a negotiated settlement in Sudan, or we will go from crisis to crisis.

Mr. Andrew Robathan (Blaby): The Secretary of State and I agree that peace is the key to solving the famine in Sudan and I pay tribute to her Foreign Office colleague who I believe was instrumental in achieving the ceasefire recently. Does she agree that famine is being used as a weapon of war in Sudan by both sides, particularly by the Government of Sudan? Their ambassador stated at the International Development Committee recently that Sudan had sufficient food and was even exporting it, but was unwilling to provide food to its own people in the south of the country.

Clare Short: I agree very much with the hon. Gentleman that peace is the answer. The real problem is that the international community has almost given up on Sudan and that humanitarian aid just props up the terrible war economy in which the conditions of the people get ever worse. I also agree that the Government of Sudan and the leadership of factions in the south care little for the welfare of the people and continue prosecuting this endless war. Both should be criticised, but we should all use our influence to extend the ceasefire and achieve a negotiated settlement, as that is the only way forward.

Dr. Jenny Tonge (Richmond Park): Does the Secretary of State accept that her opposition to humanitarian emergency appeals to help the starving people of southern Sudan may—and I emphasise that word—have led some people to think that the British Government are allowing the Government of Sudan to get away with using starvation as a weapon of war? Does she accept that the USA is reported by some sources to be backing the rebels in southern Sudan, where there are oil deposits? In view of that perception, what discussions have taken place with the USA about its potential role in the peace process? *[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: Order. Before the Secretary of State replies, the House must come to order as one can very seldom hear the Members who are speaking. I want to

hear the response of the Secretary of State. *[Interruption.]* Order. The House must come to order. Conversations are much too noisy.

Clare Short: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

No. I do not accept that my suggesting that there needs to be international pressure on both sides to gain access rather than telling the public that the problem was lack of resources was in any way an error. The pressure of international public opinion made the Government of Sudan change their mind on flights and access and led the Sudan People's Liberation Army to agree to the ceasefire which, as the hon. Lady knows, it was unwilling to do at first.

It is true that the USA is providing support for capacity building to the factions in the south. I have spoken to Brian Attwood, the head of USAID, about the need to back the ceasefire. Others worry that some elements in the Administration take the position that the hon. Lady put forward. It is absolutely crucial that countries do not line up on the war because of their criticism of the Government of Sudan and allow the people of Sudan to continue to suffer. We must do better to get everyone to work seriously for a negotiated settlement in Sudan.

Mr. Gary Streeter (South-West Devon): While I understand entirely what the Secretary of State is saying about the need for peace, and wish her well in her pursuit of a long-term political settlement, will she take the opportunity this afternoon to give a clear and unequivocal message to the British people that she now accepts that in the south of Sudan at least, more money, food and medical supplies are urgently needed to keep people alive? Will she whole-heartedly endorse the public appeals now being made by UK aid agencies?

Clare Short: No. As I said to the hon. Gentleman, no one should play games with the crisis in Sudan. Millions of people are in danger of dying while 90 per cent. of the money that is provided goes on air drops. We are spending money on aeroplanes while people starve. Much of the food that is getting in is being diverted by fighters from the people in need. We need international concern about Sudan to keep pressure on both sides, first to get in massively more food—and we need the ceasefire for that—and secondly, to press for a negotiated settlement. That is what is needed and that is what I ask British public opinion to seek.

Southern Africa

7. **Helen Jackson** (Sheffield, Hillsborough): What assessment she has made of the impact of the measures announced in the comprehensive spending review on aid to community development in southern Africa. [51326]

The Secretary of State for International Development (Clare Short): We are reviewing our programmes in southern Africa to ensure that they deliver poverty reduction and sustainable development. Community involvement is essential to ensure that services meet the needs of poor people. Total expenditure in the region will be about £70 million this year.

Helen Jackson: I thank my right hon. Friend for that reply. Like my colleagues, I congratulate her and the Government on reversing the decline in aid spending that took place under the previous Government. I understand that she has recently visited Mozambique, which is of course one of the poorest nations in southern Africa. Does she plan—and if so, how—to increase the percentage of aid that goes to local, community-based projects in such countries, which help the people there?

Clare Short: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. Yes, I have just visited Mozambique. It is one of the poorest countries in the world, where 65 per cent. of people live on the equivalent of less than half a dollar a day. The World bank reckons that living on a dollar a day is abject poverty. It is incredible that, despite Mozambique suffering everything monstrous that history can throw at a country, the people and the Government at all levels are determined to make progress—and are making it. I am very optimistic about likely progress in Mozambique. We are likely to treble our programme over the next few years from the extra resources made available, and we shall work with the Mozambique Government and local communities to involve all in improving health, education, economic management, enterprise development and crop-growing. There is lovely land in Mozambique, but much of it is under-used. Government systems and local communities need to work together to sustain progress in Mozambique.

PRIME MINISTER

The Prime Minister was asked—

Engagements

Q1.[51350] **Mr. Lawrence Cunliffe** (Leigh): If he will list his official engagements for Wednesday 29 July.

The Prime Minister (Mr. Tony Blair): This morning, I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further such meetings later today.

Mr. Cunliffe: Does my right hon. Friend agree that legislation to abolish the cruel hunting of animals with dogs for human entertainment will never be accepted by the committed anti-democratic Members of Parliament on the Opposition Benches? Will he assure me that he will find ways in which to honour his and our party's pledge to accommodate a Bill similar to that promoted by my hon. Friend the Member for Worcester (Mr. Foster) so that, once and for all, we can abolish the despicable, barbaric practice of hunting animals with dogs?

The Prime Minister: Hon. Members have made clear their view, with a very large majority indeed in favour of banning hunting. My right hon. Friend the Member for Worcester—[Hon. Members: "Right honourable?"] My apologies; no doubt he will be in due course, but not quite yet. Of course, the private Member's Bill promoted by my hon. Friend the Member for Worcester (Mr. Foster) failed through the action of its opponents, not the Government. My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary has discussed with him and others ways in which we can make progress on this issue. I cannot, of course, speculate about the next Session, although the Government's

priority will be to ensure both that our full legislative programme is intact and that we honour our manifesto commitments.

Mr. William Hague (Richmond, Yorks): If the Prime Minister's welfare reforms are going as well as he has always said, why did he sack the Secretary of State for Social Security and provoke the resignation of the Minister for Welfare Reform?

The Prime Minister: I assure the right hon. Gentleman that welfare reform will continue as we have set out in our Green Paper. Indeed, we have accomplished more welfare reform in our 15 months in office than the Conservatives did in 15 years. Of course, most of that reform has been opposed by his party.

Mr. Hague: Is it not time for the Prime Minister to drop the pretence and admit that his programme of welfare reform in the past year has been an abject failure? Did he call in the former Secretary of State on Monday and say, "Congratulations on your numerous successes. You are fired."? Did he call in the former Minister for Welfare Reform and say, "You are so important to the Government in this Department that it is time you moved to another one."? Is not the truth that he has lost one of the few men of principle in his Government, whose name he has traded on and whose reputation he has used as a substitute for action? Is it not a fact that that Minister found that he did not have sufficient authority to act, demonstrating that, on this subject, the Prime Minister has been talk, talk, talk without a clue as to what to do?

The Prime Minister: Let us deal with the facts, Madam Speaker. In relation to my right hon. Friend the Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field), I have the greatest respect for him—but I must decide who is in the Cabinet. The decision as to who is in the Cabinet is mine alone.

In respect of the specifics, over the past 15 months, we have reformed student finance; brought in proposals to reform legal aid; changed lone parent benefits; introduced £3.5 billion for young people getting off benefit and into work; proposed a fundamental reform of the Child Support Agency; and put together the first ever comprehensive strategy on benefit fraud. Each of those actions—plus the working families tax credit and the action to get disabled people off benefit and into work—has been opposed by the Opposition. They still will not say—perhaps the Leader of the Opposition will do so now—whether there is a single part of the welfare budget that they propose cutting. Perhaps he will do it now.

Mr. Hague: It is my job to ask the questions and the right hon. Gentleman's job to answer them. He talks about his respect for the right hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field). Other Ministers must be hoping that, by this time next year, he has not developed the same respect for them. He talks about the importance of welfare reform, but no new Minister for Welfare Reform has even been appointed.

Will the annual report of the Government, to be published today, tell the real story of the last year—that welfare bills are higher than a year ago; that waiting lists are higher; that class sizes are higher; that taxes are higher; that interest rates are higher; that inflation is higher; that exports are falling; that unemployment is rising; that output is stagnating—*[Interruption.]* Labour Members had better listen to this list because it will haunt them. Exports are falling; unemployment is rising; output is stagnating; industry is on the brink of recession; agriculture is in recession and the cronies are in clover. When will the Prime Minister stop his power struggles with the Chancellor and tackle the real problems of this country?

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman accused me of not giving any specifics, but I have just given him a long list of our specific reforms. We have had two weeks since the comprehensive spending review. He still does not tell us whether he is in favour of more spending or less. We have given him a list of the social security changes. He still does not tell us whether there is a single one of those that he supports or opposes—indeed, he still will not tell us whether he supports the independence of the Bank of England or not, whether he supports any interest rate rises or not or whether he supports the minimum wage or not. He is all very well at the level of generality, but when it comes to specifics, he is Mr. Vague.

We will put through the annual report detailing the changes that we have made. Above all, we shall show how the extra money that we are getting to schools and hospitals will give this country the public services it wants. People can then contrast that record of achievement with the 18 failed Conservative years that the right hon. Gentleman supported.

Q2.[51351] **Mr. Ken Livingstone** (Brent, East): Given that 14 of the 20 most deprived council areas in Britain are in London, can the Prime Minister understand the concern among teachers and providers of social services at press speculation that the Government are considering switching £500 million of Government grant from London to tackle poverty elsewhere? Can he give the House an undertaking that will set that concern at rest by making it clear that poverty elsewhere will be tackled out of new resources that have been set aside, and will not involve taking resources from some of the poorest boroughs in Britain in London?

The Prime Minister: There are no such proposals to cut hundreds of millions of pounds from the education budget—or, indeed, any other sum from any other service—in London. There are always such scares before the negotiations on standard spending assessments. The Government recognise that it costs more to provide services in London than in most of the rest of the country, and that there are many deeply deprived areas of London. We are determined to let nothing get in the way of our getting those extra resources that we have provided to the schools and hospitals. My hon. Friend will be aware that what some of the most deprived areas in London and elsewhere need is the new deal for tackling unemployment, the new deal for communities, the extra money for housing and the extra help for education, which will lift the standards and spirits of people living in the inner city of London.

Mr. Paddy Ashdown (Yeovil): The Prime Minister talks about specifics. May I ask him a very specific question on the central issue of welfare reform? When the outgoing Minister for Welfare Reform, who resigned on

Monday, told his colleagues that the Chancellor was opposed to compulsory second-tier stakeholder pensions, was he right?

The Prime Minister: We have made it clear several times that our welfare proposals on pensions will be published later, in the autumn. As I said a moment or two ago, who goes in the Cabinet, no matter how much respect I have for them, is in the end a matter for me as Prime Minister, and me alone.

Mr. Ashdown: This is nothing to do with who goes in the Cabinet: it concerns whether we are to have genuine welfare reform policies. If the Prime Minister adopts the proposal to which I referred, this Opposition party will support it. Why do the Government not realise that there is only one viable, affordable way of ending pensioner poverty: to ensure that those in work contribute to the funding of their own retirement by using this new and innovative scheme? If the Government do not grasp that nettle on welfare reform, how on earth will they grasp the others?

The Prime Minister: We are grasping that nettle. That is why we will publish our proposals in the autumn, at which time we can debate them. I have just listed some of the areas of welfare reform that we have engaged with over the past year. They are fundamental areas of reform: tackling unemployment; lone parents; student finance; and legal aid. We have more reform proposals coming up on asylum, on the working families tax credit and on other matters, but so far the right hon. Gentleman's party has opposed every single one of our proposals, and the Conservative party, which says that it is in general in favour of cutting social security, is not prepared to name one specific item that it would support changing. In those circumstances, people would prefer to stick with the strategy that we have proposed.

Mr. Paul Flynn (Newport, West): Has the Prime Minister seen the tribute paid this morning to my hon. Friend the Member for Bridgend (Mr. Griffiths), saying that he has served his country and his party remarkably well as a Welsh Office Minister? Is he aware that the Welsh group of Labour Members is bewildered and unhappy about the decision to sack him? What is the Prime Minister's assessment of the value of my hon. Friend's work as a Welsh Office Minister?

The Prime Minister: Of course I value the work that my hon. Friend the Member for Bridgend (Mr. Griffiths) has done. I understand the fact that when people leave the Government, for whatever reason, they may feel concerned about it, but I, as Prime Minister, have to decide who should serve in the Government, and in what position. That has always been the case with Prime Ministers, and it will continue to be the case with me.

Q3.[51352] **Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown** (Cotswold): Is the Prime Minister aware that, earlier this year in the Keith Joseph memorial lecture, the former Minister for Welfare Reform said that 1998 would be a year to remember in welfare reform and added, "Watch this space."? Was he referring to a sacking or a resignation?

The Prime Minister: I have already listed the areas that we have reformed. Let me now list the areas that are set out in the Green Paper on welfare reform that we shall carry through over the next year: new proposals on disability living allowance; fundamental reform of incapacity benefit; a minimum income guarantee for pensioners; a single work-focused gateway into the benefit system; asylum and legal aid reform. These are proposals for welfare reform. The hon. Gentleman can shout about it as much as he likes but the truth is that we are reforming the welfare state, and we are doing it in the teeth of opposition from the Conservatives.

Mrs. Sylvia Heal (Halesowen and Rowley Regis): The Prime Minister knows that certain sectors of industry have been somewhat critical of the strength of the pound recently. Despite that, some sectors of industry are by their own efforts achieving high exports. I am thinking in particular of a company in my constituency which for the third time has won the Queen's award for export achievement. In 1997-98, Griffin-Woodhouse increased its exports by more than 50 per cent. through the efforts of staff ranging from the managing director down to the people on the shop floor—a great team effort.

The Prime Minister: I congratulate my hon. Friend's firm. Although we of course understand the difficulties for manufacturers with the strength of the pound at the moment, the Conservative policy of perpetual devaluation is not the answer to Britain's manufacturing problems. Yes, we have had to raise interest rates since the election. They have gone up to 7.5 per cent., but let us never forget where they were under the Conservative party: interest rates were at 15 per cent. for a year or more and there was a 7 per cent. fall in manufacturing output. The Conservatives were the party of boom and bust, and we are not going back to that.

Q4.[51353] **Mr. Archie Norman** (Tunbridge Wells): I was interested in the Prime Minister's answer to the previous question. He will be aware that in recent weeks the Chancellor of the Exchequer has taken to berating business men for the productivity gap in British business, as if the deteriorating state of the economy is nothing to do with him. The Prime Minister will also be aware that future productivity is a function of investment today and the prospects for investment in this country are declining rapidly, as recent surveys have shown. For instance, the Institute of Management—

Madam Speaker: Order. We want no for instances; we want questions at Question Time.

Mr. Norman: Will the Prime Minister comment on recent surveys of business confidence that have shown that business confidence is plummeting to an all-time low and that export prospects, as shown by Dun and Bradstreet, are at their lowest level for 10 years? Is this what the Prime Minister had in mind when he said that the Labour party—

Madam Speaker: Order. I require the hon. Gentleman to resume his seat.

The Prime Minister: It is important that we come through this period without returning to the boom-and-bust policies that did so much damage to British industry and investment over a long period.

We have to avoid the situation that we had in the late 1980s and early 1990s, which the Government whom the hon. Gentleman used to support put us into. Of course I understand the difficulties caused by the strong pound in certain sectors of manufacturing, but productivity is an issue in British industry. Devaluation is not the answer to all British industry's problems. As for productivity, I suggest that he concentrates a bit on that at Conservative central office.

Mr. Tony Benn (Chesterfield): Whereas the Prime Minister's power to appoint and dismiss members of the Cabinet has always been totally unchallenged, and rightly so, will the Prime Minister give the House an absolute assurance that he will not promote the Liberal leader, the right hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown), from a Cabinet consultative committee, about which I asked last year, to the full Cabinet post that he has been longing for, having failed to get elected?

The Prime Minister: I think I shall stick with the conventions that I outlined a moment or two ago.

Hon. Members: Oh!

Mr. Hague: I think that we would all have welcomed a straighter answer to that question. Where in the Labour manifesto did it say that a Labour Government would make it more expensive for council tenants to exercise their right to buy their homes?

The Prime Minister: I assume that the right hon. Gentleman is referring to the proposals on the right to buy, where we have restricted that right in terms of the amount of expenditure. The reason, of course, is precisely to save money on the benefit bills.

Mr. Hague: Clearly that idea was not in the Labour manifesto. What we object to is cuts in help for people who are trying to be independent of the state—*[Interruption.]*—while the Government spend billions more on making people dependent on the state. Before the election, the Labour party went out of its way to stress its support for the right to buy. In "New Labour—New Britain", a useful little book, in answer to the question,

"Doesn't Labour oppose council tenants' right to buy their homes?",

why did it say,

"No, we fully support the right to buy."?

Why has the Prime Minister now gone back on that right to buy? Thousands of people will now find it more difficult to buy their homes. They have been hit hard and they do not know why—they are not even friends of the Chancellor. Is the Prime Minister going to guarantee no further reductions during this Parliament?

The Prime Minister: Now the right hon. Gentleman is saying that we have got to guarantee no cuts—that is his cry. It is pathetic to see such opportunism on the part of the Opposition. For two weeks, he has opposed in general the increases in spending, yet he has supported every one in particular, and asked for more money. He has opposed the social security spending in general, yet he has opposed any measure to improve the situation in particular. His position is one of hypocrisy and opportunism, and typical.

Mr. Hague: Is it not thoroughly pathetic for a Prime Minister to parade himself before the election as a friend of tenants who wanted to buy their home, and then to leave thousands of people wondering today whether they can still do so? Are they not entitled to feel deceived by that utter hypocrisy?

The Prime Minister: They are actually still being given very considerable taxpayers' help in discounts. I repeat my question—and perhaps the right hon. Gentleman can tell us now: is there a single item of the social security budget that he would cut?

Mr. Hague: The Prime Minister answers the questions; I ask them.

The Prime Minister: I appreciate the fact that it is I who answer the questions and the right hon. Gentleman who asks them, but, perhaps he will answer, just this once. He has been in power as Leader of the Opposition for 15 months, so surely he can tell us whether there is one spending proposal that he opposes or one social security spending cut that he would make. Can he not at least give some leadership to his party?

Ms Bridget Prentice (Lewisham, East): It is quite fun getting used to the sound of my own voice again. Is my right hon. Friend aware of the delight that will be felt on the Government Benches about the fact that, for the first time since 1995, there has been a downturn in the number of people waiting for hospital treatment? Given that that is something about which the Leader of the Opposition and the shadow health spokesperson have been banging on for some time, has my right hon. Friend received a message of congratulation from them? Has our right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health received a message of congratulation from either of those people? If not, is my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister either surprised or dismayed?

The Prime Minister: I am certainly not surprised. Waiting lists are now coming down for the first time in years, and class sizes will start to fall for the first time from September. The Conservatives used to say that that was the test of whether we were serious about schools and hospitals, but we have not heard much from them since we started to deliver on those promises.

Q5.[51354] **Mrs. Teresa Gorman** (Billericay): Did the Prime Minister have time yesterday to read the extremely gloomy economic forecast in the *Financial Times*, which said that small businesses in the north-east are getting smaller every day? Does he agree that for workers in the north-east, size is, indeed, everything?

The Prime Minister: I appreciate the difficulties experienced by some companies when there is an economic downturn, but, as I said to the hon. Member for Tunbridge Wells (Mr. Norman), we have a simple choice—we can go through the economic cycle and return from the boom to bust that we had under the Conservatives, or we can take the measures that promote monetary stability and allow us to reduce interest rates in the long term. The hon. Lady should remember that long-term interest rates have fallen since this Government were elected. We have taken measures to cut the Budget deficit that we inherited from her Government.

In addition, we shall tackle the problems of productivity to which the hon. Member for Tunbridge Wells referred by investing in education, skills, the transport infrastructure, technology and science, which this country needs. I understand the difficulties experienced by some firms at the moment, but the worst thing for them would be a return to the recession-led days of the Conservatives.

Maria Eagle (Liverpool, Garston): What policies will the Government develop to assist those council tenants who exercised their right to buy during the Conservative years only to find, to their dismay, that they had purchased defective dwellings that were not designated defective and who are now stuck in crumbling homes which they have absolutely no chance of selling?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is absolutely right to draw attention to that matter. The programme that we have implemented for housing will give those people at least some help with the problems caused them by the Conservative Government.

Q6.[51355] **Mr. Humfrey Malins** (Woking): Why does the Prime Minister's White Paper on immigration and asylum fail to deal with the huge problem of the tens of thousands of people in this country who have lost all their immigration appeals and should no longer be here, who have gone to ground and are at addresses that are not known to the authorities and who are effectively a huge burden on the taxpayer? I appreciate that the problem has existed for a long time. [HON. MEMBERS: "Oh."] I am being honest. Is the Prime Minister prepared to act on that? Will they be deported or given an amnesty? What will be done?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman should be congratulated on realising that the problem has been going on for a long time. We inherited a backlog of more than 30,000 cases concerning people who have been here for five years or more. We have to try to deal with that as best we can by ensuring that we set up a new system in which we spend resources on dealing with cases quickly rather than allowing a backlog to build up over a long period.

I am glad that the hon. Gentleman mentioned asylum, because the measures proposed by my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary will dramatically reduce the costs of asylum. If we continued operating under the Conservatives' proposals, we would be spending roughly double the amount. Yet again, the Conservatives say that they want reduced spending but oppose our proposals to reduce it.

Q7.[51356] **Mrs. Rosemary McKenna** (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth): My right hon. Friend will be aware that those of us involved in working with local partnerships to develop the new deal very much welcome this week's announcement of help for homeless young people to have early access to the new deal. Does he agree that that will give many thousands of young people hope for the future for the first time in a long time?

The Prime Minister: The initiative set out by the social exclusion unit should cut the numbers of people sleeping rough, by two thirds in three years. The essential elements of that are to try to ensure that we give people a roof over their head so that they can then get a job if they are given the right help with skills, and also to try to prevent them from becoming homeless in the first place. That is precisely the type of strategy, which operates across Government Departments, that has been advanced by this Government but was wholly lacking under the previous Administration.

Mrs. Angela Browning (Tiverton and Honiton): May I remind the Prime Minister of one of his welfare reforms that he has not mentioned this afternoon—the benefit integrity project? During the next five weeks, three of my constituents with disabilities will, quite separately, go through the appeals procedure, because in the past few weeks they have lost the benefit that allows them to drive a Motability car. If, while the Prime Minister is sitting by his pool in Italy, he were to write a postcard to send to those people, what would he write on it?

The Prime Minister: The benefit integrity project exists to ensure that those who are entitled to benefit get it but that those who are not entitled do not, and there is an appeals procedure that the hon. Lady's constituents can use. Yet again, we have a proposal that is designed to try to curb the rising costs of welfare, and the hon. Lady's question shows that, although the Conservatives say that they are in favour of welfare reform, they oppose every specific measure to do it. I also remind her that the benefit integrity project was introduced by the Government in which she served.

Q8.[51357] **Ms Helen Southworth** (Warrington, South): The Prime Minister is aware that, in the community of Warrington, people have raised £1 million in the past three months to build a peace centre. It is a place where younger people, living in areas that have been affected by the troubles in Northern Ireland, in southern Ireland and in England, will be able to meet, build some bridges, break down some barriers and make some friendships in an atmosphere of tolerance and understanding.

Will my right hon. Friend give his full support to the people in communities all across these islands— *[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: Order. Members should read the latest Modernisation Committee report before calling those words out. Continue.

Ms Southworth: Thank you, Madam Speaker, for your support on this crucial issue. I am asking my right hon. Friend for his support for people in communities all across these islands who dare to believe that the future can be different from the past.

The Prime Minister: We have, of course, given a lot of support to projects right across the islands which, as my hon. Friend says, promote the cause of peace. The Warrington peace centre and the Tim Parry exchange are two especially worthwhile projects. They show, above all else, that the progress that we are making in Northern Ireland, difficult though it is, is supported by people not only in Northern Ireland but throughout the United Kingdom. They deserve, and will get, the better future that we are prepared to give them.

Personal Statement

3.31 pm

Maria Eagle (Liverpool, Garston): On a point of order, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: No. I must take the personal statement first.

The Prime Minister (Mr. Tony Blair) *rose—*

Hon. Members: Order!

Madam Speaker: Order. This House must come to order. That is disgraceful behaviour from Members on the Front Bench.

Mr. Frank Field (Birkenhead): Madam Speaker, as I was saying, before I was interrupted by the privileges of office.

For a decade before entering Parliament, I worked on behalf of poor people, attempting to make their needs and views better known to the nation. In Parliament, to which I was elected in the political watershed election of 1979, I argued for welfare reform, and helped campaign to make Labour acceptable again, while representing the interests of my constituents in Birkenhead. In so many respects, all three battles overlapped.

My past 30 years have been characterised by helping to get changes made—calling for the sale of council houses, and for the money to be used to build new homes and repair old ones; initiating the one member, one vote, campaign; and spearheading the political drive for the introduction of child benefit. On those and other issues, the stress was on seeing reforms through.

Before my right hon. Friend the Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) became the leader of the Labour party, I put it on the record that I did not believe that Labour would ever win an election again. My right hon. Friend transformed that position. The 1997 election result indicated the electorate's wish to embrace political change on a scale equal to, but radically different from, that made by Mrs. Thatcher.

On the Saturday after my right hon. Friend's election triumph, I was offered the post of Minister for Welfare Reform. I sensed then, only tentatively, that to reform welfare required a position of executive authority. I was to learn the full importance of that only later. In the end, I settled for a non-executive position, wishing as I did, and still do, for the welfare reform programme to be the big success for which the country longs, and wishing to play some part in that revolution.

I also knew that not to have taken that opportunity could have led to accusations that I had never been a team player, for that was a charge to which I was particularly open. I had spent most of my political life here in Parliament, where there was no Labour team worth playing for, and in trying to maintain some political sanity when others had lost their heads. I am pleased to see that so many are back in order.

On the Monday after the election, I talked to the Prime Minister about the welfare reform strategy. He gave me his immediate agreement to the production of a Green Paper. The idea was to produce a route map guiding the way in which reform should be conducted. Then the difficulties began. However, it is not true that the Prime Minister ever vetoed earlier versions of the Green Paper as being too radical. Nothing could be further from the truth.

Over many years, the Prime Minister has commented on my publications. There was much about the way in which welfare was impacting on people's lives on which we agreed—how it affected behaviour, and how individuals saw or did not see their personal responsibilities and their duty to self-improvement. Here, then, was the central theme of the welfare reform strategy. People's natural wish to improve their lot and that of their families had to become once again the great engine force of social advance in Britain.

Much of current welfare expenditure counters that objective. Although the level of expenditure is an issue, the main concern is the cancerous impact that much of welfare has on people's motivations, their actions and thus their character. Those are the beliefs underpinning the Green Paper. There, the objectives of welfare reform are spelled out, together with 32 success measurements. No democratically elected Government have ever before stated so clearly at the start of their stewardship the measures by which they wish to be judged.

The process of reform was put out to consultation, which ends on Friday, although not before I had travelled more than 9,000 miles and listened and talked to more than 2,000 people.

The Green Paper lays down the framework within which welfare reform is to be conducted. Other Green Papers on specific topics are to follow. One on the Child Support Agency is already out for consultation. Again on the Prime Minister's authority, I and the DSS team produced within eight weeks a Green Paper on countering fraud.

Bigger decisions are now awaited. The reform of disability benefits is urgent. Housing benefit cannot be left providing millions of tenants with a free good for life, at the cost of giving landlords open access to taxpayers' money.

The biggest of all reforms should be heralded in the pensions Green Paper, where the battle is joined by those who see a limited operation as desirable, with a major role for means-tested provision not only for now but for many generations to come.

The alternative centres on proposals that I have made for a universal stakeholder pension. That would guarantee a pension from national insurance and from funded sources which links the interests of rich and poor into a single scheme. It involves some redistribution from richer people to their poorer neighbours, in return for guaranteeing a pension level that only the community can offer. I wish my right hon. Friend the new Secretary of State for Social Security every success in that debate.

If the past 15 months have taught me anything, it is not only that the biggest of all reforms requires an executive position for a person with convictions about welfare reform, but that the entire Cabinet, especially the Chancellor, shares beliefs about that common endeavour.

I went into Government to see the welfare reform programme through. When my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister offered me other tasks on Monday, I resigned. It was from the other side of the House that I

[Mr. Frank Field]

put together the philosophy underpinning our welfare reform programme. It is from this side that I shall attempt once again to help to build a consensus for radical change which, while accepting the pivotal role of self-interest and its crucial link to self-improvement, does not collapse into a selfishness which excludes the poor.

May I thank you, Madam Speaker, for allowing me to make this statement? Through you, may I thank the House for listening to me?

Points of Order

3.40 pm

Mr. Paul Burstow (Sutton and Cheam): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. You have made it plain several times how much you deprecate the leaking of Government information in advance of statements in the House. I would ask you to rule on another example that has occurred today, when the Secretary of State for Health issued press releases signalling a substantial change in direction in the policy of care in the community, which had not been the subject of a statement in the House this afternoon.

Can it be right, Madam Speaker, that the House is not to be given the opportunity to question the Secretary of State about his intentions for mental health services, an issue that concerns many of our constituents, and which concerns the community at large? Surely the House should have had the opportunity adequately to question the Secretary of State. Will you give us a ruling, Madam Speaker?

Madam Speaker: A written question was answered at 10 o'clock this morning. Next.

Maria Eagle (Liverpool, Garston): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. As a relatively new Back-Bench Member, may I secure guidance on the appropriate behaviour when, as a Back Bencher, one receives, clearly inadvertently, a fax at the office from a senior member of an Opposition party? Should one be good enough to return it? Are there any matters of privilege that arise as a result?

Madam Speaker: That really is a poser. I would say that it depends on what it says. On the whole, I would be honest and return it with affectionate greetings and, "Have a good recess."

Sir Peter Tapsell (Louth and Horncastle): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. Is it not almost unprecedented when a Minister makes a personal resignation statement in the House that the Prime Minister of the Administration that he or she is leaving does not show the retiring Minister and the House the courtesy of being in his place to listen to the statement?

Madam Speaker: I said only this week, on a similar matter when statements were being made, that it is a question for Ministers whether they remain in their places, or whether they have other duties to which they need to attend.

Parliamentary Oaths (Amendment)

3.43 pm

Mr. Kevin McNamara (Hull, North): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to enable a person lawfully elected to the House of Commons to take his seat without swearing the present oath or affirming; and for connected purposes.

On 4 December 1997, following a meeting with the Members for Belfast, West (Mr. Adams) and for Mid-Ulster (Mr. McGuinness), you informed the House, Madam Speaker, as follows:

"Having listened carefully to their representations, I reaffirmed my decision of 14 May that those who choose not to take their seats should not have access to the benefits and facilities . . . in the House."

You said

"that it was their refusal to swear or affirm that prevented them from taking their seats, not any action by the Speaker."

Madam Speaker, you further explained that,

"as Speaker, I am bound by the law. Swearing the Oath, or affirming it, is a legal requirement that cannot be set aside by whim or any administrative action. Primary legislation would be needed to change the Parliamentary Oaths Act 1866 or the form of the Oath."—[*Official Report*, 4 December 1977; Vol. 302, c. 487.]

I beg leave to introduce such a Bill. I do so with some trepidation, because the taking of an oath and the act of its swearing or affirmation is a matter of great moment in the life of a person or of a nation. No democratic institution would demand that its participants take an oath without reason. No person seeking election to perform a public service would take an oath without understanding the significance of such an act. It is considered a public, solemn and sacred undertaking. Believers swear on their holy books, which is why I always ask for the Douai testament.

I seek to challenge the reason and purpose of the current oath, and suggest an alternative for those who may not wish to take it. The era in which it was thought to be appropriate or fit for legislators to set a political or religious test for those deemed acceptable to enter the parliamentary club has long since passed. Our vision, and that of the Government, is inclusive representation. Parliament must be open not only to Catholic, Protestant or dissenter, but to involvement and engagement with those of all religions or of none.

We aspire to a democracy in which discrimination on grounds of race or religion might be assigned to the history books. The only test for inclusion and membership of this House should be the will of the electorate, freely expressed. This year, we celebrate the 50th anniversary of the universal declaration of human rights. Article 21.2 provides:

"Everyone has the right to take part in the Government of his country, directly or through freely chosen representatives".

We recognise that the law must, without discrimination, respect the rights of citizens to seek political or public office, individually or as representatives of political parties or organisations, to ensure that the will of the people serves as the authority for government. We also recognise that parliamentary privilege is not for the benefit of Members, but protects the rights of the electorate, who depend on those whom they have elected to uphold their rights and interests in Parliament.

When we are heralding the potential of the Belfast agreement to advance an agenda of human rights and equality for all, to transform that sad political landscape and the political landscape of these islands, and to create a new framework for the reconciliation of a divided country, it is ironic that we can be so unaware of the need to be seen to get our own house in order.

Every hon. Member understands that at least one source of the alienation and disaffection in Northern Ireland stems from the belief of a substantial number of the population that their identity is Irish, not British; that, given the choice, they would prefer to live in a united Ireland, rather than the United Kingdom; and that they do not want to be British, whether citizens, subjects or stakeholders.

Successive Governments have rightly proclaimed the superiority of the ballot box over the Armalite, and demanded that those from the Irish republican tradition renounce the use of violence and seek change exclusively by democratic and peaceful means. Is it not hypocrisy of the first order to argue that Irish republicans should contest elections, only to find when they have succeeded in winning that they are denied the right to fulfil their mandate and represent their electorate?

I have used the word "republican" mainly in an insular and Hibernian sense, but republicans from the rest of these islands are denied access to this House not only in that sense. For what democratic reason should a person of republican beliefs be required to renounce his or her political opinions to take a seat in this Parliament? How can a law requiring Irish or other republicans to take an oath of allegiance to a British sovereign be compatible with the principle of parity of esteem or equality of treatment?

Whether Sinn Fein republicans, because of their party's constitution, would or would not take their seats if the oath were removed or an alternative supplied is beside the point for the purpose of setting out the principles that should govern the law of admittance to this House. The question whether they would choose to take their seats is a matter for them and their constituents; it is not for this House to pose a barrier to them.

The law should require that all discriminatory barriers to participation in the political process be removed; as it stands, it denies access to the political process to people who elect republican Members of Parliament. Such a barrier protects Parliament from hearing the voices and views of sections of the electorate that sometimes it would prefer to ignore, but I do not believe that the Government would want to be associated with a policy of ignoring uncomfortable truths. After all, they boast about the tough decisions that they have had to take.

I believe that providing an alternative to the oath as it stands is a vital part of the modernisation of our democracy and of the House. To treat the oath as "traditional" in the sense of a folklore heritage would be to undermine and trivialise the significance of such a solemn undertaking. As with the great debate on the televising of proceedings of the House, once change was accomplished, a return to the old system would be inconceivable.

We should not duck this issue. Individuals, such as my right hon. Friend the Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn), may add their own personal preface to the oath of allegiance. Others, such as the Minister for Sport, my hon. Friend the Member for West Ham (Mr. Banks), may regress to infancy in the belief that crossed fingers can undo a promise that they do not want to make. Who

[Mr. Kevin McNamara]

knows what other unheard or unobserved acts hon. Members have performed when taking the oath? The oath is a serious and public matter. It may assuage the consciences of individuals to act in that way, but it does not resolve the issue of how we, as a Parliament, deal with this problem. If we provide an alternative, we could overcome that difficulty. We could draw upon the oath taken by Scottish constables, who must swear before a sheriff or a justice of the peace:

"I hereby and solemnly and truly declare and affirm that I will faithfully discharge the duties of the office of constable."

We could do that as Members of Parliament. We could adopt the oath proposed by my right hon. Friend the Member for Chesterfield, which stated:

"I do solemnly Declare and Affirm that I will, to the best of my ability, discharge the responsibilities required of me by virtue of my membership of the House of Commons and faithfully serve those whom I represent here."

I am not suggesting anything revolutionary. I am merely saying, in good conscience, that we should provide an alternative for those who, by taking an oath of allegiance to the sovereign so as to take their seat in the House, may be starting their parliamentary career on a note of deception and hypocrisy.

3.51 pm

Mr. Peter Brooke (Cities of London and Westminster): Madam Speaker, I thank you for affording me the opportunity to oppose the motion proposed by the hon. Member for Hull, North (Mr. McNamara). He was the first Member of the House to make representations to me in person when I became a Minister, and he has always been assiduous in pursuit of his constituents' interests, but he is perhaps even more widely known in the Chamber for his attention to Northern Ireland affairs, and to Irish issues in general.

By seeking leave to bring in the Bill, the hon. Gentleman will no doubt enlarge that reputation. His Bill addresses a larger constitutional issue at the strategic level, but alludes to a particular Irish dimension at the tactical level. The larger issue is whether the oath of allegiance, which has passed through many vicissitudes and variations, not least in the oaths that have sometimes replaced it and sometimes accompanied it, since the eras of Henry IV and Henry VI, should be changed again.

In 1964, an article in the *Table*—the journal of the Society of Clerks-at-the-Table in Commonwealth Parliaments— said:

"the modern wording of the Oath, as settled by the Promissory Oaths Act 1868, and of the affirmation permitted by the Oaths Act 1888, now conforms fairly closely to the medieval Oath of Allegiance. The circle is therefore complete: the old Oath of Allegiance which had disappeared was replaced by a series of religious Oaths; but the religious contents of those Oaths has been steadily purged away, until nothing remains but an Oath of Allegiance very nearly in the ancient form."

This has always been essentially a matter for the House. The legal cases ring down the ages: Burdett *v.* Abbot; Stockdale *v.* Hansard; and Bradlaugh *v.* Gossett—Gossett being the predecessor in 1883 of our present much-respected Serjeant-at-Arms. Blackstone says:

"The whole of the law and custom of Parliament has its original from this one maxim, that whatever matter arises concerning either House of Parliament ought to be examined, discussed and adjudged in that House to which it relates, and not elsewhere."

As Lord Chief Justice Coleridge, in the judgment on Bradlaugh *v.* Gossett, said:

"the jurisdiction of the House over their own Members, their right to impose discipline within their walls, is absolute and exclusive."

He went on to quote the words of Lord Ellenborough:

"they would sink into utter contempt and inefficiency without it."

I am not a lawyer, but it was on that rock of Parliament's exclusive jurisdiction within our own walls that the application for judicial review of your decisions, Madam Speaker, of 14 May last year with regard to the hon. Members for Belfast, West (Mr. Adams) and for Mid–Ulster (Mr. McGuinness), fell in the High Court in Belfast last October, although I read in the press that, after the two hon. Members visited you in December last year, they were intending to challenge you at the European Court of Justice. I have no further intelligence on the progress of that case.

Her Majesty's Government made it clear last summer that they were not minded to take action in these matters. In answer to a question from a Government Back Bencher about the oath of allegiance, the then Leader of the House said:

"I do not accept the basic idea behind my hon. Friend's question: that we should either abolish or change significantly the oath itself."—[*Official Report*, 17 June 1997; Vol. 296, c. 115.]

That does not mean that the idea has not been visited in recent years—most notably, as the hon. Member for Hull, North said, by the right hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn). He would pale at any suggestion on my part of verisimilitude to an archdeacon, but he is a venerable Member, and his views, though sometimes idiosyncratic, are venerated throughout the House.

Rather in the manner of an elderly gentleman in Hampstead in my youth, who used, at regular intervals, to walk through private gardens in order to preserve an ancient right of way, so the right hon. Member for Chesterfield ventilates his views at intervals of a decade in Bills entitled, in 1988, Democratic Oaths, and, in 1998, Parliamentary Declaration, which are presented, printed and published, but then lie on the Table as written statements without further oral advocacy.

The oaths have been changed in the past. It was a predecessor in my constituency who was the first professing Jew to serve in the House as a result of just such a change. But if and when we come to make the change, it should be a considered judgment and not to solve a local difficulty.

In so far as there is a current local difficulty, we are accused by commentators outside of hiding behind the oath as a way of either excluding those we do not like or punishing those who voted for them. As I got into some trouble myself during the first ceasefire for saying that I thought that the hon. Member for Belfast, West, as he then was not, had been courageous in helping to create the ceasefire, I hope that I stand personally acquitted of that charge.

The hon. Member for Mid–Ulster himself has accused some British politicians of not adequately understanding Irish history; but it is not unreasonable for us to ask those who pride themselves on their Irishness and their Irish history to pay some attention to our own history.

The oath of allegiance cannot be regarded as a recent instrument of Parliament. In one form or another, it has been part of our constitutional procedures for centuries.

Anyone standing for Parliament knows the obligation that the oath involves. It may not have concerned those who wish to be abstentionist Members, but they cannot accuse us of having invented it to exclude them. Even Bradlaugh was not initially excluded because he would not swear the oath: it was Parliament which would not let him swear it. No such prohibition is present today.

Moreover, the Belfast agreement, to which the hon. Member for Hull, North alluded, which I acknowledge follows on from last year's events and upon the threat to take Madam Speaker to the European Court, underlines, underpins and copper-bottoms the principle of consent within the United Kingdom. If a man or woman seeks to sit in the House, the oath of allegiance is essentially the password to entry. Once the password has been uttered, it does not prevent an hon. Member from seeking to change the arrangements of our constitution, as the hon. Gentleman is seeking to do today, having himself sworn the present oath a year ago.

I call on the House to reject the motion moved by the hon. Gentleman:

"That leave be given to bring in a Bill to enable a person lawfully elected to the House of Commons to take his seat without swearing the present oath or affirming; and for connected purposes."

Question put, pursuant to Standing Order No. 23 (Motions for leave to bring in Bills and nomination of Select Committees at commencement of public business):—

The House divided: Ayes 137, Noes 151.

Division No. 350] **[3.58 pm**

AYES

Atherton, Ms Candy
Austin, John
Baker, Norman
Ballard, Jackie
Barron, Kevin
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, Andrew F
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Brand, Dr Peter
Brinton, Mrs Helen
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Buck, Ms Karen
Burgon, Colin
Butler, Mrs Christine
Cable, Dr Vincent
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Canavan, Dennis
Cann, Jamie
Caton, Martin
Chaytor, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cooper, Yvette
Corbett, Robin
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Crausby, David
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Dalyell, Tam
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Dean, Mrs Janet
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Etherington, Bill
Fearn, Ronnie
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foster, Michael J *(Worcester)*
Fyfe, Maria
Gardiner, Barry
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Mrs Linda
Godman, Dr Norman A
Goggins, Paul
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gorrie, Donald
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Harris, Dr Evan
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Heath, David *(Somerton & Frome)*
Hepburn, Stephen
Hinchliffe, David
Hopkins, Kelvin
Hughes, Ms Beverley *(Stretford)*
Iddon, Dr Brian
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Ms Jenny *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Kemp, Fraser
Kidney, David
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
Kingham, Ms Tess
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Laxton, Bob
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Linton, Martin
Love, Andrew
McAllion, John
McDonnell, John
McNamara, Kevin
McWalter, Tony
Malleber, Judy
Marek, Dr John
Maxton, John
Michie, Bill *(Sheff'd Heeley)*
Mitchell, Austin
Moffatt, Laura
Moran, Ms Margaret
Morgan, Alasdair *(Galloway)*
Morgan, Ms Julie *(Cardiff N)*
Morgan, Rhodri *(Cardiff W)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
Oiner, Bill
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prosser, Gwyn
Rapson, Syd
Reed, Andrew *(Loughborough)*
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Ms Joan
Salmond, Alex
Salter, Martin
Sanders, Adrian
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Shaw, Jonathan
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Skinner, Dennis
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Ms Helen
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stunell, Andrew
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Todd, Mark
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Vis, Dr Rudi
Webb, Steve
White, Brian
Williams, Alan W *(E Carmarthen)*
Willis, Phil
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wise, Audrey
Wood, Mike
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Gerald Bermingham and
Mr. Alan Johnson.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Allan, Richard
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Arbuthnot, James
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Beard, Nigel
Beggs, Roy
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Body, Sir Richard
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Rt Hon Mrs Virginia
Brady, Graham
Brazier, Julian
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Burnett, John
Burns, Simon
Campbell, Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clark, Rt Hon Alan *(Kensington)*
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rayleigh)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Colvin, Michael
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cotter, Brian
Cran, James
Donaldson, Jeffrey
Duncan, Alan
Duncan Smith, Iain
Evans, Nigel
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Flight, Howard
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam
Fraser, Christopher
Gale, Roger
Garnier, Edward
Gibb, Nick
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gray, James
Green, Damian
Grieve, Dominic
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archie
Hammond, Philip
Hancock, Mike
Harris, Dr Evan
Harvey, Nick
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John
Heald, Oliver
Heath, Rt Hon Sir Edward
Horam, John
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson Smith, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Keetch, Paul
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lansley, Andrew

Leigh, Edward
Letwin, Oliver
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
McIntosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
Maclennan, Rt Hon Robert
McLoughlin, Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Major, Rt Hon John
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury)*
Mates, Michael
Maude, Rt Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll & Bute)*
Moss, Malcolm
Opik, Lembit
Ottaway, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Powell, Sir Raymond
Prior, David
Randall, John
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Ruffley, David
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Sayeed, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Simpson, Keith *(Mid-Norfolk)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spring, Richard
Steen, Anthony
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Streeter, Gary
Swayne, Desmond
Syms, Robert
Taylor, Ian *(Esher & Walton)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Thompson, William
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Wells, Bowen
Whitney, Sir Raymond
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Woodward, Shaun
Woolas, Phil
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Stephen Day and
Mr. Nigel Waterson.

Question accordingly negatived.

Opposition Day

[19TH ALLOTTED DAY]

Government Policy (Presentation)

Madam Speaker: I have selected the amendment in the name of the Prime Minister.

4.10 pm

Mr. Peter Ainsworth (East Surrey): I beg to move,

That this House notes the view of the Committee on Culture, Media and Sport in its Fifth Report (HC 742) that the Department of Culture, Media and Sport is focused on trivial matters at the expense of important industries like tourism; believes this to be symptomatic of a Government which places undue emphasis on presentational issues in order to mask policy deficiencies; and deplores the culture of cronyism which is discrediting political life.

This debate is not some end-of-term tease at the expense of the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport. It goes to the heart of the way in which this Government do business. This afternoon, Conservative Members will set out to expose the shallow, superficial and cynical way in which the Government approach their task.

Fifteen months into this Parliament, there is more than ample evidence that power has gone to the heads of Ministers. I exclude, of course, those Ministers who lost their heads in Monday's reshuffle. Power in that case has gone to someone else's head. I welcome the two new members of the ministerial team to what one person in the museum world has described to me as the battlefield of art. I look forward to debating with them in the months ahead.

We have a Government composed of a Prime Minister who thinks he is a president, a Chancellor of the Exchequer who thinks he is Prime Minister, a Lord Chancellor who thinks he is a cardinal, and a press secretary who thinks he is the whole lot rolled into one. But let us start with the Secretary of State, otherwise known as Mr. Cool, or, in the words of the novelist A. N. Wilson:

"a philistine who talks twaddle and does nothing."

I know that that description is not entirely fair. The Secretary of State will probably claim that it was a misleading headline. He should know, because, with the Prime Minister and the rest of the Government, he is an expert in misleading headlines.

It is not hard to work out exactly why the Secretary of State attracts that type of adverse criticism. Consider his oeuvre "Creative Britain", produced to loud fanfares earlier this year. I will not embarrass him by referring to the critical reviews: I observe merely that it was described as a book. It looks and feels like a book and has a nice cover, but it is not a book. It is a pamphlet full of old speeches. Full marks for style; zero for substance.

What about the allegation that the Secretary of State does nothing? When the Royal Opera house gets into difficulty, what does he do? He commissions a review. When the results of the review are published, what does he do? He sets up a committee to review the review. In sport, after eight months of delay, he finally announces, in a blaze of publicity, that the United Kingdom sports institute is to be set up in Sheffield. Since

then, he has almost nothing to show for his efforts. Have any contracts been announced? No. Have any been put out to tender? No.

When the BBC suddenly announces out of the blue that it wants to renegotiate the terms of its licence fee, what is the response from the Secretary of State? Nothing. His Department is keen on putting out lengthy documents about media convergence, new broadcasting technologies and digital television, but does he understand who is going to pay for all that? Who will be the driver behind it? Advertising will pay for it. Nor do we hear anything from the Secretary of State about what he is doing to prevent the tide of politically correct EU and other home-grown initiatives that are designed to restrict and impede the advertising industry.

Last December, the Secretary of State promised a much-vaunted tourism strategy by the early summer. Where is it? It is delayed until the autumn, or even the winter. Perhaps the Secretary of State is indulging in a bit of pathetic fallacy. He will know what I mean by that. He is imitating the weather, and turning summer into winter.

There has been a lot of doing nothing over the past several months, but, when one considers what the Secretary of State is doing, that is probably just as well. Last Friday, he published his Department's comprehensive spending review: "A new approach to investing in culture". He chose to make it coincide with a photo opportunity sitting on a magic carpet.

I shall return later to the bogus claims of the Secretary of State about the extra funding that he announced that day, but let us first have a quick look at the document, which is a fairly thick one. Across the board it presages a new era of meddling, interference and state control. When the Secretary of State finally got around to doing something, he chose to abolish the English tourist board, despite the fact that opinion polls in the industry suggest 97 per cent. support for the board. People wanted it to be enhanced and strengthened, not abolished. His decision comes at a time when the English and the Welsh tourist industries are going through a particularly difficult time, not just because of the bad weather, but as a consequence of the Chancellor's high pound. They also face a new tide of Government regulation. That is a particularly bad start for the Secretary of State.

Across the board we see new structures to

"develop new policies and spending programmes to deliver those objectives which focus on real outputs".

The Government want to

"develop tangible indicators of performance linked to our key policy aims".

It may sound like officialese, but what it points to is more state control.

There is much talk about new regional executive bodies acting as the Government's local agents. No doubt they will also be required to develop tangible indicators of performance linked to the Government's key policy aims. The dismemberment of autonomous national bodies will leave the regions exposed more directly than ever before to the Government's key policy aims. Just to make sure of that, the Secretary of State proposes a new national watchdog which would

"review and report to us on performance in achieving standards set, meeting aims and objectives and efficiency targets."

I have been speculating about the new watchdog and wondering what it should be called. I thought that it might be called "Ofcult". Somebody else suggested "Ofart", but I am not sure that the Secretary of State will take up that suggestion. Nowhere is that idea more misguided, and nowhere will it be more resented, than in the arts.

The music critic Norman Lebrecht has taken the promise of extra funding for the arts at face value. Even so, he realises what is going on. He writes:

"The state has taken control of the arts for a mess of potage."

The Government's approach to the arts is dirigiste, paternalistic old Labour. As if to reinforce the point, when the Association of Business Sponsorship of the Arts held a recent awards ceremony at the Globe theatre in London to celebrate a record year of business investment in the arts, not one Minister from the Department for Culture, Media and Sport bothered to turn up.

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham): My hon. Friend has given a fair assessment of the Secretary of State's performance to date. Has he, by any chance, seen the commentary of the distinguished parliamentary sketch writer, Quentin Letts, in yesterday's edition of *The Daily Telegraph*, in which he said:

"By any gauge of parliamentary ability Mr. Smith would be lucky to have kept his job. He has an irritating tick of saying 'er' and 'um', which might go down as coquettish in some parts of Islington but is just irritating in SW1"?

Mr. Ainsworth: I did see the piece in question; and, er, we, er, look forward to hearing the Secretary of State's speech.

Mr. Gerald Bermingham (St. Helens, South): I have listened with great care to what the hon. Gentleman has said. Now we are the Government who are to blame for everything—naturally, they always are—including the weather, will he turn his mind to the following tiny fact? Why do more and more people want to come to this country for their holidays, why do we have a developing film industry, why do we produce some of the best music, and why are our people some of the most creative in Europe if this country is ruled by a Government who are not encouraging all those fields?

Mr. Ainsworth: I am sorry to correct the hon. Gentleman, but he may have missed the fact that, in the first three months of this year, there was an overseas visitors deficit of £1.7 billion. I am afraid that the Chancellor's policies, mismanagement of the economy and the high pound have been a major deterrent to people visiting this country.

I wonder whether the arts are safe in the hands of a Secretary of State who is on record as saying that Bob Dylan is the artistic equal of John Keats.

The Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Mr. Chris Smith): Will the hon. Gentleman tell me exactly where I said that—because I have never done so?

Mr. Ainsworth: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for putting the record straight. He had better address his comments to *The Spectator*. He is also quoted in *The Spectator* as saying:

"The distinctions between higher and popular arts are meaningless."

If he really believes that, is it surprising that he has remained so dumb amid all the accusations that the BBC is dumbing down its programme quality? This Government are dumbing down politics altogether.

Mr. Ivor Caplin (Hove): I assumed that the hon. Gentleman would say a little more about the arts. Will he reflect on comments on the proposals in the *Evening Standard* on Friday? It said that they were

"genuinely radical proposals, and some financial news which delight those of us who have been fighting to ensure our great arts institutions do not crumble entirely."

Mr. Ainsworth: It was not worth giving way, was it? When those at the *Evening Standard* consider the Secretary of State's proposals more carefully, they will realise that they are not the salvation that they think.

"I don't mind Radio 1 trying to be trendy, but I can do without the Labour party trying to strut its funky stuff."

Those are not my words; they are the words of Ben Elton, who is hardly a well-known Conservative supporter. He went on:

"The present Government should be very careful: style is no substitute for substance.

It's no good going on about our great designers if everything they design is made in China. Jobs are cool . . . I didn't vote Labour because they've heard of Oasis."

The departmental Select Committee picked up a similar point. Its report on the Secretary of State's handling of his Department derided his promise that he would promote

"everything from Beefeaters to Britpop".

It was astonished that tourism, which is

"far and away the largest industry for which the Department is responsible",

was being

"subordinated in favour of more glamorous and trivial matters".

That is not surprising, given that the Prime Minister lent his name to an article in the national press that contains, among a heap of other vacuous platitudes, the following immortal line:

"We are forging a new patriotism focused on the potential we can fulfil in the future."

What on earth does it mean? It is a strange sort of patriotism which halves the British zone of the millennium exhibition and then spends £500,000 on a survey to discover what Britishness is.

The millennium dome stands like a paradigm of the Government's approach to presentation. It is a fine structure—all are agreed about that—but what is inside it? At the moment, we are told that it is a distorted human shape with two heads and a single pair of legs. There is something equally disturbing at the heart of the Government, which stands where their principles should be—a void. In order to clothe it, the Government have created a whole new industry devoted to weaving and spinning. You, Madam Speaker, have had cause in the past to comment unfavourably on the number of apparatchiks working in Government Departments.

Mr. Ian Bruce (South Dorset): My hon. Friend appears to be leaving the subject of tourism, but I am sure that he will agree that, if the Prime Minister needed a free holiday, any one of us could have found a wonderful place in our constituencies for him and his family to stay. All he wants to do is advertise that people ought to spend their time overseas in Italy, instead of using the wonderful facilities available in south Dorset—where many Labour Members come on holiday.

Mr. Ainsworth: There are many wonderful opportunities in south Dorset for holidays, as there are in Scarborough, where I am going tomorrow. Perhaps the Secretary of State would like to come with me—on second thoughts, perhaps he might not.

The job of the apparatchiks is quite clear—it is to engage in the cynical manipulation of news, irrespective of truth, to the advantage of the Government. This is not only a Government for journalists, but government by journalists. The press machine of the Government is headed by Alastair Campbell, as we all know, the Prime Minister's press secretary—formerly of *The Mirror*. It includes a number of other prominent former journalists, including—in a selective list—Lance Price, formerly of the BBC, now at No. 10; David Bradshaw, formerly of *The Mirror*, now at No. 10; Martin Sixsmith, formerly of the BBC, now at the Department of Social Security; John Williams, formerly of *The Mirror*, now at the Foreign Office, where he is not doing a good job; Sherrie Dodd, formerly of *The Mirror*, now at the Northern Ireland Office; and Phil Bassett, formerly of *The Financial Times*, now running something called the strategic communications unit at No. 10. I imagine that their meetings are rather jolly; it is probably a bit like an El Vino's reunion party. They probably get the Liberal Democrats to come round and pour the claret.

Mr. Andrew Robathan (Blaby): Before my hon. Friend leaves the subject of Alastair Campbell, is he aware that it is not two years since a judge referred to him as a witness in whom one could not have a great deal of confidence? Does my hon. Friend think that he is therefore an appropriate man to have running the press machine from No. 10?

Mr. Ainsworth: I could not agree more with my hon. Friend. I would have no confidence in a press machine run by Alastair Campbell, or any of the other cronies with whom the Government surround themselves.

Mr. Robert Maclennan (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross): I want to be clear—is the hon. Gentleman attacking the role of journalists, or the lack of economy in the use of journalists by the present Government? We all remember Bernard Ingham.

Mr. Ainsworth: Bernard Ingham is going back a bit, but I am certainly not attacking journalists—I am attacking the way in which the Government seek to manipulate journalists in a systematic way.

Around the media men in the Government are a host of other figures—the cronies. These include people such as Roger Liddle of the policy unit, who, together with the

new Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, so memorably prefaced their book "The Blair Revolution" with the words:

"Both of us owe a special debt to Derek Draper, Peter Mandelson's former assistant . . . New Labour is fortunate indeed that it can boast a whole new generation with his quality of organisational energy, political commitment and realistic vision."

O brave new world, that has such people in it.

Ben Lucas, who ran the Prime Minister's political briefing unit during the general election campaign, has now set up his own lobbying firm, where he expects clients to

"reshape their core corporate culture"—

that is not trivial—

"in order to get in line with New Labour's vision."

He neatly sums up the quality of that vision:

"This is a Government that likes to do deals."

The Government have created a political culture that would have done credit to a late mediaeval principality, and it is spreading outwards. Tucked away in a recent edition of *The Times Educational Supplement*, I came across an article entitled "Councils urged to spin, not whinge". It is a report of the recent Local Government Association conference, covering a speech made by Mr. Greg Wilkinson, who was until recently at the Audit Commission and is now a Labour councillor for Hammersmith and Fulham. To the assembled delegates, he said:

"Learn the fine art of spin . . . In a world where perception is sometimes more important than reality, it is no longer enough to do well."

The insidious culture of cronyism is discrediting political life. The Secretary of State is already a victim of it, and will become even more of a victim of a political culture that is moving ever further from the reality of life in Britain. No amount of media manipulation or photo calls on magic carpets will help the crisis in regional theatres; help manufacturing industry as it goes into recession—remember: jobs are cool; help people who are worried about their mortgages; or help the sportsmen and sportswomen who are waiting for the Government to fulfil their promises.

No amount of spin will undo the damage to our constitution or offer comfort to thousands of small businesses in tourism and other industries. Fashionable ideas such as cool Britannia and the rebranding of Britain have precious little meaning to the people who live in the real world of Labour's Britain. They do not need to have their own money spent on telling them who they are. They know who they are. The majority of them do not live in Islington as the Secretary of State and the Prime Minister do, along with any number of Cabinet members; it appears almost to be a qualification for getting into the Cabinet to have an address in Islington.

The majority of people do not share the Cabinet's metropolitan values. Their values are deeper; they are not glamorous, but they are strong. We saw people marching to protect the countryside, and we see them every day in suburban streets and city estates. They are increasingly bewildered by a Government who have abandoned their principles and placed style over substance. Nowhere is that more true than in the Department for Culture, Media and Sport.

4.32 pm

The Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Mr. Chris Smith): I beg to move, To leave out from "House" to the end of the Question, and to add instead thereof:

'commends the Government for its progress on major matters of substance across all fields of responsibility, and in particular for its recognition of the cultural, social, educational and economic value of the areas of activity sponsored by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, and for the concrete action taken across all parts of the Department's responsibilities over the last year to maximise that value; welcomes the outcome of the Comprehensive Spending Review, which provides for a significant investment in culture, sport, heritage and tourism alongside positive steps to reduce bureaucracy and ensure the most effective use of public money; and notes that this brings to an end a damaging period of real cuts presided over by the Opposition.'.

The speech of the hon. Member for East Surrey (Mr. Ainsworth) demonstrated neither style nor substance. I wanted to take notes as he was speaking, but there were absolutely no points for me to answer. Quite apart from the fact that he could not get his quotations from me right, he could not get his quotations from Shakespeare right.

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: I am stung to my feet. I may have said, "O brave new world, that has such people in it", rather than "has such people in't", but the Secretary of State is being a little pedantic.

Mr. Smith: It is important to get these things right; the hon. Gentleman did not.

Last Tuesday, the Liberal Democrats launched an important debate about the relationship between Government and Parliament, which lies at the heart of some of the things that I think the Opposition are trying to get at. Not one Tory Back Bencher was in the House to listen. This morning, we had an important debate on concessionary television licences for pensioners, which was brilliantly handled by the new Minister in my Department, my hon. Friend the Member for Rossendale and Darwen (Janet Anderson). Not one Tory was in the House. Those were matters of substance but they were clearly not interested.

Mr. Michael Fabricant (Lichfield): It is all right to say that we had a debate this morning on a question of substance, but what have the Government decided? Are they going to give pensioners concessionary licences, yes or no?

Mr. Smith: No. Had the hon. Gentleman been here to listen, he would have heard the arguments.

The Tories cannot stand the Government's success on matters of substance across the board. All they can come up with is an obsession with the froth of whether there are six or seven journalists working at No. 10 Downing street. They are not interested in our investment in the national health service; the money that we have provided for education; how we are genuinely tackling crime across the country; how we are integrating transport; the help for pensioners with their winter heating bills; the reduction of VAT on people's fuel bills; the new deal that is taking hundreds of thousands of young people off the dole and putting them into work; signing up to the social chapter; the introduction of the national minimum wage; the use of

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capital receipts to allow local authorities to start building houses again; devolution for Scotland and Wales; a mayor and elected assembly for London; investment for the first time on a proper basis in science; the banning of trade in landmines; the banning of ownership of handguns; building on the work of the previous Government in the search for peace in Northern Ireland. Those are matters of substance but they are not interested in them.

Mr. Ian Bruce: Like the comprehensive spending review, the Secretary of State did not include tourism in his list. Why is the British Tourist Authority's chairman rushing down to see us in Dorset about the Secretary of State dismantling support for tourism? What are the Government going to do? This is one of our largest industries and important to my constituents. Will he give us a substantial answer?

Mr. Smith: I shall come to tourism because it is referred to specifically by the Select Committee. If the hon. Gentleman is interested in tourism, perhaps he noticed the press release on the comprehensive spending review issued on Friday by the British Hospitality Association. Its chairman welcomed our announcement that we are increasing funding for tourism. That is precisely what we are doing. He said:

"Chris Smith's announcement today that an additional £6 million has been allocated to tourism . . . is welcome news."

That is the industry's response to last Friday's announcements. I shall deal with that in more detail later.

I have described real, solid achievements by the Government. They have nothing to do with style, glamour, trivia or any of the things that the Opposition go on about. They are real and they matter to people. It was breathtaking chutzpah for the hon. Member for East Surrey to accuse us of endorsing the idea of cool Britannia. He said that it had precious little meaning to people in the real world. Perhaps he would care to look at the press release issued by the right hon. Member for South-West Surrey (Mrs. Bottomley) on 6 November 1996, when she was Secretary of State for National Heritage. It was headed:

"Cool Britannia as Latest Tourism Figures Reveal Best August Ever".

On 5 February 1997, the right hon. Lady issued a press release saying that we must ensure that more overseas and British tourists made "Cool Britannia" their first choice. On 5 March 1997, she issued a press release headed:

"Cool Britannia rules the way."

On 9 March 1997, she claimed:

"'Cool Britannia' is now an internationally recognised phenomenon."

Best of all, she used the phrase twice in her press release of 4 December 1996, describing

"London's place as the coolest city on the planet"

and adding that

"'cool Britannia' rules."

I have them all here—the hon. Member for East Surrey can have a look at them if he wants to, but certainly he cannot criticise us for leaping on some "Cool Britannia" bandwagon.

Turning to my own Department and related matters of substance, we inherited a situation in which all the areas for which the Department is responsible had faced neglect and cuts for many years; the arts in particular had suffered for years from cuts or standstill funding. The enormous opportunity offered by the lottery had been mishandled. School playing fields were being sold as local authorities throughout the country were forced to sell them. Some of our main national museums were having to introduce entrance charges and important arts organisations were staring closure in the face. The film industry was, as Bob Hoskins described it, like flowers

"grown like grass through the concrete."

Mr. Robathan: The right hon. Gentleman said that local authorities were forced to sell off playing fields, but nothing could be further from the truth. At that time, I was parliamentary private secretary to the then Minister of Sport, who worked extremely hard—as I know his successor has done—to prevent local authorities from selling off playing fields. We looked into the possibility of having a register, but the truth is that we did not have a right to order local authorities not to sell off the playing fields. Nevertheless, we tried very hard to stop them so doing.

Mr. Smith: First, I am tempted to observe that the hon. Gentleman was not very successful if that was what he was trying to achieve. Secondly, he did nothing at all to ensure the withdrawal of the circular from the then Department of the Environment which insisted that local authorities throughout the country should look at the asset value of playing fields. That is the sort of thing that he ought to have done.

Even within the self-agreed spending constraints that we have rightly imposed on ourselves for the first two years of the Labour Government, we have within the field of culture, media and sport been able to make a real difference. We introduced substantial reform of the national lottery, with our White Paper which was published a year ago and is now enshrined in the National Lottery Act 1998. New sets of directions are in place for the lottery distributors. We have established the new opportunities fund to make lottery funding available for projects related to health, education and the environment. We have established the National Endowment for Science, Technology and the Arts, or NESTA. We have ensured that lottery distributors place new emphasis on small-scale community grants and on making sure that more money goes to support people and activities, rather than to bricks and mortar. All that has been put in place in the last year.

Mr. Bermingham: My right hon. Friend knows of my interest in the lottery. Will he undertake to continue to press the lottery distribution bodies to accelerate the rate at which money is distributed? Currently, much of it sits gaining interest when there is so much to be done on the types of project that he has just described.

Mr. Smith: I will certainly do that. However, one of the issues that has to be addressed is the speed with which those organisations that have been awarded grants manage to get their projects off the ground and take up their grant.

Our other achievements include the introduction of fiscal incentives in British film making; those are to be applicable for the next five years, rather than for three

years, which was the period in the measure that we introduced within weeks of coming into office. We have sorted out the Channel 4 funding issue with a requirement that Channel 4 puts more emphasis on original programme making and film making. We brokered the agreement that saved the Old Vic theatre in London for serious theatre.

We have developed the new audiences fund to make money available to theatres and orchestras around the country to bring in new audiences to enjoy our greatest arts. We have developed the schools youth music trust to make available an additional £10 million a year for instrumental tuition for young people. There has been a savage decline in that over the past 15 years, which was presided over by the Conservative party. We are taking action on that.

We are developing new technology in the public library service. We have made available £50 million for the digitisation of content and £20 million for the training of librarians. We have set up the Wolfson Challenge fund to assist with the development of infrastructure.

We have stopped the unnecessary sale of school playing fields, which was achieved by co-ordination between my Department, the Department for Education and Employment and the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions. We have established the UK Sports Institute. We took an idea that was completely unformed and off track under the previous Government and made it a reality. The institute will open in 2000, as everyone intends. We are providing backing for the 2006 world cup bid, transforming it from a gleam in the eye to a genuine possibility, which we are intent on pursuing in the coming years.

We have saved Newstead abbey, which faced the threat of being undermined by coal mining. There is the prospect of a solution to the problems of presentation at Stonehenge, which is our greatest ancient monument. We are very close to reaching agreement between all the local communities, English Heritage, the National Trust, the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions and the Ministry of Defence to ensure that the landscape of Stonehenge can be restored. That will be a major achievement, which has required painstaking, difficult and patient negotiation and government of substance, not glamour or trivia.

We have introduced a common grading scheme for hotels. There has been agreement between the English tourist board, the Automobile Association and the Royal Automobile Club. We are ensuring that the tourism and hospitality industries take advantage of the new deal so that they can train more young people and solve their labour shortages. We have established the tourism forum, which regularly draws together all representatives of the major tourism organisations to consider tourism issues seriously.

Those are all measures that we have introduced in the 14 months since we came into office, and that is a pretty good record for any Government.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Smith: I give way to my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble).

Mrs. Joan Humble (Blackpool, North and Fleetwood): Does my right hon. Friend agree that tourism initiatives, especially the industry's involvement in the new deal, will improve the quality of services that so many of our resorts, including my constituency, need to offer to their thousands of visitors, or millions, in the case of Blackpool? Greater quality in staff training and recruitment is vital to improve our tourism industry, which is why the industry welcomes Government initiatives and its involvement in the new deal.

Mr. Smith: My hon. Friend is absolutely right and I am looking forward to going to Blackpool in two months to enjoy the best that it has to offer. She is right to point out that it is quality of service that counts in the tourism industry and draws visitors back to resorts. Quality of service depends on decent remuneration, career prospects, motivation and training opportunities for staff. The tourism industry recognises that, which is why it has welcomed initiatives on the new deal, the minimum wage and the quality benchmarks that we are putting in place. That is why the Opposition, in their opposition to all those measures, are completely out of touch with modern tourism.

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: The Secretary of State has boasted a lot about the achievements that he is claiming in the arts, but he has not answered the question about the erosion of the arm's-length principle, and the extension of ministerial control into areas that had a degree of autonomy until the Government came to power. If he is so proud of his achievements in the arts, how does he account for the article written by Peter Hall as recently as a month ago, in which he says:

"In a hundred years' time, our new government will, I am sure, be seen as having been in the great tradition of English puritanism—narrow-minded and joyless. They are also indifferent to what really matters in life. If they destroy the British arts, they will look fools in the eyes of history"?

Mr. Smith: Well, Peter Hall has now realised that we are not in the process of destroying the arts. On Friday last week, he said the following:

"I am delighted that the deprivations of the last 20 years"—

for which that lot are responsible—

"have been stopped and that the government has at last realised that there is a serious crisis in the performing arts. Every pound put into the arts will earn its money back many times over . . . I hope this is the beginning of really progressive thinking about the arts by the government".

Peter Hall recognises that it is, and the hon. Gentleman should get his facts up to date, not a month old.

Mr. Ainsworth: Unquestionably, we all want the arts to flourish in this country, but the public will be gravely disappointed when they discover that the money that the right hon. Gentleman is talking about is not as much as he claims, and that it will be, as never before, under the control of the Secretary of State instead of under the control of people in whom they can have confidence.

Mr. Smith: The hon. Gentleman is wrong on both counts. First, the money is exactly what it says it is. It is £30 million, in cash, next year, £40 million extra, in cash, the year after and £55 million, in cash, in the third year—each of those sums in addition to this year's figures. Over

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three years, it adds up to £125 million for the arts. In addition, there is £100 million for museums and galleries and £65 million for all the other activities that the Department sponsors. That adds up to the biggest enhancement ever for all the fields of cultural activity in this country. It will enable—

Mr. Bercow *rose—*

Mr. Smith: I am so fond of the hon. Gentleman that I shall give way.

Mr. Bercow: I am most grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for generously giving way. Does he agree with the view expressed by his hon. Friend the Minister for Sport in the debate on 5 June 1998, at column 679, that children should receive an irreducible minimum of three hours per week of physical education? If he agrees with that view, why has he downgraded physical education as part of the curriculum?

Mr. Smith: In a debate about the creative industries, we shall take no lessons from the hon. Gentleman about designer style.

My hon. Friend the Minister for Sport was expressing an ideal aspiration that he has for children. The hon. Gentleman ignores the fact that sport and physical recreation remain part of the national curriculum. They must be taught by schools. There is flexibility in when the school decides to time them in the school week, but they must be taught. They are part of the curriculum; to try to pretend otherwise is to mislead the public and the House.

Mr. Richard Spring (West Suffolk): Can the right hon. Gentleman confirm that the Secretary of State for Wales has rejected that view, and has insisted that physical education remains part of the core curriculum in Wales?

Mr. Smith: Sport and physical recreation never were part of the core curriculum. They have the same status in the curriculum as they have always had—they must be taught. That has been confirmed many times in the House by me, by my hon. Friend the Minister for Sport and by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Employment.

To return to the £290 million that we have made available under the comprehensive spending review over the next three years—

Mr. Ian Bruce: That is not what the right hon. Gentleman said before.

Mr. Smith: If the hon. Gentleman had been listening, he would have realised that £125 million for the arts, £100 million for museums and £65 million for other activities adds up to £290 million. I am glad that he is not an Education Minister.

The £290 million has enabled us to ensure that there will be improved access to our major national galleries and collections, with—if the trustees wish it—free entrance for all children next year, free entrance for all pensioners as well in the second year, and in the third year of the settlement, free entrance for all, universally. That development will be welcomed by many people around the country, although not, I expect, by the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: Will the Secretary of State deduct £912 million from £1,038 million? He said that Conservative Members could not do their arithmetic. The answer is £126 million. That is the figure in the Chancellor's Red Book, resulting from the comprehensive spending review, and that is the increase to which the Secretary of State referred—not £290 million, but £126 million. I am sorry to have to do the right hon. Gentleman's arithmetic for him.

Mr. Smith: The hon. Gentleman does not understand what is being done. The figure that he cited is the year 3 figure, as compared with the current figure. That indeed represents a cash-terms increase of £126 million in the third year over the current position. There are also to be increases next year and the year after. By adding up the extra money for year 1, year 2 and year 3, we get the figure of £290 million. That is additional money for the arts, museums, culture, sport and tourism that was not in the Conservative Government's plans, which would not have been spent by them and will be spent by us. That is the difference. It is real money in cash—new money—and the Conservatives cannot accept it.

We shall ensure free access to our great national collections. I would have hoped that the hon. Gentleman would welcome that, but he has not done so, because the Conservatives were the party that presided over the introduction of entrance charges. Perhaps they could have welcomed the new money that we have allocated for the designated museums of national importance around the country. They put in place the designation system, but it was meaningless, because no money came with the act of designation. We are putting the money in place to make sure that designation means something.

We are ensuring that the performing and visual arts develop new audiences and, perhaps even more important, that they develop more education sessions so that pupils have the chance to learn at first hand from people who are involved in the theatre and in music about the delights that the arts can bring. The Arts Council will have control of the money. It will be up to the Arts Council to make decisions, and I hope that it will use some of that money to keep some of our best arts organisations alive.

We have ensured that there will be enhanced funds above inflation for the British Tourist Authority. We have also ensured that extra funds will be available for the United Kingdom Sports Council to make sure that it gets off the ground well in its new form. We are ensuring that we put right the cuts that we had to make this year in the national heritage memorial fund, and we have given a guarantee of future lottery income to the arts, sport, charities and heritage.

Of course we have not said that that will be something for nothing; of course conditions must be attached. I am accused of being meddlesome, and I plead guilty to that. Presumably the Opposition would have given something for nothing. They would not have been interested in ensuring that taxpayers' money was well, efficiently and properly spent. However, that is what we are doing; that is all that we are doing. We are not dictating what happens

to that money. We are simply ensuring that it is spent in the right way, and it is absolutely right that we should do so.

Mr. Gordon Prentice (Pendle): Was it not a disgrace that, year after year, the previous Government did nothing to ensure that people with conditionally exempt works of art opened up their houses to allow members of the public to see them, when the owners were given enormous tax breaks by that Government?

Mr. Smith: My hon. Friend is right to identify the enormous importance of making sure that we support excellence in this country—the best performances, the best companies and the best collections that are in our museums and galleries—and that ordinary people can get to see those performances, companies and collections, and enjoy them in ever greater numbers. That is the kernel of our arts policy: excellence and access going hand in hand. Conservatives, of course, do not understand any of that because they are interested only in tittle-tattle.

Mr. Tim Loughton (East Worthing and Shoreham): Will the Secretary of State acknowledge that the effect of the Budget changes on historic asset items will be, as many hon. Members on both sides of the House have had letters to say, that people will be forced to sell historically important artefacts, which will go into foreign hands, with the result that there will be no access for anyone in this country because those artefacts will no longer be in this country?

Mr. Smith: If the hon. Gentleman had followed the debates that took place in Committee on the Finance Bill, he would know that my hon. Friend the Financial Secretary to the Treasury is at this very moment conducting discussions with the Historic Houses Association, to try to ensure that we do not lose out in terms of heritage as a result of the tax changes that have been genuinely brought in to ensure that the loophole in the tax system could not be exploited by hundreds of people with no genuine heritage reason for doing so.

The hon. Member for East Surrey mentioned tourism, as did the Select Committee on Culture, Media and Sport. The Select Committee, rather interestingly, said that I was somehow not interested in tourism. In coming to that conclusion, it ignored the fact that we have ensured that tourism has a real and prominent role in the work of the regional development agencies; that we have made sure that a proper grading scheme for hotel and guest house accommodation in England can be put in place; that we have established the tourism forum, which I chair on a regular basis, to bring all representative bodies from the world of tourism together; that we have a monthly meeting of the strategic tourism working group—which again I chair—to bring leading representatives of tourism together to put our tourism strategy in place; that we have ensured that the British Tourist Authority and the British Council have developed good working relationships abroad so that we can have real synergy—

Mr. Peter Ainsworth *rose—*

Mr. Smith: Wait. There is a longer list to come.

Those relationships have been developed so that we can have real synergy between the work of these important bodies. We have ensured that there will be enhanced funding for the British Tourist Authority and the important work that it does. We have gone out to proper nationwide consultation on the future of the structures of support for tourism in England, which has been a consultation exercise welcomed by many people in the industry. We have guaranteed to ring-fence the funding of tourism support in England. It is a consultation exercise about the best structures rather than anything that is driven by the need to obtain finance or cuts.

Mr. Ainsworth: Will the Secretary of State now give way?

Mr. Smith: I will now.

Mr. Ainsworth: Has the right hon. Gentleman finished his list?

Will he explain why it was that on Thursday 18 December 1997, he answered a written question from my predecessor, my right hon. Friend the Member for Horsham (Mr. Maude), stating:

"I aim to publish a comprehensive and detailed tourism strategy next summer, spelling out how the Government intend to create and sustain an improved framework within which tourism, hospitality and leisure can flourish."—[*Official Report*, 18 December 1997; Vol. 303, c. *249*.]?

Yet nothing has happened.

Mr. Smith: The reason for that is precisely the consultation exercise that we have launched. It would have been sheer folly to publish a strategic tourism document while we were consulting on an essential aspect such as the structure of support for English tourism. We intend to publish our tourism strategy in October, once the responses to the consultation have been received.

There were some interesting responses when the Select Committee produced its report. Conservative Members thought, "This is useful; we can make some fun and have a go at the Secretary of State with bits and pieces of the report." Incidentally, those bits and pieces were inserted by Conservative Members. Let us consider what the sensible parts of the tourism industry had to say.

Mr. Fabricant: Will the Secretary of State give way?

Mr. Smith: Talking of the sensible men, I will of course give way.

Mr. Fabricant: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for giving way. He was not privy to the private discussions of the Select Committee—I was there. At that time, there were 10 members of the Committee. Is he saying that my talents are so all-embracing, and my powers of persuasion so great, that one other Tory and I dissuaded a Committee including one Liberal Democrat Member and seven Labour Members, including the Chairman, from producing a glowing report saying how brilliant the Secretary of State was? Is he saying that I single-handedly persuaded those hon. Members to change their mind? The right hon. Gentleman's Parliamentary Private Secretary, the hon. Member for Slough (Fiona Mactaggart), told everyone that, but is he so naive that he believes it?

Mr. Smith: I am tempted to say yes, but, given the nature of the hon. Gentleman, such a response would

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clearly be absurd and untrue. The records of the Select Committee proceedings and the list of amendments tabled to and included in the report clearly show that the report's final form differed substantially from that which it took when it was first considered by the Committee, but the important aspect is the difference between what the report said and what the tourism industry thinks.

Let me tell the hon. Member for Lichfield (Mr. Fabricant), who is a member of the Select Committee, what the chairman of the Tourism Society had to say. On 11 June, immediately after the Select Committee had issued its report, he wrote to me, saying:

"It is extremely regrettable that the Select Committee Report created such a critical impression when the reality is the opposite."

In a press release, the British Hospitality Association said:

"The industry has never received so much interest from government and we are happy that we have built up a very fruitful relationship with both ministers and officials in government generally and at the DCMS in particular."

On 12 June—*[Interruption.]* Conservative Members laugh, but these are important representative bodies—the lifeblood of the industry in this country, not piddling little Conservative Members who do not know what is happening in tourism.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Lord): Order. I remind the House that contributions are normally made when hon. Members are on their feet. There are far too many sedentary interventions, and I should be grateful if they stopped.

Mr. Smith: I have suddenly realised, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that I perhaps got carried away and was verging on unparliamentary language. I withdraw the word "piddling" and insert the word "two-bit".

The Joint Hospitality Industry Congress wrote to me on 12 June saying:

"Dear Secretary of State.

I feel I must write and express my fullest support to you following what I consider to be uninformed and incorrect criticisms by the Select Committee concerning your interest and that of your Department in Tourism and, by implication, Hospitality as well. Nothing could be further from reality. Your personal keen involvement, coupled with the immense input from your officials, brings a clear-sighted leadership to our deliberations."

That is the reality.

This is a debate on an Opposition motion that demeans Parliament and brings discredit on those who tabled it. There are real issues and real matters of substance to be discussed, real progress to be made, real achievements to be heralded, and genuine difficulties to be tackled, some of which will not be easy.

In the past few days, we have announced the largest ever new investment in the cultural life of our country. We have set in motion a widespread consultation that could lead to a radical restructuring, for the better, of the cultural heritage, tourism and sporting fields of activities and of Government support. That is what we should concentrate on, and what the world outside has welcomed and will study. It is a pity that the Opposition cannot find the seriousness of purpose to do likewise. Perhaps that is why they are, and will remain, the Opposition.

5.10 pm

Mr. Robert Maclennan (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross): I, at least, am glad that the official Opposition chose to have a debate that enables us to focus on the work of the Secretary of State's Department, although they seem to have done so inadvertently. They have not chosen the debate to outline any constructive views of their own, never mind focusing sharply on the criticisms that could be made of the Government's record in this area over 14 months.

Before I turn to the two matters on which I want to spend a little time in this rather short debate, I want to pay a personal tribute to the two Ministers in the Department of Culture, Media and Sport who have left office. Both were well-known enthusiasts for their subjects, particularly films and the performing arts, and both were unfailingly courteous in their dealings with me and, I believe, with all those with whom they worked. I also want to wish the new Ministers well in their very important roles.

Mr. James Gray (North Wiltshire): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Maclennan: No, I shall not give way. Interventions have already been on the generous side, and it would be unfortunate to give way before I have even embarked on the substance of my speech. I shall give way later if the hon. Gentleman wants to intervene then.

I should like to deal with tourism, which is the big spending industry for which the Secretary of State has responsibility. I think that he would acknowledge that the perception of representatives of the industry is that his Department does not give it the priority that is given to other more glamorous matters for which it has responsibility.

It is clear from what the Secretary of State said today, and more importantly from the paper that he published on Friday, that important matters are being considered and are in the pipeline. He began his speech with a quick round-up of what he saw as the Government's general achievements, and I shall not follow him down that route, save to say that I do not entirely share his perspective on the Government's management of the economy. The reliance on the Bank of England as the sole controller of inflationary tendencies has resulted in an overvalued pound, which has made life exceedingly difficult for the tourism industry, and has almost certainly contributed both to the reduction in the number of visitors to this country and to a pretty lean summer.

On the wider policy point, it is the view of the Liberal Democrat party that if we were to seek early entry into European monetary union, it would be of particular benefit to the tourist industry. It would not only reduce the transactional costs of tourism, but stabilise our currency in relation to Europe at a lower level, and, as a result, increase our competitiveness. Those matters will be debated in extenso on other occasions, but they seem to be conditioning the difficulties that are currently faced by the tourist industry.

I want to focus on the Secretary of State's proposals for restructuring the public bodies for which he has responsibility. He has allowed a fairly short period for consultation, but, given that this matter has been considered before, it is not too short. I am happy to supply

the views of my party, as we published today our own consultative document, "Tourism Tomorrow". That will be a direct and first response to some of the issues that the Secretary of State has raised.

However, I should like to supplement that by responding directly to the Secretary of State's paper setting out options and choices. I hope that some matters are not cast in stone and that he will be prepared to rethink in the light of responses. I am unclear whether the Secretary of State has fully taken into account the consequences of devolution for his departmental responsibilities, and its impact on the British Tourist Authority. The paper mentions devolution, but the main clients who should be concerned about the promotion of tourism abroad will, following the completion of the Government's decentralisation exercise, be the nations of the United Kingdom. It is more important that their representative voice be heard at national level. They should decide co-operatively how best to promote the separate and distinctive interests of the four constituent nations, rather than start from the proposition that the British Tourist Authority is the right body upon which to build.

I like much in the Government's approach, but I do not think that the proposals for the English regions are apt. My experience of the tourist industry is that it looks to a higher level than the regions of England to determine strategic issues and national policy towards tourism. For the delivery of particular services, it looks to a unit much closer to the locality in which it operates than the regions. Notwithstanding the role of regional development agencies—which I am not seeking to diminish, because they will sometimes be deployed to the benefit of tourism—the proper unit for local provision of tourist services is the locality. Lumping the Lake district together with Liverpool in a region does not greatly assist: it creates a bureaucracy at an unnecessary level.

In his paper, which covers many subjects for which he is responsible, the Secretary of State is clear that some streamlining of the bureaucracy is desirable. Perhaps that is what the right hon. Gentleman should look at with the coolest and most detached eye.

I am however aware that, even in my northern constituency, for which the right hon. Gentleman has no direct responsibility save perhaps through the British Tourist Authority, there is discontent with the establishment of a local tourist board which covers half the land mass of Scotland as a region, when it is clear that the interests of even Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross would be better looked after locally by a body that does not seek to represent such disparate interests as are contained in the wider highland region. Big does not necessarily mean better here. We should not look to a building up of the regional dimension of tourist provision.

I want to question the right hon. Gentleman a little about the tourism forum to which he referred. There is the germ of an important idea here, but I understand that, for the representatives of the industry, it is too large and in a sense, in respect of Government Departments, it is not sufficiently strong. It would be preferable to have, as suggested in the Liberal Democrats' paper, some commission to bring together under the right hon. Gentleman's chairmanship Departments that will also impact upon the development of tourism—such as the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions for planning matters, and the Department for Education and Employment for the important task of bringing quality education for management and service delivery to the forefront.

Those structural changes seem desirable not only to ensure that there is no passing of the buck from the Secretary of State's Department to other Departments, which I do not suppose he would wish to do, but to give added clout within Government to the forum as the voice of tourism: as the strategic powerhouse for the industry which is so massively important and has such enormous growth potential.

In some parts of the country, there is also another problem that must be recognised. Tourism must be sustainable and there are some parts of the country where setting up bodies to encourage tourism would be regarded as positively perverse. That adds to the force of my view that local tourist boards are better adapted than regional ones to tackle the particular needs of the tourist providers.

I move from tourism to the arts, which have great importance not only in relation to tourism—they are one reason why many people come to Britain—and not only in respect of the cultural industries, to which the Secretary of State has referred on a number of occasions. I welcome the steps that have been taken, particularly in relation to the film industry and, to some extent, the music industry, and I hope that that will lead to a more powerful British film industry.

I want to put into a little perspective some of the claims that have been made about the new spending directions and decisions. I read the Select Committee's report without a whole-hearted recognition of what it was talking about. It was a patchy report. However, it made a number of telling points. One of the legitimate points that it made was that there has been real underfunding of many of the Departments' dependent bodies of clients for a number of years, for which the Government cannot be wholly blamed. However, I do blame them for having accepted the budgetary settlements that were projected by the outgoing Administration. If they had a damaging effect in the health and education sectors, as I believe they did, they have also had a real and damaging effect in the arts and cultural sectors.

When the Secretary of State speaks, as he did, about this being a record settlement, we must remember that we have had some pretty lean years and that, at the end of this triennial period, we shall only be roughly back where we were in 1992.

Mr. Chris Smith: I have enormous respect for the right hon. Gentleman and I hesitate to put him right. The arts underfunding in real terms during the past five to six years, to which he refers, has been of the order of £35 million. In the first year of this new settlement we shall almost put that right. By the time we get to the third year, we will have done a lot more than put it right.

Mr. Maclennan: I concede the point that the right hon. Gentleman makes, but I think that I am correct in saying—if I am not, I am happy to give way again—that if one takes into account his Department's expenditure as a whole, it roughly restores the position to where it was in 1992–93.

Mr. Smith: The reason for the difference is that the Department's responsibility for voluntary organisations

[Mr. Smith]

was transferred back to the Home Office so, given the Department's responsibilities, that enhances what we are able to do.

Mr. Maclennan: On that I congratulate the Minister, although it is not a bonanza, and I do not think that he would claim that it was. Moreover, it might not be worth while. I take the point made by Sir Peter Hall, which the right hon. Gentleman quoted, about the value of investment in the cultural industries and how that money fructifies in the sector when it is invested. In considering the settlement, it is necessary to recall just how little money we are talking about in terms of Government spending as a whole. During the last financial year, the Government's cultural spend was one third of 1 per cent. of total Government spending. The new injection will increase that total by 0.03 per cent. per annum during the next three years.

Britain has the balance wrong when it spends so little. If our expenditure on the cultural industries is compared with that of other countries—that is difficult because there are different parameters for measurement—we do not seem to be doing as well as other western European countries of comparable wealth. That fact has been brought out recently in some new research which has not been challenged; that should lend support to the Secretary of State's efforts to enlarge Government spending on the arts in Britain.

Looking at the structural proposals for the arts, whose purpose is similar to those for the tourist industry, in that the Secretary of State is trying to slim them down, I must question whether the right hon. Gentleman has got it right. First, however, I strongly agree with him on a number of things. In the case of the arts, the right hon. Gentleman is entirely right to recognise that the regions are the appropriate level at which public funding should be spent, and I applaud the increased emphasis on the regional bodies. But it is not entirely satisfactory that they should be predominantly appointed, if that is his intention, by the Department or by himself. I would hope that the regional bodies would be more home grown.

A second structural change that I think would help the arts is the introduction of improved planning arrangements, along with three-year funding settlements. Uncertainty about the future has forced many arts providers to devote a disproportionate amount of time to financial planning, particularly to the justification of planning applications before a proper outturn can be seen.

I must question the Secretary of State about a number of other proposals. He said that he recognised the importance of the Arts Council as an advisory body—I think that should be its principal role—but qualified that by saying that he did not want it to have an adversarial relationship with the Government. The Secretary of State must surely acknowledge that, if advice is freely given, it may involve free criticism from time to time. I do not think that criticism from that body, or indeed from any body that is charged with giving advice, should be inhibited by the Secretary of State's talk of partnerships. I do not like the idea of a partnership between advisers and Government; I find it too cosy. I think that it would be sensible to enhance the independent aspect of the Arts Council's advisory role.

Here I enter more controversial territory. I feel that it is time to question fundamentally the arm's-length principle to which the Secretary of State has at least paid lip service. In fact, I think that he has embraced that principle. I am puzzled. Most of the elements in the package of measures proposed on Friday struck me as being designed to increase accountability—through the right hon. Gentleman's Department, ultimately—for strategies and policies set by the Department; but, at the same time, the right hon. Gentleman wants the arm's-length principle to apply to the delivery of those measures. I find that odd. Is the Secretary of State saying that his Department is not capable of making assessments of how money is being used? If he is making such a self-critical judgment, he ought to beef up his Department so that it is capable of ascertaining whether its strategies and policies are being implemented, rather than commissioning others to perform the task or seeking to fulfil its role of accountability in another way.

There is one oddity—one innovation—in the package of proposals: the proposal for a powerful watchdog. I am not sure what that means, if it does not mean another tier of bureaucracy. I hope that the intention is not to sideline the work of the National Audit Office where it is responsible for such matters, or that of the Audit Commission where it is responsible for local government activities in this context. As the Secretary of State knows, such action certainly would not take the attention of the Public Accounts Committee away from the Department's activities.

I fear that this could constitute a fifth wheel—or worse, an alibi enabling the Department to seek to avoid responsibility for the outturn of the strategies and policies that it is embracing and, indeed, requiring other bodies to have in mind when spending public money. Any such move would be a failure. It is becoming increasingly unacceptable for the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, alone among the great Departments of State—for I think of it as a great Department of State—to be able to wash its hands of the way in which its strategies and policies are being implemented, and say, "That is not for us, because of the arm's-length principle".

The arm's-length principle was dreamt up—probably by that liberal John Maynard Keynes or one of his friends—in the mid-1940s, against the background of the abuse of Government power with respect to culture by Nazi Germany, fascist Italy and, indeed, the Soviet Union in the 1920s and 1930s. There were legitimate and understandable fears about Government involvement, Government meddling, Government dictation to the arts, and about the abuse of power. Today, however, we live in a very different world. If a Government sought to meddle in decisions about which play should be staged by which company, or about which composer was acceptable, or sought to burn the vanities, there would be—given the multi-media outlets that we have in this country—howls of abuse. I think that the time has come to dispose of the mantra about the arm's-length principle, and to recognise the reality that Ministers are expected to intervene when there is a problem.

The Conservative party recognised that in government. The Conservative party saw that it was important to give English National Opera more stability by providing it with a home in the Coliseum. Mr. David Mellor did not hesitate, just before a general election, to ignore the arm's-length principle and provide ENO with the

Coliseum. Similar provisions were made by the Conservative Secretary of State for Wales to help fund Welsh National Opera when it was touring England. Again, the arm's-length principle was simply forgotten—rightly, in my view.

There is now no case for distinguishing between the approach of Government to the funding of great national companies from that applying to, for instance, the British Library. There is no interposing body deciding what sort of money should go to the British Library; there is no "arm's-length" argument, although it would be possible to present such arguments. I think that the time has come to be frank, and to say that the Government are dealing with these matters and should be judged accordingly.

Responsibility for wider funding of the arts, ... which the issues are not so much national as local or regional, should be delegated to other bodies—preferably elected bodies—which should be judged according to their response to the perceived needs of regions and localities. That would build up a degree of competition in provision, which would be very healthy. East Anglia, for instance, is almost the only region not to have a resident orchestra. Although I do not think that it would be sensible for central Government to tell East Anglia that it should have a resident orchestra, I do think that the regional tier of government should consider the matter. That has been done in other parts of the country.

I am not saying that, having abandoned the arm's-length principle, the Secretary of State should intervene at every level of decision-making, although what I am saying could be interpreted in that way. I believe, however, that the Secretary of State should be responsible for the future of major companies—responsible, as effectively he is, for the future of major museums and libraries. That would get rid of many illusions about what is needed, and would avoid the fantasy that, if the Royal Opera House gets into difficulties, it is all because of personal problems between its director and the chief executive of the Arts Council—or something or that sort. If tens of millions of pounds of public money are being spent, the Government must be involved.

I do not want to speak for much longer, as this is a short debate; but I want to raise a specific structural issue. I hope that the Minister will look again at his proposal to graft the Crafts Council on to the new arts body that will replace the Arts Council. The Minister acknowledges in his paper that the Crafts Council commands widespread support among its clients. Its function is somewhat different from that of the Arts Council. It is closer to the Design Council in some respects, in that it assists people who seek to create little businesses trading in the decorative arts or crafts in which they are engaged.

Scotland has experience of a unified body which the Minister might like to examine. I make no criticism of how the matter is handled in Scotland, but there has been a feeling in the Scottish crafts world that English crafts people were advantaged by a separate and separately run Crafts Council. No doubt the Crafts Council will consider the matter and make recommendations in due course.

The Secretary of State has one of the most important portfolios in the Government. There has been a long gestation period for the proposals and I hope that we shall soon reach conclusions so that the structure for dispensing public money can be settled to enable people to get on with the job. In framing that structure, it is important to bear in mind the fact that if artists and art providers have to spend too much time checking whether they are fulfilling strategies, meeting criteria and devising or contributing advice on new criteria, there will be much less time for the activity that is at the core of the arts and the work of artists. For that reason, a bloated bureaucracy is to be avoided.

5.41 pm

Mrs. Joan Humble (Blackpool, North and Fleetwood): I agree with the right hon. Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross (Mr. Maclennan) that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport has one of the most important jobs in the Government. I say that not just because of the Department's great importance to our economy but because I enjoy so many of the facilities that it covers. I am pleased to take part in a debate that highlights the Government's exciting initiatives. Such proposals are sadly lacking among Conservative Members.

I listened carefully to the speech by the hon. Member for East Surrey (Mr. Ainsworth), but there was no substance and, I fear, no style in his presentation. We should all welcome the biggest ever increase in resources for culture, and the fact that it has been placed in the context of a wide-ranging consultative document. There have been other initiatives in the past 15 months that are especially important to tourism in view of the difficulties that face many of our tourist resorts, especially seaside towns. I represent such a town, as does my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, South (Mr. Marsden), whom I am pleased to see in his place. We are both aware of the difficulties that seaside towns faced for many years because the previous Government did not support them. At last, we are looking forward to the support that we need.

Mr. Gray: Has the hon. Lady heard from the Labour party whether it intends to return to Blackpool for the annual conferences? Her constituents must have been concerned by the recent announcement that the standard of hotels and restaurants in Blackpool did not come up to the high standards that Labour has come to expect in Islington and elsewhere.

Mrs. Humble: My colleagues and I look forward to enjoying the party conference in the autumn in Blackpool, and to enjoying the hotel accommodation and restaurants and all the other facilities that Blackpool offers. We might go to see the illuminations. Seaside resorts should not be treated with the contempt that the hon. Gentleman has displayed. They have serious problems. Those who visit Blackpool in the summer and autumn see the bright lights, the theatres and a bustling town. They do not see behind those attractions the problem of unemployment and the difficulties that have been caused by many years of underfunding.

At last, Britain has a Government who are investing not just in tourism but in housing to improve the housing stock. They are investing in health, education and new jobs. In north Blackpool, a new technology park is being built, and already there is a queue of people waiting to develop new technology and new jobs on that site. In recent years, Blackpool council and the tourism and hospitality trade have taken steps to ensure that Blackpool

[Mrs. Humble]

remains Britain's premier seaside and tourist resort. However, local support, initiatives and endeavour will not be enough. The Government must be equally committed not only to Blackpool but to other seaside towns and to tourism as a whole. That is why all those who are involved in tourism and hospitality welcome many of my right hon. Friend's initiatives.

Training and the new deal initiative are important. I was pleased to attend the higher awards ceremony at Blackpool and the Fylde college. The degree ceremony there is held in conjunction with Lancaster university, and many of the degrees are in tourism, hospitality and catering to enable people to provide for the many visitors who come not just to Blackpool but to other parts of the country. I felt proud of those students as they walked across the stage to receive their degrees. Those well-educated young people will deliver the quality service that we want, and that will encourage more overseas visitors and make life more enjoyable for those who take their holidays at home.

There have been many plaudits for the minimum wage legislation. How can we develop quality services if we do not pay the rate for the job to the people, many of whom are young, who are engaged in the direct delivery of services? Those initiatives are sponsored by many Departments which have co-operated to develop a key industry. The Department for Culture, Media and Sport has been involved in many other initiatives. I recently took part in the debates on the Bill that became the National Lottery Act 1998. I fear that my constituency is among those that have received the lowest lottery funding.

Under the new legislation, there is hope for a more equitable allocation of resources so that the many deserving causes in my constituency and in many regions that have dropped off the list will be viewed much more sympathetically. People are already approaching me to know more about the sixth good cause, the after-school clubs and the healthy living centres. They are excited by the Government's new initiatives.

I welcome the arts initiative. When my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is considering museums and art galleries, I hope he will remember that there are many excellent examples in the regions. A museum in Fleetwood has concentrated on the history of the fishing industry there. Unfortunately, that industry has declined in recent years, but many children can visit that museum to learn more about their heritage and about the industry in which their fathers, grandfathers and uncles worked. That museum is a centre of education, as well as providing an interesting afternoon out for many families. On Friday evening, I will attend the Grundy art gallery in Blackpool, where a new exhibition is to be unveiled. It regularly has new exhibitions which highlight local as well as national talent. There are many such art galleries and museums throughout the country, so, when we look at the arts, let us remember that we are talking not just about the royal opera or metropolitan organisations, however much we all wish to support them, but about local initiatives.

I could talk at length about the theatre and the plays that I have seen in Blackpool. Instead, let me say that I just hope that the Secretary of State, when he visits Blackpool in the autumn, will take the opportunity to visit local arts establishments, as well as entering into debates with the tourism and hospitality industries, and will see why many people enjoy coming to Blackpool and want to keep coming back.

5.50 pm

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley (South-West Surrey): I am very happy to follow the hon. Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble). Having had many discussions with the people of Blackpool about the tourism and leisure industry—having visited Blackpool pleasure beach and talked about the importance of tourism—I endorse many of her points about the industry in Blackpool. I was especially pleased to hear the hon. Lady comment on the importance of training. At the recent British Hospitality Association annual lunch, Adair Turner commended the document that was produced by the Department of National Heritage on training and manpower issues in—I think—1996. That makes the point that the industry needs to train young people. I hope that the hon. Member for Newport, East (Mr. Howarth), whom I welcome to the ministerial team, will be able to deploy some of the expertise that he has developed at the Department for Education and Employment in the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, because human resource issues are so important.

Enjoyable though it has been, the debate so far has been characterised by a degree of selective memory. I hope that the Minister for Sport will be able to inform the House on these points in his winding-up speech. Surely, the biggest single increase in funding to culture in this country has arisen from the incredible significance of the national lottery. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will inform the House precisely how many museums, galleries, theatres and orchestras have benefited from the national lottery. For all the credit that should be given to the Department for its work, and to Britain's extraordinary ability to achieve a reputation throughout the world for its excellence in arts, sports and heritage, the person who must take the most credit is my right hon. Friend the Member for Huntingdon (Mr. Major), who said, of his founding of the Department:

> "Man cannot live by GDP alone . . . A country can only be strong, healthy and contented if it burnishes its heritage, encourages its citizens to pursue excellence in sport and cultivates widespread appreciation of the arts . . . It was in that spirit that I set up the Department of National Heritage. Its creation was a sign that Government should take such activities seriously. For millions of people, they are not optional extras, they are worth valuing in their own right."

The most incredible boost in funding has resulted from the national lottery, which has enabled many more people to participate in the arts, sport, heritage, culture—the things that draw people together. A dilemma of modern life is that people's lives are more fragmented and more isolated. Now, however, they have the opportunity to build communities in a way that they never previously had.

The Secretary of State was less than generous to my right hon. Friend the former Prime Minister. Anyone who has served in a Department inevitably has a tremendous commitment and concern for the activities of that Department. The former Minister for Arts, the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, Central (Mr. Fisher), consistently and generously paid tribute to those elements of policy for which the team that was present when I last held office had been responsible.

The Secretary of State mentioned many initiatives that had a remarkably familiar ring. I seem to remember setting up a working group involving the British Council, the British Tourist Authority and the Department, and changing the lottery rules to allow lottery money to go into touring, to encourage access, participation and education. I remember many other themes. I was sorry that the right hon. Gentleman presented those in classic Labour fashion, rebranding and rebadging any good idea from the past, without any recognition of what had gone before.

The one respect in which the Secretary of State did give me recognition concerned the adoption of the phrase "cool Britannia." I was Secretary of State for National Heritage. I am a Conservative who is proud of our past and who believes that there is continuity. Therefore, I was happy to adopt and to apply a phrase that identified the creative, dynamic, forward-looking potential of Britain.

Mr. Chris Smith: Does the right hon. Lady agree with the hon. Member for East Surrey (Mr. Ainsworth), who said this afternoon that "cool Britannia" is a phrase that has precious little meaning to people in the real world?

Mrs. Bottomley: I am going to explain why the use of the phrase "cool Britannia" has been hijacked and abused by the Labour party, why it is absolutely to the point and why the Opposition motion is so appropriate.

New Labour believes in rubbishing the past. It really went for cool Britannia, the rebranding and rebadging of Britain, as if there were was no tomorrow, because it did not want to remember the past.

Mr. Smith: During her time at the Department of National Heritage, the right hon. Lady issued at least five press releases about cool Britannia. I have issued not a single one since I took over after the election last year.

Mrs. Bottomley: My purpose in speaking was not to engage in trivial exchanges with the right hon. Gentleman. I will talk about his record in a moment, but I wanted to make a more profound point about the significance of the phrase "cool Britannia" and its use by the Labour party, as opposed to its use by me in the context of tourism.

I was Secretary of State for National Heritage, a Department that took great pride in our history, architecture and cultural traditions and wanted to convey the message that we were creating a country that was innovative in film, tourism, hospitality and food. The Secretary of state rightly praises the film industry. He will know that all the filming for "The Full Monty" and "Mrs. Brown" was completed way before the last election. The reason why the phrase has been wrapped around new Labour's necks, whether or not the right hon. Gentleman used it, is that the Prime Minister has exploited that message comprehensively.

On the day when the House was cutting lone-parent benefit, the Prime Minister was entertaining another 400 celebrities, media personalities and pop stars at No. 10. This is a Prime Minister who has systematically sought to exploit the "cool Britannia" phrase, which has been spun out of No. 10. It has boomeranged into Labour's face because new Labour dislikes the past—anything that represents the flourishing economy that the Conservatives left in place and anything that represents old Labour. Each is equally unappetising to new Labour.

Mr. Loughton: Far from distancing himself from the ethos of cool Britannia, as the Secretary of State is now doing, does my right hon. Friend recall that in April, the Prime Minister interrupted his tour of the middle east—specifically, Saudi Arabia—to hold a press conference in defence of cool Britannia? Such was the importance that the right hon. Gentleman attached to the issue that he interrupted an extremely important foreign tour for it.

Mrs. Bottomley: My hon. Friend has the message precisely right. When I was Secretary of State for National Heritage, my right hon. Friend the then Prime Minister would not have uttered the words "cool Britannia" for any amount of persuasion had I tried to encourage him. It was an appropriate phrase to promote the tourism industry, but it is not the way to badge a Government. That is its significance in the context of the motion tabled by my right hon. Friend.

Mr. Nicholas Soames (Mid-Sussex): I endorse entirely what my right hon. Friend says. We all know exactly what the Prime Minister and the Labour Government were trying to do in rebranding this country cool Britannia. Does my right hon. Friend agree that it does not matter who is in power, as these great renaissances in the arts, music, poetry and painting in capital cities go in cycles? I am now an old man of 50 and twice in my lifetime London has been deemed to be the cultural capital of the world. If the good Lord spares me, it may happen once again, but it has absolutely nothing to do with anything that Labour has done, and very little to do with what we did.

Mrs. Bottomley: I beg to disagree with my hon. Friend, as I think that it has a great deal to do with what the Conservative Government did. The fact that, under the Conservatives, Britain set an economic and cultural framework in which initiative could flourish has meant that Britain has been the place in which many mobile and creative industries have wanted to invest. The growing pressure towards regulation, the introduction of a minimum wage and Labour's municipalising tendencies threaten to stultify much of the innovation that is taking place. That leads me to other serious issues surrounding today's motion.

It is disappointing that the Secretary of State lost responsibility for voluntary organisations, volunteering and the voluntary sector, as they gave the Department a serious flavour and registered the significance of that work and that theme in community development. I endorse the approach of working with the regions. The Department is an important lever for economic and social development, and I frequently emphasised that role.

Let me return to today's motion and the Government's preoccupation with style over substance. Various hon. Members have referred to the biggest ever increase in funding. I suggest that the biggest ever increase in funding was the input of well over £1 billion a year to the sector from the national lottery. Last week's announcement may have meant £290 million more in taxpayers' money, but in the same time frame the sector has lost £1 billion in lottery money. Worse, the Secretary of State has

[Mrs. Bottomley]

essentially allowed the Chancellor to do what successive Chancellors will inevitably want to do—to nationalise the lottery. Not only is lottery money going into education and health but the document issued last week is full of ways in which the Secretary of State is seeking to control, nationalise or municipalise the lottery stream. That is why it is so dangerous to the arts, culture and sport.

Mr. Caplin: I realise that the announcement was on Friday, but did the right hon. Lady miss the point made by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State that lottery funding for sport, arts, heritage and charities has been reinforced for 2001 onwards? That has been widely welcomed by all those sectors as the guarantee that many Conservative Members were seeking during the passage of the Lottery Bill.

Mrs. Bottomley: I regret to disagree with the hon. Gentleman. Those sectors now receive only one sixth of the lottery stream instead of one fifth. The document is riddled with implications that there will be more interference and control over the way in which the money is spent. It suggests that there will be more influence from regional development agencies, and more control—other ways of municipal agencies getting their hands on the money.

That brings me to another profound difference between Labour and the Conservatives. Labour's preoccupation with the concept of cool Britannia—from which the Secretary of State rightly now distances himself—is all about the future, not the past. The millennium dome is a futuristic building with little interest in the past history of Britain or the naval college alongside it. It is all part of Labour's branding, its image and its much-repeated phrases.

The other true reflection of the nature of the Labour Government is their renaming of the Department as the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, by which they could not have said more. The Labour Government have a soviet approach to culture. Their controlling, municipalising instincts are always there. They also have a soviet use of language. Time and again, the Prime Minister talks about the people's decision, the people's party, the people's palace and goodness knows what else. That is really a way of saying, "We have decided and we shall railroad our policies through, come what may".

The Conservative approach is much more to recognise that culture cannot be dominated and controlled from the centre and that it requires plural sources of funding. It is interesting that no Minister went to the Association for Business Sponsorship of the Arts event. During my term of office, I do not believe that I missed a single ABSA event. If I did, I am sure that a deputy stood in for me. I recall going time and again to ABSA events because I wanted to demonstrate as a Minister the degree to which what mattered was not only central Government funding, local authority funding, the box office and the philanthropy of individuals: it was businesses and others saying, "We want to play a part in the cultural life of this country". Labour always demonstrates that centralising, controlling tendency. The gut instinct comes through, come what may.

The real truth about last week's statement is that it was an effort to get the spin through in advance. This morning, I was asked to speak on the "Today" programme about today's statement on mental health reform. I said, "I do not know anything about it. I am only a Member of Parliament. I am not a journalist who gets all the information leaked in advance." I was given the information that the programme had at its disposal and I was then able to do the interview.

Earlier this week, we had the Legg report. Again, I was telephoned by a journalist asking me to comment. I said, "I am only a humble Member of Parliament. I am not a journalist who gets all the information leaked in advance."

Similarly, last Friday, from early in the morning, we had a distorted account of what was about to be announced because the Secretary of State did not want the confiscation of £1 billion from the lottery to be highlighted; he wanted the additional £290 million in taxpayers' money to appear in flashing lights. In addition, he was concealing the most serious aspect of that announcement—the death knell of the English tourist board. His consultation paper set out four options, none of which recognised the possibility that the English tourist board—with its weakness and its strengths—would continue in the role that it has performed over many years, and with increasing authority.

It was on tourism that the Select Committee rightly condemned the Department under the leadership of the Secretary of State. Tourism was slighted by the new title of the Department, which includes almost everything else one can imagine. It is difficult enough to decide what to call a Department, but why omit tourism, which generates more new jobs, great prosperity for Britain and a vital industry throughout the country?

I return to my right hon. Friend's motion on the emphasis on spin and style over substance. The Secretary of State is shameless in his selective reading of quotations. He did it again on Monday, when he referred to the English tourist board's press release following the statement, and he has done it time and again today. If he will forgive me, I shall complete some of the quotations that he used. He referred to the English tourist board's so-called welcome. David Quarmby, chairman of the ETB, said:

> "We believe that the tourism industry and local government want to see a national independent tourism body for England. They made this clear during last year's Agenda 2000 consultation exercise. This role cannot be fulfilled effectively by a committee or government Department, or a conglomeration of competing regional bodies with no natural national remit."

That does not sound like a whole-hearted endorsement of a consultation exercise that leaves no scope for the English tourist board to continue.

There has been an outcry because the Secretary of State not only made the announcement outside Parliament but allowed only seven weeks for consultation. Does it occur to hon. Members that the following seven weeks are the busiest of the year for the tourism industry? August is also the time when local authorities tend not to meet; it is a time of year when people go on holiday. The regular cycle of such meetings often omits August.

Fiona Mactaggart (Slough): As I recall, the former Government constantly consulted on matters relating to schools, which, as we know, are shut at the moment and do not open until September, between July and the end of September. We are doing a little better than they did.

Mrs. Bottomley: In making that comment, the hon. Lady implied that the reason for taking such an approach

to consultation was somehow devious and an attempt to railroad policy through. On such an important issue, surely the Government should not be afraid of a proper, open debate. To allow seven weeks at the peak of the tourism trade's year, and when local authorities often do not meet, inevitably creates suspicion, outrage and a sense that the Government are railroading policy for their own ideological reasons.

Mr. Chris Smith: The right hon. Lady might like to know that the reason for the relatively short seven-week period for consultation on the paper is that that is precisely what representatives of the tourism industry in our strategic working group asked for. It was their recommendation that we followed when we set the consultation period.

While the right hon. Lady is on the subject of selective quotations, might I complete for her the comments of the English tourist board on the document that we issued on Friday?

"The English Tourist Board welcomes the DCMS' recognition of its Agenda 2000 consultation, its acknowledgement of the need for a national co-ordinating role, and its appreciation of the real value of the England mark, launched by the ETB last year."

The ETB also welcomes our intention to continue to fund English tourism. That was a welcome.

Mrs. Bottomley: I shall help the right hon. Gentleman by continuing the quotation of the English tourist board's press notice.

"We will be making strong representation to Government for the continuation of an effective national body independent of commercial interests."

On the launching of the England mark, he knows full well that the process began a little before he took office. Be that as it may, I shall return to our quotation competition.

Ken Robinson, chairman of the Tourism Society, who was also quoted by the Secretary of State, commented:

"It is illogical, unjustified and a non-sequitur to all the good work that the Department is doing. The money being saved is peanuts in the context of Government spending, but the consequences of doing away with the ETB are catastrophic for the tourism industry."

Will the Secretary of State keep open the option of extending the consultation? Although the industry may have wanted to get uncertainty out of the way, I doubt whether it realised that the consultation would be in its busiest time. Will he make clear that, contrary to the impression in his document, he will consider allowing the English tourist board to continue—albeit following clarification of its relationship with the regions and tourist information centres? David Quarmby—also of the British Tourist Authority—and Tim Bartlett of the ETB do a remarkably good job. Their authority needs to be enhanced, yet the process that the Secretary of State has instigated simply offers them months of skirmishing over their future. Now, as never before, there is an opportunity for the Confederation of British Industry, the Government and the nation to argue that tourism is a huge boost to the economy and an industry that should be recognised in its own right. I ask the Secretary of State to look again at that area.

I ask the Secretary of State to be more truthful about the degree to which he has raided—or allowed the Chancellor of the Exchequer to raid—the lottery. I commend him for changes in the Arts Council. Gerry Robinson and Peter Hewitt are excellent appointments. Taking a more rigorous approach to their work is vital to our interests. Finally, when the Secretary of State speaks on these matters in the future, will he give more credit to the person who deserves the greatest credit for the flourishing nature of culture and the arts: my right hon. Friend the Member for Huntingdon?

6.15 pm

Mr. Tom Levitt (High Peak): I shall try to be brief, and to spend most of my time on matters of substance—unlike the right hon. Member for South-West Surrey (Mrs. Bottomley).

My constituency covers much of the Peak national park, which attracts 22 million visitors a year. That is the highest visiting figure for any national park in the world except Mount Fuji. Of those visitors, 2.5 million find their way to just one village—Castleton—in the heart of the constituency. It is a very small village at the foot of Winnat's pass, which will, I regret to say, be nothing more than a traffic jam for the next few weeks.

Given that the Peak park is within an hour's drive of one third of the population, and that so many of the 22 million visitors are day trippers, the area is crying out for a sustainable tourism strategy. It sends the strongest message that a tourism strategy must be integrally linked with our transport strategy. I believe that, given the Government's direction, the two will work together in coming years.

The car is causing not only congestion but chemical erosion. The very moorland that people visit is being eroded by the toxic products in car fumes. In addition, the Pennine way in parts of my constituency is being worn out—not by the use of the car but by people's feet. We must keep the needs of visitors, residents and people who work in the area very much in balance in a sustainable tourism strategy.

I welcome the initiatives taken by the Peak national park authority, which has received European funding, to put traffic management for tourism at the heart of their management of the national park. I stress that a tourism strategy must link not just transport but housing, planning and environmental strategy—the very policies at the heart of national parks.

My constituency is not just open countryside. There are several towns and villages in the area. Three of them—Buxton, New Mills and Glossop—have conservation areas in the town centre, which are funded by English Heritage. Buxton is a magnificent spa town; it makes Bath look like a tub with a leg at each corner. One only has to look at the 18th-century Georgian crescent to see its potential as a major tourism centre.

Just behind the crescent, we have the unique dome—dare I mention the word—of the Devonshire Royal hospital which, like the crescent, is very much in need of large amounts of funding to preserve, maintain and enhance its heritage value. Literally, the funding is needed to save them for the nation. They are potential beneficiaries of lottery funding, and the Pavilion gardens in Buxton is an actual beneficiary. The gardens are being restored to their Victorian splendour.

I have been delighted by the way in which the former chair of the heritage lottery board, Lord Rothschild, and his successor, Mr. Anderson, have expressed an interest

[Mr. Tom Levitt]

in the future of Buxton and its heritage value. They would be the first to agree that a heritage strategy should be just that, and not a series of piecemeal responses to situations as they arise. A strategy is needed for conserving our heritage to make sure that we do not just conserve, but that we enhance and promote access to our heritage and celebrate it. That, too, is something that the Department will do.

There is another heritage building, if I can call it that, in Buxton—the 1902 Buxton opera house, which is a Matcham theatre. My hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) has acknowledged that she has a Matcham theatre in her constituency. The two are joined by a rather slow and unreliable railway line between Buxton and Blackpool.

There is no resident company at the opera house, and it is perhaps the least subsidised theatre in the country. It has—it must be admitted—less than perfect facilities. It is the subject of bids for lottery funding from both heritage and arts sources, and it has not been easy to get the two wings working together and co-operating for the future. We are working on that, and the local borough council has been committed to getting the funds operating together.

In arts, it is not just the building, but what goes on in the building, that counts. At Buxton opera house, we have opera—as the name suggests—traditional and modern theatre, comedy, the choir of the year competition and lots of music. People my age enjoy the opportunity once a year to see Robert Plant and Jimmy Page reminding us of what Led Zeppelin were like at their best. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] They are appreciated not only on this side of the House.

Currently, the Buxton opera house has the Buxton opera festival, and a magnificent first night a couple of weeks ago was enjoyed not only by myself and the former Minister for Arts, my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent, Central (Mr. Fisher), but by the Chairman of the Select Committee, the mayor, the leader of High Peak council, the leader of Derbyshire county council and the local Member of the European Parliament—a Labour clean sweep, I hasten to add. The theatre lacks subsidy, and the festival deserves assistance to guarantee its future. It has a thriving and growing fringe, and Buxton fringe festival is now one of the premier fringe festivals in the country.

This weekend, when the opera festival ends, the Gilbert and Sullivan festival starts, and after that we have the festival of musical theatre—the arts are well and truly alive in Buxton. Again, that is an example of the need for strategy in the arts and in promoting arts. It is not just a question of people coming to see them in all their various forms, but of their becoming involved and taking part in the arts. The Department has a vital role to play in that.

A major television series may be relocating its permanent film base to High Peak, and that would be welcome. I regret that I do not have the time to go into all the ways in which the voluntary sector has benefited from lottery funding, and the sport sector is benefiting from lottery funding within my constituency. However, all that is welcome.

I am delighted to say that, over the past few days, it has been noticeable that a number of people from local and national voluntary organisations have expressed their appreciation of the fact that the £1.8 billion that they knew they would get from the current lottery contract has now been guaranteed. In addition, many of them will have the opportunity to bid for funds from the new opportunities fund as well. I was delighted by the Secretary of State's announcement that Baroness Pitkeathley will chair that fund. That is a welcome appointment.

All the issues I have raised point to the need for strategies and co-ordination, and for people to talk together to make sure that they are not going off in contrary directions. There is a need to break down barriers and to ensure that strategies for the arts, tourism, sport and the media are delivered through the various avenues that are available. This is an example of what has been called joined-up government, and represents fields in which my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and his team have made an excellent start. The further £290 million in his budget will go a long way, and will have a significant effect in putting strategies further into place.

I am certain that, as a result of that further investment, things will be better, not just for the people of High Peak but for all the very welcome visitors who will continue to come to my area.

6.25 pm

Mr. Michael Fabricant (Lichfield): The hon. Member for High Peak (Mr. Levitt) is a good advocate for High Peak, but I do not want to talk exclusively about the Department of Culture, Media and Sport. This is a question of style over substance.

We should have known long in advance that style would play the predominant role in this Government's life. Before the election, the clues were all there. I call it "The Colour Purple"—but not because of the film about racial discrimination in the deep south. That was far more subtle.

First, we saw the future Prime Minister change his tie. It was a gradual process. The tie changed from red to red with blue polka dots. Then there was a further transformation—a blue tie with red polka dots; then a blue tie; then the final transmogrification took place—the colour purple.

The backdrop at the Labour party conference—sadly, for the last time in Blackpool—changed colour from red to puce. It would have been pale blue, but that would have clashed with Tony's tie. Of course, those were the days when Labour considered Blackpool. After September, Blackpool will be no more—*[Interruption.]*—despite the protestations from the Minister for Sport.

It is not just about colour. The Government are about alliteration. Government policies must all begin with the same letter. We have seen welfare-to-work, but, sadly, all the predictions now are for work-to-welfare. Almost every day we hear of boom and bust—the Prime Minister used the expression twice today at Prime Minisfer's Question Time. Yet the Government are the product of bust before they have even boomed.

It is also a question of history. Drawing from the dustbowl of the American 1930s, there is Roosevelt's new deal. Away with YOPs—youth opportunity programmes, for those too young to remember. We have brought in the new deal. Is nothing original? Is nothing sacred?

We also have Americana. Spin-doctoring is an American expression, seized with enthusiasm here following the new Secretary of State for Trade and

Industry's internship with the Clinton re-election campaign. However, I am pleased to inform the House that, thanks to the tastes of President Clinton, the prince of darkness has not had to reach an immunity deal with special prosecutor Kenneth Starr, and will not have to give evidence to a grand jury without fear of prosecution.

If you want to know how the Prime Minister and the prince of darkness work, worry not about the dome. Just watch John Travolta in the movie "Primary Colours"—on release at a cinema near you soon.

Lottery money has been plundered, as my right hon. Friend the Member for South-West Surrey (Mrs. Bottomley) said, from the Department of Culture, Media and Sport, and the additionality principle has been cast aside like an unwanted toy, as have the Labour party's principles. Money earmarked for charities, the arts, heritage, the millennium and sport—normally starved of cash—has been diverted to health and education, because the Chancellor got his sums wrong when he was in opposition. Of course we value the national health service and education, but they have always been paid for by taxation.

What is the current spin? The hapless Secretary of State has just triumphantly announced that he can maintain the current spending on charities, the arts, heritage and sport into the next decade. A big hurrah. Where will the hundreds of millions of pounds a year from the millennium fund go when that is completed at the end of 2001? Will that be robbed from the Department, too? I invite the Secretary of State, who is leaning back comfortably, to say whether the hundreds of millions of pounds currently allocated to the millennium fund will be drawn back into the arts, heritage and sport. Will he answer me now? The silence is telling.

I should have thought that the Secretary of State would thank the Select Committee for its support. By branding him nice but weak and ineffectual, we have preserved his place in the Cabinet. It is clear that the Prime Minister decided that he would not be dictated to by the press or Select Committees, as witnessed by embarrassments such as the Paymaster General and the Foreign Office Minister responsible for Sierra Leone, who have also retained their salary cheques and Government drivers.

It is nice to see that both the hon. Member for Newport, East (Mr. Howarth)—who once served as a member of my party on the National Heritage Select Committee in the previous Parliament—and the hon. Member for Rossendale and Darwen (Janet Anderson) are members of the team. The latter was also, in effect, on the same side as me, when we, alone except for Angela Rumbold, fought in Committee for Sunday trading and for ordinary people throughout the country who thought that they should not be dictated to by the nanny state.

The biggest example of style or spin, and one that I believe is an attempt to mask the Government's biggest mistake, is the so-called independence of the Bank of England. It is not truly independent. Alan Greenspan enjoys an independent Federal Reserve in Washington. "Independent" means that he can set interest rate and inflation targets; but the Bank of England has no such authority in the United Kingdom.

Eddie George has to act like a high street bank manager, obeying memos from the Chancellor saying, unreasonably, that inflation targets should stay as they are while they drift up slightly in Europe and the United States of America. The object of having low inflation is to keep our goods competitive, but they are not competitive, because the value of the pound is so high.

With brooding eyes and a dour face, Brown—I am sorry, I meant to say Brezhnev—used to write out spending and income proposals in the naive belief that, if it was written in his grand office it would be done. It is not like that: one cannot set a three-year plan—a Gosplan. Despite all the spin, the welfare-to-work programme and all the other measures have failed to get welfare spending under control.

Every week, another statement is issued on new Government spending, as a product of the departmental commissioning of yet another focus group paid for by our—the taxpayers'—money, yet every week analysis shows that there is double counting, with the inclusion of initiatives announced only the previous week. If the Government were a company, the Serious Fraud Office would already have launched a dawn raid, and the books would have been carted off in police vans.

A Government who treat their electorate as gullible fools—with contempt—ignore the lessons of history. The Mississippi cardsharp and trickster may win in the short term, but he ends up with the bullet in the head. Democracy gives the electorate the loaded gun. The Government will be judged on what they can deliver, not on promises, style or spin.

6.34 pm

Mr. Ronnie Fearn (Southport): I want to dwell on the serious subject of tourism, which does not feature strongly in the Government's current priorities. I thank the Secretary of State for meeting the officers of the all-party tourism group this morning. It was a good meeting, and I hope that the discussions may be a spur to his Department to concentrate more on tourism.

Tourism is a large and vital industry, worth £40 billion a year. It has grown successfully, largely unaided by Government—a fact which I applaud. My constituency is a seaside resort, and relies heavily on tourism. Tourism has grown to the point where strategic planning is essential to overcome the problems caused by fragmentation, and to protect the environment.

The Department of Culture, Media and Sport—a new spin doctor title which does not even recognise Britain's fifth biggest industry—has produced a spending review document in which an industry of such importance to the creation of new jobs appears to have been tagged on at the end as a flimsy four-page afterthought.

I join the many who applaud the increase in funding for the British Tourist Authority, which markets Britain so well abroad, but I cannot understand why England alone in the British isles should be singled out and—probably—left without a national tourist board that is independent of commercial and big business interests.

Small businesses in England have already lost out over section 4 grants, which used to be available to improve and upgrade individual premises. The previous Government abolished them in England, but not, strange as it may seem, in Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland, despite the fact that England plays host to 80 per cent. of the tourists who come to Britain. What will the Government do for small businesses in our resorts and tourist attractions to make up for that loss of funding?

[Mr. Ronnie Fearn]

The existing accommodation facilities in many of our seaside resorts are falling below the standards acceptable to visitors. The owners can no longer find funding to upgrade, and they are shutting down in large numbers. What will the Government do to prevent seaside areas from turning into boarded-up streets with rundown houses in multiple occupancy? The appearance of such streets at the heart of our resorts drives visitors away, and whole communities are in danger of being lost for ever.

I am talking not about old-style manufacturing industries for which there is no longer a market, but about viable communities that are relevant in the service industry age, and they require only modest funding to upgrade. Will the funding from regional development agencies pay only for grand projects, or can funds be directed to smaller businesses?

Those agencies could become quangos—I hope not—and regional tourist boards are private companies, of which only 20 per cent. of the industry are members. The remaining 80 per cent. are small businesses. They are often excluded from regional tourist boards' information services, and almost always seek the advice and information that at present is provided free by the English tourist board. Who will provide that direct service for our severely pressed small businesses—a private company, the mandarins in the Department or the most sensible body: the English tourist board?

In the Secretary of State's own words, the tourist industry is "byzantine and complex", which I am sure refers to the severely fragmented nature of the industry. He appears to want to pass strategic control to so many businesses in so many fields of the industry. Private companies compete—it is the nature of the market economy—rather than co-ordinate with one another. The English tourist board, as an independent organisation free from commercial interest, works hard to co-ordinate with local authorities, which have long been the greatest investors in tourism. Many private organisations still regard local authorities as an obstruction rather than a resource.

The English tourist board, as a publicly funded organisation, is concerned with the 30 or 40 per cent. of the population who do not take any holidays at all. Many of those people are socially excluded: people with disabilities, carers, and the poor. The English tourist board has worked strenuously to promote such aspects as access at visitor attractions, accommodation, and other tourist facilities. It is not only the income-producing side of tourism that is of value; the cultural, educational and leisure side provided to the consumer indirectly benefits us all. The private sector is most unlikely to promote greater accessibility without a clear profit motive.

The English tourist board has recently helped introduce, and is actively promoting, a new nationwide hotel accommodation rating system, as mentioned by the Secretary of State. We are finally starting to move away from the quaint and quirky stars and crowns that confuse many people, especially overseas visitors. The new system is simple, and facilities-based. It is being introduced across England, and the consumer is finally getting some clarity. Would competing regional tourist boards and development agencies introduce such a system, or would they hold out for one that favoured their providers, as has occurred in other areas of the UK? We would then end up with no progress being made.

Much of the work of the Department of Culture, Media and Sport has been concerned with image, but important issues such as the strength of the pound and the second highest level of VAT in Europe being levied on our accommodation providers are brushed under the carpet. An extensive report by Deloitte and Touche commissioned by the British Tourist Authority into the likely effects on the industry, and revenue to the Treasury, of cutting VAT on accommodation to average European levels has brought little response, positive or negative, from the Department or the Treasury, despite having being on the table for five months. Are its findings to be rejected outright, investigated further or ignored entirely?

After 15 months, everything still appears to be under review. The enduring strength of the pound is a great concern to all tourism service providers, yet the Treasury appears not to recognise that the issue is crucial to businesses that seek to attract overseas visitors, who are increasingly discouraged from travelling to Britain, and to the small businesses of our resorts which are suffering from the loss in trade as customers take advantage of the cheapness of travelling abroad. Tourism is crying out for direction, but I do not think that the Government are giving it.

6.42 pm

Mr. Richard Spring (West Suffolk): I thank all right hon. and hon. Members who have participated. As Opposition spokesman, I pay tribute to the right hon. Member for Coatbridge and Chryston (Mr. Clarke) and the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, Central (Mr. Fisher), who were unfailingly polite and helpful. I wish them well in future.

On Friday morning, the Secretary of State made an announcement about his departmental budget. Characteristically, he did not make it on the Floor. He said that it was the biggest increase in cultural funding and talked of a sum of some £290 million, which he used again today. I am afraid that he is arithmetically challenged. On his birthday recently, he turned 47. God willing, in a year's time, he will turn 48. Using the methodology employed in his departmental totals, he will not turn 48 but 95. Analysis of his figures shows that that is what has happened.

The spin on the figure of £290 million is symptomatic of the media hype and distortion characteristic of the Government. If the right hon. Gentleman disbelieves me, he can check with the Library. He could send his parliamentary private secretary to the Members' Lobby to check the letter board, where there is a detailed explanation of how the figure is so entirely wrong. It is not £290 million or even half that. In real terms, allowing for 2.5 per cent. inflation, the figure is £52 million. So much for his fantasy figure.

If one thing in the lifetime of this Government sums up everything that my hon. Friend the Member for East Surrey (Mr. Ainsworth) talked about, it is tobacco sponsorship of sport. The Minister for Sport knows that angling is 85 per cent. supported by tobacco manufacturers, darts 95 per cent., and pool 75 per cent. It is the same for billiards, snooker, greyhound racing, show jumping and so on. All those sports are dependent

on this form of sponsorship, yet, out of the blue, the Secretary of State for Health announced that the situation would change. No one was consulted and no sports governing body was forewarned.

In the following autumn, Bernie Ecclestone got an audience with the Prime Minister at No. 10 Downing street. The great principle that we had heard about vanished overnight, and formula one got an exemption. The only thing lacking was lavender writing paper. The explanation given by the new Secretary of State for Trade and Industry about this fiasco and the betrayal of sporting bodies and interests was:

"The Government behaved out of character. We acted against our own principles—that honesty is the first principle of good communications."

Early in the year, representatives of the sports facing decimation met the Prime Minister to discuss the exemption. They were told that help would be forthcoming. In May, the Minister for Sport said that there was an adequate possibility of adequate substitutes being found. It is disgraceful that, again, the decision was made without consultation, or any knowledge of the level of sponsorship or the impact on individual sports. However, an exemption was given for a rich and powerful person, who was able to go to No. 10 having given a large amount of money to the Labour party. That is the truth because the task force has never met. Sporting bodies up and down the country are horrified about their treatment by the Government.

The Government and the Labour party are controlled by a magic circle. We have heard about Derek Draper's 17 most powerful individuals, and the lobbyists and spin doctors with the ear, and influence, of politicians. They meet over endless quantities of champagne and canapés. In July, the magazine *Tatler*, which is widely read in Labour clubs, produced a list of the most sought-after guests in the best circles—the top party people.

On 7 July, the *Daily Mail* printed the list of people described as the top 50 "Hot Guests". I am sorry to say that the Secretary of State was not among them—he was only No. 68—but, lo and behold, even ahead of Sarah, Duchess of York was the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry. We read that these:

"Party-goers from the worlds of modelling, showbusiness, the arts and politics are among the most wanted guests."

It must be a great pleasure to the members of the Hartlepool Labour Association to know that, when they sent their man to the House of Commons, not only did he come to have such great influence, but he came to mix in the extraordinary world that has been brought to our attention so dramatically in the past few weeks. How proud they must be of his achievements. The article starts:

"Gilt-edged invitations spill from the mantlepiece and their champagne glasses run over. Seen at the best gatherings and sometimes known to host their own, their presence guarantees a party to remember".

That is what the Labour party has come to: if one is rich and powerful, one gets favours from the Prime Minister, and influence is derived through a charmed magic circle of people who drink champagne and eat canapés together. I am sorry that the Minister for Sport is not a part of all that.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Mr. Tony Banks): I do not get invited.

Mr. Spring: The Minister will just have to try harder.

The one thing that has brought to light the whole spinning fiasco of the Government is the handling of the millennium dome—£758 million of public money has been allocated to the dome project, along with yet more spinning, more misinformation and more interference. On 22 February on "Breakfast with Frost", the new Secretary of State for Trade and Industry spoke about the birth of a baby dome. I had been to the dome a matter of days previously and did not recall having seen anything like that. Nevertheless, the remark achieved the desired effect—the right hon. Gentleman got his headlines—but it was, of course, utter rubbish and no such thing as a baby dome existed.

Other announcements that have brought the whole dome project into disrepute include the original proposals for a recumbent, androgynous figure. The figure was to have a baby in a nappy, but there was something wrong with the nappy and a case of infanticide ensued. Gradually, the recumbent, androgynous figure turned into a figure that was sitting up. Now, finally, the British people are being treated to the sight in their newspapers of Siamese twins—a combination of chest and breasts, seated, with only one pair of legs. The point is that that is no way to deal with an important project in the life of our country; it has been spun out of control and has turned the project into an utter laughing stock.

Incidentally, we heard from the same right hon. Gentleman that the great millennial sport was to be something called surfball. However, we discovered that no such game existed—it was purely illustrative—and that, throughout, the right hon. Gentleman had been talking complete and utter surfballs himself.

The Labour Government inherited what the International Monetary Fund called the finest economy anywhere in western Europe, but even *Der Spiegel* this week talks about the culture of cronyism, the atmosphere that surrounds the Government, the sense of decay and the setting in of recession. When the British people come to judge the Government, as they surely will, the issues of spin over substance and the appalling way in which major national projects and the economy have been treated will come home to roost. The part played by the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport and those like him will be central in making the people turn on the Government for leading them up the garden path.

6.52 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Mr. Tony Banks): I have little time in which to respond to some of the points that have been raised. I have to say that the Opposition's contribution to the debate has not been a triumph of style over substance; as my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said, there has been no style and no substance. It is amazing that the hon. Member for West Suffolk (Mr. Spring) should come along here, and moan and whinge about my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, when it seems that his main complaint is that he does not get invited to all the parties to which my right hon. Friend receives invitations.

I did note that, when the hon. Gentleman mentioned the amount of champagne that apparently gets drunk at those parties, the hon. Member for Mid-Sussex (Mr. Soames) squeaked into life. When champagne is mentioned,

[Mr. Tony Banks]

his interest is aroused. A little while ago, he ambled in from his club like some gargantuan summer pudding; he stayed for 15 minutes, made a wholly irrelevant point and then wobbled off back to his club. That is the sort of attitude displayed by Conservative Members that we have to deal with.

The fact is that style is not a substitute for substance—of course one understands that point. However, style is important and the Labour Government are committed to a style of government that is open—a modern style of state in respect of constitutional change, and a greater democratic style through devolution. The idea that there is no substance behind the style of the Government is arrant nonsense, and the Opposition should understand that. After all, it was not the leader of the Labour party who went around wearing a baseball hat with his name on the front. I do not know whether the right hon. Member for Richmond, Yorks (Mr. Hague) was trying to remind others who he was, or trying to remind himself. Do not talk to us about style.

As for the hon. Member for Lichfield (Mr. Fabricant), I thought at one point that he had taken leave of his senses and that Madam Speaker was contemplating using her powers under the Mental Health Acts to certify him. He spoke about purple ties and I do not know what he was going on about, but I should greatly prefer a purple tie worn by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister to the abortion that the hon. Gentleman is currently wearing around his neck. He was doing his impersonation of the boy standing on the burning deck, but let me tell him why the boy was standing there alone: everyone else had had the good sense to get off when they smelt burning. The hon. Gentleman still does not know when to get out of one of his own speeches.

The speeches with which I should have liked to deal in some depth were the thoughtful ones made by the right hon. Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross (Mr. Maclennan) and the hon. Member for Southport (Mr. Fearn), who both made some very good points. I join Opposition Members in paying tribute to my right hon. Friend the Member for Coatbridge and Chryston (Mr. Clarke) and my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent, Central (Mr. Fisher). Both worked hard and assiduously, and did a lot of excellent work. We all know that, at times, politics is a rough trade, and that we might share their experience in future.

The comments of the right hon. Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross about the arm's-length principle were extremely significant. He knows my personal feelings on that point—I feel that it is something that belongs to the past. We should be able to trust ourselves as politicians and as Ministers in terms of what we do because if we cannot, how can we expect others to trust us? The subject is worthy of being returned to and given careful consideration.

It is not that we want to intervene daily in the arts or in sport. The right hon. Gentleman understands that. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State wants to set out a broad strategy for arts, sport and culture in this country, while leaving the detailed working to those bodies that we have set up—the arts councils and the sports councils. In many ways, my right hon. Friend sees his relationship to those bodies as being like the Home Secretary's relationship to the police authorities: the Home Secretary sets out a broad strategy, but does not interfere in the day-to-day operations of the police. The House should return to that subject, because it belongs to the days of Keynes. He said, in effect, "When circumstances change, I change my mind—what do you do?" That is a perfectly reasonable approach for us to adopt.

On the question of the tourist boards, let me tell the right hon. Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross that the chairmen of the Scottish, Welsh and Northern Ireland tourist boards attend the British Tourist Authority board meetings. The BTA co-operates closely with them and that will continue. A consultation period is currently under way, and we shall listen carefully to representations and take them into account. However, it is a fact that we have to look at the adequacy of the existing structures for supporting the tourism industry and it is right that we should do so.

I have to tell the right hon. Member for South-West Surrey (Mrs. Bottomley) that it was she who coined the phrase "Cool Britannia". I wish that she had not done it, because nothing appears so silly as politicians using phrases that they think are cool in an attempt to seem in touch with popular culture. Of course we want to be popular, but not by trying to hijack other people's language.

I pay tribute to the right hon. Member for Huntingdon (Mr. Major), whom we supported in setting up the lottery. The right hon. Lady was right to say that it has brought enormous benefits to sport, arts and culture. We warmly supported the lottery when we were in opposition, so we need no lessons about how it benefits people.

There are many other points that I should like to make. On Blackpool—*[Interruption.]* I simply do not have enough time because so many Opposition Members used it up. We shall go back to Blackpool. We are taking the Labour party conference around the country to another good seaside town—Bournemouth—but I assure the House that I will again be seen walking down the front at Blackpool with my kiss-me-quick hat and a little stick of Blackpool rock in my hand. It is a great town and we love going there. I can assure the House that the Labour party will always return to Blackpool, knowing that there is no fear of contradiction from anyone.

Question put, That the original words stand part of the Question:—

The House divided: Ayes 135, Noes 355.

Division No. 351] **[7 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Amess, David
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Arbuthnot, James
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Body, Sir Richard
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Rt Hon Mrs Virginia
Brady, Graham
Brazier, Julian
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Burns, Simon
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Clappison, James
Clark, Rt Hon Alan *(Kensington)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cran, James
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham)*
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice)*
Donaldson, Jeffrey
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Duncan, Alan
Duncan Smith, Iain
Evans, Nigel
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael

Flight, Howard
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Fox, Dr Liam
Fraser, Christopher
Gale, Roger
Garnier, Edward
Gibb, Nick
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gray, James
Green, Damian
Grieve, Dominic
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archie
Hammond, Philip
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat–Amory, Rt Hon David
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas
Horam, John
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson Smith,
Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lansley, Andrew
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, Oliver
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
McIntosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Major, Rt Hon John
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Mates, Michael
Maude, Rt Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Moss, Malcolm
Ottaway, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Prior, David
Randall, John
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Ruffley, David
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Richard
Simpson, Keith *(Mid–Norfolk)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spring, Richard
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Swayne, Desmond
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher & Walton)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Wardle, Charles
Wells, Bowen
Whitney, Sir Raymond
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Woodward, Shaun
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Nigel Waterson and
Mr. Stephen Day.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Alexander, Douglas
Allan, Richard
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Armstrong, Ms Hilary
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Baker, Norman
Ballard, Jackie
Banks, Tony
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, Rt Hon Mrs Margaret
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bell, Stuart *(Middlesbrough)*
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, Andrew F
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blair, Rt Hon Tony
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Boateng, Paul
Borrow, David
Bradley, Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brake, Tom
Brand, Dr Peter
Brinton, Mrs Helen
Brown, Rt Hon Gordon
(Dunfermline E)
Brown, Rt Hon Nick *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Burnett, John
Butler, Mrs Christine
Byers, Stephen
Cabom, Richard
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Canavan, Dennis
Cann, Jamie
Caplin, Ivor
Caton, Martin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Chidgey, David
Chisholm, Malcolm
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Dr Lynda
(Edinburgh Pentlands)
Clarke, Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Iain
Colman, Tony
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cooper, Yvette
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Ms Jean
Cotter, Brian
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Curtis–Thomas, Mrs Claire
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Rt Hon Alistair
Darvill, Keith
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Davies, Rt Hon Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, John
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Etherington, Bill
Fearn, Ronnie
Field, Rt Hon Frank
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foster, Michael J *(Worcester)*
Foulkes, George
Fyfe, Maria
Gapes, Mike
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gilroy, Mrs Linda
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gorrie, Donald
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hancock, Mike
Hanson, David
Harris, Dr Evan
Harvey, Nick
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Healey, John
Heath, David *(Somerton & Frome)*
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Ms Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Ms Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hutton, John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Ms Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Ms Jenny
(Wolverh'ton SW)
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Jowell, Ms Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Keetch, Paul
Kemp, Fraser
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross Skye)*
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*

Kingham, Ms Tess
Kirkwood, Archy
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lawrence, Ms Jackie
Laxton, Bob
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Linton, Martin
Livingstone, Ken
Livsey, Richard
Love, Andrew
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Steve
McCafferty, Ms Chris
McCartney, Ian *(Makerfield)*
McDonagh, Siobhain
Macdonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKenna, Mrs Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McLeish, Henry
Maclennan, Rt Hon Robert
McNamara, Kevin
McNulty, Tony
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Mandelson, Peter
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury)*
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Marshall–Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Merron, Gillian
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffld Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll & Bute)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin
Moffatt, Laura
Moore, Michael
Moran, Ms Margaret
Morgan, Ms Julie *(Cardiff N)*
Morgan, Rhodri *(Cardiff W)*
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Ms Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Mowlam, Rt Hon Marjorie
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Murphy, Paul *(Torfaen)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
Norris, Dan
Oaten, Mark
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Hara, Eddie
Olner, Bill
Öpik, Lembit
Pendry, Tom
Perham, Ms Linda
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pound, Stephen
Powell, Sir Raymond
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Raynsford, Nick
Reed, Andrew *(Loughborough)*
Rendel, David
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Roy, Frank
Ruddock, Ms Joan
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Salter, Martin
Sanders, Adrian
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shipley, Ms Debra
Short, Rt Hon Clare
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Rt Hon Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Soley, Clive
Spellar, John
Squire, Ms Rachel
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Straw, Rt Hon Jack
Stunell, Andrew
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Rt Hon Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Temple–Morris, Peter
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Touhig, Don
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tyler, Paul
Vaz, Keith
Vis, Dr Rudi
Wallace, James
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Webb, Steve
White, Brian
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Alan W *(E Carmarthen)*
Willis, Phil
Wills, Michael
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wise, Audrey
Wood, Mike
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, Dr Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. David Jamieson and
Mr. Greg Pope.

Question accordingly negatived.

Question, That the proposed words be there added, *put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 31 (Questions on amendments), and agreed to.*

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *forthwith declared the main Question, as amended, to be agreed to.*

Resolved,

That this House commends the Government for its progress on major matters of substance across all fields of responsibility, and in particular for its recognition of the cultural, social, educational and economic value of the areas of activity sponsored by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, and for the concrete action taken across all parts of the Department's responsibilities over the last year to maximise that value; welcomes the outcome of the Comprehensive Spending Review, which provides for a significant investment in culture, sport, heritage and tourism alongside positive steps to reduce bureaucracy and ensure the most effective use of public money; and notes that this brings to an end a damaging period of real cuts presided over by the Opposition.

Rural Areas

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): At the outset, I should say that Madam Speaker has selected the amendment in the name of the Prime Minister.

7.14 pm

Mr. Tim Yeo (South Suffolk): I beg to move,

That this House deplores the Government's continued failure to protect both the Green Belt and greenfield sites from excessive development; is concerned about how transport and housing policy is neglecting the needs of the countryside; condemns the recent government proposal to cut the discount available to council tenants exercising the right to buy; and calls on the Government to end its systematic attack on the quality of rural life.

I congratulate the Minister for the Environment, the right hon. Member for Oldham, West and Royton (Mr. Meacher), on surviving this week's reshuffle. I do not know whether he was helped by the scorn poured on his head by a disgraced lobbyist a few weeks ago; he may care to enlighten us later. Even if the Prime Minister shared the lobbyist's view, he may have been reluctant to show it by moving the Minister from his post. I wondered whether the new Under-Secretary, the hon. Member for Mansfield (Mr. Meale), would attend the debate, but, apparently, he is not present. We may at least be relieved that the Minister of State, the hon. Member for Sheffield, Central (Mr. Caborn), will not reply to the debate; he is famous for his comments that the green belt was up for grabs and that the green belt west of London was a tip.

It is six months and two days since the House debated the protection of the countryside, and that debate—like today's—took place in Opposition time. In that debate, the motion deplored the Government's decisions to allow large-scale development in the countryside. It expressed concern that the protection of the green belt and green spaces was being weakened. It urged the Government to increase the share of new housing built on previously development land. Such is the cynicism of the Government's approach that those concerns are as relevant today as they were six months ago. On that issue, as on so many others, the Government's rhetoric is not matched by substance; actions do not follow words.

Sadly, we are getting used to the fact that new Labour breaks its promises on a huge scale—on taxes, on NHS waiting lists and on school class sizes. I suppose that we can at least say that those promises were all made before the Government took office. What is so disgraceful about Labour's approach to the countryside is the fact that it cannot even honour the pledges that it made six months ago.

Today's debate, however, is about more than broken promises. It is about the damage being done, week in, week out, to the countryside and to rural communities throughout England—damage to environments that have been cherished for generations, environments that Labour is destroying with a ruthlessness that no previous Labour Government, however left wing, ever showed. *[Laughter.]*

The debate is about the destruction of the green belt, a subject that Labour Back Benchers—this will not be recorded in *Hansard* unless I say it, so it needs to be said—find hilariously funny. The cornerstone of the protection that the planning system has offered the country for half a century is being destroyed by the Government and laughed at by Labour Back Benchers.

The debate is about the development on green fields that should be protected; about the erosion of the role of local authorities; about the transfer of power to remote and bureaucratic regional quangos; about how the rural areas are being starved of cash; about the record increases in council tax; about housing and transport policies that ignore the needs of the countryside; and about tenants who want to buy their own homes and who are now being penalised. The tragedy is that so much of that damage is irreversible.

All that is made worse by the collapse of farm incomes—a collapse caused by new Labour and overseen by a Minister now promoted to the role of great enforcer. "Great executioner" would be a more apt title, after what he did to British farmers.

Mr. David Taylor (North-West Leicestershire): I have frequently heard the hon. Gentleman, in Committee and elsewhere, mention the Government's damaging actions on the green belt. Does he agree that, considering the area of land on brown-field sites that has been built on since Labour came to power, our track record has been better—as have our targets for the next two or three years—than the last five years of the Government of which he was a member?

Mr. Yeo: I did my best to follow the hon. Gentleman's point. With regard to the target, under the previous Government, the proportion of houses built on previously developed sites rose from 38 to 50 per cent. and was steadily rising, year on year. That is a record of which the previous Government could rightly be proud. It was only under pressure from the Opposition that the Labour party accepted that the target should continue to be set at a higher level.

The Secretary of State—who is absent from his place today, as he was at the end of January when we debated protecting the countryside—made a statement in the House, on 23 February 1998, *Official Report*, columns 21-25, about planning for the communities of the future. He described the introduction of a sequential approach to the location of new housing and a phased approach to the release of land as "an important element" in his proposals. Recycled land in urban areas should be built on first, he said, before green-field sites were bulldozed. I agree.

What has the Secretary of State done to carry out that pledge? What has he done to take forward that important Government policy? Nothing. Six months later, we are still waiting for a single action to be taken in support of the policy. No new planning policy guidance has been issued. Not a single county has been allowed to revise its structure plan. There is no sign whatever that the Secretary of State has the remotest intention of altering his policy of forcing more and more development on to green-field sites—a policy that he pursues regardless of local opinion and the damage that his decisions cause.

On 23 February, the Secretary of State identified the first key element, as he called it, of the Government's new approach as "increased flexibility." Despite that, he has persisted in a totally inflexible manner with his legal battle to impose an extra 12,800 new homes on West Sussex, in defiance of the wishes of all three political parties on the county council. Even at this 11th hour, with the decision of the court expected any

[Mr. Yeo]

day, the Secretary of State could repent. His refusal to do so makes it clear that the Labour group leader on West Sussex county council spoke the truth when he said:

"This is the starkest possible illustration that the Government has no intention of trying to provide a greater share of the new homes said to be required by 2016 on brown field sites, rather than on green field sites in the countryside."

Next door, in Hampshire, the county council has made clear its wish, in the light of the Government's February statement, to reduce the total of 56,000 houses in its draft structure plan to 42,000. As the leader of Hampshire county council said:

"The people of Hampshire expect us to do this."

What will the Minister tell the people of Hampshire tonight? Does he accept their view, or is new Labour's claim that the top-down system of fixing the number of new homes needed in a county would be abolished just another empty promise—a promise given to get through an awkward debate and then consigned to the rubbish bin?

Mr. Tom King (Bridgwater): I have the report of Somerset county council's consideration of the examination in public panel report. The county council is fighting against the proposal for more than 50,000 houses to be built in Somerset. It is as though the welcome statement from the Secretary of State those many months ago had never been made. The entire policy and process continue, with no move by the Secretary of State or the Department to draw up new rules and arrangements. Is not the situation grave? Pressure on green-field sites will not change, given the appalling crisis that agriculture faces, with farm incomes in the south-west—the worst affected region—predicted to be 80 per cent. below those of the previous year. The temptation for many farmers facing no prospect of a future in farming will be to sell their land for development.

Mr. Yeo: My right hon. Friend is right. The words that the Secretary of State spoke in February and when he replied to our debate in January were empty phrases, devoid of meaning and lacking any follow-up action. As my right hon. Friend points out, this is a crisis of particularly serious proportions because of the difficulty faced by farmers throughout the country.

The damage that results from the crisis and directly from the Government's failure to act on their previous statement is irreversible. In some senses, it is even more serious than the problem of someone who may be made redundant. It takes a week or two to get another job, but he does find another job. Once a green field has been built on, it practically never reverts to its original use. The damage that results, which my right hon. Friend correctly identified, is serious and permanent. It makes a mockery of the Government's claim in their amendment to tonight's motion that they are in favour of sustainable development. There is nothing sustainable about their present policy.

Mr. Eric Martlew (Carlisle): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that redundancy is a serious matter, although he did not present it as such a moment ago? Does he also agree that unemployment in rural areas continues to fall? In the two rural constituencies in Cumbria, unemployment is 2 per cent. or below.

Mr. Yeo: Of course redundancy is a serious matter. The distinction that I tried to draw is that it is a problem that has a solution, but, once a green-field site has been concreted over, there is no solution. With regard to the figures that the hon. Gentleman cites, they vary from one part of the country to another.

Mr. Gordon Prentice (Pendle): One in 20 homes in the north-west lies empty. There are more empty houses in England than all the houses in Birmingham. One and a half million homes are unfit for human habitation; 1997 was not year zero. What did the previous Government do to address those issues, which would have relieved the pressure on green-field sites?

Mr. Yeo: The hon. Gentleman conveniently overlooks the fact that a high proportion of those empty homes belong to, and are managed by, Labour local councils. The worst 10 councils in the country for keeping council properties empty are all Labour. If the hon. Gentleman is concerned about resources, why do five Labour councils have £100 million of uncollected rent on their council properties? Up to one fifth of the rent roll in five Labour councils remains uncollected. No wonder there are some repairs that need attention.

In Berkshire, 2,500 homes are proposed for a green-field site around the village of Grazeley. Wokingham council does not want such a big development there. The people of Grazeley do not want such a big development. Alternative brown-field sites exist nearby—sites that are closer to where all those new residents would work—but the Government refuse to act. This week, Wokingham council unanimously passed a motion urging the Government to redraft the relevant planning guidance. When will they do so?

Those examples make a mockery of the Government's claim that they want to achieve a target of 60 per cent. of new homes on previously developed sites. The Secretary of State is a modern-day Nero, but worse—not just fiddling while Rome burns, and not just dithering while the bulldozers move in, but going to court to cover England with concrete against the wishes of the people.

If the Government are to regain credibility, the Minister must first announce that all county structure plans currently in review must be halted to allow the counties concerned to change them in the light of the 60 per cent. target. Secondly, he must publish new planning guidance introducing the sequential approach. Six months have been wasted. No more time can be lost.

The second key element in the Government's approach was "more decentralisation". That claim was made at the very time when the House was considering the Regional Development Agencies Bill, which proposed new powers for the Secretary of State to abolish the planning role of any elected council in England. The new powers would allow him to transfer that role to an unelected quango answerable only to himself. Opposition pressure forced the Government to abandon that outrageous idea.

Regional development agencies will still take power and resources away from elected councils. Members of RDAs are appointed by Ministers, their budgets are set by Ministers, their strategies are determined by Ministers and they are accountable only to Ministers. Their entire agenda is urban based. It reflects what

Country Life described as the Government's "fixation with Britain's cities." As the Rural Development Commission pointed out in its dying breath,

"policy makers are ignoring the problems"

of rural areas and

"the result is that rural areas lose out on essential programmes and funding."

No wonder the commission is being abolished. Spelling out inconvenient truths is not acceptable to Labour's control freaks.

The Government's response is to cut the resources of local councils in rural areas. This year, the Government slashed £94 million from the standard spending assessments of rural local authorities. Support for the police in Lincolnshire and Wiltshire was cut in cash terms. Oxfordshire's SSA was cut by £8 million, Kent's by more than £7 million and Suffolk's by £4 million.

Two weeks ago, the small print of the comprehensive spending review warned that council tax will rise year on year on year as the Government cut their help for local councils. Council tax will rise in real terms by 5 per cent. in each of the next three years even if councils do not increase their services. Those rises will come on top of the record rises that we have already seen this year. In the current year, rural authorities are bearing the brunt of council tax rises. On average, council tax in the shire districts rose by more than 11 per cent., more than double the average increase in London. Many county councils fared even worse. In Norfolk, where central Government help was slashed, council tax rose by 15 per cent. How much worse will all this get?

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley (South-West Surrey): Will my hon. Friend confirm that, alongside the swingeing attacks on standard spending assessment provision, there is a group of local authorities that is having special difficulties? Those groups are represented by the Town and Country Issues Group. They have combined rural and urban characteristics and, under the present regime, they are facing special difficulties that should be considered.

Mr. Yeo: My right hon. Friend is right. There are particular difficulties for councils whose populations straddle two very different types of area. The danger is that rural councils and the taxpayers who live in rural areas will be penalised yet again.

Last Wednesday, the Government sneaked out, by way of a press release, an important change in housing policy, using a procedure that prevented any hon. Member from asking a question. The document contained a warning that tenants wanting to buy their homes will now have to pay more than before. For almost two decades, council tenants enjoyed increasingly favourable opportunities for home ownership. This week, that policy has been reversed. From now on, councils will receive extra help to buy up privately owned homes in their areas.

The right to buy transformed the lives of more than 1 million families, including many in rural areas. This week, new Labour has started to dismantle the right to buy. The changed housing policy involves a big role for councils, a very old Labour approach. Predictably, the needs of rural areas were scarcely mentioned in last week's document. That is another example of how new Labour always puts the interests of the countryside at the bottom of its agenda.

My hon. Friend the Member for North Essex (Mr. Jenkin) will refer to transport when he winds up on behalf of the Opposition. The Government's approach to transport appears to be based on old Labour tax-and-spend instincts. There have been three huge increases in petrol tax—

Mr. Gordon Prentice: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Yeo: No. I have given way too often.

There have been three huge increases in petrol tax in less than a year, which have hit rural motorists hard. No amount of public spending, particularly that which is confined to buses and does not extend to taxis, can prevent people in small rural villages from remaining dependent on their cars.

Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (Cotswold): Is my hon. Friend aware that the fuel tax inflator mechanism that was put in place in the Budget, resulting in price rises of 6 per cent. over and above inflation, will result in a rise in diesel and petrol prices this year of more than 45p per gallon? Will that not hit people in rural areas especially hard, and is it not a mean measure from the Government?

Mr. Yeo: My hon. Friend is absolutely right about that. It is a most shocking increase. It is a huge burden and one which is disproportionately borne by those who live in rural areas.

I want to help the Minister when he responds to the debate because I shall ask for three assurances that are easy for him to give. None will result in extra public spending or require new legislation, but his answers will be the litmus test of whether his Government are willing to learn from their past mistakes. First, will the right hon. Gentleman publish immediately, without more delay, planning guidance incorporating the sequential approach supported by the Opposition and by many outside the House? Secondly, will he halt immediately further progress on all county structure plans in review so that counties may reflect the Government's target of 60 per cent. of new houses to be built on recycled land? Thirdly, will the right hon. Gentleman stop penalising rural councils and rural taxpayers by fiddling with the formula for distributing central Government cash to local authorities?

Unless the Minister gives those assurances, the House will know that Labour's claim to be concerned about the countryside is just another failed soundbite. The Government's attitude to the countryside started with denial that any problem existed. From denial, it moved into panic at the huge level of public concern that was so effectively demonstrated in the march last spring. The Government now rest in confusion about how to tackle the mess that their policies have created. That is confusion for which all men, women and children in rural areas throughout the country are paying. It is confusion that is permanently damaging our rural heritage. This evening, we can take the first step to ending that confusion by approving the motion, and I commend it to the House.

7.36 pm

The Minister for the Environment (Mr. Michael Meacher): I beg to move, To leave out from "House" to the end of the Question, and to add instead thereof:

'congratulates the Government on its commitment to promote sustainable development in all areas of the United Kingdom including rural areas; recognises the progress which has been made on improving rural services over the last fifteen months; welcomes the creation of powerful Regional Development Agencies which will promote prosperity in both towns and countryside; welcomes the creation of a new agency to promote the interests of the countryside in England by bringing together the Countryside Commission and parts of the Rural Development Commission; recognises the Government's determination to increase the proportion of new houses built on brownfield sites; and supports the Government's desire to give greater freedom for people to explore the open countryside.'.

Having spent quite a long time in the House, I must say that I have rarely listened to such an over-the-top litany of synthetic whingeing. More than half the griping of the hon. Member for South Suffolk (Mr. Yeo) was about green belt. No one would guess from his speech that 30,000 more hectares have been added to the green belt than have been taken away since the Government came to office.

As for Hertfordshire, which the hon. Gentleman made much of, more than five times as much new land will be designated as green belt than the area proposed for development. Interestingly, and perhaps not surprisingly, the hon. Gentleman did not mention Newcastle. It is true that 500 hectares will be deleted from the green belt compared with 25,000 which the other local authorities in the north-east propose adding to it. In both Hertfordshire and Newcastle, more than 50 per cent. of new houses will be built on brown-field sites. In Newcastle, 8,250 of the 10,750 new homes needed will be built within existing built-up areas—more than 75 per cent.

I ask—the House is bound to ask—what did the previous Government do? The previous Government—interestingly, this apparently escaped the hon. Gentleman's notice—directed three counties to increase their housing figures above those that they had proposed. In the case of Berkshire, that was an increase of 3,000 houses. It was an increase of just under 3,000 for Kent and one of more than 2,000 for Bedfordshire. As for West Sussex, which the hon. Gentleman also made much of, the proposal was that it should produce a 12,800 housing shortfall as against regional planning guidance, a cut of 25 per cent. What hypocrisy to suggest that the previous Government, having enforced increases on those three authorities, should have simply ignored the fact that there was to be a 12,800 shortfall in West Sussex.

Mr. Malcolm Savidge (Aberdeen, North): Does my right hon. Friend agree that all the Tories do when they loudly proclaim their love for the countryside is reveal their affinity for sheep? In power, they fleeced the rural areas; out of power, they bleat about them.

Mr. Meacher: There are indeed quite a few fleecers and bleaters on the Conservative Benches, as this debate has shown.

Listening to Conservative Members, one might think that the countryside was in crisis and that that situation had arisen since 1 May 1997. That is not only untrue, but laughable. The Rural Development Commission's most recent survey showed what has been happening in rural parishes over the past two decades: 83 per cent. had no general practitioner; 75 per cent. had no daily bus service; 49 per cent. had no school; 43 per cent. had no post office; and 42 per cent. had no permanent shop. That survey was published in 1997, so which party presided over that unprecedented decline in rural services? Not Labour. It may be hard to believe that the motley crowd on the Conservative Benches were ever in government, but they were—for 18 years. What was their concern for rural Britain then?

We came to power to put an end to the decline in rural services. Tonight, I have heard the most selective misrepresentations that I have ever heard, so I intend to set the record straight, in detail. In our first 15 months, we have provided an extra £50 million for rural transport; there are new proposals for supporting rural bus services; there is new rate relief for village shops to protect—

Mr. Peter Luff (Mid-Worcestershire): That was our policy.

Mr. Meacher: Perhaps the hon. Gentleman is not concerned about extra shops. The aim of the relief is to protect single shops in some of our smallest communities. We have also provided extra protection for rural schools, so that any closure proposals must go to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Employment before a school can be closed. We are giving £150 million of extra support to the agricultural community as it begins to recover from the bovine spongiform encephalopathy crisis, which certainly began under the previous Government. And we are providing financial support to the dispensing services of pharmacists who are more than 1 km from another pharmacist.

This afternoon, I announced details of my Department's proposed spending on rural programmes in the light of the comprehensive spending review. I am pleased to tell the House that spending will increase—*[Interruption.]* I do not think that that is particularly funny. If the hon. Member for South Suffolk was interested in the subject he purported to speak about, he would think it significant that spending will increase by more than 35 per cent. over the next three years. I shall discuss the announcement later.

Mr. Christopher Gill (Ludlow): If all the Minister has said is true, why has the Labour MEP for Hereford and Shropshire said that the Government should listen to country people? He writes in *Tribune*:

"In Shropshire, people genuinely thought that a Labour government would see the end of cuts in services such as education and social services.

They were bitterly disappointed".

Mr. Meacher: That is exactly what we are planning. There was a stream of closures under the previous Government, but we propose to put a stop to that, and any decision to close a school must come before my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Employment. We are also concerned about the decline in social service provision in urban and rural areas, and the comprehensive spending review will make a massive difference after the decline of the past three to five years.

The hon. Member for South Suffolk is one of those who have continually said that Labour is an urban party and does not understand the countryside. Even he might have noticed that the electorate gave rather short shrift to that view, which is why the number of Labour Members representing rural constituencies is greater than the number of Conservative Members representing them. In fact, there are probably more Labour Members representing rural constituencies than there are Conservative Members.

Judgment is not exactly a Conservative strong point. I too looked back at the countryside debate of 3 March. The right hon. Member for Fylde (Mr. Jack) argued then that there was division between the Prime Minister and the then Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, my right hon. Friend the Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) over the countryside march. No doubt thinking that he was scoring a clever little point, he concluded:

"It will not have done the right hon. Gentleman's career any good to have departed from the Prime Minister's line on the march."—[*Official Report*, 3 March 1998; Vol. 307, c. 914.]

The career of my right hon. Friend, who is now the Minister for the Cabinet Office and Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, is rather more successful than that of the right hon. Member for Fylde. With predictive powers such as that, no wonder the Tory Opposition lack credibility.

The hon. Member for South Suffolk also forgets his history. I remind the House that a Labour Government created the town and country planning system, which has done so much to protect our rural areas from American-style urban sprawl, the green belt, national parks and areas of outstanding natural beauty. I admit that Labour did not create the Rural Development Commission, but then nor did the Conservatives. That was achieved by Lloyd George in 1909, in the teeth of fierce Tory opposition.

Mr. Yeo: The Minister claims for Labour the credit for introducing the current system of planning controls. Be that history as it may, what a tragedy it is that the current generation of Ministers so fail to understand the purpose of the green belt that they think that building on one section of it is justified if, further out, they create more land that is designated green belt. The green belt surrounds an urban area; once that urban area starts to expand, the very purpose for which the green belt was created is destroyed.

Mr. Meacher: That is simply nonsense. The purpose of the green belt is to provide an area surrounding cities for recreation in open countryside, but, as populations grow, as towns change in size, and as new towns are built, it is perfectly reasonable to intervene in the green belt if the overall impact is to increase its size. That has always been part of regional planning guidance note 2, and it is exactly the line that we have taken. Under the previous Government, there were interventions in the green belt without a corresponding increase in the size of the green belt overall.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: Does the Minister recall the Deputy Prime Minister saying that the green belt was a great Labour achievement and that we must build on it?

Mr. Meacher: I remember that; my right hon. Friend has his own inimitable form of humour. As is always the case, we knew exactly what he meant and we agreed with him entirely.

Labour is once again addressing the key issue of jobs and growth in rural areas through the regional development agencies. Average unemployment rates in rural areas have been coming down and are lower than those of urban areas. Business creation is strong and there is a high level of self-employment, but it is undeniable that some of the more peripheral rural areas have particular difficulties. Even in more prosperous areas, there are black spots. Thanks to the Conservative party, rural coalfields have lost almost 60,000 jobs in the past 15 years. Conservative Governments treated rural coalfields with the same vindictiveness as they showed towards urban coalfields. By contrast, we are determined to tackle rural unemployment head on through our coalfields regeneration programme and the regional development agencies, which will be established in April next year.

We have been criticised for giving part of the Rural Development Commission's functions to the RDAs. That criticism is wholly misplaced. RDAs will be the key institutions for achieving sustainable economic development in their regions. It would not be sensible to exclude rural areas and to leave them isolated in a ghetto, as if there were no links between urban and rural economic activity. Integration is clearly the right route, but with safeguards.

I give the hon. Member for South Suffolk these assurances. First, RDAs will have a specific remit to promote rural development. Secondly, each RDA will have at least one member—probably more—with a background in rural development. Thirdly, the money spent by the RDC on rural development will be ring-fenced, and will continue to be spent on rural development by the RDAs.

Mr. David Heath (Somerton and Frome): Before the right hon. Gentleman moves off the subject of planning, will he address the important point made by the right hon. Member for Bridgwater (Mr. King)? Six months ago, the Deputy Prime Minister made a welcome announcement. However, it has had no effect in areas such as Somerset. There has been public examination of a structure plan that has increased, not reduced, the number of houses required in the county. That is not sustainable. We want the Government's policy to be applied in the context of a structure plan. How will that happen?

Mr. Meacher: That is a fair point, and it is our intention to publish the regional planning guidance as soon as we can, which I expect to be shortly. The House should be in no doubt that we are still committed, as were the previous Government, to the best demographic data on housing requirements, which show that we need an extra 4.4 million houses in the 25 years to 2016. About 1 million of them have already been built.

We do not propose a reduction in the number of houses to be built, but we accept that there should be greater flexibility in the planning process. The regional planning

[Mr. Meacher]

guidance should allow regional and local planning authorities to have more responsibility for where those houses should be built.

Mr. Peter Bradley (The Wrekin): My right hon. Friend's comment about the possibility of there being more than one rural member on the board of RDAs will be widely welcomed in rural communities. When the Tories left office in 1979—*[Interruption.]* When was it? It seems so long ago now. Anyhow, when they left office, men in the rural county of Shropshire were 125th in a low wages league table of 151, and women were in 150th position. That is why they will profoundly welcome the introduction of a national minimum wage, which the Conservative party has consistently opposed, just as it did the introduction of RDAs.

Is my right hon. Friend aware that, when my hon. Friend the Member for Forest of Dean (Mrs. Organ) secured an Adjournment debate on rural poverty, only three members of the Conservative party thought it important enough to attend? One was the shadow Minister, who sat down after five minutes because he wanted to hear from the Minister; one was a rural Member and the other was—

Hon. Members: Speech!

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Member must sit down when I am on my feet. That was too long for an intervention. The art of an intervention is to be concise—but it seems to be a disappearing art.

Mr. Meacher: It may have been a long intervention, but it was a very good point. My hon. Friend the Member for The Wrekin (Mr. Bradley) is absolutely right that the minimum wage will have a great impact on improving household incomes in rural areas. There is no evidence that it will destroy jobs if it is pitched at a sensible level. I do not believe that it will do so: it will be very welcome in rural households on extremely low incomes.

Mr. Tom King: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Meacher: Yes, but this is the last time.

Mr. King: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for seriously addressing the issue that the hon. Member for Somerton and Frome (Mr. Heath) and I have raised. The regional planning conference has already produced revised guidance, with lower figures for the south-west. Somerset county council is producing figures that should be published in September. Can the council be sure that, if it produces proposals that are in line with the guidance that the Deputy Prime Minister has produced, no attempt will be made to override them and to go back to the old policy that has now been discarded?

Mr. Meacher: The old policy to which the right hon. Gentleman refers is the previous Government's policy of predict and provide. We are trying to move away from that deeply unpopular policy. I am grateful for the right hon. Gentleman's comments about the Deputy Prime Minister's welcome statement. If Somerset county council can produce proposals that are compatible with the regional planning guidance, we shall consider them extremely carefully. I cannot give the right hon. Gentleman a commitment that we will necessarily accept them. We may, but we may not: it depends on the full content of the proposals.

The Opposition motion mentions housing. I presume that that was another mistake, because one of the greatest indictments of the previous Conservative Government was their 80 per cent. cut in the housing budget, and all the misery that that caused. We recognise that a fine balance must be struck between building new houses to ensure that there are enough places for people to live in and controls on development to protect the countryside. Housing is an issue on which the Conservatives have campaigned. I remember seeing the Leader of the Opposition posing in an anorak outside Stevenage. I suppose that that is better than the baseball cap.

The Opposition called on us to set a target of 75 per cent. of new houses to be built on brownfield sites. Or was it 66 per cent. or 60 per cent? The figure changes with bewildering speed, so I do not know what their position is. When they were in government and could do something about this matter, they actually achieved a figure of 42 per cent.—that is the most telling statistic. The hon. Member for South Suffolk alleged that there had been an increase, but the average figure was 42 per cent.

Mr. Yeo: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Meacher: Hold on. The hon. Gentleman need not look through all his papers. We know what the figures are: they show an average of 42 per cent. He might as well throw his figures away, because we know what the facts are. Only since their election defeat have the Opposition discovered a concern to protect the green belt from housing. By contrast, we have recognised these pressures and have announced a new approach to future provision.

Mr. Yeo *rose—*

Mr. Meacher: The hon. Gentleman has found his figures, but we have now moved on. I am afraid that I must make progress.

Mr. Yeo: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The Minister, unwittingly I am sure, has just quite seriously misled the House. The document that he—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I can tell already that that is not a genuine point of order. It is a matter of debate, and if the Minister will not give way, he has the Floor of the House.

Mr. Meacher: Once again, Mr. Deputy Speaker, you have saved the hon. Member for South Suffolk from himself.

By contrast, we continue to support the provision of affordable housing—for example, through the Housing Corporation's rural programme and the release of capital receipts of nearly £1 billion in the first two years. Following—I repeat again—the comprehensive spending review, which the hon. Gentleman somehow glided over, during the next three years an additional £3.5 billion will

be allocated to start tackling the backlog of repairs to the housing stock throughout England, including in rural areas.

Significantly, the Opposition motion says nothing about the Government's support for countryside and rural programmes—I presume because it is so good. As I announced this afternoon, money for my Department's countryside and rural programmes will rise from £128 million this year to £146 million next year, £162 million the year after and £174 million in 2001–02. That is an increase of more than 35 per cent. over a three-year period.

Nothing shows the Conservative party in its true colours more clearly than its opposition to our proposals to improve access to the countryside, so that all those who love the countryside, not just those who are lucky enough to own large chunks of it, will in future be able to visit more of the countryside than ever before. For all their rather feeble attempts at modernisation, the Tories remain rooted in the 18th century—the party of exclusivity and inherited privilege; the party of the few determined to shut out the many.

We will open up the countryside of England and Wales. Let no one be in any doubt about that. We have consulted on the means and we are still considering the responses. But the ends are not negotiable. We will deliver to walkers new opportunities to roam over mountain, moorland, heath, down and registered common land. If we decide to rely on the voluntary approach, we will need to be convinced that the access delivered will be of the same extent, quality and permanence as would be achieved through a statutory right.

The Government have done more for rural areas in the past 15 months than the previous Government did in nearly two decades. The sheer vacuousness of the Opposition's motion is patent for all to see, and I invite the House to reject it with all the contempt that it deserves.

8.2 pm

Mr. Matthew Taylor (Truro and St. Austell): I shall not follow the Minister all the way in his self-congratulation at the end of his speech, but I shall follow him a considerable way in his attack on the Opposition's extraordinary motion and the no less extraordinary speech of the hon. Member for South Suffolk (Mr. Yeo). The Conservatives' record of 18 years has magically disappeared. I thought that the motion was rather like a shooting gallery, with a set of feet neatly lined up for Conservative Members to shoot themselves in before our turn came.

The range of issues for which people in rural areas have far from forgotten—let alone forgiven—the Conservative Government is immense: a debate as short as this does not allow us to cover it fully. We could consider what they did in relation to farming or fishing, which has affected many of the communities in my part of the world. We could consider the erosion of traditional industry in many rural areas, particularly heavy engineering in my part of the world. We could consider the extraordinary lack of funding for local authorities, not least in rural areas, many of which were discriminated against by the Conservative party's funding formulas, particularly in the rural and more peripheral areas of the United Kingdom.

Mr. David Heath: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for giving way so early in his speech. Does he agree that it is extraordinary that the hon. Member for South Suffolk (Mr. Yeo) should have talked about the funding of rural counties, given that, in my 12 years' experience of leading and being a member of a county council under a Conservative Government, there were reductions each year in essential services in rural areas and a capping regime which caused enormous trouble? The tragedy is not that something has changed but that nothing has changed.

Mr. Taylor: My hon. Friend is exactly right. We do not have time to pursue every area, however, so let us concentrate on the matters dealt with in the Opposition's motion. I had assumed that that was what the hon. Member for South Suffolk would do, but, having written the motion last night, he clearly thought better of it, realising that there was little Conservatives could say on transport or on rural housing, homelessness and council house sales. I shall not let him off from my attack, but I understand why he did not mention those, and that may become a little more obvious later.

The motion starts by concentrating on development in the countryside. Development in the countryside, indeed: we are talking about a policy of predict and provide; about 4.4 million homes; and about the real concern in county after county about the impact that that will have on the countryside and in some-green belt areas.

All that concern is about policies pursued by the Conservative Government in their 18 years in office. Those policies were at their most rampant some years ago, when, as Secretary of State for the Environment, Nicholas Ridley approved every possible development in the countryside, encouraging out-of-town shopping, which has done so much to destroy our market town centres, and abolishing the Nature Conservancy Council because it so effectively argued the case for the protection of rural areas, leaving us instead with an emasculated and underfunded English Nature.

Those developments did not stop, even in the last years of the previous Government under the then Secretary of State, the right hon. Member for Suffolk, Coastal (Mr. Gummer), who, sadly, is not here to defend his policies. In Berkshire, the right hon. Gentleman forced up housing numbers against the wishes of local people. The same thing happened in Kent, and 400 acres of woodland in an area of outstanding natural beauty were turned over to the holiday village of West Wood, which includes 1,200 parking places. It is rather ironic that, on the site itself, cars are forbidden, in order to protect the rural nature of what is left of the wood.

It is precisely the Conservative party's record that is under attack in the motion. The Government might have taken inadequate steps to change that—that they have not acted with enough speed is a realistic criticism—but for the hon. Member for South Suffolk to argue against the policies in such terms is an act of outstanding forgetfulness, if not hypocrisy.

The Labour party's record has been mixed. There have been some wrong decisions, but the Deputy Prime Minister promised to break the mould and to abandon the predict and provide premise. The trouble is—the Minister did not adequately address this—that predict and provide is still all too much with us. For example, after his statement, Hertfordshire county council requested that the Deputy Prime Minister reconsider the number of houses

[Mr. Taylor]

in the structure plan, and the proposals for the release of green-belt land around Stevenage, but they were adopted unchanged.

Last December, the Deputy Prime Minister overruled West Sussex county council's argument for lowering housing figures and imposed an extra 12,800 houses—despite the fact that its case was well argued. The county council then applied for judicial review on the basis of what it understood from the Deputy Prime Minister to be the new policy, but there has been no change.

Today, the Government approved a major opencast coal-mining site on green-belt land in Nottinghamshire, against local opinion and planning guidance and against the position taken by Labour before the election on opencast mining and green-belt development.

Labour's rhetoric is good, and I think that the Government's intentions are genuine, but the practice clearly lags some way behind. Much worse than any individual examples is the fact that, on 1 April this year, the Department for the Environment, Transport and the Regions issued a statement outlining the implications for development plans and regional planning guidance of the Government's White Paper "Planning for the Communities of the Future".

That statement on transitional arrangements showed that the full implications of the new policy await not only new regional planning guidance, which has yet to be seen—I hope the Minister is right when he says that it will be soon; he will forgive us if we are a little suspicious, but we have been used to 18 years of misleading statements from the Conservative party, and need proof rather than promises—but the reviews of the structure and local plans already in place. That process could take about 15 years. No wonder many developers are acting on a "business as usual" basis. It is hard to see how anyone could, as yet, act in any other way.

The plans are already there. Much of the development has already been given permission, and more is being given permission all the time on the basis of outstanding policies. Exactly that case was argued for Somerset by my hon. Friend the Member for Somerton and Frome (Mr. Heath) and the right hon. Member for Bridgwater (Mr. King), and exactly the same problems are arising in Devon. We have seen them in Cornwall in the past, and we shall doubtless see them again. Indeed, we see them throughout the country. Hard work will be needed to change what is perhaps not yet set in stone—but the stones are rolling down the hill in a process that it will not be easy to stop. Change will have to be made within a certain time if it is to make a real difference, enabling people to judge Labour not by what it says it wants, but by what has happened at the end of the current Parliament—or the next, or, even worse, the one after that.

Labour's argument that more green-belt land is being given than is being taken away misses a fundamental issue. Of course nothing can be guaranteed for ever, but the principle of the green belt is that, once allocated, it provides a protection on which people can rely. If new green-belt land is allocated, that is a bonus; but we are not talking about a mathematical equation in which people say, "We will take two pieces from here and add two here, and that will be all right. We might even add another half piece on top to make it look a little sweeter". The green belt is intended to provide genuine protection for the countryside around developed areas. If we are to provide that protection, it must be long-term protection; it must not be eroded as needs are seen to arise.

The Minister said that the figure for new homes was still 4.4 million. We could argue for ever about whether that figure is right, but there will certainly be a good many. It seems to be assumed that, county by county, broadly the same allocations should continue to apply as now, even if they do not apply to exactly the same locations within counties. An extraordinary feature of this country, however, is the erosion caused by people moving out of cities into rural areas. They are doing so for a number of reasons, but one of those reasons is clearly our failure to make our cities attractive places in which to live.

People do not aspire to live in the centres of our great cities. I understand that London is virtually the only capital city in Europe to experience a major reduction in its central population—a reduction which is continuing. For a number of social reasons, if for no other reasons, policy must aim to reverse that process, and to make cities attractive. That does not simply mean that Sussex or Surrey must change where their new housing is, opting to use a little less green-field land and a little more brown-field land; it means that there should be less housing overall in the counties.

Mr. Martlew: In other parts of Europe, the problem is that populations are leaving rural areas and moving into cities. Does the hon. Gentleman advocate that?

Mr. Taylor: I do not want a problem to be caused. I want to see vibrant cities in which young couples with children can live and work, benefiting from good schools, freedom from crime and an attractive environment. That is important from the point of view of those living in cities now, as well as those whom we would like to live in them.

Mr. David Drew (Stroud): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Taylor: I will, but I shall take no more interventions after this.

Mr. Drew: I thank the hon. Gentleman. No doubt he knows of the Richard Rogers task force. Surely that is one of the most fundamental and innovative projects that any Government could take on, and we look forward to the results.

Mr. Taylor: I do not think that a task force is ever fundamental or innovative, although its conclusions may be. Let us hope that the conclusions of this task force will be.

The Liberal Democrats published detailed proposals today, including a proposal for immediate revision of planning policy guidance note 3 on housing, and a proposal for the calling in of controversial major development plans to be assessed in the light of the new PPG3. I believe that that would mean the calling in of plans for Stevenage new town, and no increase in housing figures for West Sussex. We propose a clear development hierarchy, with real backing from Ministers—particularly as regards the reuse of existing buildings, as well as

redevelopment of old sites, before the development of green-field sites. We believe that there should be a levy on green-field development, which could fund urban regeneration and provide new parks. That could improve the urban environment and, perhaps, lower council tax for all.

I also believe—this is a more difficult issue—that we should consider the difference between the nil value added tax on new build and the 17.5 per cent. VAT on renovation. The equalisation of VAT could fundamentally change the way in which older buildings in urban areas are treated, and the state of existing housing stock. All those measures could minimise new development. I understand that some work has been put into that. Belgium, for example, imposes a low rate of VAT, not just on energy conservation materials—as is often said—but on all renovation work on buildings that are more than 20 years old. Some balance between VAT on renovation and new build might be needed so the programme could be self-financing, which would doubtless be controversial for new build. It should, however, be considered.

There are two other key issues. I must be brief, because I have already used too much time. The first is transport. Not tonight, but on many other occasions, the Conservatives have attacked the fuel escalator. How ironic that is, coming from the party that introduced it in the first place. Over 18 years, the Conservatives increased excise duty on fuel by 600 per cent. Between 1992 and 1996 alone, they raised £58 billion from fuel tax, as well as selling off public transport services, taking no action over the loss of rural bus routes and cutting money for transport packages for local authorities. However, they cannot possibly claim to be friends of the motorist—quite apart from their ignoring the fact that one in four people in rural areas have no access to a car. Incidentally, whereas the real total cost of running a car has fallen since the early 1970s, bus and train fares have nearly doubled.

Labour has tried to tackle one element of the problem by providing extra money for bus routes in rural areas over the next few years, but it is still a drop: £50 million is a small amount. If it were all spent on new buses, it would not even be enough to provide one new bus for every major town. Although the rhetoric is good, we must compare that with the extra £9 billion that Labour plans to raise in fuel duties.

I believe in environmental taxation. I believe in a fuel duty escalator. I am not attacking that; I am attacking the hypocrisy of those Conservatives who now say that they oppose it, having implemented it in the first place. I also make a fundamental point about environmental taxation. I do not think that it will command public support if it is always "take" and never "give": it needs to be about changing taxes, not increasing them. That is why Liberal Democrats have consistently argued that the fuel escalator could be used to abolish vehicle excise duty for all cars up to 1,600 cc—two thirds of cars—and so encourage people to buy smaller, more fuel-efficient vehicles. The proposal means that people are getting something back in return for the increases that they are paying. It is supported by the Automobile Association, the Royal Automobile Club and other motoring organisations. It is supported by the public in general. It means that people pay as they go—rather than paying to tax the vehicle up front, which gives them an incentive to maximise their return by using it as much as possible.

Although Labour has suggested that it will consider a small cut in vehicle excise duty to just £100 for some more environmental vehicles, it is not clear which vehicles will be covered. It does not appear that many will be covered, and I do not think that the public will see this as a bargain. I do not think that it is enough to make a difference; for the amounts involved, more could be done.

Finally, let me say a little about rural housing. The real issue of council house sales, which is touched on in the motion, is the lack of replacement affordable homes for rent—either council or housing association homes—under the Conservatives. The percentage of socially affordable rented accommodation was always lower in rural areas. Between 1980 and 1991, 30 per cent. of rural local authority housing was sold—95,000 properties. In the same period, housing associations built just 10,800 rural properties, and much of that involved shared ownership schemes.

That has meant that, while the wealthy have been moving into rural areas, displacing rural people and forcing up house prices so that private accommodation has become harder and harder to afford, there has been an increase in rural homelessness. According to the Rural Development Commission, homelessness is increasing fastest in rural areas—fastest of all in the deep rural areas, and especially in the south, where prices have risen as people have moved out of the cities and bought holiday and second homes, while also investing in homes to rent for the holiday market rather than full-time homes.

My county of Cornwall is thought to be the one with the biggest gap between house prices and incomes, which are the lowest in the country. It does not have Britain's highest house prices, but they are fairly high and incomes are very low. Such poor rural areas have been devastated by council house sales, and matters have been made worse by the benefit restrictions that apply to the under-25s. They hit hardest in rural areas where private accommodation is limited. Many people do not get housing benefit that is equivalent to the rents that they pay. One of my local authorities, Carrick, has asked for a meeting with the Minister for Local Government and Housing to address the fact that it already has 88 people in unsuitable temporary accommodation and that there will be 27 more in the next three weeks for whom the council cannot find public housing. That escalator will continue to rise.

A recent survey researched the number of those sleeping rough in rural Cornwall. They proved difficult to identify because, unlike such people in urban areas, those in rural areas may be in fields and will not necessarily remain in the same place. They move between towns and between short-term jobs, such as fruit or flower picking. The survey nevertheless showed that a significant number of rural homeless people were sleeping rough. That should not happen and it is an often forgotten rural problem. I hope that the Government will address it, and that the House can be united on the issue.

8.20 pm

Mr. Eric Martlew (Carlisle): The hon. Member for South Suffolk (Mr. Yeo) described a trip around Britain. In fact, it was around the south-east. The *Official Report* will show that he probably went as far west as Somerset and as far north as Lincolnshire, and ignored the north-west, Yorkshire, Cumbria, Northumbria and the midlands. Perhaps the hon. Gentleman should be the Opposition spokesman for the south-east.

[Mr. Eric Martlew]

I am worried by Conservative rhetoric, by the propagation of the myth of town against country. Opposition Members want to divide the country to win back rural seats, but that is dangerous. My local paper, *The Cumberland News*, carried reports of Cumberland agricultural show, which is the largest one-day show in Britain and which is held in Carlisle. The British National party was there trying to recruit people, and it used the same language as the hon. Member for South Suffolk.

Mr. Howard Flight (Arundel and South Downs): Shame.

Mr. Martlew: I do not accuse the hon. Gentleman of being a fascist, but I issue the warning that people should not try to set one part of the country against the other. That is what the Conservatives have done.

Cumbria has done well under a Labour Government. It received extra money for rural transport. Deregulation and the abolition of cross-subsidy were not mentioned by the hon. Member for South Suffolk. The people of Carlisle were happy to subsidise rural bus services, but the previous Government made sure that that was not possible. As a result, many rural bus services were lost, and the Government's grant of £50 million will help to restore them.

Cumbria got an extra £7 million in its education budget. I was a county councillor for many years, and during that time such an amount was never put into the budget. Some of that money will pay for rural transport for schoolchildren. The pupils in Cumbria's rural schools probably do better in Ofsted reports than children in urban schools. Perhaps that should be tackled in urban areas.

The county council is trying to introduce information technology to villages. Its two projects, Credits and Genesis, will take IT into village schools and also to the villages. The Department of Social Security is discussing with the county council a system under which people can communicate with a jobcentre from a kiosk. That gets rid of the need to take a bus, if there is one, into Carlisle to sign on. Village schools face a strange dilemma, because, although it is said that we should not close village schools, it is also said that we should not build any more houses. Lack of pupils poses a danger to such schools. In some way, affordable houses must be provided for young families, because it is often primary schools that are at risk.

It is said that 60 per cent. of building should be on brown-field sites, and that is obviously pertinent to places such as London. Perhaps we should see whether there are brown-field sites in villages. Sometimes there are, but in my constituency one or two factories would have to be closed to meet the 60 per cent. requirement, and I am sure that that is not what the Government are about.

Unemployment in my constituency is 4.9 per cent. In the neighbouring constituency of Penrith and The Border, it is 2 per cent., and the rate has fallen by 20 per cent. in the past two years. There is no crisis in the countryside there, but, even so, the Government have tackled the problem. They have made Cumbria a pilot area for the new deal. It started in January, and in urban and rural areas, it is getting young people back to work.

My constituency is to get a new district general hospital costing £80 million to serve Carlisle and the rural area. There were many objections when it was suggested that the name of the hospital should be changed. It is called the Cumberland infirmary, which shows that it will meet the needs of people in rural and urban areas. Rural north Cumbria is a health action zone. The Government have specifically designated it as such, and one of the key objectives is to tackle ill health in rural areas. I understand that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health will visit Cumbria next week to launch that.

Mr. John Hayes (South Holland and The Deepings): I do not claim the hon. Gentleman's expertise on Cumbria, but does he think that people in remote rural villages will welcome the building or the improvement of hospitals to which many of them will have to travel 10 or 15 miles, as would be the case in my constituency? That is not delivering health care where people need it in rural communities, is it?

Mr. Martlew: If I had a heart attack, I should prefer to go to a district general hospital rather than to a cottage hospital down the road. Does the hon. Gentleman suggest that we should spend even more to build district general hospitals in villages? That would be nonsense. We should have had a new hospital 18 years ago, but the Conservative Government did nothing about it. We are now to get one that will also serve the rural community.

Agriculture is facing difficulties, although they are not showing up in the unemployment figures. BSE is a major problem in a dairy area such as Cumbria, and we all know who caused BSE. Opposition Members cannot say that problems in farming have been caused by the present Government. I hope that the common agricultural policy is reformed, and that Agenda 2000 works. We must help farmers, and especially those in the uplands and the national park—another innovation by a Labour Government. The Lake District national park suffers from overgrazing. Such problems need to be examined and resolved.

Cumbria does not do enough to add value to its food products. The European Commissioners want to get rid of Cumberland rum butter, but I think that we may win that battle. We seem to have forgotten how to market Cumbrian food. The county has millions of tourists, and the tourist board, the county council and the National Farmers Union should work together to ensure that tourists to Cumbria eat food that has been sourced there. That has to be done.

Even when we had a problem with BSE, this Government did something about it for the Cumbrians. We need a British Cattle Movement Service headquarters because of BSE. I understand that civil servants were going to put it in deepest Guildford; we may have a Labour Member for Guildford, but I am not sure.

What happened? It was decided to put the headquarters in Cumbria. The Tories attacked the Ministry of Agriculture for sending 200 jobs to Cumbria—Workington, in fact: an area of high unemployment. Where else should they have gone than to a rural area, but the Tories said that they wanted to put the headquarters in Guildford.

Therefore, we have done well under a Labour Government. We have had extra money for rural buses, for rural schools and for a health action zone, a new

hospital, extra money for the new deal and more than 200 extra jobs at the British Cattle Movement Service headquarters. The Labour Government have not let down rural areas in Cumbria. I look forward to the further expansion of the rural economy and to the bringing together of urban and rural people. This division between the two that has been created by the Conservatives has to stop, because it is in no one's interest.

8.30 pm

Mrs. Theresa May (Maidenhead): When I came into the Chamber, I was intent on making some comments about the position of Berkshire and the threat to countryside and open space in the county in which my constituency lies, but, having heard the speeches of the Minister and of the hon. Member for Carlisle (Mr. Martlew), I want to comment on what they have said.

First, may I say something about the frankly disgraceful opening remarks of the hon. Member for Carlisle. At the end of his speech, he returned to the issue of division between town and country. If anything is dividing town and country, it is the policies of the Labour party. It is the Labour party that has shown, time and again since May 1997, that it fails to understand the needs of rural areas and of the countryside.

Personally, I have always said that we should look for a better balance of development between town and country, but the Government do not help the towns and cities by putting all the development into green-belt and green-field sites. The hon. Member for Carlisle should think again, reflect carefully on his remarks, and look at the policies that his party has produced, because it is those policies which are dividing town and country.

The Minister will genuinely come to regret having said in the House that it was perfectly reasonable to make inroads into the green belt. I think that that statement will come to haunt him and the Labour Government. Throughout this country, Members of Parliament and councillors are desperately trying to defend their green belt from development proposals, and what do we see tonight? This Government are giving yet more comfort to developers that it is okay to build on the green belt. That is what the Minister said.

Mr. Meacher: May I just help the hon. Lady by making it clear what I did say? I said that it is reasonable to go into the green belt as a last resort if no alternative means of expansion are available, and if there is a compensatory, much greater increase in green belt. In those circumstances, it is very different. I am not suggesting that there should be ready intrusion into the green belt. It is reasonable to go into the green belt only in exceptional circumstances, and in the two circumstances that I have mentioned.

Mrs. May: It is obvious from that intervention that the Minister is already ruing his earlier statement. *Hansard* will show what he said, and I do not recall his making any reference to a last resort.

Even so, what the Minister has just said again shows a complete lack of understanding about the purpose of the green belt. It is there as a protection and as an area of open space around an urban development. It is not something where we can say, "If we get a few more people, we'll build into this and stick another bit somewhere else." That would fail to act as a protection. That is what the Government seem to be saying about green belt—that they can mix and match green belt and urban development here and there, and it does not make any difference.

Mr. Colin Pickthall (West Lancashire): Has the hon. Lady discussed what she has just said with the Country Landowners Association, which in the briefing that it sent us this week says:

"The CLA accepts that some Green Belt areas will have to go to protect other countryside areas of even greater importance"?

Mrs. May: The Labour party is desperately attempting to show that it is suddenly the friend of the Country Landowners Association. The Minister's remarks on open access and the right to roam will have been listened to with great interest by the CLA.

Mr. Meacher: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. May: No. I have to make some progress.

The Minister referred to rural schools and their closure. I tried to intervene on him at that stage and he did not accept my request, but he stated that the Government were protecting rural schools and stopping their closure. The House should be aware of exactly what happened on rural school closures.

On the eve of the countryside march, the then Minister for School Standards, who has been promoted to the Cabinet, possibly because of all the mistakes that he was making in the Department for Education and Employment, stated that people need not worry about rural school closures, because, although the procedure for deciding on the closure of schools had been changed in the School Standards and Framework Bill, so that the Secretary of State for Education and Employment no longer had a role, the Secretary of State would have a role in the case of rural schools, and the Government would ensure that all rural school closures went to the Secretary of State before the decision was made.

When pressed several times by Opposition Members, myself included, to enshrine that intent in legislation, the Government refused to do so—little wonder that people often feel that what they say is mere empty words. Again, we saw that the reality of their policy was different from the rhetoric. Their soundbite in the television studio did not reflect what the Government intended to do. Rural school closures are a prime example of that.

I said that I wanted to comment on the position of Berkshire. My hon. Friend the Member for South Suffolk (Mr. Yeo) has already referred to the problem faced by Wokingham district council over the proposed development of 2,500 houses at Grazeley. Those are the development pressures that Berkshire already faces, but I want to take the debate forward, to look at future pressures and the problem that we have at present.

The south-east regional planning committee—Serplan—is putting forward proposals for the number of houses to be developed in Berkshire and the rest of the south-east by 2016. Once again, we have the difficulty that, despite all the rhetoric from the Government about 60 per cent. of development being on brown-field sites and protecting the green belt, planning conferences are

[Mrs. May]

having to prepare their proposals for the future without the changed guidance in respect of planning policy guidance 3 that is required.

Berkshire is the smallest county in the south-east—it represents only 4.9 per cent. of the area. Despite that, 15.4 per cent. of the county has been built on. It is three times more urbanised than Oxfordshire, for example, but the proposals from Serplan are that 46 per cent. of the additional green-field development in the south-east until 2016 would be in Berkshire.

The plans provided by Serplan in respect of current potential supply from the housing capability study and in terms of options for the future show that, in every other county, the additional number of houses over and above the potential supply is either relatively small or reduced. In Berkshire, they envisage up to an extra 50,000 houses being required in the period to 2016.

One of the difficulties in the way in which Serplan has put together its proposals relates to the guidance from the Government. The Berkshire housing development figures have been set so high because the Serplan planners say, "All the jobs are in Berkshire, and we need economic regeneration elsewhere in the south-east if we are to put housing development there." Yet the Government have asked Serplan to produce housing development figures before the regional development agencies—on which I take a different view from the Government—that the Government claim will be involved in the economic development of their areas, are in place.

The Government have got it the wrong way round. They are requiring housing development figures based on the current economic position to be prepared, agreed and in place before the RDAs look at potential economic regeneration in other parts of the south east. I hope that the Minister will be able to explain why the Government are so keen to have the housing development figures in place before the RDAs are up and running and doing what the Government intend them to do in economic regeneration. The housing development needs could be so different if the figures were produced once the RDAs were in place.

I am conscious that a number of hon. Members wish to speak on this very important issue. I have outlined just a few of the problems we face in Berkshire in respect of pressure for development. That pressure does not apply just to housing. We are also facing pressure for the development of a motorway service area, as are other parts of the country. The potential for noise pollution, light pollution and the impact on countryside areas is significant, and I sincerely hope that the Government will be able to give us some comfort in terms of reviewing the minimum distance rule between motorway service areas, which is currently 15 miles.

I hope that the Government will take action on such issues. So far, we have heard a lot of words and seen a lot of glossy brochures, but the Government are failing to act. As in so many other sectors, Government policy does not match their rhetoric.

8.41 pm

Mr. Colin Pickthall (West Lancashire): I start by welcoming the remarks made by my right hon. Friend the Minister for the Environment at the end of his speech on access to the countryside. He has been steadfast on the issue. I agree with what I think lies behind what he said—that it is unlikely that landowners will be able to deliver a watertight voluntary system, and that sooner or later, legislation will be inevitable.

The Opposition motion

"deplores the Government's continued failure to protect both the Green Belt and green-field sites from excessive development".

During the past couple of months, the Labour Back-Bench rural affairs group, led by my hon. Friend the Member for The Wrekin (Mr. Bradley), has met some 25 organisations concerned precisely with the quality of life in rural areas. Almost without exception, they urged on us the need for flexibility in planning in green-belt areas, and raised that as a major issue. Their plea was reiterated by the Country Landowners Association in the quotation that I used in my intervention on the hon. Member for Maidenhead (Mrs. May).

My constituency is almost all in the green belt which prevents the spread of urban Merseyside and Greater Manchester towards the Ribble and the Irish sea. To that extent, the green belt performs the function described by the hon. Member for Truro and St. Austell (Mr. Taylor). The green belt is very jealously guarded by West Lancashire district council, although some farmers and landowners are very adept at getting around the restrictions. I could take my right hon. Friend the Minister for the Environment to an agricultural worker's cottage that was built about 10 years ago in the middle of the green belt, which has 10 bedrooms, four bathrooms, and a kitchen—the only room I was allowed into—which is larger than my house.

There is a serious and detailed debate to be had, which the terms of the motion and the recent sloganising about the countryside obscure. There is clearly a need for some appropriate development in the green belt. In my area, there is a desperate need for small industrial estates to serve the interests of packers and transporters who service the horticultural industry. There is clearly, too, a need, which I think is recognised generally on both sides of the House, for small housing developments, covenanted—hopefully—to needs in villages and hamlets. In the Lancashire green belt, however, it is vital that large residential and industrial development is strongly resisted. That is made more possible and important in my area due to the large concentration of brown-field sites in the north-west.

Last week's report by the Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology—I pay tribute to its reports, which are always timely and very informative—showed that, in the north-west of England, 21.8 per cent. of the total area can be classified as derelict land. That is far and away the largest percentage of any English region. At the same time, the projected increase in demand for new homes in the north-west is 10.2 per cent.—the sixth lowest of all English regions.

Obviously, the availability of such land and the demand for new homes differ from region to region. The needs and pressures in the north-west are obviously very different from those in some of the areas represented by Opposition Members. I strongly welcome the Deputy Prime Minister's policy to devolve strategic land use decisions to the regions, to Regional Development Agencies—and I hope, ultimately, to regional government.

Mr. Hayes: I acknowledge the hon. Gentleman's interest in these matters. On the Library's figures,

he represents the 97th most rural constituency in Britain, which is pretty high as Labour Members go, as I shall explain in my speech. Will not rural Britain—this is certainly true of Lincolnshire and, I am sure, his area—be dominated by urban areas? People in Lincolnshire are frightened that the regional development agency will be dominated by Leicester, Derby and Nottingham. What will such cities care about south Lincolnshire, the Lincolnshire fens and other rural areas?

Mr. Pickthall: I understand what the hon. Gentleman is saying. If he will allow me, I shall come precisely to that point a little further on in my speech.

The use and abuse of green belt and other countryside areas must be subject to the most sensitive planning considerations, and decisions must be made as locally as possible. I hope that, as far as possible, the presumption will always be against building in such areas except in the direst necessity. I was pleased to hear my right hon. Friend the Minister for the Environment say almost exactly that in his intervention a few moments ago.

Mr. Oliver Heald (North-East Hertfordshire): It is of course said that the presumption will always be against building except in the direst circumstances, yet, in Hertfordshire, we are being asked to agree the building of 10,000 homes on a piece of unspoilt green belt west of Stevenage. The Deputy Prime Minister was personally approached and asked to intervene to save that green belt, but he totally ignored the request. Does the hon. Gentleman really believe all the Government's crocodile tears and weasel words?

Mr. Pickthall: Of course I believe my right hon. Friend—what a silly question. The hon. Gentleman describes a region and county with which I am not intimately familiar, but, clearly, the pressures of population and the need for new homes are much greater in his region than in mine.

The megaphone debate about rural areas has done no favours to the sensitive issues of green-belt and rural development. That is true also when we consider any aspect of rural life and conservation. We have had an extraordinary period of ersatz claims by the Conservative party that it represents, in some mystical way, rurality. The hon. Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Mrs. Browning) recoined the phrase "truly rural" to describe herself and her colleagues, in an attempt to show that Labour Members, such as me, who represent rural areas—and Liberal Democrats—are not rural. On the other hand, she might simply have been proving that she could pronounce "truly rural".

The hon. Member for Tiverton and Honiton spoke with real knowledge of the problems of rural areas, but that is not, by and large, the Opposition's concern in this debate. The trumpeting of "We are the party of rural England" by the Opposition has prevented the proper discussion in this place of the complex needs of people in rural areas, and has prevented us from asking—let alone answering—some awkward and serious questions. I am thinking of the sort of debate that the Local Government Association has undertaken in its recent document, "Behind the Scenery".

There has been a tendency to separate the nature of rural life completely from urban life, as my hon. Friend the Member for Carlisle (Mr. Martlew) pointed out, ignoring, incidentally, suburban life in the process. Conservatives and the Countryside Alliance paint a picture of Britain where towns and cities are dark conglomerations of howling multitudes, whose involvement in rural Britain is to plunder—or, at best, ignore—it, while those in rural areas cower in fear of proletarian invasions.

Life is not like that. My area is not untypical of the countryside. I have Skelmersdale in one corner of a huge rural area which has the small market town of Ormskirk in the centre.

Mr. Hayes: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Pickthall: I will not give way, if the hon. Gentleman will excuse me. I want to sit down as soon as I can to allow as many hon. Members as possible to contribute.

The area is surrounded by Liverpool, Southport, Preston and Greater Manchester. All the transport systems, rail and road, have their roots in those towns, and serve the rural areas—however unsatisfactorily—on the way through. That interdependency of rural and urban areas is reflected in the county of Lancashire as a whole, which has vast rural areas edged by quite large towns. The county council—and, on a smaller scale, my district council—has worked over many years to hold together the interests of urban and rural areas and to explain each to the other in terms of their needs.

The problems of service provision in areas of sparse population are well recognised and, at least in part, addressed by Lancashire, involving some redistribution of wealth from towns to rural areas. Urban areas constitute the largest part of the tax base of this country. Three of my villages have libraries, one of which is brand new. Two have sports complexes, and one large village has two sports centres. All of those have been provided largely by urban taxpayers.

As bus deregulation destroyed rural bus services, the council has had to provide what alternatives there are, financed by urban and rural taxpayers. I am not trying to suggest that the rural areas of Lancashire are okay—far from it—but I am asserting their interdependency with urban areas and the need for greater understanding, rather than the constant drive to polarise.

I wish to refer to a report by the Rural Development Commission, which—I ought to point out to the hon. Member for South Suffolk (Mr. Yeo)—has not been abolished; it has merged, and is still going strong. We have received briefings from it this week. The report states that, in rural Lancashire, the average weekly earnings are £45 lower than the national average, £41 lower than neighbouring Cheshire and £14 below neighbouring Cumbria. It is a fact that earnings in rural areas for those who work there are lower than those in urban areas. Employment is harder to come by and the new deal is harder to deliver. Services are much more sparse.

Those crucial disadvantages must be addressed. I want to highlight the disadvantage of isolation. Of course, it is more than possible to be isolated physically and psychologically in urban areas, but the possibility of help or of pursuing solutions is much less in the countryside. There is a sort of gulag archipelago, and generally prosperous and thriving rural communities,

[Mr. Pickthall]

often composed of those who travel into urban areas to earn a living, disguise pockets of poverty and misery. Elderly people and those with mobility problems often occupy the gulag.

The services—whether medical, environmental or housing, and whether public or private—are at best problematic and often non-existent. Where the services are supplied, they are vastly expensive, and shire authorities are well aware of the cost disparities. Lack of transport also isolates young people, leading to problems in many villages, including the importation of some of the difficulties that we more usually associate with towns and cities.

Those with access to private transport travel to towns or to out-of-town supermarkets to shop, while lamenting the collapse of their village shops and post offices and demanding public funds, through council tax rebates, Rural Development Commission grants, or whatever, to shore them up.

Many projects are designed to pick away at the problems of economic hardship and isolation in country areas, and they are all valuable, but, in the face of the dwindling of employment in agriculture, the slowness of replacing those jobs through new small enterprises and the collapse in transport, their impact is limited.

To begin to resolve some of the social difficulties in the countryside, we need vision and determination such as is being exhibited in local government in the shires and shire districts. "Behind the Scenery" encapsulates that, and I congratulate the Local Government Association on it.

Mr. Hayes: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Pickthall: No, I want to finish as soon as I can.

"Behind the Scenery" concentrates on identifying social exclusion in rural areas and seeking solutions to it. The Local Government Association sees a large part of the solution lying in increased resources, and we have heard this evening how some of that, at least, is happening. The need to carry the rest of the tax-paying population along with that view has not been addressed.

Maintenance and improvement of the quality of life in rural areas depend largely on enlightened local government and on the success of regional development agencies in improving economic performance and investment. There has been much debate about rural representation on RDAs. Personally, I do not think that putting one member from a rural area on the board is any answer. It would be all too easy for the rest of the board to listen respectfully and then carry on regardless, rather like the role of Dr. Weakling among the 40 thieves in "The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists".

The RDAs—I am speaking especially about the north-west—should have a rural filter so that every decision involves enhancing the rural economy as well as protecting the landscape, ecology and biodiversity of a region.

I have long believed that the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food should be replaced by a rural affairs Ministry, but further thought and discussions have changed my mind—not that I want to retain MAFF as it stands—and I now believe that plucking rural bits out of so many different Departments would be likely to produce paralysis. There is, however, a need for a body that considers the needs of rural areas across the boundaries of existing Departments, and the LGA's suggestion of a Select Committee has some attractions.

The megaphone debate on rural affairs has prevented us from asking some serious questions, which I would like to ask now. What do we do if and when people in rural areas wake up to the fact that 93 per cent. of public support for rural areas goes to agricultural production—excluding horticulture, pigs, poultry and egg production, which are the backbone of the industry in my constituency? What happens if, and perhaps when, common agricultural policy reform fails to curb production subsidy?

What relationship should we foster between agriculture, tourism and leisure? Can we justify organising agricultural subsidy to run stock in inhospitable hill areas to keep the fells trim for tourists? Is there anything that Government or Parliament can do to check the power of the big supermarket chains that control farmers and growers? They tear up contracts at a minute's notice and switch their buying policies at the drop of a hat, to the ruin of certain sectors and regions.

We do not discuss those important questions because we are too busy shouting about who is more rural than thou. We do not live in two countries, however much the hon. Member for South Suffolk sought to suggest it. I thank him for visiting my constituency—without telling me, of course. He figured prominently in my local newspapers, standing in the middle of an empty street. I am not sure whether he was trying to comment on the disappearance of rural shops.

The Opposition are seeking to create a party political war between rural areas and the rest. If their pursuit of that objective is not ended, rural areas can only lose out as the rest of the country has forced down its throat what the Tories present as a rural whinge. In my patch at least, I do not hear that from rural people.

9 pm

Mr. Howard Flight (Arundel and South Downs): West Sussex has been mentioned several times and my constituency forms the greater part of it. There are four important points about the case of West Sussex.

First, 45,000 people have signed the petition against the imposition of an extra 12,800 houses. Petitioners come from across the full range of party politics and there is cross-party support on the county council. An important plank of the new policy announced by the Deputy Prime Minister—something that will help judgment on whether it is to be believed—is that the new approach to housing should involve an element of bottom-up consideration and dilution of what has been accepted across the board as too many orders from on high under the old predict and plan. West Sussex is a classic test case from which we will judge whether the new policy is for real. The citizens of West Sussex have spoken more than loudly with those 45,000 names opposing the extra homes.

Secondly, simple arithmetic shows that, under the structural plan, about 40 per cent. of the new housing will be on green-field sites and 60 per cent. on brown-field sites. With the extra 12,800 houses, the balance swings the other way. Such housing would have to be entirely on

green-field sites and the balance would change to 60 per cent. on green-field sites and 40 per cent. on brown-field sites. In deciding whether the Government's policy objective of reducing the extent of green-field sites is to be believed, their decision on cancelling their order to add the 12,800 houses, or reducing the number, will be important.

Thirdly, West Sussex went to the length of having an independent environmental audit, for which it won a significant award. It succeeded in convincing the Department's inspectorate. In effect, the Minister overruled his own inspectorate. If we are to have a rational approach to the amount of additional housing with which rural areas can cope, without—in the words of the Minister—turning them into American rural suburbs, the principle of independent environmental assessments is important. They should be encouraged.

Fourthly, and I am surprised that this has not come out in the debate on green-field and green belt, in a large metropolis such as Birmingham or London, one effect of the success of the green belt has been to tip the pressure out to the next layer, to the perimeter lying on a 40-mile radius. Country areas have been hit by issues such as overbuilding and whether the Government's change of policy is for real; the problem of agriculture going seriously bust; and the gerrymandering of the standard spending assessments with the result that counties such as West Sussex have had a 10 per cent. increase in rates but no effective increase in real spending. To put it candidly, country areas like my own want to stop being dumped on by the Labour Government.

9.5 pm

Mr. David Drew (Stroud): In an effort to allow as many people as possible to contribute to the debate, I shall keep my remarks brief.

Contrary to what might be imagined, I welcome this debate on the basis that, although we have debated similar topics five or six times before, the Opposition have yet to land a glove on us. I see that that proud record is continuing tonight. Much of the rhetoric in the Opposition motion is understandable, although their points about the green belt and green-field sites stick in the craw of Labour Members who spent the past 15 years working under Tory planning procedures, fighting those procedures through appeals and all manner of other processes, only to find that central Government had undermined what we were trying to achieve, with the result that we lost out to developers—developers who were often contributors to the Conservative party. Let that not be misunderstood.

There are more important issues that should be discussed in a debate about rural Britain. I am sure that the fact will have escaped no Labour Member that all is not well in rural Britain, but we shall look at what we consider to be the real analysis of the real problems and the real dilemmas facing rural Britain—poverty, disadvantage and social exclusion. As my hon. Friend the Member for The Wrekin (Mr. Bradley) pointed out, earlier this year there was an Adjournment debate introduced by my hon. Friend the Member for Forest of Dean (Mrs. Organ), but only a limited number of Conservative Members bothered to turn up for that debate, albeit more than were present at this morning's debate on concessionary television licences.

The Labour Government are prepared to accept that rural poverty exists, although it might be dispersed and difficult to measure. One of the previous Government's legacies, and something that should never be forgotten, is that they commissioned a report on rural poverty during the mid-1980s. Even though it was their own report, they chose not to publish it or to own up to it; instead, they buried it. That is a disgraceful record. As my right hon. Friend the Minister for the Environment said, that report would have shown the scale of the problems of deprivation that were identified in the Rural Development Commission report published in 1997. I shall not reiterate the figures given by my right hon. Friend, but it is important that we understand how many communities suffer the problems of not having public transport or easy access to a GP.

Why have the problems occurred? There are five key elements in the Conservative's legacy of failure. First, there are village services, which have declined out of all recognition. It was not without remorse that the right hon. Member for Suffolk, Coastal (Mr. Gummer) recognised at last the folly of the policy that he kept in place for so long—out-of-town shopping development. He came to realise the damage that that was doing to villages and market town centres.

Secondly, deregulatated public transport—which has been mentioned several times by my hon. Friends—and rail privatisation have done immense damage to our rural communities.

Thirdly, I could speak at great length about housing, but I shall concentrate on the provision of affordable housing. It is all very well to talk about taking away people's rights to a discount on a council house sale, but what about the people who have no access to housing in rural Britain? The Conservative party practised social exclusion because it failed to allow any reprovision of council stock and denuded rural housing associations of any opportunity to provide the housing that is desperately needed. That is social exclusion of the worst sort.

Fourthly, low pay is ever present in many rural areas, including my constituency. The Government can be proud that they have been able to introduce the national minimum wage, which will deal with low pay in all areas, whether urban or rural.

Finally, there has been an overall deterioration in services such as health, education and social services, which of course has a disproportionate effect on the old, the young, the disabled, the low paid, the unemployed, lone parents and parents who are left at home.

There is therefore no reason for the Opposition to warn us or tell us what we should be doing because the previous Administration let us down badly on rural matters. This Government take rural issues very seriously. We are fortunate to have so many Members who represent rural constituencies that we were able to form the rural Back-Bench group a year ago.

Mr. Hayes: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Drew: No, time is very short.

We formed that group and, only the other day, the Conservatives aped us. It is pleasing that they are now taking rural issues seriously.

We have considered many rural matters and we shall continue to battle to get across our point of view on transport, on the reprovision of services and on dealing

[Mr. Drew]

with the ever-present rural housing issues. The Government will continue to listen to people in rural Britain and act on their views.

9.11 pm

Mr. James Clappison (Hertsmere): This is an important debate on a subject that is of great interest to my constituents. The Government now know, if they did not before—I suspect that when they took office, they did not fully appreciate—how important the green belt is to many people, particularly those in certain parts of the country, including my constituents in Hertfordshire. More than anything else, those people want the full force of existing protection to be given to the green belt. There has been a change in the Government's pronouncements on this issue and, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Bridgwater (Mr. King) said, we shall seek proof of that in the Government's actions in future.

We want full protection for the green belt and development to be permitted there only in exceptional circumstances. I was slightly concerned by what the Minister said about the contents of the White Paper, particularly the doctrine of compensation in other places through extension of the green belt, rather than protection of the existing green belt. I counsel the Government against moving too far in that direction. People want the existing green belt to be protected.

I know that the Department is responsible for protection and conservation of wildlife as well as environmental protection. It would be strange if it applied its green belt principle to the conservation of wildlife. Ministers might say, for example, "The song thrush has become extinct, but never mind because we have added the skylark and the sand martin to the protected species list, which is a great triumph for conservation." They might say, "The Siberian tiger has become extinct, but we are now giving protection to the Indian elephant and the white rhino." We want a better policy than that.

I was also concerned by the Minister's comment that, under the previous Conservative Government, there had been no corresponding increase in the size of the green belt. That is strange, and I seek an explanation because, under the previous Government, the green belt doubled, with the addition of 837,000 hectares.

The Minister for the Environment produced an interesting figure of a 30,000 hectare increase, under the Government, in the area of green-belt land. It was an improvement on the one that the Prime Minister recently gave, when he told the House at Prime Minister's Question Time:

"We have always made it clear that we will protect the green belt. In fact, there has been an increase in the amount of green-belt land since 1 May, so we do not need any lessons from the Conservative Opposition".—[*Official Report*, 4 February 1998; Vol. 305, c. 1046.]

When the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions was asked about the Prime Minister's answer in a written question, we were told that the basis of the Prime Minister's boast was

"a net increase of nearly 4,000 ha"—[*Official Report*, 11 February 1998; Vol. 306, c. 234.]

in the green belt. That compared with an increase under the previous Government, between 1979 and 1993, of 830,000 hectares. According to my—admittedly shaky—maths, that means that, if the present rate of increase continued, we would have to wait until 2205 for the Government to match the previous Conservative Administration's record. Even if the figure of 30,000 is correct, it would take the Government about 26 years to achieve what the previous Government achieved in 14 years. Has the figure of 30,000 been achieved, or does it represent an aspiration for the future? Perhaps the Under-Secretary, the hon. Member for Hampstead and Highgate (Ms Jackson), will tell us. She is bound to know the answer.

The Under-Secretary can help us on another point. I listened carefully to the Minister's comments and claims about the Government's achievements. Some of them, especially on village shops, had a familiar ring; I wondered where I had heard them before. Then it occurred to me that, in the previous Parliament, I served on the Committee considering what is now the Local Government and Rating Act 1997, which introduced the rating discount for village shops. I know that it was late in the previous Parliament and, to give the Government credit, the then Opposition did not oppose the Bill, but the legislation was carried through by the previous Government. I am pleased to note that it is now an achievement of the present Government.

More than anything else, we want proper protection of the existing green belt—the full force of existing protection. That is what my constituents want in Hertfordshire, that is what we want in the rest of the country and that is what Conservative Members will press for.

9.16 pm

Mr. Mark Todd (South Derbyshire): The 1997 general election result produced a major benefit for rural areas—it introduced political competition into parts of the country that had not experienced it for many years. We have a—

Mr. Hayes: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Todd: My goodness; I have only just started. Time is short, so I am afraid that I must decline.

As I have said to rural voters in my constituency—many of them have agreed—that political competition will be of benefit, because we are starting seriously to discuss issues that had previously been dealt with complacently by the Conservatives and with relatively little interest by Labour.

The misguided Opposition motion fails to address the rural quality-of-life issues that my constituents care about. They are the ones that would be familiar in an urban constituency—the quality of schools, the availability of jobs, decent transport, affordable homes, crime and the quality of our environment. Those are the issues which most people in South Derbyshire care about, as I suspect do most constituents throughout the country.

The previous Government's record on some key indicators reveals why their motion has been severely rubbished by all participants in the debate from other political parties. For example, in Derbyshire, in the last six years of the previous Government, the percentage of parishes with no rural daily bus service increased from 54 to 62 per cent. Eighty-seven per cent. of parishes in Derbyshire had no nursery, and there was a massive loss

of council housing in the rural areas. Many villages in my constituency have less than half the council housing that was once constructed, substantially reducing my constituents' choice of housing.

The Government have focused on addressing those key issues. First, the additional £700,000 plus given to Derbyshire county council for rural bus services is gratefully received, with very many thanks. It will provide the platform for restoring services cut in the past—even for introducing new ones—and must be applauded.

Secondly, the emphasis, within the comprehensive spending review, on nursery provision and on pre-school education generally, will increase the availability of pre-school places in rural communities in my constituency. I am delighted with that, too.

Thirdly, if one examines the state of schools in my area, one sees that there has been a transformation, even in the 15 months since the last election. Schools in Findern, Hartshorne, Long Lane, Hilton, Barrow on Trent, Netherseal, Rosliston, Melbourne, Overseal and Egginton have already received promises of money from last year and during this year. By my reckoning, perhaps one of those schools would have received some resources under the previous Government. To put the matter in context, more than £1 million has been committed to those rural schools, as against the Conservative Government pledging in their last year just £2.1 million for the entire county of Derbyshire. That is the kind of thing that my constituents care about most.

There remain issues to address. First, we must have a self-sufficient rural economy, diversifying away from agriculture. We must ensure that homes are available for workers in rural areas. We must sustain the environment of rural Britain and ensure that our citizens can enjoy it. We must recognise the increasing threat and fear of crime in rural areas, and we must maintain viable key services such as pharmacies and post offices.

We must address those concerns holistically. If we accept a rural economy dependent on commuting, we shall damage our environment, force up housing costs in our rural areas, undermine critical rural retailers and other key services, and entrench a stratified society with a hidden minority of seriously deprived individuals concealed in our midst.

Farm diversification is clearly critical to the task. The focus should be on trying to build local small businesses based around the food industry and providing additional jobs through that route. Local low-cost housing is essential to support that economy, together with cheap, reliable public transport. We do not need sprawling suburbia or protective nimbyism. In South Derbyshire, we require a clear balance between extra housing in our local plan and job growth. I would criticise the current county structure plan for lacking that balance in my area.

We must build around local successes. We have many attractive, highly successful local primary schools. We should aim to build other key services around those schools, making them the focus of community life and maximising the efficient use of scarce resources. We must recognise the shortcomings of existing deprivation indicators in the standard spending assessment—in this context, I have considerable sympathy with some of the points made by Opposition Members, but they should recall that the rules were drawn up under their own Government.

The useful Rural Development Commission report on that shows that the current disadvantage indicators in the standard spending assessment are built around an urban slant, which clearly needs to be substantially altered. Deprivation is hidden in rural areas. Lack of advice services, paternalism and self-help often hide disadvantage that would be much more evident in an urban setting. Regression analysis based on past spending levels also works against low-spending rural authorities. Key services face higher unit costs than in urban areas. The Government's promised review of the SSA should correct those faults.

The development of rural development agencies obliged to produce rural employment strategies should start to address farm diversification, as should the Government's lead on Agenda 2000. Other initiatives include the minimum wage, which has been applauded already by some of my colleagues, the new deal for unemployed groups and the work of the coalfield task force. My community has a significant coalfield legacy. The coalfields were largely in rural areas. The task force will be an important component in redressing the balance for our rural communities. All those initiatives will provide a platform for improvements in rural quality of life.

Extra health spending will allow us to address the alarmingly poor performance of the Derbyshire Ambulance Service NHS trust, which currently produces the worst performance in the country in terms of response times—something which is a particularly acute problem in a rural constituency like mine. That is something that I am keen to see addressed.

The Government are taking on board the key quality concerns of my rural constituents while the Opposition motion addresses the Opposition's old obsessions in their old way and offers no future.

9.24 pm

Mr. Owen Paterson (North Shropshire): Representing as I do one of the most rural constituencies in the country, I can inform the House that the Government's long-term policies will cause extreme difficulties for rural areas.

In Shropshire, an extra 36,000 houses are due to be built between 1996 and 2011, to conform to the ludicrous plan to build 4.4 million that the Secretary of State will impose on the country. That will lead to a 10 per cent. increase in the population of Shropshire, with an increase of 34 per cent. among those of retirement age. It will lead also to jobs and homes not being in balance with the economy—and certainly not with the services offered to the public by local agencies. The local council says that in Oswestry, for instance,

"all options will require environmental capacity to be breached."

The provision of 2,400 houses a year is being made at twice the rate required to cope with the natural change that would occur if immigration were ignored.

In 1891, there were 236,000 people and 49,000 houses. Since then, there has been an incredible 70 per cent. increase in population and an amazing 330 per cent. increase in housing. That is partly due to social changes, but the Government must think about their long-term policies because so many more people will be divorced and single. By 2011, one-person households will take up one third of all houses in Shropshire.

[Mr. Owen Paterson]

The pressure on local services has not been taken into account. Funding in Shropshire has been cut drastically since the Government came to power. For example, £100 million has been taken from the rural areas to the inner cities. It is ludicrous that an area such as Shropshire should have a standard spending assessment only 80 per cent. of Newcastle upon Tyne's. Shropshire is twice the area of London, but has only 4 per cent. of London's population. The Government do not understand that it costs more to provide services in a sparsely populated rural area.

There are 522 settlements in Shropshire with fewer than 2,000 people. That is 26 per cent. of all our settlements. We need seven primary schools to serve 1,000 people—twice the number required in an urban area. However, we have an urban Government who do not understand that.

Mr. Hayes: I notice that the hon. Member for Stroud (Mr. Drew), who represents the 110th most rural constituency, according to Library figures, is laughing. I hope that my hon. Friend will agree that, despite the claims made by the Labour party, the truth is that it does not represent rural Britain psychologically. If we take the 50 most rural seats in Britain, the Labour party is the third party of Britain after the Conservatives and the Liberal Democrats. Perhaps that is why the Government do not understand the issues that my hon. Friend is speaking about.

Mr. Paterson: That was a most helpful intervention; I entirely agree with my hon. Friend. The Labour party won many rural seats last year, but it does not understand rural issues. Nothing more clearly showed that than the local government settlement this year, when £10 million worth of cuts were imposed on Shropshire and there was a 17 per cent. increase in council tax. It was only after I led a march of 4,000 people, with the Bishop of Ludlow, who I suspect is not of my political persuasion, that the Government graciously lent Shropshire another £2.5 million.

These circumstances will lead to real pressures to resist an increase in population. Cuts in services have not been thought through. There are real costs involved in delivering services to a rural area, and the most obvious is transport. The Government do not understand that. The White Paper which was introduced last week—*[Interruption.]* The Minister jumps up and down, and laughs, but 60 per cent. of people in Shropshire drive to work. It is just not on to pretend that we can impose a Gosplan-type fixed system—*[Interruption.]* It is not possible to impose a coherent publicly planned transport policy on an area such as Shropshire. In my constituency, which has 98 villages, that cannot be done. As I have said, 60 per cent. of people drive to work. *[Interruption.]* The escalator tax on petrol is a tax on every business throughout north Shropshire, as is the increase in the price of diesel. Distribution is a major business in north Shropshire. Diesel costs 30 to 40 per cent. more in this country than on the continent, the rate of vehicle excise duty in France is a sixth of the rate in this country—and the Minister laughs, even though 95 per cent. of goods are transported by road freight. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael J. Martin): Order. Until now, the debate has been very good natured. Hon. Members should not be shouting across the Chamber.

Mr. Paterson: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I have used the last minute of my speech to show how exasperated my constituents are at the policies that are being imposed by an urban Government who do not understand rural areas.

9.29 pm

Mr. Bernard Jenkin (North Essex): As often happens in such debates, Back Benchers have provided original and relevant contributions. The hon. Member for West Lancashire (Mr. Pickthall) posed a number of questions that the Government would do well to answer, my hon. Friend the Member for Arundel and South Downs (Mr. Flight) raised the West Sussex drama once again, and my hon. Friends the Members for Hertsmere (Mr. Clappison) and for Maidenhead (Mrs. May) made striking comments about the extraordinary admissions by the Government in respect of their new and bizarre philosophy for the green belt, which has turned it into an ever-moveable feast for developers.

The hon. Member for South Derbyshire (Mr. Todd) forgot to mention that the Government have rate-capped his county council, which is the only one in the country that has been capped. My hon. Friend the Member for North Shropshire (Mr. Paterson) spoke of the 10 per cent. increase in population that is being been forced on Shropshire by the Government; and I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for South Holland and The Deepings (Mr. Hayes) for making such a welcome and useful intervention about the nature of the Labour party.

When he replied to my hon. Friend the Member for South Suffolk (Mr. Yeo), the Minister for the Environment did it again—new Labour has consistently shown that it does not understand the countryside. Nothing showed that better than the countryside march in the spring, and nothing surprised country dwellers and their supporters more than the strength of feeling that was mobilised against the Government, who were evidently surprised as well.

New Labour means new taxes on the countryside. The people who live there know that, because they are already feeling the pain and bearing the brunt of the record council tax increases that the Government have imposed on the counties and the rural districts. The Minister for the Environment comprehensively failed to answer that point, which was made by my hon. Friend the Member for South Suffolk.

The other taxes targeted on rural areas are taxes on the motorist. The Government will raise an extra £9 billion in fuel duties during this Parliament, over and above what would have been raised by our tax plans had they remained in place. The impact of Labour's tax rise is most cruel for those in far-flung areas, where there is no practical alternative to the car for the vast majority of journeys.

In many cases, the car makes it possible for rural communities to survive. The Government campaigning against the car in today's countryside is as paradoxical as making a film about the wild west without horses. The urban dweller does little mileage, so increased fuel

costs are of little consequence. Country dwellers have to travel much greater distances; moreover, they have to pay the taxes, because they have no alternative to the car.

The purpose of these taxes is to raise tax for the Treasury. The Government say that they are against regressive taxation. What is the choice for rural people? Pay the taxes and use the car, or lose their jobs, incomes and businesses, their contact with friends and family in neighbouring towns and villages and their ready access to public services and benefits that should be theirs by right.

These motoring taxes do not redistribute wealth from the rich to the poor. Excessive motoring taxes hurt the poorest most, and those who need the car are often those who can least afford it: single mothers in part-time work; pensioner households, for whom the car is the last and most precious luxury; people on low incomes; and in particular, the self-employed. Come to rural areas and find forms of social exclusion that simply do not register on new Labour's urban radar.

Under the Conservatives, there was a huge increase in access to cars across rural communities, and women and pensioners were the biggest beneficiaries. The car brought them freedom to travel and unparalleled opportunities to improve the quality of their lives. New Labour does not realise that, or it does not care. It may think that it is modernising, but it seems determined to turn the clock back. Those are the very people whom new Labour says it champions. Under new Labour, people who need their cars suffer most. If fuel poverty is bad, why is car fuel poverty acceptable?

Yes, there are some public transport alternatives scattered across rural Britain. The Minister said that 75 per cent. of rural parishes have no daily bus service. Community transport alternatives are on the increase. Parishes with dial-a-ride schemes increased from 8 per cent. in 1991 to 15 per cent. in 1997. Conservatives will support any practical alternatives to the car in rural areas and anywhere else, particularly if they harness the enterprise of the private sector and the good will of the community. We have never pretended to have all the answers.

Mr. David Taylor: I am pleased to hear the shadow Front-Bench spokesman say that the Conservatives will support any alternatives to the car. How does that sit with the deregulation of bus services, which removed much of public transport from the most rural areas which hon. Members on both sides of the House now represent?

Mr. Jenkin: The hon. Gentleman cannot have been listening to what I was saying. One of the reasons for the decline in rural bus services is that people have the superior alternative of the car. In the last six years we were in office, there was a big increase in dial-a-ride services and community transport, which is much more applicable to rural areas.

New Labour is a byword for wanton cynicism and opportunism. In March this year, the Chancellor announced that the Government were to devote an extra £50 million to rural bus schemes. That is a classic example of new Labour spin, and the Minister wantonly spun it again today. This tokenism has gained publicity out of all proportion to the scale of the commitment. It would be instructive to compare that figure with the amount of extra money that the Treasury will suck out of the countryside through its draconian increases in fuel duty. The Library estimates that to be at least twice as much every year.

As for the Minister's announcement of an increase in money for the countryside, the real increase is 26 per cent. spread over three years. The increase of 11 per cent. in the first year is only £18 million. How does that compare with the £9 billion in extra fuel duties? How many new bus services per village would £50 million buy? Even if it were to double the provision of rural bus services, a village would get perhaps four services a day instead of two. What alternative is that to a car? *[Interruption.]* The answer to that question was thought to be the transport White Paper. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The House must calm down: we need to hear the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Jenkin: I shall take it out of the Minister's time. The answer to that question was thought to be the transport White Paper, "A New Deal for Transport: Better for Everyone", but it is a very poor deal for rural areas. Like the bad old days of British Rail, the Chancellor's £50 million for rural transport is announced again and again throughout the White Paper, but the policy itself never arrives.

The White Paper is almost exclusively about urban and inter-urban transport. Virtually nothing in its 170 pages of waffle pays more than lip service to the transport problems of rural areas. Its central thesis is "pay up now and benefit some time in the future"—by way of little more than the faint prospect of improvements to public transport. When the Deputy Prime Minister made his statement last week, he called that hypothecation. In the here today, gone tomorrow world of Labour's Transport Ministers, that is what passes for a victory over the Treasury.

The only other money the Government have to spend for the next five years comes as a direct benefit of rail privatisation—the money freed up by reducing rail subsidies. The Government will take people off the road long before adequate alternatives are in place. The Council for the Protection of Rural England complains that the Government are creating a two-tier transport system—a new deal for the towns, but no deal for rural areas. It is new Labour tax on tax on tax from the party which, before the general election, solemnly promised no new taxes at all. No concessionary fares scheme can possibly compensate people in isolated communities for being priced out of their cars.

In the section "Reducing social exclusion", the Government come up with another novel solution. Paragraph 4.88 states:

"Planning has a role here, for example, in promoting the growth of key villages."

[Mr. Jenkin]

What exactly does that mean? I am reminded of the words of Jon Mendelsohn, the famous lobbyist and crony of the Prime Minister:

"Tony is very anxious to be seen as green. Everything has to be couched"—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. When we refer to the Prime Minister or any other hon. Member we use his constituency name.

Mr. Jenkin: Speaking of the Prime Minister, the lobbyist said:

"Everything has to be couched in environmental language—even if it is slightly Orwellian."

In this Orwellian world, what is a key village and what do the Government mean by growth?

The integration of planning and transport is meant to be a key part of the Government's integrated transport strategy. But the Government's house building policy flies in the face of what they say about land use planning.

The Government rightly acknowledge the Conservative Government's changes in planning policy guidance. It was the Conservatives who took the first initiatives towards the integration of transport and land use planning—in PPG 13. However, the Government have not only accepted unquestioningly the projection that 4.4 million new homes will need to be built in the next 20 years, but the Deputy Prime Minister has set about the task of ensuring that they are built. Moreover, half of them are to be targeted on rural areas.

We are pushing for two thirds of new build to be situated on brown-field sites; for the planning guidance which the Minister has yet to produce to reflect changes in Government policy; and for a halt to the structure plans until the guidance is issued—another point to which the right hon. Gentleman did not refer, not least because the Government do not seem to appreciate that the people who choose to live in those houses on green-field sites will need to own cars.

Does the Deputy Prime Minister understand that, even if he realises his golden age of racehorse buses, his integrated transport policy will be no more than a pantomime horse if more and more people live away from the large conurbations and continue to use their cars? The whole purpose of land use planning is that people should live nearer where they work and the shops, offices and facilities that they need so that alternatives to the car can become available by choice.

The Government's policy is a mess. The transport White Paper is the most manifest evidence that they have failed to appreciate the problems facing rural areas. The CPRE has made public its fear that

"Transport corridors could become a location for 1990s-style ribbon development."

As every schoolboy knows, that is exactly what the green belt was designed to prevent. As well as hammering the rural motorist with ever higher taxes and creating rural car fuel poverty, they are targeting housing in rural areas or, to reuse their Orwellian rhetoric,

"promoting the growth of key villages".

That is not integration; it is a massive fudge. The Government's policies are destructive of the environment and ultimately self-defeating. But that should come as no surprise when key former advisers regard key green-belt areas as

"just a bunch of mud tracts on the edge of town".

Those are the words of Derek Draper, whose key contact in the Government is Mr. Geoff Norris of the No. 10 policy unit. It was he who ripped the guts out of the transport White Paper even before it had reached the dim world of off-the-record briefings.

What happened to the environment? Let Mr. Draper explain:

"He"—

the right hon. Member for Oldham, West and Royton (Mr. Meacher)—

"is very weak and basically he's irrelevant and nobody should have to take him into account . . . He's nobody going nowhere. I don't think he'll be in his job much longer."

Mr. Draper got that bit wrong. I pay tribute to the outgoing Minister of Transport. The Government might well have done better to listen to his advice. I welcome his successor, the hon. Member for Hamilton, North and Bellshill (Dr. Reid), but he has some catching up to do to win an Oscar nomination like that of the Minister for Transport in London.

The real problem lies in the Government's mindset—in the Labour party's fundamental bias in favour of its urban heartlands. New Labour's first-hand knowledge of the countryside is from an Islington perspective: it is a mixture of James Herriot, "The Archers" and Postman Pat, laced with the poison of coercion and political correctness. The Liberal Democrats are completely divided on the countryside. They say what they want, depending on where they happen to be at the time. It therefore falls to the Conservatives to speak for rural Britain.

The Government are determined to make the countryside pay for their failures and their policies. They are not just harming those who live and work in the countryside; they are failing Britain as a whole. Today, the populations in our great towns and cities may far outnumber those in the countryside, but the few are no less a part of our nation's history and greatness. When we sing

"And did those feet in ancient time

Walk upon England's mountains green?",

we want to sing about the England of today, not about an England that has been laid waste by the Government's dogma and incompetence. While the Government and their cronies are trying to build some new Jerusalem of their own, the rest of us can see that the countryside is already our inheritance. It must not be squandered.

9.45 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (Ms Glenda Jackson): This is, I believe, the third Opposition day on which Opposition Members have chosen to debate rural issues. On each occasion, they have markedly failed to convince either the House or the country that they are even vaguely what they continually claim to be—the party that speaks for rural interests.

What we have heard tonight has been the usual recycling of, in the main, inaccurate statistics, along with empty insults directed at the Labour Benches—where sit a Government and a party committed to the interests of our rural communities. If the Conservative party genuinely wishes to present itself as a party with even the slightest interest in the countryside and its people, all that it needs to do is apologise for the grievous damage that it inflicted on rural communities during the 18 years of its lamentable Government. It is the party which was responsible for vast unemployment in rural areas, for the reduction of housing in rural areas, for taking away public transport in rural areas and for causing grievous damage not only to agriculture but to the human food chain. It sat idly by and allowed BSE to take a poisonous grip on the country, and taxpayers are still paying vast amounts as a result.

Let me now adopt a rather more factual approach to the issues raised tonight, and, perhaps, set the record straight on some of the issues that Opposition Members introduced time after time. The most obvious is the canard that the Government—and, indeed, the Labour party—are giving away the nation's green belt. As my right hon. Friend the Minister for the Environment pointed out, it was the Labour Government who introduced a green belt. It may interest the hon. Member for Hertsmere (Mr. Clappison), who asked a direct question, to know that, since 1 May last year, the green belt has increased by 29,547 hectares.

The hon. Member for North Essex (Mr. Jenkin) and, I believe, the hon. Member for North Shropshire (Mr. Paterson) were much exercised by what they claimed to be the Government's plans for new house building over the coming decades. I understand that the need for 4.4 million new houses was first suggested by the previous Government who significantly failed to meet their target of 50 per cent. of new build on brown-field sites. They managed to average only 42 per cent. on such sites.

The hon. Member for Arundel and South Downs (Mr. Flight) was much concerned about the effect of new build on Sussex. It is impossible for the Government, and it would have been impossible for the previous Administration, to accept a shortfall of 12,800 houses in that area. The hon. Gentleman claims that 60 per cent. of them will have to be built on green-field sites. The figure for the previous Government was 58 per cent., and our clear commitment is that the majority of our houses will be on brown-field sites.

Mr. Yeo: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Ms Jackson: No, I will not.

Mr. Yeo: Give way.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Lady is not giving way.

Ms Jackson: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Despite being exhorted by their leader to listen, Opposition Members are totally incapable of doing so. When I say no, I invariably mean no.

Opposition Members have dwelt on the issue of the Government overruling local councils that want to build on the green belt. Their assertions were untrue. The Tories overruled councils and approved building on green-belt land in Manchester, South Bedfordshire, Kent and Woking. In one of his last decisions as Secretary of State for the Environment, the right hon. Member for Suffolk, Coastal (Mr. Gummer) approved development on 50 hectares of metropolitan green belt in Surrey.

I hope that the hon. Member for Maidenhead (Mrs. May) expressed her concern to the previous Administration. As I have said, Berkshire was one of the three counties that the previous Government directed to change its plans by increasing the number of houses to be built by 3,000. That direction resulted in adjustments to Berkshire's green-belt boundary. The hon. Lady spoke about the number of houses that the south-east regional planning conference has announced, but those are for consultation only. She also asked about motorway service areas. I am sure that she is aware that my noble Friend the Minister for Roads was paying particular attention to that issue and examined it in no small detail.

The hon. Member for Maidenhead castigated the Government for what she decried as a policy for the closure of rural schools. We have made it abundantly clear that a proposal to close any rural school will have to be submitted to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Employment for a decision. The hon. Lady may be interested to know that, in 1997, a rural council survey highlighted the fact that, in 49 per cent. of rural areas, there was no school at all.

In a sense, the debate began with the contribution by the hon. Member for Truro and St. Austell (Mr. Taylor) who touched on the issues that are genuinely important to people in rural areas. We would argue that they are also important to people in urban areas. Those issues relate to improving the quality of life. The hon. Gentleman made a valid point to which the Government have paid, and will continue to pay, particular attention. It was about how the previous Administration for 18 years allowed the quality of life in urban areas to deteriorate so lamentably that people moved from towns to rural areas. That happened despite loud pronouncements by the then Prime Minister, now Baroness Thatcher, that that Government had to take action on the cities. They markedly failed to do that. That is an issue to which we are, indeed, directing attention.

The hon. Gentleman will know of Lord Rogers's task force. The whole thrust of our transport policies, as the hon. Gentleman will know, is to offer genuine alternatives to over-dependence on the private car. We are looking at issues such as home zones and the use of information technology to ensure that traffic does not pollute urban areas to such an extent that not only people but industry, business and retail outlets wish to move from urban areas.

Mr. Matthew Taylor: I touched on rural homelessness. I have now had information that, in Devon and Cornwall, the Government office has confirmed a 23 per cent. increase in homelessness acceptances. There seems to be a genuine problem, with the increase in homelessness perhaps linked to the increase in repossessions and to benefit changes. I hope that the Minister will ask some of her team to look at that problem.

Ms Jackson: I have little doubt that my colleagues will read this evening's debate because, as I have made abundantly clear, rural issues and the quality of life in rural areas are of prime importance to this Government, but I will certainly draw the hon. Gentleman's point to my hon. Friends' attention.

[Ms Jackson]

It was Labour Members, who have direct experience of life in rural areas because they represent those areas, who touched on the issues that are of real concern to people who live in rural areas. As my hon. Friend the Member for Carlisle (Mr. Martlew) pointed out, those issues include unemployment. He paid tribute to the Government's policy on the new deal. He also touched on the health needs of rural areas, again an area which was mercilessly attacked by the previous Administration, and highlighted again the Labour Government's health action zones.

My hon. Friend the Member for West Lancashire (Mr. Pickthall) also raised many precise, particular and detailed points as they affect his constituents in a rural area. He again made the point that it is only Conservative Members who have a desire to foster the entirely false premise that there is a difference between rural and urban. He made the point, as he has on previous occasions, that town and country are mutually dependent. It is certainly this Government's policy, as we have said on more than one occasion, to govern for all the people, which is why we are targeting so many of our activities and, indeed, so much of our finance, towards redressing the appalling damage that was inflicted on rural areas by the Conservative party. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. There is far too much noise in the Chamber. Too many conversations are going on.

Ms Jackson: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

I repeat that it was left to Labour Members to introduce into the debate the issues that are of real importance to people in rural areas. My hon. Friend the Member for Stroud (Mr. Drew) touched on the total lack of transport in many rural areas because of the previous Administration's approach to public transport as a whole. They deregulated the buses and privatised our railways, leaving many rural areas totally isolated.

My hon. Friend touched on social exclusion, which was introduced by the previous Administration: they denuded many rural areas of affordable housing and refused to allow rural housing associations to attempt to redress the balance. My hon. Friend paid tribute to the historic introduction by this Government of a national minimum wage, which will do much to redress the appallingly low pay that exists in rural areas.

My hon. Friend the Member for South Derbyshire (Mr. Todd) again touched on the real issues—it was my hon. Friends who raised many of them for the first time in the debate—including crime. That is an issue, as this Government are aware, which is and can be as prevalent in rural areas as it has been in urban areas. Here, too, we are taking steps to attack and tackle the problem so that the quality of life in the rural environment can be improved.

The Government are determined to address the real, everyday concerns of people in rural areas. They are the same concerns as those of their neighbours in towns and relate to jobs, schools, health, transport and the provision of services. As my right hon. Friend said earlier, the Government have a clear vision for rural areas—a living, working and sustainable countryside that contributes to the general prosperity of the country.

Question put, That the original words stand part of the Question:—

The House divided: Ayes 159, Noes 304.

Division No. 352] **[9.59 pm**

AYES

Amess, David
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Arbuthnot, James
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Beggs, Roy
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Rt Hon Mrs Virginia
Brady, Graham
Brand, Dr Peter
Brazier, Julian
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Burns, Simon
Campbell, Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Clappison, James
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cotter, Brian
Cran, James
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham)*
Donaldson, Jeffrey
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Duncan, Alan
Duncan Smith, Iain
Evans, Nigel
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Fearn, Ronnie
Flight, Howard
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam
Fraser, Christopher
Gale, Roger
Garnier, Edward
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
Gibb, Nick
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorrie, Donald
Gray, James
Green, Damian
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, Rt Hon John
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archie
Hammond, Philip
Hancock, Mike
Harris, Dr Evan
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John
Heald, Oliver
Heath, David *(Somerton & Frome)*
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas
Horam, John
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson Smith, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Keetch, Paul
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross Skye)*
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Kirkwood, Archy
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lansley, Andrew
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, Oliver
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
McIntosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Mates, Michael
Maude, Rt Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Moss, Malcolm
Oaten, Mark
Öpik, Lembit
Ottaway, Richard
Paice, James
Paisley, Rev Ian
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Prior, David
Randall, John
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Ross, William *(E Lond'y)*
Ruffley, David
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Sanders, Adrian
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Richard
Simpson, Keith *(Mid-Norfolk)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spring, Richard
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stunell, Andrew
Swayne, Desmond
Syms, Robert

Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher & Walton)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Thompson, William
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Tyler, Paul
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Wardle, Charles
Webb, Steve
Wells, Bowen
Whitney, Sir Raymond
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Wigley, Rt Hon Dafydd
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Woodward, Shaun
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Nigel Waterson and
Mr. Stephen Day.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Alexander, Douglas
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Armstrong, Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Banks, Tony
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, Rt Hon Mrs Margaret
Bell, Stuart *(Middlesbrough)*
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, Andrew F
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Boateng, Paul
Borrow, David
Bradley, Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brown, Rt Hon Nick *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Butler, Mrs Christine
Byers, Stephen
Caborn, Richard
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Canavan, Dennis
Cann, Jamie
Caplin, Ivor
Caton, Martin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Chisholm, Malcolm
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Rt Hon Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clarke, Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Iain
Colman, Tony
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cooper, Yvette
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Ms Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Curtis–Thomas, Mrs Claire
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Rt Hon Alistair
Darvill, Keith
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Davies, Rt Hon Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Dean, Mrs Janet
Dewar, Rt Hon Donald
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Doran, Frank
Drew, David
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Etherington, Bill
Field, Rt Hon Frank
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Michael J *(Worcester)*
Foulkes, George
Fyfe, Maria
Gapes, Mike
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Golding, Mrs Llin
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hanson, David
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Healey, John
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Ms Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hughes, Ms Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hutton, John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Ms Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Ms Jenny *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Jowell, Ms Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
Kingham, Ms Tess
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lawrence, Ms Jackie
Laxton, Bob
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Livingstone, Ken
Love, Andrew
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Steve
McCafferty, Ms Chris
McCartney, Ian *(Makerfield)*
McDonagh, Siobhain
Macdonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKenna, Mrs Rosemary
McLeish, Henry
McNamara, Kevin
McNulty, Tony
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Mandelson, Peter
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury)*
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Marshall–Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Meale, Alan
Merron, Gillian
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheff'ld Heeley)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin
Moffatt, Laura
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moran, Ms Margaret
Morgan, Ms Julie *(Cardiff N)*
Morgan, Rhodri *(Cardiff W)*
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Ms Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Mowlam, Rt Hon Marjorie
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Murphy, Paul *(Torfaen)*
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Hara, Eddie
Olner, Bill
Pearson, Ian
Pendry, Tom
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pope, Greg
Pound, Stephen
Powell, Sir Raymond
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Primarolo, Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Raynsford, Nick
Reed, Andrew *(Loughborough)*
Reid, Dr John *(Hamilton N)*
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Ms Joan
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Ms Joan
Salter, Martin
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Spellar, John
Squire, Ms Rachel

Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stoate, Dr Howard
Straw, Rt Hon Jack
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Rt Hon Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Touhig, Don
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Vaz, Keith
Vis, Dr Rudi
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
White, Brian
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Alan W *(E Carmarthen)*
Wills, Michael
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wise, Audrey
Wood, Mike
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. David Clelland and Mr. Jim Dowd.

Question accordingly negatived.

Question, That the proposed words be there added, *put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 31 (Questions on amendments) and agreed to.*

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *forthwith declared the main Question, as amended, to be agreed to.*

Resolved,

That this House congratulates the Government on its commitment to promote sustainable development in all areas of the United Kingdom, including rural areas; recognises the progress which has been made on improving rural services over the last fifteen months; welcomes the creation of powerful Regional Development Agencies which will promote prosperity in both towns and countryside; welcomes the creation of a new agency to promote the interests of the countryside in England by bringing together the Countryside Commission and parts of the Rural Development Commission; recognises the Government's determination to increase the proportion of new houses built on brownfield sites; and supports the Government's desire to give greater freedom for people to explore the open countryside.

Northern Ireland (Sentences)

10.14 pm

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Marjorie Mowlam): I beg to move,

That the draft Northern Ireland (Sentences) Act 1998 (Specified Organisations) Order 1998, which was laid before this House on 28th July, be approved.

The Good Friday agreement commits the Government to providing for an accelerated programme for the release of prisoners convicted of scheduled or similar offences. The Government introduced legislation to meet that commitment, and that legislation, the Northern Ireland (Sentences) Act 1998, received Royal Assent last night.

The Good Friday agreement was overwhelmingly endorsed by the people of Northern Ireland, and it is our duty is to implement it as faithfully and as fully as possible. The agreement will work only if all parties honour the commitments that they have made.

The purpose of the order is to specify organisations under section 3(8) of the Northern Ireland (Sentences) Act 1998. The order is important and forms a key part of the scheme provided for by the legislation. Under section 3 of the Act, a prisoner will not be eligible for early release if he or she supports an organisation that is specified.

In addition, prisoners may have their licences suspended and be recalled to prison if they support an organisation, regardless of whether it was specified when they were released.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): If my right hon. Friend has seen Mrs. McBride, ought she not also to take an early opportunity to see Mrs. Wright and Mrs. Fisher or the Scots Guards Association?

Marjorie Mowlam: I am aware of that point. I saw the family of the man who was killed in the incident, and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence saw the Scots Guards Association. In that sense, both have had their voices heard by Government. I know the interest that my hon. Friend takes in the matter, and I assure him that I am well on the way to reviewing the case, and will make an announcement as soon as possible.

Mr. Andrew Hunter (Basingstoke): Is it not the case that, last year, the Secretary of State informed the release committee that she felt that it was inappropriate for her to become involved in individual cases? The impression that she has given by seeing the McBride family or its representatives is that she has contradicted her stated opinion and consulted one side and not the other in a matter for which, ultimately, she has responsibility.

Marjorie Mowlam: The situation changed when I announced that the review was on, and the parents, who were extremely upset at the possible releases, wanted to express their views to me. That does not bias me one way or the other. I discussed the matter with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence, who has seen the association that is fighting the case for Mr. Fisher and Mr. Wright. I am reading the facts and making my own judgment, not talking to one side or the other in any way. I would have preferred to remain outside both, but, when the Secretary of State for Defence saw the one side,

and the parents were very upset, I thought that it would do no harm to hear of the pain that they felt they would continue to suffer.

The conditions that I specified are not the only ones that a prisoner must satisfy. In addition to the requirements regarding the nature and length of the sentence, the commissioners who will make decisions under the Act must consider that the prisoner would, if released, not be likely to become a supporter of a specified organisation or become concerned in the commission, preparation or instigation of acts of terrorism concerned with the affairs of Northern Ireland.

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Inverclyde): Can my right hon. Friend estimate the approximate numbers of republican and loyalist prisoners who might be affected?

Marjorie Mowlam: There are approximately four to five hundred—probably 420—scheduled offence prisoners in the Maze. Their eligibility is for the commission, under the criteria that I am outlining, to decide. I do not have in my head the numbers of loyalists or republicans. My hon. Friend will understand that the numbers depend on which groups are specified; their prisoners will not be eligible for early release, and the commission will consider each individual case and make its decision.

Rev. Ian Paisley (North Antrim): I think that the Secretary of State said forty-five hundred—[HON. MEMBERS: "Four to five hundred."] I thank hon. Members.

Marjorie Mowlam: Some reports say 400, some 500. The figure depends on the organisations that prisoners identify with, on whether they are transferred prisoners under scheduled offences, and on whether they are on remand. There are variations. I think that about 420 will in the end be eligible.

Prisoners will not be permitted to be part of the scheme if they support a specified organisation or become involved in the commission or preparation of terrorist offences. A life sentence prisoner will not be released if he or she would be a danger to the public. The commissioners make that decision.

Mr. David Wilshire (Spelthorne): If a Sinn Fein-IRA murderer is released and Sinn Fein-IRA break their ceasefire, will that murderer be returned to prison?

Marjorie Mowlam: If that individual supports Sinn Fein-IRA actively by leafleting, raising money or committing terrorist acts, yes.

Mr. Wilshire: Will the Secretary of State give way?

Marjorie Mowlam: No. I am sorry, but I have given way once to the hon. Gentleman. I beg the forbearance of the House to allow me to make some progress before taking further interventions.

In deciding whether to specify an organisation, I am required to make a judgment on two matters. First, I must judge whether the organisation is concerned with terrorism connected with the affairs of Northern Ireland, or in promoting or encouraging it—that is, that it is a terrorist organisation. The second matter follows directly from the words of the agreement, which states:

> "Prisoners affiliated to organisations which have not established or are not maintaining a complete and unequivocal ceasefire will not benefit from the arrangements."

Mr. Peter Robinson (Belfast, East): Will the right hon. Lady give way?

Marjorie Mowlam: If the hon. Gentleman will let me make a little more progress, I shall certainly give way.

In deciding whether an organisation has established and is maintaining a complete and unequivocal ceasefire I must in particular take into account the following factors: first, whether an organisation is committed to the use now and in future of only democratic and peaceful means to achieve its objectives; secondly, whether it has ceased to be involved in any acts of violence or preparation of violence; thirdly, whether it is directing or promoting acts of violence by other organisations; fourthly, whether it is co-operating fully with the decommissioning commission. Those factors are familiar to many hon. Members, and follow directly from the Prime Minister's speech at Balmoral on 14 May. I can, in addition, take into account other relevant factors, but, in making my overall judgment, I must take account of each of those.

I have considered which organisations I am required to specify under the Act, and have decided to specify the Continuity Irish Republican Army, or CIRA; the "Real" Irish Republican Army; the Irish National Liberation Army, or INLA; and the Loyalist Volunteer Force, or LVF.

Mr. Peter Robinson: Will the Secretary of State give way?

Mr. Andrew Robathan (Blaby): Will the Secretary of State give way?

Marjorie Mowlam: I shall give way to the hon. Member for Belfast, East (Mr. Robinson) first.

Mr. Robinson: During the referendum campaign, the Prime Minister came to Northern Ireland. He indicated that no prisoners would be released unless the organisation of which they were part had given up violence for good. Over the past few weeks, the Provisional IRA has killed one man and brutally beaten another. Why is it not on the list?

Marjorie Mowlam: If the hon. Gentleman will allow me, I shall refer to that matter in two or three points' time, when I shall go into some detail and answer him directly. Will the hon. Member for Blaby (Mr. Robathan) wait until then as well?

Mr. Robathan *indicated assent.*

Marjorie Mowlam: Good.

Prisoners who support the organisations that I have specified will not be eligible for early release. I have reached those decisions on the basis of security assessments and following consideration of advice from the RUC; but, in the end, the judgment is mine.

[Marjorie Mowlam]

I should like to say a little about my decision in each case as to whether or not an organisation has been specified. The Continuity IRA has been involved in acts of terrorism since 1994, and there are no indications that either CIRA or its political wing, Republican Sinn Fein, has any intention of abandoning violence as a means of pursuing its political objectives. I have therefore specified the Continuity IRA.

The Real IRA has carried out a number of attacks so far this year, which have included car bombings and mortar attacks. There are no indications that the Real IRA intends to call a ceasefire, and I have therefore specified that organisation.

The Irish National Liberation Army is a more established organisation, having been in existence since 1975. At no time since then has it declared a ceasefire. It has been responsible for many appalling attacks, and there are no indications that the INLA is yet ready to declare a ceasefire. Its political wing, the Irish Republican Socialist party, has spoken of the possibility of a ceasefire, but there are no indications yet that there is a serious prospect of that being delivered. I have therefore specified the INLA.

The Loyalist Volunteer Force or LVF has been responsible for many murders. In May this year, the LVF declared a ceasefire—a welcome step. It has also named a contact person with the decommissioning body, and meetings have taken place. However, a ceasefire must be demonstrated in acts as well as words. I hope that that will be the case—[HON. MEMBERS: "Oh!"]—but I have yet to be convinced that the LVF ceasefire is complete and unequivocal; therefore, I have specified the LVF.

The three other organisations that I have decided not to specify in this order are the Provisional IRA, the Ulster Defence Association and the Ulster Volunteer Force. In each case, the advice I have received does show that there have been serious deficiencies. In particular, although all three organisations—or in the case of the Provisional IRA and the UDA, the political party with which they are associated—have had discussions with the decommissioning body, there has been much less progress than I would wish to see.

I take that extremely seriously, and will expect to see the progress on decommissioning that is envisaged in the Good Friday agreement. However, viewing the matter in the round, as I am required to do by the Act, I have concluded that all three of those organisations are maintaining complete and unequivocal ceasefires.

Mr. Robathan: As always, the right hon. Lady is generous in giving way. Will she tell the House whether she has received information, intelligence or advice from the RUC to the effect that Direct Action Against Drugs is a front organisation for the Provisional IRA; and whether she has received information that Direct Action Against Drugs has carried out several punishment beatings and probably one murder? If she has not received such advice, will she go and walk the streets of west Belfast, where everyone will tell her that Direct Action Against Drugs is the same as the Provisional IRA, and is carrying out so-called punishment beatings and brutal acts of terrorism?

Marjorie Mowlam: I shall turn to punishment beatings in a moment, when I shall respond to the hon. Gentleman's point. There have been 960 punishment beatings by both sides since the first ceasefire. I have made it clear that I think that punishment beatings are appalling—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael J. Martin): Order. I do not want hon. Members to speak while the right hon. Lady is addressing the House. That is unfair.

Marjorie Mowlam: My point is that the previous Administration realised that these are difficult matters. I have made it clear that punishment beatings have to stop. I shall explain later how I view that matter in the context of the judgment that I have had to make. That judgment has not been easy. I had to judge in the round, according to the four criteria, whether all four organisations should be specified. I shall explain in more detail why that is the case. I have taken the matter extremely seriously, and expect to see progress on decommissioning and other aspects very soon.

Having viewed the matter in the round, as the Good Friday agreement says I should, I have concluded that the three organisations that I have not specified are committed to maintaining a complete and unequivocal ceasefire. I have taken into account the four factors. I know that certain hon. Members are dissatisfied with my conclusion, but it was far from an easy judgment. It was inevitably a balanced judgment, in which any specific failure by an organisation has to be weighed alongside all the other available information, and that is what I have done.

There are organisations, particularly the Loyalist Volunteer Force, that have yet to establish a complete and unequivocal ceasefire, but appear to be moving in the right direction. I hope that those organisations will now embrace the democratic process that has been endorsed by the vast majority of people in Northern Ireland. If they establish and maintain complete and unequivocal ceasefires, I will reassess their position. The process will be under continuous review, so other organisations, such as PIRA, the UDA and the UDF, which have established such a ceasefire, will have to continue to demonstrate that they are maintaining it to avoid being specified in future. That is the crucial test.

Mr. Wilshire: The right hon. Lady speaks of an unequivocal ceasefire. Will she explain how many murders and punishment beatings an organisation is allowed to perform before a ceasefire stops being a proper ceasefire?

Marjorie Mowlam: I have, I hope, made it clear to the House what the agreement asks me to do, including informing the House, as I am doing this evening. The agreement requires me to consider whether organisations are completely and unequivocally maintaining a ceasefire. There are four criteria by which I judge that.

I have to make a judgment in the round, so, in answer to the hon. Gentleman, I cannot respond to hypothetical cases. I will make that judgment when I am given facts. That is the job I have been given, and I am making that announcement in line with the criteria and the information with which I have been provided. Clearly, the hon. Gentleman does not agree with my judgment. I have information that I have presented to the House, and I have other information that it is difficult to present to the House. I assure him that the judgment was difficult, but I have made it as fairly and justly as possible.

The process will be under continuous review, so it will be possible for groups to be specified and then removed from the list if the position changes. I shall monitor it carefully. I point out, to try to allay some of the fears of the hon. Member for Spelthorne (Mr. Wilshire), that the judgment will become more stringent over time, as the Prime Minister said when he announced the criteria, both for specified and unspecified organisations.

The judgment will become more stringent in relation to progress made elsewhere. For example, people do not expect the dismantling of paramilitary organisations overnight, but dismantling must increase over time. Similarly, there should be progress on decommissioning over time. As I have said many times in the House, all forms of sectarian intimidation and so-called punishment attacks must end.

I should like to say some more about that, in answer to the hon. Member for Blaby. Since the first IRA ceasefire was announced, in September 1994, there has been an appalling catalogue of punishment attacks—committed by both loyalist and republican groups. In each case, the RUC has done all it can to find those responsible.

Despite the Good Friday agreement, those attacks have continued. As the RUC Chief Constable, Ronnie Flanagan, has said, members of both republican and loyalist organisations have been involved in violent criminal acts in recent weeks, which the hon. Gentleman listed. In particular, the RUC has said that it is pursuing a line of inquiry that assumes that the recent brutal murder of Andrew Kearney was committed by the Provisional IRA.

This pattern of brutal punishment attacks is wholly unacceptable. It must come to an end. Paramilitary organisations have shown their ability to stop those activities in the past. Now they must stop them for good. As I have said, the judgments that I have made today will be kept under continuous review, and will become more and more stringent over time.

Mr. Dominic Grieve (Beaconsfield): During the run-up to the Good Friday agreement, there was a period when the Provisional IRA was effectively excluded because of the Chief Constable's judgment and opinion that it was behind the commission of certain acts of terrorism. The right hon. Lady has now told the House that it is the Chief Constable's opinion that at least one recent act is also the responsibility of the Provisional IRA. In those circumstances, how can we justify not placing the Provisional IRA on the list?

Marjorie Mowlam: I chose my words very carefully. I said:

"In particular, the RUC has said that it is pursuing a line of inquiry that assumes that the recent brutal murder of Andrew Kearney was committed by the Provisional IRA."

I shall keep the situation under continuous review and, if the situation changes, I shall look at it again. I judge the situation now—and I can judge over time—in relation to the four Balmoral criteria, as to whether, in my judgment, groups are maintaining an unequivocal ceasefire.

I consider the early release of prisoners an essential part of the Good Friday agreement, but it has to be matched alongside others. As we have said so often in the House, the agreement cannot be cherry-picked; it is an overall package, which I believe must be implemented in full. I hope that we stick to that. We have all made solemn commitments to try to reach that goal. The future of the success of the agreement depends on it. I commend the order to the House.

10.36 pm

Mr. Andrew MacKay (Bracknell): This is a very sad day for the House of Commons, a sad day for democracy and a sad day for the rule of law in the United Kingdom. I regret to say that our worst fears about the Northern Ireland (Sentences) Bill—now enacted—are being confirmed.

You will recall, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that I described the Bill as fatally flawed when, sadly, the Government and the Secretary of State felt unable to accept an amendment in my name and those of my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition and the right hon. Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble)—now First Minister in the Assembly. That amendment would have said that any paramilitary organisation had to prove that it had renounced violence in all shapes and forms, and was co-operating with the decommissioning commission.

Instead, clause 2(9) of the Bill says that the Secretary of State merely has to take into account—and tonight the Secretary of State has let the House know that she has taken into account—a series of criteria. One of those criteria is that the organisation is

"committed to the use now and in the future of only democratic and peaceful means to achieve its objectives".

Another is that the organisation has

"ceased to be involved in any acts of violence or of preparation for violence".

I am grateful to the Secretary of State for being so frank and honest with the House; I know that the House will appreciate that. She has said that acts of violence are still being committed; she described them as wholly unacceptable. She was absolutely right, as every Member of the House would confirm. She has said that there are very serious deficiencies in so-called ceasefires. I agree with that, as would the entire House, and yet, when we read in the order the specified organisations that are listed as continuing to commit crimes of violence, we find that the Provisional IRA, the Ulster Volunteer Force and the Ulster Defence Association are excluded.

You will recall, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that, since the Assembly elections, there have been a series of punishment beatings and worse. I draw two of those to your attention tonight. I drew them to the attention of the House last week when the Northern Ireland Bill was proceeding through this place. First, there is the case of Mr. Andrew Kearney, who was dragged from his flat, knee-capped in a lift and left to die, which he subsequently did. That is believed to be the work of the IRA. Secondly, there is the case of the beating of Vincent McKenna, who was a peace worker in Belfast. He clearly recognised his assailants as being members of Provisional IRA.

In the debate on the Bill, my hon. Friend the Member for Blaby (Mr. Robathan) intervened on the Secretary of State and rightly raised the question of punishment beatings. In her reply she said:

"It is clear that I will make a judgment on the four factors, in which are included punishment beatings and the instigation of paramilitary activity. That is one of the factors that, in the round, will be part of that judgment."

[Mr. Andrew MacKay]

The rest of the quote is important. The Secretary of State continued:

"Like the hon. Gentleman, I find punishment beatings obscene."—[*Official Report*, 10 June 1998; Vol. 313, c. 1084.]

There is absolutely no doubt that the Secretary of State and I share that view. In criticising her, I never question the fact that she finds as deplorable as the rest of the House the punishment beatings that are conducted by the Provisional IRA and loyalist paramilitary groups. Although it is known that that is happening, they have been excluded from the list.

I shall quote from *The Irish Times*, a newspaper which is usually considered to be a fair and reasonable commentary on events in Northern Ireland. An article on the front page of last Saturday's edition states:

"In a statement released yesterday, the RUC said: 'Detectives investigating the murder of Mr Kearney are pursuing a line of inquiry that suggests it was carried out by the Provisional IRA.'

According to republican sources in north Belfast, it appears that Mr Kearney was killed at the behest of a senior IRA figure from Belfast. It is known Mr Kearney was in a brawl with the IRA man, who was linked to the Shankill Road bombing in October 1993 when 10 people were killed.

Eight IRA men went to Mr Kearney's flat in the New Lodge area last Sunday and took over the entire block in what the Ulster Unionist negotiator, Mr Reg Empey, described as a 'military-style' operation.

Mr Kearney (33) was cradling his two-week-old baby girl in the flat when an armed gang dragged him out and flung him into a lift before shooting him in both legs. Mr Kearney bled to death."

That is the work of the Provisional IRA, and those people are not on the list tonight. Therefore, Provisional IRA prisoners will be allowed early release while the House is in recess, if the order is passed.

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): I appreciate the right hon. Gentleman's giving way. Does he accept that the mythology is a misunderstanding of the workings of Provisional IRA? The security advice now to the Minister, as I understand it, is that it has not been centrally directed, and that it has been working on the basis of closed cells doing their own work.

Mr. MacKay: The hon. Gentleman makes an important point, which is underlined by the Chief Constable, who said in a BBC interview two days ago, on 27 July, referring to the Provisional IRA, the Ulster Defence Association and the Ulster Volunteer Force:

"If they think because their definition of a cessation of violence is a cessation of military operations they must be disabused of any notion that any other acts of criminality are any more acceptable."

That is the point.

What worries us is that because the Provisional IRA and the two loyalist paramilitary groups have caused a so-called military ceasefire, so that military and police targets and major so-called spectaculars on shopping precincts and elsewhere are not going on, it is thought by some that there is a complete and absolute ceasefire. There is not.

Life is still hell for many ordinary, decent people on many estates in the Province because paramilitaries are dominating the estates. Punishment beatings and intimidation are taking place. We owe it to ordinary, decent people to make sure that that activity ceases. The one way in which it can cease is if prisoners are not released unless the punishment beatings end. The message tonight, if we pass the order, will simply be that the punishment beatings can continue and the prisoners can be released. The people whom the House will be letting down are those who cannot speak for themselves on the estates. They are largely unemployed or on low incomes, and are not necessarily as articulate as we are. It is the duty of the Opposition to protect these people.

I do not ask the Secretary of State or other Labour Members merely to accept my view. I shall refer to a press release that was issued today by Families Against Intimidation and Terror, an outstandingly brave cross-community organisation which has done much to help in the Province. The press release states:

"The Good Friday Agreement states that these organisations"—

the IRA, UVF and UDA—

"can only qualify for early prisoner release if their cease-fires are intact. Since the agreement was signed, the IRA, UVF and UDA have all been engaged in acts of violence and have repeatedly breached their cease-fires. Are the Government really accepting a definition of a paramilitary cease-fire which allows paramilitary groups to beat, shoot and intimidate people? What sort of cease-fire is that? We do not believe that these organisations can in any way qualify for this scheme."

The press release continues:

"Many victims of the paramilitaries had problems with this section of the Agreement that related to the early release of prisoners, but nevertheless voted for the Agreement because they believed that it would stop the violence and create no more victims. With the death of Mr. Kearney, the beating of Vincent McKenna, the shootings at Derry and last night's shooting of a man in Newtownabbey, no one could possibly claim that the paramilitaries have ended violence."

Families Against Intimidation and Terror concludes its powerful press release with this plea:

"We continue to support the Agreement"—

as we do on the Opposition Benches—

"but we are saddened that the Government have dangerously compromised it with turning a blind eye to paramilitary violence."

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): We all condemn the terrible crimes to which the right hon. Gentleman has referred. No one in the House, for one moment, would try to justify them; obviously these are crimes that must always be condemned. However, when the previous ceasefire took place, which the IRA was to break—I am referring to 1995–96—the front organisation of the IRA, Direct Action Against Drugs, murdered quite a number of people. The then Secretary of State, now Lord Mayhew of Twysden, said to the House that the ceasefire was continuing, despite the crimes that were being committed by an IRA front organisation. The present situation is nothing new; it is a question of balance and what sort of conclusion should be reached by the Secretary or State in any given situation—*[Interruption.]* I do not know what the hon. Member for North—East Cambridgeshire (Mr. Moss) is heckling about.

Mr. MacKay: Let me answer the hon. Gentleman clearly and precisely. It was clearly outlined in the agreement that the violence had to cease. We thought that that was outlined in the Bill, but not strongly enough.

That is why we sought to amend it. We were right to do so in the light of what has happened tonight. Let me say in answering the question—

Mr. Stephen Hesford (Wirral, West): Yes, answer it.

Mr. MacKay: Yes, I would like to, if the hon. Gentleman would care to allow me to do so. The hon. Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick) has great experience of these matters and I think that he would like to hear my answer.

The answer to the hon. Gentleman's question is clearly this: it was a tough and difficult decision that my Government, and, in turn, the present Government, took about whether they would continue with the talks, when there were clearly punishment beatings taking place. On balance—it was a hard call, but it was probably the right one by both Governments—it was decided that the talks would continue.

We are now in an entirely different situation. We are asking whether the prisoners should be released, because we have the unique opportunity to stop punishment beatings and intimidation straight away by saying that the organisations' friends and colleagues will not be released. The beatings would stop and, in due course, organisations could be removed from the list and the prisoners could be released.

I do not think that the hon. Member for Walsall, North has any doubts that this is a unique opportunity, because he is very experienced in matters relating to Northern Ireland. If he does, let me take him back to the Assembly elections. In a speech from the Back Benches that was so powerful that she has, I am glad to say, been appointed a Home Office Minister, the hon. Member for Vauxhall (Kate Hoey), whom we congratulate on her appointment, said that IRA-Sinn Fein could turn the tap of violence on and off at will.

Throughout the three weeks of the Assembly elections, there were no knee-cappings or punishment beatings; the people who carry them out were told to cease, because that was in the electoral interests of Sinn Fein-IRA. We know that such a ceasefire could happen again, but I deeply believe that it will not happen if the prisoners whom we are discussing are released. The two issues are inextricably linked.

I am pleased that the Secretary of State has again made it clear that she has complete flexibility in these matters. One of the more attractive parts of the Northern Ireland (Sentences) Bill is that paramilitary organisations can be added to the list, or taken off it, at short notice. That flexibility is essential. It is in the interests of the House to add the UDA, the UVF and PIRA to the list, because I believe that that would halt punishment beatings. Should that happen, I would welcome the Secretary of State removing their names from the list after a reasonable period so that prisoners could be released.

On Friday, the House goes into recess until the middle of October, so I should like an undertaking that no terrorist prisoner will be released during that time if beatings are still going on. Perhaps I have misinterpreted the Bill and the order, but my interpretation is that excluding those organisations from the list would mean that any prisoner who applied who was otherwise eligible because of time served could be released during the recess. Punishment beatings could be going on in one part of Belfast while paramilitary prisoners were being released down the road at the Maze. That would be horrendous. It would also be would be wrong, it could be damaging to the agreement and it would not be in the interests of democracy.

Marjorie Mowlam: We should listen carefully to the right hon. Gentleman. All that he is doing is making a different judgment from mine about how to move forward. It is a matter of putting groups on the list or removing them. He suggests that adding organisations to the list would stop punishment beatings, but we do not know that to be the case and I cannot play that kind of game. I have to make a decision on the basis of the available information, which is what I am doing. This is not an easy situation, but I have made a judgment on the balance of the information that I have been given. I have made that overall judgment in relation to all the information that I have.

When we were in opposition, I had to trust my predecessor when he had more information than I had. I did so, and I gave him that trust. When Lord Mayhew was in that position, I backed him—regardless of not having all the information. I am making this judgment on the basis of the information that I have, and I can assure the right hon. Gentleman that it is important to stick by the Good Friday agreement.

The right hon. Gentleman said that I could not do anything during the summer if there was continuous review. Well, I can. I can continuously review and decide to specify or unspecify, and then come back to the House after the recess to debate the order. It does not tie my hands in the way that the he suggests.

Mr. MacKay: May we assume that, if the people who have been arrested are subsequently charged for the murder of Kearney and are found to be members of the Provisional IRA, their organisation will be added to the list while we are in recess?

Marjorie Mowlam: The right hon. Gentleman is asking me to do exactly what other hon. Members asked me to do. I have said that punishment beatings must stop, and that I will make a judgment as the situation develops. I cannot give him a categorical assurance, because it is my job to consider all four criteria in relation to the Balmoral statement, and to make a judgment on whether the ceasefire is being maintained unequivocally. I cannot make an ad hoc decision now, but I assure the House that I will make it during the summer if it is demanded on the basis of the information with which I am provided.

Mr. MacKay: All the available evidence shows that punishment beatings, murders and knee-capping are continuing. They are being committed by PIRA, the UVF and the UDA. In such circumstances, it is wrong that those organisations are not on the list, and that it is perfectly possible for their prisoners to be released while the House is in recess. We believe that that is wrong, so, in the interests of the ordinary, decent people across the Province who are being petrified, I urge the House to vote against the order.

10.57 pm

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): I speak in anger, and I expect that the Secretary of State will doubtless reply in kind. I do not know how many hon. Members have read

[Mr. Tam Dalyell]

the transcript of the trial of Guardsmen Fisher and Wright. That trial was a travesty. For example, the judge came to the conclusion that those two young guardsmen could not have thought that they were in any danger. Did he not understand that their colleague, Guardsman Shackleton, had been killed on the very same streets of New Lodge only weeks before? That is just one example, but there are others.

I must not take up the time of the House, but I must tell my right hon. Friend that, for months, we have been told by Secretaries of State for Defence from both sides of the House that this is the business of the Northern Ireland Office. The truth of the matter is that the Ministry of Defence has behaved badly these six years, but that is by the by. It has repeatedly told us, "You must go to the Northern Ireland Office. This matter has little to do with us. We may be sympathetic, but it is up to the Northern Ireland Office."

The fact of the matter is that, if my right hon. Friend, for perfectly humane reasons which I understand, sees Mrs. McBride, she is under a moral obligation to see Mrs. Fisher and Mrs. Wright and the Scots Guards Association. I beg her to do so.

10.58 pm

Rev. Ian Paisley (North Antrim): This is a very sad night for Northern Ireland. Those on both sides who have committed atrocious acts of murder and atrocious terrorist acts will be let loose on the community. During the Secretary of State's speech, there was an argument about whether organisations such as the IRA should have come into the talks. There is a great difference between talking to people and letting prisoners out. Let us not introduce that red herring across the Floor of the House on this issue. There is no comparison between the two. We know what happened in the talks. Those organisations were to come into the talks on certain conditions, but two of the parties to the talks did not keep to them. It was interesting to notice that, when the Secretary of State was considering the matter, the IRA could switch off the violence. While she was making the assessment, there was no violence, but, afterwards, the violence continued.

I have in my hand tonight the speech made at Balmoral by the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom. He said:

"People want to know that if these parties are going to benefit from proposals in the Agreement such as accelerated prisoner releases and Ministerial posts, their commitment to democratic non-violent means must be established, in an objective, meaningful and verifiable way."

When has the IRA met that condition? Is the murder of Mr. Kearney a verifiable way to tell the world that it has given up its violence? Do the shootings that took place in Londonderry from the other side verify anything? They tell the world that those people are still linked to violence. They are still carrying out violent acts. I heard it argued that, as punishment beatings had been carried out with batons and sticks, and, thank God, no guns were used, the ceasefire still held. Guns now have been used, so there is not a ceasefire—there is no complete ceasefire and no unequivocal ceasefire. Yet the Government go on with their plan to release those prisoners.

What is more, the Prime Minister made it clear that there can be no fudge between democracy and terror; the agreement has to be implemented in all its parts. The agreement has not been implemented in all its parts. We find tonight that the Government are prepared to fly in the face of what is happening and let those prisoners out.

The Prime Minister, in clarifying whether the terms and spirit of the agreement were being met and whether violence has genuinely been given up for good, said:

"there are a range of factors to take into account".

What are they? He went on:

"first and foremost, a clear and unequivocal commitment that there is an end to violence for good on the part of republicans and loyalists alike".

Have we had that? Have we seen that? Have we heard the IRA leaders yet confirming that? I have heard that the IRA leadership was perfectly happy about its meeting with the Secretary of State, and happy that its prisoners would all get out, but there has been no keeping of the agreement.

What is more, the Prime Minister said that we must be sure

"that the so-called war is finished . . . gone".

Go and tell the people in sorrow in Belfast tonight about what has happened in these past few weeks, and they will tell you that the sorrow has not gone. Evidence about that has been read from the Front Bench tonight. The Prime Minister expressly said:

"the ceasefires are indeed complete and unequivocal: an end to bombings, killings and beatings".

The Secretary of State gave us a list of what is happening. On the basis of the list that she mentioned, she should be saying to the House, "We cannot go ahead with releasing anybody until such time as the terms have been kept and have been seen to be kept, and they have not been kept."

In an aside, I might say that I do not think that the Scottish guardsmen should be treated in the way that they have been treated. We should not be talking about a law to release terrorists in the same breath as we talk about men who did not go out to kill. They were only young men doing their duty. They may or may not have failed in certain parts of their duty, but they are in no way on a par with what we are dealing with here tonight. I say that with all the strength that I can.

People in Northern Ireland are worried, because those who are coming out of prison are experts. They know how to make and use mortar bombs, and they know how to carry out desperate deeds of violence. The question for the House tonight is simple: can we afford to release such men into the Northern Ireland community? I say that we cannot afford to release them on to the streets of Belfast, or the streets of any town or village in Ulster. They should be kept behind bars until their organisations meet the criteria set for them by the Prime Minister.

We hear much talk about what was voted for in the referendum. What the people voted for was what the Prime Minister said, and that has not been kept to. The Secretary of State has given us evidence of beatings and killings, and of the association of these people with those beatings and killings. On that basis, she should say, "I am sorry, but I must tell them that they have not met the criteria that we have set and, until those criteria are met, it will be dangerous to let those people out on to the streets."

The Secretary of State was asked whether, if a prisoner who belonged to a certain organisation was released from prison and that organisation returned to violence,

the prisoner would be recalled. The Secretary of State said that would happen only if the prisoner were no longer associated with the organisation—but he would have been released from prison precisely because of such an association. He would have no credentials for release apart from his membership of the organisation. Does the Secretary of State think that he would cease to be a member of it after his release, or that the IRA would be stupid enough to let him be released in such circumstances? It will have a tight control on every one of its members who is released from prison.

I say that if an organisation reverts to violence, all its freed members should be put back in prison. That is the way in which the system should work if we are to secure peace in Northern Ireland.

From the beginning, those of us who represent constituencies in Northern Ireland have told the House what has been repeated here tonight. We have not been heated, but I say now that we shall see greater acts of violence if this continues. The people will say, "We could get our prisoners out anyway. We do not need to worry." But we have a great deterrent. The greatest deterrent that the Government can offer is to say to the IRA and other groups, "Unless you meet the criteria, your prisoners will not be released." That would show us their attitude, and that is what the Secretary of State should do: she should use that as a deterrent to stop the violence in our country.

11.8 pm

Mr. Kevin McNamara (Hull, North): I was enthralled by the rigorous defence of the Belfast agreement that we heard from the hon. Member for North Antrim (Rev. Ian Paisley). I never knew that we had such a firm defender of the agreement and the principles contained in it, and I welcome the fact that he has joined its supporters. Indeed, we should all welcome his raising of the very issues raised by the Prime Minister as being part and parcel of the agreement, and his demonstration of support for every issue in it when lesser mortals might have fallen by the wayside.

As I listened to the right hon. Member for Bracknell (Mr. MacKay), I wondered whether he was the same person who spoke on behalf of his party in the autumn of 1995 when the previous Government introduced the Bill that was to become the Northern Ireland (Remission of Sentences) Act 1995. Colleagues may recall that that was during a ceasefire when, although punishment beatings and other evil and dastardly acts were going on, prisoners were being regularly released under the terms of legislation that was presented by the then Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, now Lord Mayhew. What is the difference between what was happening then and what is happening now, apart from the more rigorous conditions that the Government are imposing on the releases? My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State spoke about that.

The right hon. Member for Bracknell was right when he said that such matters must pose difficult problems for the Secretary of State, as they did for Lord Mayhew. Decisions about releases and attempts to form an overall view of the situation cannot be easy. Such matters must be given the same consideration and accorded the same weight, and the understanding of my right hon. Friend's judgment must be the same, as that which was given when we were in opposition when the then Secretary of State, in exactly the same situation, introduced the Bill that was to become the Northern Ireland (Remission of Sentences) Act. That is the least that we should be entitled to expect from the right hon. Member and his right hon. and hon Friends.

Mr. MacKay: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. McNamara: Perhaps I may be allowed to finish this point. On second thoughts, I shall give way now and return to my speech.

Mr. MacKay: The hon. Gentleman was shadow Secretary of State for Northern Ireland. He says that the bipartisan policy should be total and that the Opposition should always offer a blank cheque. Why, year after year, did he fail to support the renewal of prevention of terrorism orders? On some occasions, he led his Opposition colleagues into the No Lobby. Does not that make his assertions somewhat flimsy, to say the least?

Mr. McNamara: Far from it. We are not comparing like with like. We are debating the wisdom or otherwise of releasing prisoners, something which happened under the Northern Ireland (Remission of Sentences) Act and is likely to happen under the current legislation. While internment, which was the biggest recruiting sergeant that the Provisional IRA ever had, was still on the statute book, it was my duty to try to alter the Government's attitude and to tell my colleagues that we had to do it. If we had time, I could go through the other blunders that were committed by the previous Government and that helped IRA recruitment. Bloody Sunday is one that immediately springs to mind, and there were others.

When I listen to Opposition Members, I sometimes feel that perhaps they do not want the Belfast agreement to succeed. I also sometimes think that they are striking poses in relation to that agreement because, if their proposals were carried through, the whole edifice would fall. I understand that from the dissident Unionists, from the Democratic Unionist party and from the United Kingdom Unionist party, but the attitude that has been taken by Her Majesty's Opposition on this matter seems specifically designed to weaken the whole of the Belfast agreement and to bring it down. *[Interruption.]* The right hon. Member for Bracknell is sitting there with a sneer on his face and muttering away. I shall give way to him if he wants to say his piece. I see. From the comfort of a sedentary position, the Opposition spokesman on Northern Ireland can twitter away but, when challenged, he is not prepared to say anything.

I come back to the point that I started on. My right hon. Friend has had to take an important decision. It deserves the support of the whole House. It cannot have been easy for her, but the success of the Belfast agreement depends on that decision's success and on her judgment of those matters, as do so many other things.

11.15 pm

Mr. Lembit Öpik (Montgomeryshire): Before us is a list of the four organisations that have yet to abandon violence; I think that we can all agree on that point. I use the word "yet" because I am basically an optimist and I sincerely hope that, in the months to come, they may conceivably give up violence, with the other

[Mr. Lembit Öpik]

organisations, and wake up to the political realities of the 1990s. Evidence is abundant that the one way to make progress in Northern Ireland is to participate peacefully in the conduct of Northern Irish politics.

We can all agree that those who still seek to promote themselves through violence should not benefit from the peace. Again, I do not imagine that there is a single person in the Chamber who would question that point, or the fact that, if they do not accept the agreement, the agreement cannot accept them. However, I am confident that the list that has been drawn up by the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland was based on comprehensive advice from the general officer commanding and the Chief Constable of the Royal Ulster Constabulary.

I am also confident that the Secretary of State's view is that the right organisations have been included and the right organisations excluded. In simple terms, it is a rather poor demonstration of bad faith for anyone in this Chamber to question the idea that the Secretary of State has sincerely attempted to make the best decision that she possibly can with the information that she has at her disposal.

Let us not pretend that we all have the same quality of information before us. The Secretary of State, by the very nature of her job, has access to more insightful and more detailed information than others. *[Interruption.]* I hear a Conservative Member say that that is absurd.

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham): I said "subservient."

Mr. Öpik: I am confused. I give way so that the hon. Gentleman can perhaps explain what he means.

Mr. Bercow: I simply said that the hon. Gentleman was guilty of subservience. I certainly did not suggest that he was in any way suggesting that our position was that the Government's attitude was absurd. I said that his position towards the Government was subservient.

Mr. Öpik *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): Order. We have a very limited amount of time for an extremely serious debate. Sedentary comments, whether from the Front or Back Benches, do not help.

Mr. Öpik: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It is appalling that any Opposition Member should imply that any one of us is here to be subservient to the Government. I grew up in Northern Ireland and one reason why I feel so strongly about this is that it affects the lives of individuals with whom I grew up. I sincerely hope that, by helping to try to make the right decision tonight, I might make the life of those people a little better. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will have the good grace to accept that view.

Mr. Peter Robinson: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Öpik: I give way for the last time and then I must go through my speech very quickly because I know that other hon. Members wish to speak.

Mr. Robinson: Has the hon. Gentleman been in contact with his sister party in Northern Ireland, the Alliance party? Has he spoken to Glyn Roberts, a representative of Families Against Intimidation and Terror, who takes an entirely different view from his own? Is there a split?

Mr. Öpik: I do not know whether it is relevant to the debate, but let me assure the hon. Gentleman that I am speaking on behalf of the Liberal Democrats tonight. I certainly encourage him to speak to any parties with whom he wishes to speak if he wants their views. I must now make progress and, for the sake of time, I shall take no more interventions.

I want to make two brief points—one about the LVF and the other about the UVF. First, will the Secretary of State confirm that, in her view, the less than whole-hearted declaration from the LVF that accompanied the ceasefire is the key reason why that organisation has been specified; and that if its representatives can reassure us that they are no longer willing to engage in acts of terrorism or violence, they can benefit from the order? Secondly, I would welcome clarification that the Secretary of State regards the UVF as having the potential to benefit from the order as long as its representatives continue to show a genuine commitment to the ceasefire; more to the point, if evidence comes forward that they are not adhering to it, they can, I trust, be easily specified and will not benefit from the order. In essence, it works both ways. If I understand the order correctly, it is not a one-way ticket for organisations to enjoy prisoner release and then return to acts of violence and terrorism.

I have had discussions with others outside the Chamber and I recognise that it would be difficult—in some cases almost impossible—to re-imprison anyone. Nevertheless, we must acknowledge that this is a two-way process and that the mechanism exists to withdraw the privilege afforded by the order.

It appears that the official Opposition are entering the debate in rather bad faith. I say that as they have gone beyond questioning the outcome of the assessment made by the Secretary of State and may be suggesting some other motive. I am disappointed by that. Obviously, hon. Members are entitled to differ with the Secretary of State's view, but we should all assume that the Secretary of State and the Government are acting in good faith. I always made that assumption in respect of the previous Government.

Mr. MacKay: As I am the only hon. Member who has spoken for the official Opposition, will the hon. Gentleman say at what point in my speech I questioned the Government's good faith? I am disagreeing with the Secretary of State on a matter of judgment, nothing else. It is uncharacteristically unfair of the hon. Gentleman to misinterpret me.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The right hon. Gentleman is not conducting a conversation with the hon. Member for Montgomeryshire (Mr. Öpik). He should be addressing the Chair.

Mr. Öpik: The right hon. Gentleman has made a reasonable request. I am not casting aspersions on his position, but I was unhappy with a specific phrase that he used. He began his speech by saying that this is a very

sad day for this House and for democracy. If he is merely questioning the judgment of the Secretary of State, why is it a sad day for democracy? Ultimately, the judgment may be wrong in his view, but it does not entitle him to imply a failure of democracy in the House.

I am in danger of straying far from my purpose tonight. I hope that the right hon. Gentleman is assured of my goodwill towards him as an individual. I am just concerned that he is mixing up his views on democracy with questions about the judgment of the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

Let me move on to a point on which I agree with the right hon. Gentleman. The punishment beatings must stop. If they do not, it behoves the Secretary of State to reconsider whether some organisations currently excluded from the list should be included. I wholeheartedly agree with the right hon. Member for Bracknell (Mr. MacKay) on that point.

Nevertheless, step by step, yard by yard, we must find ways of making progress. We will have to take some risks as we move forward. Is this order a risk? Yes, it is a risk; but which is the bigger risk: not proceeding in the spirit of the agreement or taking the risk of approving the order? Let us not pretend that there would be no opportunity cost if we voted down the order; of course there would be. Many would feel that we had acted in bad faith with regard to the Good Friday agreement.

Mr. Grieve: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Öpik: I do not have the time to do so. I have nearly come to the end of my comments. Perhaps the hon. Gentleman will attempt to catch your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

It is not only a question of the risk. In the real world, we are dealing with people's lives. There is a risk of harming the democratic peace process if we do not act responsibly and attribute good faith to the very people whom we need to convince to stay in the political process.

Mr. Roy Beggs (East Antrim): Will the hon. Member give way?

Mr. Öpik: I am sorry; I feel that I cannot do so.

The public will take a very dim view if political cynicism is allowed to take over from the profound need to drive this matter forward. The public are also desperately in need of seeing us act in a non-partisan, non-party political way in the interests of the people of Northern Ireland. I personally feel that, given the necessarily limited evidence and the Secretary of State's assurances, the best way forward is to take the risk of agreeing to the order.

Mr. William Cash (Stone): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Öpik: I will not give way.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. It is quite clear that the hon. Member is not giving way.

Mr. Öpik: I appeal to the official Opposition to think again about their pessimism concerning the order. I appeal to all hon. Members to think very hard before they consider voting against the order. Tonight is a sad night only if we make it so. It is only a divisive night if we choose to obscure the issue before us with other considerations. It is a night for sombre reflection, judgment and the courage to see beyond our personal party political views toward the interests of the people of Northern Ireland. Above all, it is a night to remember that, if we fail to create the circumstances for peace, we will also be guilty of obstructing the process.

To break with the past is to take a risk. The Liberal Democrats feel that that risk is worth taking. In supporting the Secretary of State's decision, we hope with all our hearts that she is right. Let us not pretend that anything besides history will prove us either right or wrong.

11.27 pm

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Inverclyde): Down the years, I have had a thoroughgoing detestation for the activities of the so-called volunteers of the Provisional IRA. I think that Opposition Members would confirm that they have heard me say that I regard as absurd and obscene the Provisional IRA's claim to be conducting a military campaign in a mature parliamentary democracy.

I know that we Scots Members of Parliament have largely been immune from such activities, even though we have young constituents in Northern Ireland. Indeed, I recently met members of the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders. Across that narrow stretch of water that divides the west of Scotland from Northern Ireland, members of families in my constituency have suffered death and injury. However, for some curious Celtic reason, the Provisional IRA took the decision not too extend their so-called military campaign to Scotland. There have been one or two incidents, and we have had lots of incidents of Protestant or loyalist extremists running guns and explosives across to Northern Ireland, as every hon. Member from Northern Ireland knows. Some of those extremists are still—rightly and properly—serving time in Scottish gaols.

I wish to tell my hon. Friend the Member for Hull, North (Mr. McNamara) that back in 1972—as someone with recent military experience—I knew that something had gone dreadfully wrong on that dreadful Sunday.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman must bear in mind the fact that there is very little time left and he is straying rather wide of the matter before us.

Dr. Godman: I beg your pardon, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

It is the easiest thing in the world for the Opposition spokesman, the right hon. Member for Bracknell (Mr. MacKay), to offer comprehensive solutions to problems that appear to bedevil the administrators. The Secretary of State has to make enormously difficult decisions.

I deeply deplore the dreadful punishment beatings that continue to take place in Northern Ireland. We must do as much as we can where those dreadful, vicious people are concerned. I will support my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State's courageous decision, but I urge her to keep under surveillance the people who are conducting those dreadful beatings.

[Dr. Godman]

May I tell the Secretary of State that there is a great deal of sympathy for Guardsmen Fisher and Wright? Many of us deal in our surgeries with people who come to plead on behalf of those two young soldiers. I wish to remind my right hon. Friend of that concern for those two young soldiers, who—as I have said in the past—were rightly and properly gaoled for what they did to that young man, McBride. I shall support the Secretary of State, but we need to keep a close watch on what is going on over there.

11.31 pm

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): I appreciate the interest of the hon. Member for Greenock and Inverclyde (Dr. Godman) over the years, but I would suggest that if the security services kept a watchful eye on those being released, the media and others would immediately start screaming, "Intimidation". That should be borne in mind.

There is a degree of hypocrisy. The Loyalist Volunteer Force—I have no time for it—has had a ceasefire, and has renewed that claim. It is one of the two bodies that have appointed people as executors who are prepared to liaise with the decommissioning committee. The interesting thing is that the Ulster Volunteer Force is the other. Yet the security forces and the police have said that the UVF has been responsible for the blast bombings.

We have had it reported in the press—without any correction from the Chief Constable—that the culprits around Carrickfergus who have been causing the depredation there were members of the Ulster Defence Association. It seems to me strange, meanwhile, that a judgment is being made about other organisations which are not to be acceptable—the LVF, the Irish National Liberation Army, the Continuity IRA and the real IRA. We accept that judgment, but the Provisional IRA battalion in Ardoyne was clearly responsible for the murder of a person in Belfast. The UDA is continuing its depredations—elements of the UVF likewise—and it has been judged to have been acting in a way that would allow the release of its prisoners.

Some people outside may be acting as calmly as they can and trying to keep a lid on the situation because they have already heard from some of those in the prisons that, if they do not get out, their throats will be slit. That is not scaremongering; it is the reality of what is going on. We should not convey the message that we are prepared to let convicted offenders out without any prior response from them.

I am speaking from my conscience and for my people. Most of my people did not vote for terrorists to be released or for their representatives to be in government in any shape or form. Those who keep talking about the Belfast agreement as the Good Friday agreement might have a point of connection: Good Friday was when the innocent was crucified and the prisoners were released.

11.35 pm

Mr. Andrew Hunter (Basingstoke): There is a shameful and sordid predictability about the schedule to the order. The same comments may be applied to the UDA and the UVF, although I am less certain of the evidence in their case, but the omission of the IRA from the schedule, although predictable, further undermines confidence in the Government's handling of the process and in the Secretary of State's objectivity and judgment.

The core of the argument is straightforward: there is no compelling, unambiguous or unequivocal evidence that Provisional IRA falls outside the two subsections of clause 3(8) or that it complies with any of the requirements of the four subsections of clause 3(9). PIRA should be included in the schedule.

On Second Reading, the Secretary of State and the Minister—the hon. Member for East Kilbride (Mr. Ingram)—made much of the four clarifications in the Prime Minister's speech at Balmoral on 14 May. They were ultra-selective in their quotations. The Prime Minister's speech was much more precise than the requirements in the Bill or in the order. He talked about an end to bombings, killings and beatings. There has been no end to those beatings; everyone knows which organisations are involved, and they should be included in the schedule.

Some of us needed no further evidence, but the order has provided us with it. What started as a peace process has turned into a process of appeasement, and we should all be ashamed of it. It is too late now—the Act is the Act—but would that we could have nothing to do with the Act or the order.

11.38 pm

Mr. Andrew Robathan (Blaby): Guardsmen Fisher and Wright still languish in gaol, having been sent by the Government to protect this country. Like every policeman and service man on the streets of Northern Ireland, they went out to do their duty. They made a grievous error, but for them to be still languishing in gaol when we are talking about releasing convicted murderers who went out to do murder is a disgrace. If the Secretary of State cannot reply now, will she write to me to say when she will make the decision on whether they are to be released?

About a year ago, I said to the Secretary of State at a meeting of the British-Irish parliamentary body that all the concessions were coming from one side. She said that I had got it entirely wrong, that it was a peace process, and concessions had to be made by all sides. Once again, all the concessions have been made by the Government and none by the Provisional IRA, which has killed someone within the past fortnight and is carrying out punishment beatings. No one doubts the good faith of the Secretary of State, but the path to hell is paved with good intentions. She is making a fudge to keep Sinn Fein on board by failing to put the Provisional IRA—loyalist parties as well, but I home in on the IRA—on the list of specified organisations. If she wants peace to succeed, she must make a stand and say that the Provisional IRA and its political side, Sinn Fein, cannot take part in the peace process until they subscribe to all the parts of the peace process to which they have signed up.

11.40 pm

Mr. Jeffrey Donaldson (Lagan Valley): I want to home in on the criteria that the Secretary of State has used to reach her decision. The Belfast agreement states that there must be a complete and unequivocal ceasefire

for organisations to benefit from it. What does that mean? When the Prime Minister came to Balmoral during the referendum campaign he spelled it out clearly when he said that a complete and unequivocal ceasefire is

"an end to bombings, killings and beatings, claimed or unclaimed; an end to targeting and procurement of weapons; progressive abandonment and dismantling of paramilitary structures actively directing and promoting violence".

None of the terrorist organisations of which I am aware in Northern Ireland meets those criteria. There are murders, beatings and bombings. If they are not carried out by those organisations, one suspects that they are done with the assistance of their members. There has been no abandonment and dismantling of paramilitary structures by the Ulster Volunteer Force, the Ulster Defence Association or the Provisional IRA. Not one weapon has been decommissioned by any of the terrorist organisations. The Provisional IRA has so far failed even to appoint someone to liaise with the decommissioning commission. Under the terms of the legislation, how can the Secretary of State argue that the Provisional IRA is co-operating with the commission? It is not co-operating or decommissioning, and violence is continuing.

The Prime Minister came to Northern Ireland and wrote some pledges for the people of Northern Ireland. He gave them his word. He wrote:

"Prisoners kept in unless violence is given up for good."

Are not the murder of Andrew Kearney and the beating of Vincent McKenna violence? Violence has not been given up for good. If the prisoners are to be released in circumstances where violence continues, the Prime Minister has broken his pledge to the people of Northern Ireland.

I appeal to the Secretary of State. Last weekend, the Truesdale family, whose brother Norman was murdered by the Provisional IRA, invited the Prime Minister to watch the video of his murder so that the Prime Minister could get some of the hurt that they feel because his murderer is going to be released on to the streets. I invite the Secretary of State to watch that video. Perhaps the Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office, the Member for East Kilbride (Mr. Ingram) has watched it and understands. I spoke to the family yesterday. They live in fear because the man who murdered their brother lives just up the street. When he is released, he will be in the heart of their community. They live in fear because of what is being proposed. The Minister may think that that is unfair, but he must understand how people feel. The feelings and fears are real. People in Northern Ireland do not understand why, when violence and murder continue, murderers will be released on to the streets. I ask the Government to think again.

11.43 pm

Mr. William Cash (Stone): I have never witnessed so much nervous twitching as I did while the Secretary of State listened to the Opposition's arguments. This is the biggest sell-out that I have seen in my time in Parliament. The release of the prisoners and the arrangements to allow members of the Northern Ireland Executive to take part in running Northern Ireland when they unquestionably have guns, either on or under the table, is one of the most abhorrent—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

It being one and a half hours after the commencement of proceedings on the motion, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *put the Question, pursuant to Standing Order No. 16.*

Question put:—

The House divided: Ayes 219, Noes 86.

Division No. 353] **[11.44 pm**

AYES

Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Alexander, Douglas
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, Rt Hon Mrs Margaret
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Borrow, David
Bradley, Keith *(Withington)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Burgon, Colin
Cabom, Richard
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Canavan, Dennis
Cann, Jamie
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Chisholm, Malcolm
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Rt Hon Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clarke, Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Iain
Colman, Tony
Connarty, Michael
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cotter, Brian
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Crausby, David
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Dalyell, Tam
Darvill, Keith
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Dobbin, Jim
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Etherington, Bill
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Michael J *(Worcester)*
Foulkes, George
Fyfe, Maria
Gapes, Mike
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Golding, Mrs Llin
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hanson, David
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Healey, John
Heath, David *(Somerton & Frome)*
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Hepburn, Stephen
Hesford, Stephen
Hill, Keith
Hoey, Kate
Hood, Jimmy
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Ms Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Hutton, John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Ms Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Ms Jenny *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Keetch, Paul
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
Kingham, Ms Tess

Kirkwood, Archy
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Linton, Martin
Livsey, Richard
Love, Andrew
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Steve
McCartney, Ian *(Makerfield)*
McDonagh, Siobhain
Macdonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McNamara, Kevin
McNulty, Tony
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martlew, Eric
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheff'ld Heeley)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Ms Julie *(Cardiff N)*
Morgan, Rhodri *(Cardiff W)*
Morley, Elliot
Mowlam, Rt Hon Marjorie
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul *(Torfaen)*
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
Olner, Bill
Öpik, Lembit
Pendry, Tom
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Plaskitt, James
Pope, Greg
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Reed, Andrew *(Loughborough)*
Reid, Dr John *(Hamilton N)*
Rogers, Allan
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Ms Joan
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Salmond, Alex
Salter, Martin
Savidge, Malcolm
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Short, Rt Hon Clare
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Soley, Clive
Squire, Ms Rachel
Steinberg, Gerry
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Straw, Rt Hon Jack
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Stunell, Andrew
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Rt Hon Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Tipping, Paddy
Touhig, Don
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Vis, Dr Rudi
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Webb, Steve
White, Brian
Wills, Michael
Winnick, David
Wise, Audrey
Wood, Mike
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Jane Kennedy and
Mr. Robert Ainsworth.

NOES

Amess, David
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Beggs, Roy
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Rt Hon Mrs Virginia
Brady, Graham
Brazier, Julian
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Burns, Simon
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Clappison, James
Donaldson, Jeffrey
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Duncan Smith, Iain
Evans, Nigel
Fabricant, Michael
Flight, Howard
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Fraser, Christopher
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Gray, James
Grieve, Dominic
Hammond, Philip
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson Smith, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Key, Robert
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, Oliver
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Loughton, Tim
McIntosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, Andrew
McLoughlin, Patrick
Maples, John
Mates, Michael
Maude, Rt Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
Moss, Malcolm
Ottaway, Richard
Paice, James
Paisley, Rev Ian
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Prior, David
Randall, John
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Ross, William *(E Lond'y)*
Sayeed, Jonathan
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spring, Richard
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Swayne, Desmond
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Thompson, William
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Tyrie, Andrew
Wardle, Charles
Wells, Bowen
Whitney, Sir Raymond
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Woodward, Shaun
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Nigel Waterson and
Mr. Stephen Day.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Resolved,

That the draft Northern Ireland (Sentences) Act 1998 (Specified Organisations) Order 1998, which was laid before this House on 28th July, be approved.

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Legal Services

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 118(6) (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation),

That the draft Conditional Fee Agreements Order 1998, which was laid before this House on 16th July, be approved.—*[Mr. Allen.]*

Question agreed to.

SECTION 5 OF THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITIES (AMENDMENT) ACT 1993

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Order [21 July].

That this House approves the Government's assessment as set out in the Economic and Fiscal Strategy Report 1998 and Comprehensive Spending Review for the purposes of section 5 of the European Communities (Amendment) Act 1993.—*[Mr. Allen.]*

Question agreed to.

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Education (Scotland)

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order 118(6) (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation),

That the draft Education (Student Loans) (Scotland) Regulations 1998, which were laid before this House on 17th July, be approved.—*[Mr. Allen.]*

Question agreed to.

EDUCATION

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order 118(6) (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation,

That the draft Education (Student Support) Regulations 1998, which were laid before this House on 17th July, be approved.—*[Mr. Allen.]*

Question agreed to.

REGISTERS OF INTERESTS

Ordered,

That the Resolution of 17th December 1985 be amended in line 31, by leaving out the words 'copies of the Registers be placed in the Library for the use of Members' and inserting the words 'the Registers be made available for public inspection under arrangements to be approved by the Committee on Standards and Privileges'.—*[Mr. Allen.]*

SELECT COMMITTEE ON MODERNISATION OF THE HOUSE OF COMMONS

Ordered,

That Mrs. Ann Taylor be discharged from the Select Committee on Modernisation of the House of Commons and Mrs. Margaret Beckett be added to the Committee.—*[Mr. Allen.]*

Compressed Natural Gas Vehicles

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Graham Allen.]*

11.55 pm

Mr. Peter L. Pike (Burnley) *rose—[Interruption.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): Will Members who are leaving please do so quickly and quietly?

Mr. Pike: I want to draw attention to an important issue—the use of compressed natural gas in vehicles on our roads. It is an important environmental issue. It also has important implications in my constituency, where, in a few months, 70 people are likely to be made redundant as a result of lack of orders for the gas bottles they make for natural gas vehicles.

Lucas Aerospace converted from defence production to the manufacture of a consumer product, and has done so extremely well. I have taken a close interest in the product since the idea was first considered, when the then site manager of the factory, Mr. Gardiner, invited me to the site to discuss it with the unions and management. The unions and management co-operated extremely successfully in finding a product that could use the existing skills of the work force and could transfer from defence to consumer use.

The product started in production last year. On 24 April this year, I toured the factory, with the bottles, with their finished covering, in full production. I was very impressed by what I saw.

On 17 February, the management sent me a detailed letter, making the case for compressed natural gas. That was from Jon Matthews, who is general manager now. At the time, I sent that letter to Treasury and Trade and Industry Ministers, and subsequently received replies.

The point that Lucas Aerospace made in that letter, as a member of the Natural Gas Vehicle Association, was that it wanted to promote the use of natural gas as a clean, safe and efficient fuel. Its view was:

"Of all the alternative fuel options, world-wide natural gas has become the preferred"

option,

"safe in use and storage,"

with

"world-wide availability".

I accept that there is also an argument for liquid petroleum gas. One of the problems is that the two are competing with each other. That may be right, but it means that those in the retail trade find it difficult to know which product to supply.

I am glad to see the Minister for Science, Energy and Industry in his place, because he has corresponded with me and met me to discuss the industry, and has been extremely positive and helpful. The work force recognise that he has tried to be positive in the way in which he has tried to help in tackling the problem. On 17 May, he wrote to me:

"I am convinced that there is an environmental case for natural gas vehicles to take a share of the UK car population."

[Mr. Pike]

We all agree on the objective. The problem is how we achieve it.

On 22 May, I received a fax from Lucas announcing 70 redundancies. Following that, the union representatives came to London and, together with me, Mr. Maciver, the divisional managing director of Lucas Aerospace, Terry Burns, the works convenor, and others, met the Minister for Science, Energy and Industry on 9 June. The unions had prepared an excellent brief, and presented a petition with a large number of signatures that had been gathered in the town centre in support of the work.

The brief stated:

"CNG vehicles are better for the environment. Natural gas is virtually pollution-free. Compared to gasoline powered vehicles, natural gas vehicles emit almost no carbon monoxide, much lower levels of nitrogen oxides, and less than half the amount of reactive hydrocarbons."

The brief gave a number of reasons why we should change to CNG and pointed out what Lucas had done in this field. An extract from the *Leifeld News*, under the headline "Peace dividend a real bonus", stated:

"The Lucas Aerospace facility at Burnley has for 15 years been one of the West's leading suppliers of steel rocket motor cases for missiles. In 1990 it was recognised that future reductions in defence spending would result from the ending of the Cold War.

A resourceful management therefore initiated a search for non-defence related products which could be made drawing on in-house expertise in metal forming and utilising existing plant with a minimum of additional investment. The answer—high pressure seamless steel gas cylinders."

That has been done extremely well, and represents a remarkable feat of co-operation between management and the work force.

Unfortunately, another letter from Lucas on 15 June reported:

"There is no visibility of any future orders for this product and therefore the action in respect of our employees will unfortunately have to continue.

However, as far as the production equipment is concerned, I can confirm that no action will be taken to dispose of it within the next 3 months."

Early-day motion 1443 has been tabled on the subject, and, as of last Thursday, 124 hon. Members from all parties in the House had signed it.

Enterprise plc, Burnley borough council, and Members of the European Parliament Mark Hendrick and Michael Hindley have all tried to find a way forward. We all know that, in a few years, there will be a market for the product, even though the market is not sufficient to justify production at present. The danger is that, if Lucas goes out of production, when the market develops the gas bottles will not be made at Lucas in Burnley or anywhere else in the United Kingdom—we will end up importing them. That is why it is important to find a solution.

In the local government magazine *talkback*, the Minister for Transport in London, my hon. Friend the Member for Hampstead and Highgate (Ms Jackson), is pictured launching an LPG vehicle. The accompanying article states:

"Due to drastic reduction in emissions, both LPG and CNG powered engines are ideal for use in urban environments—one of the strong reasons why many municipal authorities have already added Ford alternative fuel vehicles to their fleets.

LPG is currently available from more than 80 sites nationally, and CNG from about 12; any lack of local refuelling facilities need not be a problem, however, because a mobile LPG refuelling unit or overnight CNG refuelling unit can be installed at a fleet depot."

Matters are not quite as simple as the article would lead one to suppose.

I have had letters from various Ministers, including the Financial Secretary and the Minister for Roads. There has also been correspondence with Moscow, where we tried to find a market for the product. Unfortunately, the market in Russia is falling. In addition, the Russians do not use such a high-quality gas bottle. As a result, they want a much cheaper product.

On 8 July, Mr. Maciver, from Lucas wrote to tell me that there was an additional six weeks' work, which will take work to mid-September, when the redundancies will now take place.

I received today a letter from Ford. I had written to the company in the USA. The letter that I received was written by Peter Pestillo, the executive vice-president. He wrote:

"We believe that in the long-run there will be a natural gas market, but as you know, it remains an emerging market. Underscoring our belief in the long-term strength of the CNG market is Ford's substantial investment in CNG vehicles."

The letter continues:

"Towards that end we welcome government assistance in developing much needed infrastructure."

The key issue is securing that infrastructure.

My hon. Friend the Minister for Science, Energy and Industry sent me a detailed letter on 22 July, in which he set out what the Government are trying to do and pointed to where he sees the problems. My hon. Friend has to admit at the end of the day that the Government are not able to come forward with the type of package that, in the short term, would secure the production of these gas bottles at Lucas at Burnley.

British Gas, or whatever it is called these days—I never remember what its new name is—has written to me as follows:

"Natural gas has significant environmental advantages over petrol and diesel and could, given the right incentives, play a major role in cutting vehicle emissions: it is virtually free of lead, sulphur and aromatic hydrocarbons. It produces less Carbon Monoxide, Nitrogen Oxides, Benzene, Carbon Dioxide and particulates than petrol and diesel. Natural gas buses have a quieter car-like ride and therefore have a significant role to play in attracting people to make better use of public transport, meeting the objectives of the Transport White Paper. Urban depot-based transport operators often have restricted operating hours because of the noise impact of diesel-engine HGVs on the neighbourhood. HGVs powered by natural gas are significantly quieter, allowing these constraints to be lifted. This could lead to less congestion at peak hours."

British Gas adds:

"the Government could reduce the duty on natural gas . . . towards the EU minimum."

It believes that that would be a help.

Metrocab has written to me as follows:

"The key issues seem to be:

1. The additional initial cost of the gas vehicle. Maybe £1500–£2000

2. The operating costs even with the differential in pricing between diesel and gas, are marginally higher.

3. The limited number of refuelling points."

That is another problem. The fourth one is described as

"the lower range between refuelling for a given size of tank."

Those are the situations that Metrocab sees as problems.

The Energy Saving Trust has a powershift programme that

"aims to encourage demand for these fuels from businesses, local authorities and, ultimately, the general public".

That is something that may well need to be followed up and encouraged, because it could lead to a solution.

The letter from Energy Saving Trust adds that that aim is

"accompanied by commitments from fuel companies and vehicle manufacturers. It seeks to make clean fuel vehicles more affordable through stimulating demand. This is being done by bringing companies and local authorities together to wield enough collective purchasing power to ensure substantial capital cost reductions, and offering up to 75% of the difference in the cost of clean fuel vehicles above the price of petrol/diesel vehicles."

We all know of the situation which existed when we first had unleaded fuel. It was only when the Government introduced a sufficiently wide price differential that garages began to supply the fuel. It was only when we knew that we could go to any garage and obtain unleaded fuel that we were reasonably confident of buying a vehicle that operated on it.

London Taxis International, makers of the famous black cab, says that it is

"dedicated to producing a fully accessible 'low emission' taxi.

As part of a study towards this end we have produced a vehicle which is in service, running very successfully on either petrol or CNG and we have also built a dedicated CNG vehicle . . .

Whilst CNG creates lower local emissions, the difficulties for Taxi operators are that the vehicles do not follow a defined route nor necessarily return to a base at night, hence the need for a comprehensive refuelling infrastructure or a large driving range for the vehicles, both of which seem to be beyond us at the moment."

Mobil CNG has also written to me. It

"welcomes the Government's 'New Deal for Transport' . . . in particular the call for environmentally cleaner fuels and quieter vehicles.

Mobil CNG offers the UK the most viable fuel option that is significantly cleaner and quieter than diesel vehicles. This means that it is particularly suitable for the commercial sector and bus fleets, being ideally suited to Mr. Prescott's bus for the 21st Century . . . We believe that CNG is the fuel for the future and that the Government should combine with industry to develop and manufacture environmentally friendly vehicles for the new millennium."

Today, I received a fax from the unions. They think that Lucas has not done all it could. They recognise that investment in the aerospace industry takes a long time to pay back, but they also believe that a more positive approach could be achieved if Lucas Aerospace took such a view about CNG bottles. They think that the Government are committed to CNG, but are perhaps not doing quite as much as they could to get over this short-term difficulty.

I recognise the problem, but we are considering something that will have a market in the next century. It would be a tragedy if we failed to save this production unit and did not encourage CNG vehicles to ensure that, when we have more of them on the road, their gas bottles are not imported, but made in this country.

12.11 am

Mr. Gordon Prentice (Pendle): I shall spend no more than a couple of minutes emphasising the points made by my hon. Friend the Member for Burnley (Mr. Pike).

Many of my constituents work at the Burnley plant, and it is simply inexplicable that the management over in the United States has decided to pull out of the market when it is about to take off. In the United Kingdom, 9,100 vehicles run on gas, or a mixture of petrol and gas, and the management at Lucas in Burnley forecasts that the market could be as high as 200,000 vehicles in six years.

There is a colossal market out there, but how can we kick-start it? The Government have reduced fuel duty to achieve a differential between clean fuels and petrol, which is good. They have introduced the £500 reduction in vehicle excise duty for vehicles converted to run on clean fuels, which is good. They have also set up the cleaner vehicles task force, which is up and running and doing a good job. That is splendid, but what should they do beyond that?

First, we need to set the road fuel duty for natural gas at the European Union minimum, like France, and like Germany. Secondly, we must provide grants to public service vehicle operators to convert to gas. There should be a 100 per cent. allowance for fleet operators who do the business and convert dirty, polluting vehicles to run on clean natural gas.

Thirdly, only 50 or 55 local authorities out of more than 300 in the United Kingdom run vehicles on compressed natural gas. I should like my colleagues in the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions to urge local authorities nationwide to do the business, and convert their rubbish vehicles and other depot-based vehicles to run on this clean, environmentally friendly fuel.

12.13 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (Ms Glenda Jackson): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Burnley (Mr. Pike) on securing this debate on an issue that he has raised with ministerial colleagues from my Department, from the Department of Trade and Industry, and from the Treasury. The importance that the Government attach to the issue he has raised is reflected in the presence on the Front Bench of the Minister for Science, Energy and Industry.

My hon. Friend the Member for Burnley is not alone in highlighting this issue, which is clearly of particular and grave concern to his constituency and to his constituents. My hon. Friends the Members for Pendle (Mr. Prentice) and for Chorley (Mr. Hoyle) have also raised this issue in recent weeks.

Air pollution has become a matter of increasing public concern and political importance in recent years. The Government are committed to improving the quality of the air we breathe, and we have set ourselves demanding objectives on air pollution. Road transport is responsible for a significant proportion of air pollution—around 50 per cent. of nitrogen oxides come from that source. Any attempt to improve air quality needs to address the problems that road transport causes.

Environmental considerations are at the heart of the integrated transport White Paper, which was published last week. My hon. Friend the Member for Burnley made

[Ms Glenda Jackson]

the point that we are discussing how we can create a more environmentally friendly mode, not only through vehicles but through fuel. Alternative fuels, such as compressed natural gas, have an important role to play in helping us to meet those objectives. Provided that the latest conversions are used, CNG can offer substantial reductions in emissions of pollutants such as carbon monoxide, sulphur dioxide, nitrogen oxides and particulate matter, compared with vehicles running on diesel.

CNG vehicles also emit less carbon dioxide, which is the main gas produced by road transport that is implicated in climate change. They also emit less visible smoke and odour than diesels, which is an important factor in urban areas. Vehicles running on CNG are also significantly quieter than their diesel counterparts. Compared with petrol engines, CNG can offer some emissions benefits for pollutants such as benzene.

We are committed to a policy of encouraging the use of fuels, such as CNG, through a package of measures, including fiscal incentives. In his last Budget, the Chancellor announced that the extra cost of enabling company cars to run on road fuel gases will be disregarded in calculating the income tax charge on company cars. He also froze the duty on road fuel gases for the second year in a row, and, to provide some certainty to the market, we are committed to retaining the differential in duty rates between gas fuels and diesel that existed at the time of the Budget last year.

There is now a significant difference in the duty on CNG and liquefied petroleum gas and the duty on conventional fuels. In fact, the duty on CNG is about one third that on diesel. That provides a significant fiscal incentive to switch from diesel to gas.

Other cost savings are associated with road fuel gases: for instance, lower maintenance costs. The Government car service showed that there is a strong economic case for fleet operators to use gas fuels. It announced last year that the economic grounds for using road fuel gases, plus the environmental benefits, were strong enough to persuade it to convert its entire car fleet to run on CNG or LPG over the next five to six years.

Mr. Pike: That is the key point. The quickest way of encouraging the market for CNG, and ultimately the gas bottles that are of consequence to Lucas, is to get fleets to convert. The measures to which my hon. Friend is referring are extremely important.

Ms Jackson: I strongly agree with my hon. Friend.

The price premium on larger gas-powered vehicles, such as buses and lorries, is more significant than for cars. That is partly because not enough vehicles are currently purchased to introduce significant economies of scale.

In order to develop the market for alternative fuels further and to encourage people to buy gas-powered vehicles that are more expensive than their conventionally fuelled counterparts, my Department is providing £6 million of funding for the powershift programme run by the Energy Saving Trust.

The aim of the three-year programme is to create a sustainable market for alternatively powered vehicles. It does that by setting up demonstration projects, by assisting different companies and local authorities interested in purchasing alternatively fuelled vehicles to form partnerships, thus increasing economies of scale, and by providing grants for up to 50 per cent. of the additional cost of purchasing an alternatively fuelled vehicle.

Another measure to offset some of the additional costs associated with gas-powered vehicles is the vehicle excise duty incentive which will be available from 1 January next year. Buses and lorries meeting stringent emission standards will be entitled to a reduction in VED of up to £500. Vehicles running on gas should qualify for that incentive. Bus operators operating routes eligible for fuel duty rebate who run their vehicles on gas are already entitled to reclaim all the duty that they pay on the fuel from the Government.

The gas fuel industry should be further stimulated by measures designed specifically to reduce emissions from vehicles in urban areas. The alternative traffic in towns project, launched by my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister in April, is designed to produce concerted action by cities across Europe to give preferential access in certain areas to vehicles with zero or low emissions.

Under the process of local air quality management, local authorities must put in place action plans to deal with poor air quality. It is likely that many of the actions needed to improve air quality in urban areas, where air quality tends to be poorest, will focus on transport, and some local authorities may look to introduce low emission zones, where only vehicles producing very low emissions will be allowed to enter certain areas of towns or cities.

We have also been active in raising the profile of alternative fuels as much as possible. Ministers have launched a variety of gas-powered vehicles, including those purchased under the powershift programme. For instance, last year I launched the conversion of Adur district council's refuse collection fleet to CNG. I have not visited every local authority, but I assure my hon. Friend the Member for Pendle that I and my Department are closely engaged in that activity. My Department also played a major role in organising a high-profile exhibition of alternatively powered vehicles in Chester in April this year. More than 20 alternatively fuelled vehicles were on display, showing just how far the market has already come.

Therefore, substantial progress has been made in encouraging the introduction of alternative fuels. The Natural Gas Vehicle Association estimates that 50 local authorities and a number of private sector fleet operators have one or more vehicles that run on natural gas.

However, we are aware that there remain a number of barriers to the further uptake of these vehicles. Some of these are inherent properties of the fuel—for instance, the tank required to store CNG is large and heavy enough to reduce bus capacity by one passenger, or a lorry's payload by around a tonne. However, there are also other problems, and the cleaner vehicles task force has set up a working group to consider the role for alternative fuels and what barriers stand in the way of their fulfilling that role. One of the most obvious barriers is the lack of refuelling infrastructure for both CNG and, to a slightly lesser extent, LPG. That is an area which we must look to the industry to resolve.

As I have mentioned, CNG can offer significant environmental advantages, particularly over diesel and in terms of emissions on nitrogen oxides and particulate matter.

We have already taken a number of actions to promote the use of alternative fuels—including freezing the duty on road fuel gases, raising the profile of gas power through ministerial launches and the powershift programme, as well as exhibitions and contribution towards material such as the Natural Gas Vehicle Association's annual report. Officials in my and other Departments have had a number of discussions about the merits of conversion to alternative fuels, including in niche markets, such as buses and taxis.

Officials have discussed with the Public Carriage Office the possibility of persuading more taxi drivers to consider the use of gas fuels, and have also discussed the issue with bus operators. The House will be aware that my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister has a gas-powered car, as do my hon. Friend the Minister for London and Construction, and my noble Friend the Minister for Roads.

Through this package of measures, plus initiatives taken by local authorities, business and others, the number of gas-powered vehicles on the road has increased substantially. The Natural Gas Vehicle Association estimates that the number of natural gas vehicles on the road has doubled since 1995, while the LP Gas Association believes that around 200 new LPG vehicles are appearing on the road every month. Many of the vehicles running on both fuels are operated as part of fleets by both the private sector and local authorities.

Despite those measures, I know that my hon. Friend the Member for Burnley is disappointed that the Lucas Aerospace factory in Burnley has recently announced that it will be closing the unit of the factory that had been converted to produce gas bottles for gas-powered vehicles because of a decline in the demand for this equipment.

I understand—my hon. Friend referred on more than one occasion to his activities—that my hon. Friend the Minister for Science, Energy and Industry has been pursuing a number of avenues to see if there is any scope for providing regional assistance to the factory. My hon. Friend the Minister wrote to my hon. Friend the Member for Burnley on 22 July, saying that he and officials

"have explored all avenues of selective and regional assistance for the plant, but none has proven suitable".

I appreciate that that was not the news that the my hon. Friend wished to hear. However, the Government are taking many steps to encourage the wider use of gas fuels, and I hope that industry will respond to that.

Our primary aim in this area is to improve air quality, and to target climate change. We have received a number of representations—they were made in the Chamber tonight—saying that the duty on road fuel gases should be reduced to the European Union minimum. However, we have a duty to pursue our policies on air quality and climate change in as cost-effective a manner as possible. Government policy is aimed at encouraging the use of low emission vehicles, rather than being prescriptive about the type of technology used.

The incentives to persuade people to switch to road fuel gases—

The motion having been made after Ten o'clock, and the debate having continued for half an hour, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *adjourned the House without Question put, pursuant to the Standing Order.*

Adjourned at twenty-five minutes past Twelve midnight.

House of Commons

Thursday 30 July 1998

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

MESSAGE FROM THE QUEEN

DOUBLE TAXATION RELIEF

The VICE-CHAMBERLAIN OF THE HOUSEHOLD reported Her Majesty's Answer to the Address, as follows:

I have received your Addresses praying that the Double Taxation Relief (Taxes on Income) (Oman) Order 1998, the Double Taxation Relief (Air Transport) (Hong Kong) Order 1998 and the Double Taxation Relief (Taxes on Income) (Kazakhstan) Order 1998 be made in the form of the drafts laid before your House.

I will comply with your request.

PRIVATE BUSINESS

BODMIN MOOR COMMONS BILL *[Lords]*

Order for consideration read.

To be considered on Thursday 22 October.

ALLIANCE & LEICESTER PLC (GROUP REORGANISATION) BILL *[Lords] (By Order)*

Order for Second Reading read.

To be read a Second time on Thursday 22 October.

Oral Answers to Questions

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

The Minister was asked—

Fur Farming

1. **Mr. Robin Corbett** (Birmingham, Erdington): What has been the response to the public consultation on the future of fur farming. [51685]

The Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr. Elliot Morley): The response to the public consultation exercise carried out last year on the future of fur farming showed that there was overwhelming support for the Government's position to ban fur farming. I want to announce that it is the Government's firm intention to end fur farming in this country. Primary legislation will be required, and we will be seeking the most appropriate route by which to achieve that.

Mr. Corbett: I congratulate my hon. Friend, and through him the Government, on making for the first time a pledge that a Bill is to be introduced to ban fur farming. Does he agree that fur looks better on the backs of animals that are born with it than on the backs of bimbos?

Mr. Morley: The public certainly find fur farming unacceptable. We know from the many representations that we have received from welfare and other organisations and consumer groups, as well as from our own specialist advisory bodies, such as the Farm Animal Welfare Council, that there has been long-standing concern about the practice of fur farming. I want to make absolutely clear our commitment to bringing it to an end through legislation.

Mr. Norman Baker (Lewes): I congratulate the Minister on his announcement; I know that he takes the matter very seriously. I am sure that many hon. Members were pleased to hear it. Can he give an undertaking that legislation will be in the Queen's Speech? Will he give a definite undertaking that fur farming will have been stopped by the end of this Parliament?

Mr. Morley: The procedure will be announced in due course, although there are several ways in which such legislation can be brought forward. It is right and proper that the details of legislation, including such aspects as the phase-out period, will be announced for consultation among interested parties.

Mr. Vernon Coaker (Gedling): Does my hon. Friend agree that that news will be especially welcomed by the very many young people who write to us, and who find it inconceivable that a modern Government cannot end such an immoral and barbaric practice as soon as possible?

Mr. Morley: I agree with my hon. Friend. From the many representations that we have received, it is clear that many young people find it very strange that, in our society and in this day and age, animals are kept in such conditions for no other reason than to produce fur.

Common Fisheries Policy

2. **Mr. Andrew George** (St. Ives): What representations he has received on proposals for the reform of the common fisheries policy. [51686]

The Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr. Nick Brown): The Ministry receives many suggestions—I cannot truthfully say that I have seen them all yet—for improving the common fisheries policy, including some from the hon. Gentleman, who has been assiduous in his efforts on behalf of fishermen from St. Ives, Newlyn and Hayle.

Mr. George: May I first warmly welcome the Minister to his new post? Now that he has taken on the brief, is he aware how anxious fishermen in the United Kingdom are for reform of the common fisheries policy, especially in terms of the need to ensure equality in monitoring and

enforcement throughout the European Union? Is he prepared to make a statement this afternoon about the previous proposals to ensure that licensing arrangements for all fishing vessels, including quota hoppers—the new arrangements to establish a clear economic link—are introduced soon?

Mr. Brown: I am aware of the concerns in the fishing community about enforcement. My predecessor in this job, my right hon. Friend the Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham), made it the centrepiece of the British presidency and took tough action. I have inherited the fruits of that, and will continue to do as he did.

On quota hopping, I understand the need to ensure that all British-registered fishing vessels that use United Kingdom quotas also bring benefits to our fishing communities. Last year, the Prime Minister secured a clear statement from the President of the Commission about the steps that we could take, and my predecessor put to the Commission proposals based on careful discussions with all concerned. I am pleased to say that we have now secured the agreement of the Commission to our proposals.

I shall make a detailed announcement later today, but I am certain that the House will want to know now that our measures will require all United Kingdom vessels to demonstrate, by one method or another, that they have real economic links. Choices will be available, including landing, crewing and other economically significant activities. I believe that those measures will make a real difference to the benefits that we receive from United Kingdom quotas—and will achieve that with the minimum burden for vessels that already have economic links.

Mr. Austin Mitchell (Great Grimsby): I congratulate my right hon. Friend on his accession to the most important job in British government today. May I also express the hope that he adopts the same firm but conciliatory policy towards the fish and the fishing industry as he adopted towards the parliamentary Labour party? I also hope that he will accord a big role to the proposals made by the National Federation of Fishermen's Organisations and the Scottish Fishermen's Federation about coastal state management, so that power is transferred down from Brussels to coastal states to manage their own waters and control their own conservation, with better effect than a centralised policy.

Mr. Brown: Those proposals are under consideration by the Ministry now, and I hope to meet in the relatively near future representatives of those most interested. I thank my hon. Friend for his welcome for me to my new responsibilities; as he will know, I had quite a bit to do with him in connection with my previous responsibilities.

Mrs. Margaret Ewing (Moray): In welcoming the right hon. Gentleman to his new position in the Government, may I pursue some of the points raised by the hon. Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell)? Much serious consideration has been given to the issue of coastal management, and I would like to know when the Government will decide how they will argue that case in the renegotiation of the fisheries policy.

Mr. Brown: Those are important matters, and there will be several consultation meetings. As the hon. Lady knows, probably in more detail than I do at the moment, some of the issues will be devolved and will eventually fall under the responsibilities of the Scottish Parliament. I intend to discuss the Scottish aspects of fisheries matters closely with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland, and I hope to be able to give the hon. Lady a fuller reply soon.

Mr. Frank Doran (Aberdeen, Central): May I, too, welcome my right hon. Friend to his new job? For the record, I should say that we have had very little contact over the past year. He is taking over an extremely important brief, and I look forward to welcoming him to Aberdeen to meet the fishermen and fish processors. He has made an important announcement this afternoon; we look forward to hearing the details later. Will he say more about his intentions? In particular, will the scheme have the flexibility to allow fishermen choices about how they operate?

Mr. Brown: I thank my hon. Friend for welcoming me to my new duties. I look forward to visiting Scotland to discuss these matters with his constituents and their representatives. He is right to say that I did not have much to do with him in my previous capacity; I look forward to having much more to do with him in my new one.

My hon. Friend rightly asks whether there will be a range of choices for compliance. The answer is yes. There are proposals, for example, that 50 per cent. of the catch of quota species should be landed in the United Kingdom; that 50 per cent. of the crew must be resident in United Kingdom coastal areas; and that a certain level of operating expenditure must be incurred in United Kingdom coastal areas. Other measures will be spelled out in more detail at 4 pm.

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip-Northwood): In welcoming the right hon. Gentleman to his post, may I commiserate with him on having to exchange one bed of nails for another? He will soon find that the common fisheries policy has been an unmitigated disaster for our country, ecologically and economically—communities round our coasts have been economically devastated by it. Will he, in the recess, take the ferry from Newcastle to Norway to sound out fisheries communities? If he does, he will find that Norway's national fisheries management has been an unbounded success—it provides an example that we should follow.

Mr. Brown: I intend to take a close interest in all these matters, not only because my responsibilities require it, but because I want to do so anyway. I think that the hon. Gentleman's approach is wrong. We must negotiate with the other interested parties rather than assert that they are all wrong and that somehow, we have a solution for the United Kingdom that we can adopt without reference to our friends and neighbours. The hon. Gentleman says that I have moved from one bed of nails to another, but my previous job was no bed of nails.

Mrs. Joan Humble (Blackpool, North and Fleetwood): I congratulate my right hon. Friend on his new position and thank him for his announcement about quota hoppers. He may be aware that the Fleetwood Fish Producers Organisation recently invited 38 Anglo-Spanish vessels to join it, and that the grant that Wyre district council is

offering to the local fishing industry is tied in with various conditions on local economic links. Will he advise local fish producers associations, port managers and local authorities on the details of his proposals on quota hoppers, which I am sure will be greeted with much interest in my local community?

Mr. Brown: I am sure that they will and, yes, everyone with an interest will be advised on exactly what the Government propose. As I said to the hon. Member for St. Ives (Mr. George), the Government take enforcement seriously; it is right that everyone should know precisely what will be enforced, as, I assure the House, enforced it will be.

Mr. James Wallace (Orkney and Shetland): I offer my congratulations to the right hon. Gentleman; if he can make such an announcement after two days in office, we wait with bated breath to see what he can do in the first two months. I echo what has been said about coastal state management. Will he assure us that regional management of fisheries will be developed and that fishermen will be involved in setting total allowable catches, as they have expertise as well as a stake in the outcome? Concepts such as the north of Scotland or Shetland box should also be developed in any renegotiation of the common fisheries policy.

Mr. Brown: I am very keen to make sure that we make progress in renegotiating the common fisheries policy. I am also keen to ensure that we examine how much room for manoeuvre we have within the regime in terms of making adjustments in decision making, and perhaps even devolving some decision making. Nevertheless, the parameters are fixed, and I shall not take the approach urged on me by the hon. Member for Ruislip-Northwood (Mr. Wilkinson). The approach of the hon. and learned Member is far more constructive.

Mr. Michael Jabez Foster (Hastings and Rye): Is my right hon. Friend aware that the beach-based, under-10 m fleet at Hastings has this year recorded its lowest catch in history, wholly as a result of quota hopping? I refer to quota hopping not from other countries, but from former over-10 m fleets which have shortened their vessels and moved in to take the historic catch of my constituents. Will he take some form of enforcement to ensure that that does not continue to occur?

Mr. Brown: I promise my hon. Friend that I will consider his representations. I am sorry to hear what he has to say about Hastings, not least because I grew up in Hawkhurst, which is only 15 miles away. I regard Hastings as part of my home.

Bananas

4. **Mrs. Maria Fyfe** (Glasgow, Maryhill): What assessment he has made of the potential benefit to the economies of developing nations through the promotion and recognition of fair trade principles in the export of bananas. [51688]

The Minister of State, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr. Jeff Rooker): Fair trade bananas may have a part to play in strengthening the economies of developing countries. As part of the successful negotiations on the EU's banana regime which the previous Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, my right hon. Friend the Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham), recently chaired in Luxembourg, the Commission has agreed to bring forward a communication and a proposal on fair trade bananas by 1 March next year.

Mrs. Fyfe: I thank my hon. Friend. What progress is being made in fulfilling our Lomé convention commitments? Does he agree that the purchase of fair trade bananas in our supermarkets and food shops ought to be encouraged, for the good of both our children and developing countries?

Mr. Rooker: My hon. Friend will be aware that the banana is the highest-selling fruit in this country, averaging two per person per week—a substantial number. As regards the question of third-world countries, the deal that was successfully concluded at Luxembourg fully meets this country's commitments under the Lomé convention and, we believe, our World Trade Organisation obligations—not every other country on the planet takes that view.

Mr. Bowen Wells (Hertford and Stortford): Will the Minister confirm that the agreement on fair trade bananas—which is welcome—is not WTO-compatible in two respects? First, the quota is not agreed within the WTO, and is therefore subject to challenge; it is likely to be challenged by the United States and countries from central America. Secondly, the agreement under which bananas can be imported into Europe under WTO waiver ends in 2002, and this agreement is designed to run to 2004. Therefore, an extension of the WTO waiver will be necessary.

Mr. Rooker: The hon. Gentleman is right on the latter point. On his former point, we are disappointed that the United States continues to take a confrontational stand on the issue. We sincerely hope that, following mature consideration and a look at what was agreed, the United States will see that we have found what we consider to be a reasonable way in which to honour our international obligations.

Ms Jean Corston (Bristol, East): Does my hon. Friend agree that the description of the future of the banana industry as being between straight and curved bananas is a gross caricature? There are two large problems here: one is the British consumer preference for the smaller, Caribbean banana, and the second is the desire of former colonial territories—particularly in Africa and the Caribbean—for trade rather than aid. However, countries such as the Windward Islands in particular cannot compete with the same economies of scale against the large multinationals operating in central America, such as Dole and Chiquita. They look to the British Government and the EU to provide fair trade.

Mr. Rooker: As former colonial powers, we and some of our European partners have a moral obligation to ensure that the economies of the African, Caribbean and Pacific countries are not wrecked by other forces. The United States is not a banana grower, but it has close

relations with Latin American countries that are. Companies such as those that my hon. Friend mentioned gave some countries the name of banana republic. I will not go into the reasons for that. We would prefer trade and not aid, and so would those countries. It would be wholly unacceptable for Caribbean countries' economies to be wrecked—which is a possibility—and for them to be forced to grow cash crops.

British Beef

5. **Mr. James Gray** (North Wiltshire): What measures he is taking to promote the sale of British beef. [51689]

The Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr. Nick Brown): The Government have continued to support various initiatives to help to promote the sale of beef. As a result, there has been a significant increase in beef consumption and, in the first four months of this year, a substantial increase in the United Kingdom share of the domestic market.

Mr. Gray: I welcome the right hon. Gentleman to his new position. I hope that he will forgive me for adding a slightly discordant note when I say that I hope that he will show more interest in and concern for the beef industry and beef producers than his predecessor did, and that he will find the way from the Smoking Room to the Chamber for important debates.

The beef industry is deeply disappointed by the lack of progress towards lifting the ban, despite the Government's constant boasts about their Euro credentials. Assuming that the ban is eventually lifted, will the right hon. Gentleman give mainland farmers the same help, on a pro rata basis, that he recently gave Northern Ireland farmers? He gave them £2 million to help with their marketing abroad; pro rata, that would work out at about £11 million for the mainland. Will he undertake to give the same help to mainland farmers?

Mr. Brown: I thank the hon. Gentleman for welcoming me to my job, but I cannot accept what he said about my predecessor. Only as a result of my predecessor's efforts was I able to make an important announcement yesterday about a further step that we are taking to ensure that we can get British beef sales back in the European Union. I did not make the decision—it would be nice to claim the credit after 48 hours in the Ministry—and the momentum was entirely due to my predecessor's hard work and consistent negotiating skills. I pay tribute to him.

The £2 million spent in Northern Ireland was a one-off payment related to the peace process and not support for the industry in the United Kingdom.

Charlotte Atkins (Staffordshire, Moorlands): How much has been paid to farmers under the present Government, and how much agrimonetary compensation did the previous Government pay?

Mr. Brown: The answer to the latter part of the question is none. The figure for total payments is huge, and the vast majority of it is driven by the Government's endeavours to eliminate BSE.

Mr. Charles Kennedy (Ross, Skye and Inverness, West): Does the Minister agree that the promotion of the sale of beef is primarily a question of confidence; that great strides have been made domestically in the re-establishment—and indeed, in some cases, the extension—of consumer confidence; and that it is vital for that to be extended beyond these shores? I welcome him to his post, in which he has inherited a problem about which it may not be too late to do something. The producer confidence of British farming would be greatly assisted if he reconsidered the statement of aims agreed by his predecessor, which rightly mentions the environment and conservation, but does not mention the word "farming". It is coupled with a set of figures that represent a phasing out of support for some of the most fragile parts of the beef-producing sector of the UK economy, which would be of no great help towards the lifting of the ban in the longer term.

Mr. Brown: I regard the lifting of the beef ban as a top priority for me and for the Ministry. I assure the hon. Gentleman that I take it very seriously. His point about confidence was also right; I accept that I have a duty to set a lead. Yesterday, I went to Asda to look at its display of British beef—*[Interruption.]* I am trying to make this answer an all-party effort by including both the hon. Gentleman and the hon. Member for Tunbridge Wells (Mr. Norman), who is the Conservative Member most connected with Asda, although he is not here. [HON. MEMBERS: "He's writing out redundancies."] I know. He is writing them out at Conservative central office. I will do what I can to set a lead, and to support the British beef industry.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Is my right hon. Friend aware that those of us who sit on the bank of seats below the Gangway have just had a quick check, and even we have decided that, after only 48 hours, we cannot blame the new Minister for what has happened with BSE? He may have sent us some nasty letters from time to time, but we cannot blame him for BSE. Does he agree that the real blame for the billions of pounds that the British taxpayer has had to spend on BSE arises entirely from the Conservatives' total and utter neglect when they were in government? That money could have been spent on the national health service and schools, which would have made farmers themselves better off.

Mr. Brown: In view of our relationship when I was in my previous job, I am grateful to my hon. Friend for not blaming me. Of course the money could have been better spent. No one wanted to get into the position we are in, and, although some good may come of it for the future, the cost of getting out of it has been enormous. I am grateful, too, to my hon. Friend for not asking me to divert the subsidy into the mining industry, but I suppose that that will come.

Mr. James Paice (South-East Cambridgeshire): May I welcome the right hon. Gentleman to his new duties? If he is in any doubt about the need to rekindle confidence in his Government among farmers, he need only step outside London to meet them. They lost all confidence during the term of office of his predecessor.

The beef market is affected not only by BSE, but, possibly seriously, by tuberculosis. Herd outbreaks have increased by 30 per cent. over the past year, which is causing concern about our notional status of being free of

TB. The right hon. Gentleman has just received the report of the expert group. Will he ensure that there is no further delay in implementing the Krebs recommendations? Will he consider levels of compensation for farmers who currently see no help coming for the five years of the study?

Will he ask the expert group to consider movement restrictions on farms that break down to see whether all of them are needed? Krebs did not consider that, but I ask the Minister to request that the group does so. As the right hon. Gentleman has decided to end the calf processing scheme, farmers producing calves will need to rear them if they have a breakdown, because they will not otherwise be able to dispose of them.

Mr. Brown: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his welcome to me. Some political issues divide the parties, but where there is a clear national interest, and where it is possible for us to co-operate, I hope that we can do so. Many issues involve not purely domestic arguments, but how the outside world perceives our country. We have a responsibility to do the best we can for the nation.

The Krebs report is before me, and I also have all the Ministry's advice. I am holding a meeting this afternoon on the matter, and I hope to have something positive to say before the House rises for the recess. Bovine TB is important, but I am not able to make a statement now. The hon. Gentleman spoke of the industry's attitude, and I can tell him that I will be meeting the president of the National Farmers Union and his colleagues later today to discuss a range of matters, of which I am sure that that will be one.

Mr. John Smith (Vale of Glamorgan): May I congratulate my right hon. Friend on his new post, in which he will do an excellent job for the farmers of my constituency? Promotion and sale of beef is primarily carried out through our major supermarkets. May I draw the attention of my right hon. Friend to this morning's reports that the Office of Fair Trading is to look at the purchasing power of the supermarkets to see whether the price of beef is kept artificially high in the shops?

That, in turn, is not helping our farmers at all. Next month we have the agricultural show in the Vale of Glamorgan at Fonmon castle. Does the Minister plan to meet John Bridgeman to discuss this important issue?

Mr. Brown: I have already had discussions with the Secretary of State for Wales, and he has invited me to visit the agricultural communities in Wales, which I intend to do on an early occasion. I accept what my hon. Friend says about the power of the big retailers and I shall also be meeting representatives of retailing organisations, probably in the autumn. The Government have always taken the view, however, that competition policy is a matter for the regulatory authorities.

BSE Compensation Payments

6. **Sir Geoffrey Johnson Smith** (Wealden): If he will make a statement on the future of BSE compensation payments. [51691]

The Minister of State, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr. Jeff Rooker): We have no plans to change the formula for calculation of the compensation payments to owners of BSE suspect animals. But as the number of animals with BSE continues to fall, and fall dramatically, the total amount of compensation paid to farmers will decline accordingly.

Sir Geoffrey Johnson Smith: Yesterday the Government announced that the calf processing aid scheme would end on 30 November. What grounds does the Minister have for assuming that hard-pressed dairy and beef farmers will be able to cope with the sudden termination of this benefit?

Mr. Rooker: I am glad that the right hon. Gentleman accepts that the scheme is of benefit. The end date has been known since the scheme started and was agreed in 1996. There is nothing new about the end date of 30 November this year; it was agreed in the European Union and by the previous Government. There has never been any doubt about the change. We cannot enter into a voluntary arrangement. We shall monitor carefully the consequences of finishing the scheme, not least for possible difficulties regarding animal welfare.

Mrs. Anne Campbell (Cambridge): What steps is my hon. Friend taking to ensure that British beef is seen to be safe? Is it not true that the return of beefburger companies to British beef is proof that the Government's policies are working, and that more progress has been made in the past 15 months than was made in 18 years of Tory government?

Mr. Rooker: At the risk of being partisan about this, I remind my hon. Friend that during a short discussion of the beef industry in the recent debate on the estimates I set out 23 positive steps that the Government had taken to assist the beef industry. On safety, I repeat that two thirds of cattle farms have never had a case of BSE and 80 per cent. of beef farmers have never had a case of BSE, which is why they are so angry about the overall restrictions on the industry imposed by the European Union ban.

We have made food safety our top priority. We have not knowingly allowed any BSE infectivity into the food chain—hence the beef on the bone ban. As I said a few weeks ago, in the first four months of the year beef imports decreased by 22 per cent. and consumption of beef increased. That means that British consumers are consuming more British beef because they know that this Government are not playing fast and loose with the safety of British beef.

Mr. Michael Jack (Fylde): I welcome the right hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, East and Wallsend (Mr. Brown) to his post. It resumes a former acquaintanceship that we had in our business careers. At one time he was one of the fairies, but he has moved on since then. Although beef is the only item mentioned in the Government's annual report, can the Minister of State explain why, given that every single sector of British agriculture is in a state of crisis, there is only one paragraph on agriculture in the report, and beef is the only issue discussed?

Mr. Rooker: We are grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for his welcome to my right hon. Friend.

I understand that at one point one of them dealt with Daz and the other with Ariel. We shall be judged by our actions, and by our actions we know that at the end of the day we shall deliver a much better programme for British agriculture than the previous Government ever began to think about.

Mr. Jack: In the light of the Minister's answer, if he will be judged by his actions, why did his right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food confirm yesterday—in his written answer on the response to the comprehensive spending review—that farm support will fall in real terms during the three years covered by that review? Why did he confirm nothing more than the target of resolving the BSE crisis, giving no firm commitment to campaign to end it, and ending the early retirement scheme, which had never begun, as well as the calf processing aid scheme? Why was there no commitment to negotiate on hill livestock compensatory allowances? Is that really the priority that the Minister gives to agriculture?

Mr. Rooker: I invite the right hon. Gentleman to re-read that five-column answer in *Hansard*. He has picked out certain passages for his convenience and ignored all the positive points in the report and the answer concerning what we will do for agriculture. Several other answers given yesterday added to the arrangements. We have had to make some hard decisions in the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and no one denies that. From the figures in the answer yesterday it can be seen that the legacy of BSE is so great that this year the BSE programme is £4 million greater than the running costs of the Department.

Fishermen (Northumberland)

7. **Mr. A. J. Beith** (Berwick-upon-Tweed): If he will make a statement about the eligibility of Northumberland fishermen for PESCA assistance. [51692]

The Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr. Elliot Morley): In the United Kingdom, aid under the PESCA Community initiative is available in areas that have been designated as fisheries dependent. There are separate PESCA sub-programmes for England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, and each has its own priorities for aid.

Mr. Beith: How can it be right that a fisherman in Eyemouth can get a substantial grant to put refrigeration in his boat when a fisherman in Amble, just down the road in Northumberland, cannot do so because MAFF interprets the rules much more restrictively than the Scottish or Northern Ireland Departments? Since the Minister has agreed to review that matter and hopes to make an announcement in a matter of weeks, can we hope for a sympathetic response; and if his response is positive, can we hope for a review of the cases that have been turned down in recent weeks?

Mr. Morley: When PESCA was set up, different regions had different priorities. The priorities that the Government inherited in the English region were based on structural aid rather than aid of the sort to which the right hon. Gentleman refers as regards Scotland. We have had correspondence on the matter and I understand the case that the right hon. Gentleman makes. That is why we have agreed to review the situation as it applies to England and Scotland. Of course, we will take into account the problem that the right hon. Gentleman's constituent had to face because of the differences of approach.

Advisory Committees

8. **Mr. Alan W. Williams** (East Carmarthen and Dinefwr): What steps he has taken to widen membership of advisory committees to include representatives of consumers and environmental organisations. [51693]

The Minister of State, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr. Jeff Rooker): We have widened the membership of the independent advisory committees that deal with food, health, veterinary medicines, pesticides and environmental concerns to include at least one and sometimes two relevant consumer or lay members where appropriate; and we have some more announcements to make in the next couple of weeks.

Mr. Williams: I thank my hon. Friend for that answer and am pleased to hear that there is considerable progress in that direction. However, does he accept that the advisory committees have always tended to be heavily populated by industrialists or academics who derive their livelihoods—consulting fees or research grants—from the industries concerned? It is important that consumers and environmental organisations be strongly represented on the committees if we want a balanced report and if we want to retain public confidence.

Mr. Rooker: My hon. Friend is quite right. We are satisfied—I must repeat this, as people have been under attack—with the integrity of all members of the independent advisory committees. We are open and transparent about declarations of interest. Of course, some are statutory committees, such as the one on veterinary products in which the Medicines Commission is involved.

I am pleased to say that most of the lay, non-scientific, consumer representatives appointed to the committees in the past 15 months have been women, which contributes to righting the imbalance that we inherited. My hon. Friend is right to say that the committees have to engender confidence. They are not independent committees as such, although we want them to be committees of independent people—that aspect is crucial—whatever the background from which they come: academia, the health service, industry, and lay and consumer members.

Mr. Tom King (Bridgwater): Does the Minister agree that the need in the present crisis in agriculture—the latest figures for the south-west show an 80 per cent. fall in incomes—for regional agricultural committees could hardly be greater? Will he urge the Minister of Agriculture, on taking up his new office, to note not only the seriousness of the situation but the feeling that has grown among farmers that the Government do not care? The best thing he could do in the recess would be to make early visits to as many regions as possible. Will he put the south-west high on his list?

Mr. Rooker: The right hon. Gentleman makes a fair point, although there was a note of criticism behind it.

It is true that the farmers panels were abandoned when we came into office. However, on our regional visits, my ministerial colleagues and I have met liaison groups that have included farmers' representatives and others to take in a much wider spectrum of rural interests and the rural economy than could have been involved if we had stuck to the panels. It goes way beyond agriculture because of the spin-off into other areas. We do not apologise for that.

We will continue our regional visits, as we have for the past 15 months. The pace will be faster now that we have ceased to hold the presidency of the European Union.

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall): Will the Minister refer to the Advisory Committee on Pesticides the examination undertaken by *The Guardian* newspaper on the basis of the Environmental Protection Agency report that multinational chemical companies are paying substantial sums to students to use them as human guinea pigs for testing dangerous organophosphate pesticides?

Mr. Rooker: I welcome the hon. Gentleman's question. The research reported in *The Guardian* today, which was also reported in yesterday's *Daily Mail*, was done in 1992 and 1996–97. It is therefore not possible to get all the necessary information. Where a contract research laboratory in the United Kingdom undertakes work on pesticides on behalf of an overseas client, the Advisory Committee on Pesticides is not involved. It is for the client laboratory to satisfy itself that the ethical and medical conditions under which the work is carried out are in line with international guidelines under the Helsinki declaration and the guidance issued by the Royal College of Physicians in London.

My inquiries in the past 48 hours lead me to believe that the experiments were conducted in line with international guidelines and in conformity with the guidelines of the Royal College of Physicians. The reports merit further inquiry.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

The Attorney-General was asked—

Crown Prosecution Service

28. **Mr. Oliver Heald** (North-East Hertfordshire): If he will make a statement on the adequacy of his Department's funding for the implementation of the recommendations of the Glidewell report. [51715]

The Attorney-General (Mr. John Morris): To facilitate early progress on implementation of the proposals for the internal restructuring of the Crown Prosecution Service, the Treasury has agreed, subject to Parliament agreeing the change in the expenditure estimates, additional provision of £5.3 million for the CPS in the current year. Provision for subsequent years is included in the three-year settlement announced by the Chancellor of the Exchequer on 14 July 1998. There are now both a commitment to change and the necessary resources. I look forward to providing the House with a progress report in the autumn.

Mr. Heald: The comprehensive spending review shows an increase from the current year's figure of £281 million to £312 million for 1999–2000. Does the Attorney-General agree that that is grossly misleading, because spending in 1997–98 was £321 million? Has he secured some increase, or is there a substantial cut in CPS funding as it faces a major reorganisation that will cost a great deal of money?

The Attorney-General: I do not think that the hon. Gentleman will find a cut. I told him that we are seeking parliamentary authority for an increase of £5.3 million for the present year. If he looks back, he will find that the Government whom he supported planned significant reductions in 1997-98 and 1998-99. I have never suggested that the settlement is anything but tight. He may know that there is a difference between prosecution costs and the running costs of the Department. We shall see as we go how tight the settlement is, but I am confident that we have succeeded in ensuring that money is available for the early implementation of the Glidewell report.

Mr. Kerry Pollard (St. Albans): What has been the reaction of the CPS staff to the publication of the Glidewell report?

The Attorney-General: I am conscious of the attitude of the staff and I am aware, of course, that there will be further uncertainties. These can be minimised, but they cannot be avoided altogether if we are to get the CPS on a sound footing and provide a new start for it. Since the report, the former Solicitor-General and I have made a number of visits to CPS offices. We have been impressed by the warm welcome that CPS staff have given the report. The new chief executive, whose appointment I announced on 1 June, is putting in place mechanisms for receiving feedback from staff on the reorganisation.

Mr. John Burnett (Torridge and West Devon): I am delighted to see the new Solicitor-General in the House. We congratulate him and welcome him to his appointment. Will the Attorney-General confirm that securing and enhancing the independence of the Crown Prosecution Service will be at the core of his proposals for its reform? Will he confirm that any integrated unit with police officers attached to it will be under the control and supervision of the Director of Public Prosecutions or one of the 42 chief Crown prosecutors?

The Attorney-General: I am aware of the concern of the hon. Gentleman. The criminal justice units were recommended by the Glidewell report in order to ensure better preparation and integration between the work of the police and the prosecution process, which are distinct. The proposals will be considered by my ministerial colleagues and me. I am sure that whatever changes occur will be aimed at the working relationship between the CPS and the police and at making them closer, more effective and more efficient in the fight that we all share against crime.

I assure the hon. Gentleman that decisions on whether cases are to be prosecuted will remain the sole responsibility of the independent prosecutors applying the code for the Crown prosecutors. I am confident that in the way forward we shall not undermine the independence of the CPS.

Sir Nicholas Lyell (North-East Bedfordshire): I join in welcoming the new Solicitor-General to his post. I hope that he will last longer than his predecessor, who appears to have been shuffled off to be the Government's junior enforcer, or perhaps we should say enforcer's apprentice.

Getting back to real business, does the Attorney-General agree that securing an extra £5.3 million for the CPS over the rest of this Parliament cannot possibly meet anything but the most elementary requirements of the Glidewell report? Does he agree that Glidewell recommends that the CPS take over many of the duties of the police admin support units? Does he know—the Home Office failed to answer—how many people are employed in those admin support units? I suggest that it is almost as many as are employed in the CPS itself. Does he agree that, if the CPS is to take over any significant portion of those duties, a massive injection of cash will be needed, which the comprehensive spending review simply does not provide?

The Attorney-General: I welcome the right hon. and learned Gentleman back to his post after his recent illness. He will have heard what I said a moment ago about the reductions that took place in the CPS provision in the last two years. Built into the provision is £6.5 million of transitional costs for the next two years for the implementation of Glidewell. I emphasise that the running costs are obviously cash-controlled, whereas the prosecuting costs have to be looked at as they occur. I am confident that the provision is a good start and will provide the necessary beginning for the implementation of Glidewell.

International Court of Justice

29. **Mr. Tam Dalyell** (Linlithgow): How many of his officials are engaged in cases before the International Court of Justice. [51716]

The Attorney-General: None.

Mr. Dalyell: In view of the careful and obviously considered form of words used by the Prime Minister in the House on 22 July in respect of Lockerbie, who in the Government is causing the delay of an announcement that there will be a trial in The Hague under Scottish rules of justice and under a Scottish judge nominated by the Prime Minister; and why is the delay being caused?

The Attorney-General: I know of my hon. Friend's long interest in the matter. I read carefully his speech in the Adjournment debate of 21 July and he has confirmed that he followed closely the considered reply of the Prime Minister on 22 July, which the whole House heard. I have nothing to add to that reply.

Miss Anne McIntosh (Vale of York): May I press the Attorney-General further? The House should be in a position before the recess to know when the case will be brought to trial.

The Attorney-General: That is a matter not for me, but for the Lord Advocate.

Director of Public Prosecutions

30. **Mr. Bowen Wells** (Hertford and Stortford): When he expects to appoint a new Director of Public Prosecutions. [51717]

The Attorney-General: An open competition is at present being conducted under the auspices of the first civil service commissioner. I expect an appointment to be made in the autumn.

Mr. Wells: The Attorney-General has not really answered the question asked by my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for North-East Bedfordshire (Sir N. Lyell) about the implementation of the Glidewell report—

Madam Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman's question must relate to the Director of Public Prosecutions, as it says on the Order Paper.

Mr. Wells: I am coming to the appointment of 42 Crown prosecutors, whom the Attorney-General promised would be appointed by 1 April this year. He ordered that they should be appointed on 27 May, but a study of the comprehensive spending review suggests that those Crown prosecutors will not be appointed until the end of the Parliament—

Madam Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman's original question to the Attorney-General was about when the right hon. and learned Gentleman expects to appoint a new Director of Public Prosecutions—appointment in the singular. Is that not what the Order Paper says?

Mr. Wells: Yes, but the DPP has to make those appointments. My question is: when are those appointments going to be made, and is the money available to make them?

The Attorney-General: Now we are there. The answer, very simply, is that the post of the new DPP has been advertised; we have had responses, which will be considered over the summer; and in the early autumn, I hope, an appointment will be made. Of course, the hon. Gentleman is right to say that one has to have a DPP in post first; but once the new DPP is in post, it follows naturally that we can proceed as quickly as practicable, having regard to civil service considerations, to appoint the new chief Crown prosecutors. One follows the other.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): Will not one of the tasks of the new DPP be to try to ensure that those responsible for the murder of Stephen Lawrence are brought to justice? Is my right hon. and learned Friend aware that the Lawrence case thus far is a denial of justice as great as the miscarriage of justice in the case of Derek Bentley, who was hanged in January 1953?

The Attorney-General: I know of my hon. Friend's deep and long-standing concern about the Lawrence case. Individual cases are for the CPS and important matters are for the director herself. Obviously she, or her successor, will have to consider the evidence as it stands.

Lobbyists

31. **Mr. Nigel Evans** (Ribble Valley): What meetings he has had with representatives from *(a)* GJW, *(b)* GPC Market Access and *(c)* LLM to discuss the prosecution services. [51718]

The Attorney-General: My Department does not have substantial policy responsibilities, and meetings with interested groups outside Government are quite rare. It is not the practice of this Government to make information about such meetings or their content publicly available. The Prime Minister published guidance on Monday setting out the basic principles that should be followed in any contact with people outside Government, including lobbyists.

Mr. Evans: I am grateful for that response. Does that mean that the Attorney-General has changed procedure in his Department since the Derek Draper cash-for-access cronygate scandal, or is he happy that the procedures in his Department were sufficient not to soil its good standing, which was not the case with Downing street?

The Attorney-General: I have made my Department's position clear. I invite the hon. Gentleman to read and study over the recess and improve his knowledge. I know that he is a graduate in politics. During the summer holiday he has 11 weeks to consider the guidance to all civil servants setting out the principles.

Mr. Gerald Bermingham (St. Helens, South): Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that the hon. Member for Ribble Valley (Mr. Evans) could begin his lessons by learning to read and to understand that in the civil service, and certainly in the Law Officers Department, everything is totally above board and always has been?

The Attorney-General: I very much welcome my hon. Friend's observations.

Local Government

3.30 pm

The Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (Mr. John Prescott): With permission, Madam Speaker, I should like to make a statement on local government.

I have today laid before the House a White Paper, "Modern Local Government: In Touch with the People." Copies are available in the Vote Office, together with a summary leaflet.

Today my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister published the Government's annual report. It shows that we have made a cracking start in modernising Britain: 177 manifesto commitments, 50 kept or done and 119 under way. There is plenty more to do, and our White Paper today is part of doing more.

The Government are building a modern Britain and a fair society. The White Paper that I am publishing today will help to achieve both. After two decades of creeping centralisation, the White Paper returns power to the people. It sets out proposals to modernise English local government. Those reforms are at the heart of our programme for constitutional change.

The Parliament for Scotland, the Assemblies for Wales and Northern Ireland, a mayor and assembly for London and the regional development agencies are all part of a package for decentralising power in Britain. It is the most radical and comprehensive package of local government reforms for generations. Previous Governments have changed local government boundaries and structures. Those are not unimportant, but they are not the whole story either. We have seen over the past few years what a distraction such boundary and structure changes can be.

The changes that we are proposing today are about how councils work and how they can be more in touch with the people whom they serve. The changes have been developed in consultation with local government. I have been pleased to work with the Local Government Association, and I want to place on record my support for the LGA. I fully support a single all-party voice for local government. It has enabled my right hon. Friends and me to have regular dialogue with the leaders of the LGA in our central-local partnership meetings.

We want the changes to be the start of renewed, stronger and more accountable local government. It is a programme of reform for the next decade. Councils educate our children, house the homeless, care for the elderly, encourage arts and sports for all, plan better health care, help to regenerate local communities, plan better local transport and create real and lasting jobs. People look to the local council for support when things go wrong. From family breakdown to factory closures, from fire to flood, the local council picks up the pieces.

Earlier this year I visited Warwickshire, where communities were devastated by the worst floods in memory. I spoke to local families whose houses had been wrecked and who had nowhere to go. They looked to the local council and its emergency services. They knew that the council was there for them. When I visited Manchester, I saw the public-private partnership rebuilding the city after its centre was shattered by a terrorist bomb. I spoke to local business people whose enterprises were brought to the brink of disaster. They were dependent on their local council and they knew that their council was there for them.

It is right that the House should be reminded that councils serve the country well. Many thousands of councillors of all political persuasions do an excellent job under difficult circumstances. It is time for the House to make that clear when so many criticisms, often unjustified, are levelled at our councils.

I want all our councils to be up to the standards of the best, not hampered with political organisation from the previous century as they face the new millennium. These proposals will help councils to modernise, to improve their performance and, where necessary, to rid themselves of old-fashioned and inward-looking attitudes. The best councils will act as beacons to the rest. They will be pace setters and centres of excellence, and they will gain new freedoms to show how much the best councils can achieve.

Through best value, all councils will have to learn from and adopt best practice in the delivery of efficient public services, so I want to strengthen local accountability and streamline decision making. I am therefore proposing to allow local choice on new ways of running councils. I want voters to know who is responsible for taking local decisions and how to hold those people to account.

Councils will be required to review their political management structures and to draw up a plan, with a timetable, to introduce new arrangements which will separate the executive. Too often today, too many councillors get sucked into the meetings culture in their town hall, rather than representing their community to the council. We want to give all councillors clear and important roles in representing their communities—some as mayors and cabinet members, and others holding the executive to account.

At present, by law, passed by this House, councils have to conform to a single model of political organisation—the 19th-century committee structure. In place of centralised conformity, we propose a local choice. The local choice will be from a range of models including: an executive mayor directly elected by the people, with a cabinet of council colleagues; a cabinet with a leader appointed by the council; a mayor directly elected by the people to give a political lead, with a full-time manager to run the council; or local people will decide whether they want to keep a directly elected mayor. In special circumstances, if the authority tests the opinion of the electorate, the existing structure can be retained if the electorate so decide. Local people will vote if a council proposes a mayor, and they will have the right to demand a referendum themselves to create a directly elected mayor.

Local systems of political management can be adapted to suit local needs, but the Government will not allow complacency. All councils will need to review their structures and make proposals for change. The Government also want to improve accountability.

We want more people to vote, thus giving more local responsibility for taking crucial spending decisions. Reading the beginning of the White Paper—I cannot recall the page—it is remarkable to learn of the low level of participation in voting in this country as compared with others.

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): That is because of the first-past-the-post system.

Mr. Prescott: It is indeed a challenge for all of us to secure a better voting system, but I might add that the

countries that do better do not necessarily have proportional representation, which is the Liberals' answer to everything. *[Interruption.]* I must be protected, Madam Speaker.

Our proposals are as follows: yearly elections in most areas, with councils also having a new power to hold referendums on local issues; improved procedures for councils to consult local people; and making it easier to vote. Councils will be able to try out new ideas to make voting easier—wider use of postal votes, electronic voting, mobile polling stations, and voting in supermarkets, railway stations and town centres.

Crude and universal council tax capping is over. As we said in our manifesto, new safeguards will mean more responsibility locally for council spending and taxation, and protection for local people from excessive council tax rises through new reserve powers. As I told the LGA conference earlier this year, I will have those reserve powers, and I will not hesitate to use them if necessary. It will not be crude capping, but it could be called crude Prescott.

Like all public servants, councillors must be beyond reproach. The overwhelming majority of the 2 million people who work for councils and the 20,000 councillors who serve on them perform an outstanding service to the public. They have a tough job and they do it well. Those councillors and public servants resent the doubts that are cast on their integrity by the activities of a few. Hon. Members have much experience, some of it as councillors. I have never been a councillor but I have a great deal of respect for councillors' hard work, dedication and commitment. It is my respect for the greater majority that makes me intolerant of the tiny minority who are guilty of dishonesty, corruption and sleaze.

Local government already has a strict regime—I might point out that it is stricter than the one that operates in the House. However, it has not proved enough, just as our arrangements here have not necessarily proved enough. We shall introduce for local government a tough new ethical framework with strict codes of conduct for councillors and council employees and an independent standards board to deal with complaints about improper behaviour. There will be no hiding place for dishonesty, corruption or sleaze. This is not a political issue: it must be the aim of all those who are in public life.

I now turn to the delivery of local services. I am pleased to announce the end of compulsory competitive tendering. It was divisive and was not always the best way to provide efficient services to local people who had no say whatever in those contracts. We propose a new and demanding duty for councillors to deliver best value. It will give councillors the flexibility that they need to be fair to the many dedicated people who work to provide our public services and it will guarantee the best deal for those who use and depend on those services.

Councillors will give more say to service users and, in partnership with local people, they will set clear service standards and targets for continuous improvement and will publish them so that local people will know the standards that they can expect. Services will be subjected to regular and independent inspection, and I am pleased to announce the creation of a new best value inspectorate as part of the Audit Commission. Local people will play a part in the inspection process. The Government will act swiftly and effectively if councils fail to tackle serious or persistent failures.

We propose a new duty on councils to promote the economic, social and environmental well-being of their areas in co-operation with public, private and voluntary bodies and local people. That will make councils more effective in leading their communities and serving their people. The capital finance system will be made simpler, so that councils can organise their capital investment and assets in the best way.

Just as I want to improve the accountability of councils to voters, I also want to strengthen the relationship between councils and their businesses. National business rates will stay but, within defined limits, we want councils to be able to vary the rate locally, with councils and business agreeing on how any extra money that is raised will be spent. Once again, that will give councils a stake in the success of their local businesses, and local businesses a stake in the success of their councils.

The proposals are good for councils and will enable them to fulfil their potential to be a powerful force for progress and social justice. The proposals are good for councillors because they will be able to do more for their local communities and able to serve and represent their voters more effectively. Above all, our proposals are good for local people. They will have better services that will be delivered by more accountable councils. The purpose of the proposals is to give people a bigger say and a better deal—to put local people first. I commend the White Paper to the House.

Mr. Tim Yeo (South Suffolk): I am grateful to the Deputy Prime Minister for making his White Paper available to us at 2.45 pm. I warmly welcome the fact that the Government are now addressing a wide range of local authority issues. The Opposition share the right hon. Gentleman's view that the vast majority of councils and councillors conduct themselves properly and responsibly. I should mention that, of course, it is not councils that educate our children but teachers, many of whom, although not all, are employed by councils.

The Opposition will judge the right hon. Gentleman's proposals, first, by whether they improve value for money for service users and for taxpayers and, secondly, by whether they increase the accountability of councils to voters. Is he aware that the White Paper is published at a time of great concern about the rising cost of local government? This year, there were record rises in council tax, averaging 8 per cent. in England, which is more than double the rate of inflation.

Will the right hon. Gentleman confirm the figures that I received from the Library this week, which show that, as a direct result of the comprehensive spending review, council tax will rise by 5 per cent. a year in real terms for each of the next three years? Will he confirm that council tax payers will therefore pay substantially more council tax every year for the rest of this Parliament just to maintain existing services? Is he aware also that there is great concern about abuses in local government, to which he made some reference?

Will the right hon. Gentleman confirm that the replacement of compulsory competitive tendering by best value is in danger of being a smokescreen behind which the discipline of competition is removed? Will he not

[Mr. Tim Yeo]

admit that CCT did bring huge improvements in the quality of service and delivered massive savings for the taxpayer? Will he confirm that many Labour councils are already anticipating the end of CCT by awarding more contracts in-house?

Will the right hon. Gentleman confirm that the reserve powers that he retains over council spending mean that, effectively, capping continues in all but name? From the point of view of councils, does that not simply replace crude and universal capping, which he has pledged to abolish, with crude and arbitrary capping, another broken Labour promise, alongside tax, class sizes, waiting lists and the welfare state?

On business rates, are not the right hon. Gentleman's proposals in effect just another new tax on business? Do they not mean that, for the first time since the uniform business rate was introduced, all businesses face the possibility of above-inflation increases in their business rate? Will he explain how businesses, especially small businesses, will be consulted before councils put the business rate up?

Will all types of council apart from parish councils be invited to adopt a new model of operation? Will councils be forced to choose one of the models that he has referred to, or can they opt to continue with present arrangements? If they choose the option of a directly elected mayor, with a full-time manager, what will be the role of elected councillors? Does he believe that those new models will involve more or less spending on administration? Does he claim that any of those new models will improve the scrutiny of council decisions?

I welcome the concern that the right hon. Gentleman expresses about ethical standards. I fully agree that concern about that issue is not a party political matter. Nevertheless, will he not admit that he is worried, as his Scottish counterpart is, about evidence of widespread abuse in Labour councils, of which we have had more reports even today?

I share the right hon. Gentleman's concern about the level of turnout. In the light of his comments—which were not in his written statement—I invite him to join the campaign against proportional representation that Conservative Members will shortly launch. Can he produce any evidence that introducing annual council elections will increase voter turnout? Indeed, given the poor turnout in the recent London referendum, what makes him think that the turnout in other local referendums will be any higher?

Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that we will examine the detail of his White Paper because we have found that the fine print of new Labour documents often contains nasty surprises? Finally, is he aware that best value will not automatically improve services or cut costs; that a new model of political organisation does not put a single extra teacher in the classroom or care for one more old person; and that no one will be persuaded that allowing him to select beacon councils, as the White Paper suggests, will return power to the people?

Mr. Prescott: It is nice that the Opposition have finally found some policies and are prepared to campaign on proportional representation. We await with interest what else will come about. We have applied different voting systems to elections to the Scottish Parliament, the Welsh Assembly and the mayor and the assembly for London. Lord Jenkins's commission is looking at proportional representation and we are committed to a referendum in respect of parliamentary elections. We will have to see how those matters affect local councils, but no decision has been taken, and the White Paper does not address the issue.

The Opposition seem to have changed their mind since they were in government about a mayor and assembly for London, devolution and a Scottish Parliament. They soon adjusted to the reality of political life, and we await their proposals on proportional representation.

Mr. Yeo: You have changed your mind.

Mr. Prescott: I have given examples of adjustments that have to be made. It is up to the hon. Member for South Suffolk (Mr. Yeo) to show whether I have changed my views. I certainly welcome his endorsement and that of many in the House of my view that, despite all the attacks that have been made on local councils, we should remind ourselves what an effective job they do.

There is common agreement on the need to improve the position of local councils, to give them powers and resources to be more accountable; and for local people to have a greater say. I understand that the Leader of the Opposition made that point to the local government conference when he said that he wanted people to have a greater say in matters relating to local councils. I welcome those remarks.

The hon. Gentleman referred to value for money. The efficient production of services is important and the White Paper is designed to achieve it. The compulsory spending review—[*Laughter.*] I gave the Opposition the chance to get a laugh in, but I think I was well ahead of them. I have done it before and perhaps that shows an attitude of mind.

On the comprehensive spending review, the settlement to local authorities is generally agreed to be most generous as compared with previous settlements. It also covers a three-year period so that local authorities have sufficient time to settle their planning priorities. Our projections for inflation and growth in the economy are consistent with that. We must wait to see what happens in the coming years, but most people would agree with us.

We have planned for three years instead of one. That will provide greater stability to local authority financing and it is what local authorities wanted. It is at the heart of what we have done. As for efficiency and value, the idea of having beacon councils is to say that certain councils are excellent and that we want to reward excellence and encourage other local authorities to reach their standards. That is another step in the right direction of getting good service efficiently at the best price and for the best value.

In regard to best value, it is generally agreed that compulsory competitive tendering was extremely expensive in the long run. It concentrated solely on price, largely at the expensive of the people employed in the industries concerned, and it resulted in a reduction in the quality of services. I do not have to make the case; it has been pretty well made by any analysis of compulsory competitive tendering.

Although we are interested in efficiency and price, other issues of best value must be considered. That has come out of all our surveys, and we intend to bring it

home to people. It has been demonstrated in the 40 pilot areas where we have implemented new systems. There were some improvements in productivity under compulsory competitive tendering, and certain practices were changed that should have been changed.

The activities of some local authorities show that the initiative for change—whether or not it arose in that way—is to be welcomed, but other factors must be taken into account in achieving best value. That is why we have highlighted the fact that under compulsory competitive tendering there was much too concerned to pay contractors—

Mr. Bernard Jenkin (North Essex): The unions.

Mr. Prescott: In many areas, they were not trade union members. If the hon. Member for North Essex (Mr. Jenkin) looked at the facts instead of indulging his obsession with trade unions, he would discover that many of the people involved were not trade union members. They could not be protected because, under compulsory competitive tendering, local authorities were obliged to accept the cheapest price.

The hon. Member for North Essex might also be concerned for the taxpayer because the consequence of reduced wages under CCT was very often a considerable rise in the cost of family credit. The taxpayer paid for the low wages enforced by CCT. The Opposition often lecture the Government on cutting expenditure on welfare and subsidies, yet at the same time, they propose policies that would have the opposite effect. Under CCT, employers avoided their responsibility to pay employees a fair wage for providing a decent service. That is the argument concerning best value and CCT.

I have made the position on capping reasonably clear. We need legislation on the reserve powers to which I referred. Present laws will, of course, apply in the next financial year. We have made absolutely clear to local authorities that they have a three-year expenditure programme and that we want them to take that into account. We will be setting rates for average council tax increases over that period on which we will make an announcement in—I think—November. It is then up to councils to act responsibly, as I hope they will.

To be fair, most councils spent within their expenditure ranges. Only a handful found themselves facing conflict and the imposition of capping. That applied only once most recently—and there were special circumstances—as it did the previous year. We are quite prepared to allow councils a three-year programme, and we want them to be flexible on it. We are not indifferent to levels of council expenditure—no Government can be. After all, central Government provide councils with about 75 per cent. of their expenditure. I will properly take into account the reserve powers.

On the issue of new model organisations, we provide different choices. If we move more towards having paid councillors and reducing allowances, if we want to attract more and different people to council work, and if we have full-time mayors or executives, there will be some cost involved. That is the same for Parliament, where we have moved more towards full-time than part-time conditions. That is a price that one can pay for democracy. We want an improved democratic local council structure which allows much more open and accountable decisions to be made and which gives councillors more power to check the executive's decisions.

All the models split the decision-making power between, on the one hand, an executive, as we have in Parliament, and, on the other, councillors who can openly question what is going on. All too often, decisions at council committee meetings are decided beforehand and councillors merely act as administrators, putting their hands in the air. We want to change that; I do not think that people like that. We want fundamental change, and that is what we will bring about.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett (Denton and Reddish): I welcome the White Paper. Will my right hon. Friend confirm that, in order to implement it, we need legislation? What timetable does he envisage for such legislation, and when does he hope that it will begin affecting local councils?

Mr. Prescott: As early as possible, I sincerely hope. My hon. Friend will know that the matter is for the Ministerial Committee on the Queen's Speeches and Future Legislation, since it proposes which Bills are to be in the Queen's Speech. I cannot comment on that at the moment.

Mr. Paul Burstow (Sutton and Cheam): We very much welcome much of the language in the Deputy Prime Minister's statement, although, when we look at the White Paper in more detail, I think that we shall find quite a few areas in which our approach will substantially differ from the Government's. The Liberal Democrats believe that local government is in need of reform. Too many councillors do not listen to the public. Too many councils are one-party states, and complacent about the way in which they run town halls. That is why the White Paper is a missed opportunity. Rather than a White Paper that tackles the first-past-the-post voting system, which so undermines local government legitimacy, we shall have annual elections and supermarket voting. We will return to the subject time and again, no matter how much certain hon. Members snore.

Does the Deputy Prime Minister recognise that the prospects of a close result, the possibility of a change of council, and councillors who are more than just mere agents of Whitehall will do more to increase voter turnout and interest in local government? Is he aware that a fair voting system based on the single transferable vote would have done more to open up town halls and challenge one-party states? Will he confirm that the proposals give the Secretary of State wider powers to intervene in the affairs of town halls? If councils deliver new Labour's agenda, they will be rewarded with beacon status, which is not so much freedom as a slightly longer leash from Whitehall.

Does the right hon. Gentleman accept that his proposed changes to the capping and financing regime fail to clarify accountability, and that local electors will still be left wondering whether Ministers or their councillors are responsible for council tax rises? Will he also take this opportunity to go a little further with the proposals for citizens' initiatives with regard to directly elected mayors, and provide for the electorate to seek to recall a directly elected mayor if he proves incompetent?

The White Paper hands more power to central Government and reduces local discretion; it sees democratic local government as nothing more than an

[Mr. Paul Burstow]

administrative arm of Whitehall. Do not the Secretary of State's proposals therefore represent another victory for Whitehall over town hall?

Mr. Prescott: I am grateful for the hon. Gentleman's opening remarks, especially his congratulations on my use of language—not something with which I am usually associated, as Mr. Parris will tell us if he is in the Press Gallery. That is welcome praise, wherever it comes from, and I thank the hon. Gentleman.

Nevertheless, like many hon. Members on the Government Benches—and, I suspect, on the Opposition side too—I still do not feel that many of the evils and wrongs in our society could be removed simply by changing the electoral system to one of proportional representation. I do not want to enter into that argument now, but we can examine electoral systems in different parts of the world and see that such changes are not necessarily guaranteed by this or that voting system. Participation in voting is crucial, and there are also other factors, as well as the type of vote.

I do not dismiss other ideas entirely; we have tried different types of votes, as the hon. Gentleman knows, in Scotland, in Wales and in the London mayoral elections, so we are being quite radical in introducing change. We may not perhaps be as radical as—

Mr. Burstow: We want more.

Mr. Prescott: I understand that, but we choose to strike a balance. We are not convinced of the argument for local authorities, although we are now examining it in connection with constituencies, through Lord Jenkins's commission on proportional representation. I am not a great fan of that myself, as hon. Members may have guessed. None the less, that is where we are at the moment.

We need to make a judgment, and turnout certainly does not depend simply on the voting system. We will consider the commission's findings and all the ideas; I agree that it may contribute to the arguments and debates on the Government side of the House. However, new ideas will have to be judged in terms of accountability. I have always thought that proportional representation means that 5 per cent. of the electorate run the Government, as we have seen in Germany and other countries. So I am not convinced about that either. *[Interruption.]* Of course, the 5 per cent. in Germany were Liberals, so I can see why some hon. Members argue that case.

As for the Secretary of State's powers of intervention, on balance, Secretaries of State will have to reserve powers for themselves. They cannot be indifferent to levels of expenditure on providing services when 75 per cent. of it comes from the state. Both the Government and local councils will carry the responsibility for what the electorate feel about the bills for council spending, because people are aware that it is both the Government and councils that make the choices. We are saying that it is reasonable to expect a certain level of services to be provided and a certain level of finance to be required. That is a matter for political decision.

As we said in the White Paper, if councils want to spend more than we allow, they can, but they will not necessarily get a subsidy from central Government to do so. Councils can make that choice and explain it to the electorate. That is taking things further than any previous capping system, and it is a step in the right direction. Local authorities have to make the decision themselves.

As for the powers of intervention and the powers of local authorities to get on with some jobs, new powers and new resources are involved, and the procedures that we have set out for partnerships give them greater authority and autonomy to do some of those things within the balanced framework that we have set.

I cannot read my notes here; I am sure that the hon. Gentleman made one last point—*[Interruption.]* The point about Whitehall—

Mr. Burstow: I said "recall".

Mr. Prescott: I am sorry; the hon. Gentleman was talking about the right to recall the mayor. Where a council does not carry out any of the changes, the electorate will have the chance to have a kind of referendum—a 10 per cent. petition, we could say—to call for a mayor. However, the argument that, once the mayor has been elected, there should be a right of recall if he has not done too well after 12 months in office will, I imagine, send a shiver through the House, when hon. Members think that judgments could be made on individual Members' competence within their first 12 months. I am not convinced of the argument, and I suspect that, if I invited hon. Members to vote for it, I would not carry the Liberals with me, either. None the less, it is another interesting idea from the Liberals, who never get the chance of having the power to implement their ideas.

Mr. Derek Foster (Bishop Auckland): Will my right hon. Friend totally reject the lectures from Conservative Members, who brought us the poll tax, continually denigrated local government and changed our constitution by making local government merely an agent of central Government? In wholly welcoming the White Paper, may I say that his celebration of local government's performance will be widely welcomed in the county of Durham? His words represent one of the best ways in which to ensure that local councillors will embrace his modernising agenda. May I ask him to go further and to pay tribute to all local councillors, who in many cases have sacrificed their careers, families and social lives without any thought of return?

Mr. Prescott: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for his remarks; I very much agree with what he says. To be fair, the Opposition have agreed with us on the need for change and I welcome their commitment. Indeed, that was almost bound to come, as the Leader of the Opposition said to the Local Government Association:

"I've come here today to tell you the Conservative Party is changing."

That little I accept and welcome; change in the right direction is for the good whether in the Tory party or in the Labour party.

My right hon. Friend was right to say that councillors feel almost besieged by press comments. We should say loudly and more often that the great majority of councils are not involved in any wrongdoing. As I know from my experience in Hull, if I may be so bold as to mention it,

the press pays a great deal of attention to any allegations that are made. I wish the same amount of publicity was given when it is found that there is no evidence to support the allegations and the allegations are withdrawn. We would all welcome balanced reporting and more credit being given to the work that councillors do.

Mr. Peter Brooke (Cities of London and Westminster): Will the Deputy Prime Minister explain the intellectual paradox whereby the Government are delegating greater powers to local authorities, but power in the Labour party nationally is being increasingly centralised?

Mr. Prescott: I will not pray in aid Mr. Archie whatever his name is. I thought that the right hon. Gentleman was going to say that the intellectual paradox was that central Government wanted both to give local government more power and to retain some influence and control—striking the right balance is the problem at the centre of any debate about local government. In the White Paper, we have tried to strike a balance; it will not be acceptable to all, but at least we have tried to outline the proper responsibilities of central Government and local government.

I am happy that the right hon. Gentleman accepts that the thrust of the White Paper is to decentralise, as that is contested in other quarters. If I have time, I shall tell him all the things that the Labour party has decentralised in the past two or three years—they are considerable, they are consistent and they work.

Mr. Bill O'Brien (Normanton): I thank my right hon. Friend for the action that he is taking to lift the shackles that the Tories imposed on local government over the past two decades. I also thank the Minister for Local Government and Housing, my hon. Friend the Member for North-West Durham (Ms Armstrong), who has worked hard to improve the relationship between the House and local government—long may she continue to do so. I believe that the problems in local government commenced in 1974, when the Tories reorganised local authorities and moved responsibilities from local communities to remote metropolitan district authorities.

As chairman of the special interest group of metropolitan authorities in the House of Commons, may I ask my right hon. Friend to look at financing? The distribution of resources needs to be fairer. Some London authorities receive one and a half times as much as some metropolitan authorities do to teach a pupil, and the same applies to community care. I thank him for tackling the problem of capital debt, but will he also ensure that resources are much more fairly channelled to local government nationally? The electorate would be much more interested in electing people to serve them if they realised that they would receive the services that they wanted.

Mr. Prescott: I thank my hon. Friend for his comments. The House will have listened to him with considerable care owing to his long experience, not only in local authorities but as an Opposition spokesman on these matters. He made some interesting points. He asked whether we should begin to change the financial distribution between different types of authorities, and he referred to metropolitan, unitary and district authorities. There is an argument there. We have talked about changing the standard spending assessment distributions, and our commitment to a three-year review will bring some stability to achieve that.

I was struck by all the delegations which used to come to see me and my Ministers each year to discuss and marginally change the SSAs—in most cases, not change them. That was not a good use of the time of councillors or of Ministers. I have said that we needed to change that, and the three-year financial programme for local authorities means that we can settle down and look at how SSAs can be properly distributed. There are many complaints about the system.

Finally, I endorse what my hon. Friend said about the Minister for Local Government and Housing, my hon. Friend the Member for North-West Durham (Ms Armstrong). Anyone standing at this Dispatch Box as Secretary of State knows that much of the hard work is done by Ministers of State and by Under-Secretaries. I could not be better served than by the present Minister of State in this matter.

Sir Paul Beresford (Mole Valley): Does the Secretary of State accept that a rising group in local government are concerned at his replacement for capping which they see as interventionist and subjective? What will be his criteria for action in that matter?

Mr. Prescott: We have said that capping is unfair and we have made our case on that. We accept the responsibility for public expenditure in that area. We have chosen to use an element of reserve powers which identify what councils can spend. That will have an implication, as I will announce, for what we think the average rises will be. If a council chooses to go above that figure, it will face the first penalty—it will not receive the Government support. With the reserve powers under the new legislation, persistent offenders will be faced with a situation where the penalty is made retrospective, and we will take that into account in the settlement of their expenditure over that year. That allows us greater flexibility.

The hon. Gentleman will know from his considerable experience in local government—he has more experience than me—that capping was very much limited to the one year. People had to make the case within that year. In some cases, authorities got into difficulties with public expenditure or Government financial support—as was the case in Derbyshire—and to ask them to try to settle that in one year was absolutely impossible. Councils could face real penalties of cuts, as in Derbyshire. We did not concede everything that Derbyshire wanted, but we thought that there was a case because of the difficulties over the years. This three-year programme will allow us to deal with the matter in a fair and flexible way, and with a great deal more social justice.

Mr. Andrew Dismore (Hendon): Will my right hon. Friend confirm that under the new scrutiny powers there will be strong powers for back-bench councillors to inquire into the activities of councils—powers sadly lacking under the present system, which so frustrated those of us trying to dig out the Westminster scandal during the 1980s? A condemnation of the Westminster scandal by those on the Opposition Front Bench is sadly lacking. Will my right hon. Friend confirm that there will

[Mr. Andrew Dismore]

be powers to take enforcement action where such scandals are detected, and that these can be brought into effect quickly—rather than waiting years and years for, so far, no outcome whatever in the Westminster scandal?

Mr. Prescott: This is an area of some difficulty, but I do not wish to enter the party political exchanges. We can all reel off councils, but the response should not be just to turn round and say, "What about Westminster?" That does not help us. We should all agree that something has to be done. That is the general will of the House. To name councils with problems does not help the House and certainly does not help the councillors.

We need to ensure that councillors have the powers to deal with the problems. We are increasing the powers of scrutiny by introducing a new structure. There will be an executive—it could be a mayor or a leader—for councillors to scrutinise. Council decisions are generally taken in groups. That is the same for any political party. Even when there is power sharing between political parties, agreement has to be reached.

The overwhelming majority of councillors are asked simply to have a little discussion and put up their hands in a committee meeting to endorse a decision that has already been made. Scrutiny is a far better system, and we have endorsed it and put it at the heart of our White Paper. Councillors will be able to check the executive and the chairs—even those of their own party—and scrutinise decisions.

When the citizens listen to councillors putting their case, they often complain to their Member of Parliament that the decision had already been made and that all the councillor could do was say, "I'm sorry, I can't say anything." That does nothing for accountability or for democracy, and it affects turnout at elections. Scrutiny will put greater pressure on the executive, and decision making will be much more open and transparent. The press and everyone else will be able to see an open, public debate on decisions that affect so many people's lives.

Scrutiny is a major step towards dealing with wrong decisions, corruption and other problems. The strengthening of the standards board will mean that there will be a readily accessible body for people to complain to, which will serve democratic accountability in councils.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley (South-West Surrey): On the matter of finance, I hope that the Deputy Prime Minister will look sympathetically at the authorities that share the characteristics of urban and rural areas and are represented by the town and country finance issues group.

The White Paper, however, is more about restoring the credibility and integrity of local government, which must be an important task for us all. Is it not therefore all the more deplorable that, when we are seeking to ensure that taxpayers' money is not used for party political purposes, the White Paper should be published on the same day as the most deplorable example of such an abuse that I have seen in 15 years? Page 31 has the caption, "I am still hopeful that Tony Blair will keep his promises." That is no different from a party political document, but it is funded by the taxpayer nationally. That is no example to set local government, and I intend to take the matter up with the Cabinet Secretary.

Mr. Prescott: I am sure that the Cabinet Secretary will be worrying about that. I say that with a certain amount of cynicism, because most of us remember the practice of the previous Administration in their 18 years in office. I do not normally get into slagging off different periods of government, because it is not useful, but I remember that the Government's policies and achievements used to be recorded by asking Ministers what a Department had done since such and such a date, and that that would always happen to be the date of that Government's election.

All we have done is put our achievements in a proper annual report, record what we have done and be accountable for it. I call that democratic accountability. I would have been very happy for the previous Government's achievements to have been in a report that we could have debated in the House. The report makes it easier to have a debate than under the old system, whereby a question had to be put to the relevant Minister.

This is a new form of accountability. Much recent argument in the House has concerned whether the Labour party is keeping its promises. That is constantly asked at Prime Minister's Question Time. The Prime Minister can make a statement here, so why cannot we as a Government make a comprehensive statement in an annual report? I hope that all Governments will follow that practice. Governments can be in favour with the electorate one year and out the other. Good year or bad, Governments will now be accountable for their record: the record of what happened and not of what the Opposition put about.

Mr. Peter L. Pike (Burnley): My right hon. Friend will know that only a minority of the country still has two-tier local government. Does his White Paper give such authorities the option to become unitary authorities? If that is not possible in the short term, does not the fact that the authority that spends the least—less than 20 per cent. of the total—has to collect the money go against the accountability that he seeks? Should not county councils have to collect their own money so that there is direct accountability, and so that people know where the money is being spent?

Mr. Prescott: I said at the beginning of my statement that much legislation over the past couple of decades, has been about organisational structure rather than services. Unitary authorities exist, and the general opinion on both sides of the House is supportive of them. Unitary authorities have increased during the past few years. Two-tier government remains in metropolitan areas and in county areas where there are district authorities.

Mr. Jenkin: Three-tier.

Mr. Prescott: In the background, there is also regional government, which I have always supported, which may shock the hon. Member for North Essex. There are questions about the structure of local government, but it would take two Parliaments to be able to deal with them. Anyone who considers organisational change in local government will know that there must first be a consultation document, then legislation that will take time

to pass. I am an advocate of regional government, but for now there exist local authority structures that are both unitary and two-tier. We will seek to make authorities work as best they can. Where there are injustices, particularly as regards finance, as my hon. Friend the Member for Burnley (Mr. Pike) said, we shall seek to make matters fairer.

Mr. Christopher Chope (Christchurch): Does the Deputy Prime Minister accept that the consequence of today's announcement will be that people up and down the country will pay a lot more in council tax without any improvement in quality of service? His White Paper is entitled "In Touch with the People", but does he accept that he is out of touch with the people if he cannot tell us that people will get better quality services for the same or less council tax?

Mr. Prescott: Some of our changes to local authorities will make for better value, greater efficiency and improved provision of services. If we can do that, we can get more services for the same money. That is what efficiency and effectiveness are about. We have made changes to local authority financing regarding Treasury rules with which I was in considerable disagreement. Trading corporations in local authorities, such as airports—Manchester was a classic example—found themselves in difficulties because they had to borrow against the requirements of local government, instead of the requirements of a profitable company with considerable assets.

Changes to those rules will relieve local authorities of some expenditures and difficulties, and will enable them to put resources into providing better services. That will not cost the taxpayer one penny. We are making more intelligent use of the financial framework in which local authorities operate. Along with our best value system, that will mean better services. That belief lies at the heart of the White Paper, and we will be able to judge it over the next couple of years.

Judy Mallaber (Amber Valley): I welcome the Secretary of State's reaffirmation of the value of public service, and the measures for greater local accountability and local scrutiny that must go with it. Would he say more about the criteria that will be used to assess progress by local councils in considering political structures to meet that aim, and the aim of being closer to the people? Who will decide, and how, which councils are beacon authorities?

Mr. Prescott: The final point is highly relevant, and the White Paper contains a considerable section about beacon authorities. We use the term to identify centres of excellence. Some authorities, as we know, can build houses or provide services more efficiently than others. We want to highlight those authorities as offering the standards that we want for local authorities.

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham): Like Wandsworth.

Mr. Prescott: It might be Wandsworth, or it might be a Labour authority. I do not seek to make any ideological point about it. Where best practice exists, we should try to use it. Where good practices do not exist, we should act to say so. The White Paper says that they will be unacceptable, and that we are quite prepared to take action in areas that do not improve.

Local democracy is not about having the worst, inefficient services; it is about being proud of running local services. Most citizens have no chance of determining a council one way or the other, and we are obliged to do something about services. Beacon councils meet that argument. On setting targets, whether for housing, or for provision of services, the Audit Commission has already done some work.

We should like to talk more about the outputs than about the inputs. The Audit Commission is largely concerned about getting value for money. That is quite proper, but the services that emerge are equally important. That is where we draw the distinction between compulsory competitive tendering and best value. We shall negotiate those targets with the local government associations and we shall take that matter into account. Governments always come under a certain amount of pressure when dealing with public expenditure to bring about the best practice. We stand for better quality services and best practices. That is what the White Paper is about.

Mr. Mike Hancock (Portsmouth, South): I am delighted with much of what the Secretary of State has had to say this afternoon. When the White Paper materialises into a Bill, I hope that he will not give up completely on the idea of having a change in the voting system for local government. Some of us think that that exercise would bring more accountability.

Can he explain how the options for change in the way in which a local authority is organised and run will be put to the people? I know from my experience of over 30 years in local government, some 20-odd elections and four changes in local government organisation that the party in power at the time decides on how the options are put to the people. The end result is nearly always geared to support the continuation of power rather than to give more democracy to the people.

I am refreshed to hear that the matter of regional government remains high on the Secretary of State's agenda, as it is on mine. As his White Paper passes through its consultation exercise I should welcome him adding weight to the idea that regional government is an option to which we should look forward.

Mr. Prescott: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his contribution, particularly for his words about regional government. As we all know, these major constitutional changes or, at least, boundary changes, are extremely controversial. There great heat generated by whether the area we live in is called one thing or another. I shall not pick an example because these matters get particularly hot. I believe in these changes and I shall take every opportunity to push in that direction.

As the hon. Gentleman knows, we have set up the Jenkins commission to look into types of political representation and voting systems. We have a manifesto commitment to have a referendum on the issue also. Those are some steps towards what he is asking for. We are trying different electoral systems for the Scottish Parliament, the Welsh Assembly and, indeed, the London mayor. The system of election for the mayor is different from that for the assemblies. It tries to encourage the maximisation of the vote.

[Mr. Prescott]

The election of mayor requires a candidate to achieve 50 per cent. support. We will use a system of voting that will encourage that. If there are more than two or three candidates, it will allow for it to be judged which of the last two candidates gets more than 50 per cent. of the vote. The maximisation of the vote is designed to encourage support for the mayor. Indeed, the additional member system allows for a combination of the system of direct election of a member to a constituency and the top-up principle.

Given our proposals for these elections, it is fair to say that this is a radical agenda and a major change in our electoral process. It is right for us to claim that, even if we do not go as far as the hon. Gentleman wants us to do.

Mr. Gordon Prentice (Pendle): These are innovative proposals which will transform the face of local government and will be widely welcomed. My right hon. Friend said that local authorities could trigger referendums. Given that we want local authorities to speak on behalf of their entire community, will there be any restriction on the types of issue and question that can be put to the voters in a referendum? Is there any provision for the voters themselves to trigger a referendum?

Mr. Prescott: Our White Paper may not go as far as my hon. Friend wants in regard to questions in referendums. We have chosen to suggest ways forward. For example, with regard to the mayor, the local authority is required to put its proposal forward and have a vote on it. If citizens are to initiate a referendum they must produce a petition signed by 10 per cent. of those involved. That is not a unique idea. It is used for parish councils—where a certain area calls for a parish area. In Hull, either Beverley or East Yorkshire—I think it was Beverley—was campaigning hard for that. My hon. Friend has granted Beverley the right to have a parish area because 10 per cent. of the people involved produced a petition.

We are prepared to consider a number of suggestions and one could be a proposal for an authority that wants either the mayor, the chief executive or the change in structure. We should also bear it in mind—I have said this once, but think that I should repeat it, particularly for those councils that might not like the idea of changing those structures—that, if the existing structure is found to be acceptable, that option can be put to the electorate, who can say, "We don't want a change. We're happy to accept the council's verdict." In many cases, the referendums will not be decision-making referendums but will merely offer advice.

Mr. Patrick McLoughlin (West Derbyshire): Will the Deputy Prime Minister go into more detail about his conclusions on page 40 of the White Paper regarding more frequent elections? What will be the position for councils affected by the Local Government Commission's ward redistribution, whose cases are before his Department and which have not taken into account the possibility of yearly elections? Will he take it from me that such elections are not necessarily the answer that he seems to think they will be?

Derbyshire Dales district council is elected every four years, whereas Amber Valley district council has yearly elections, but the turnout in Derbyshire Dales is, in the main, higher than that in Amber Valley. Therefore, annual elections will not necessarily result in a great increase in turnout. There is a difference between district councils, which do not spend much money, and county councils, which provide the majority of services in the shire county areas. The White Paper states that the counties will have elections every two years. However, as the wards will be much larger, that policy is worrying, particularly in large rural areas such as mine.

Mr. Prescott: We made it clear in our manifesto that we wanted more regular elections and we are taking into account the different election cycles. For example, some unitary authorities are elected by thirds, with elections each year for three years and the fourth year fallow. That will also be the case in London, where we propose to hold the elections for the mayor and the assembly in the fallow year; so we will have elections there every year.

There are real difficulties in having multi-member arrangements for the counties, so we have decided to allow elections for half the seats every two years—so all the seats will be covered in four years—with a district holding its elections every two years. That will allow more regular and frequent elections, but will also take into account the fact that whereas towns and highly populated areas can have multi-member constituencies, that is not the case in the county areas and so we have to provide a proper balance for them. That is why we have arrived at that conclusion and why we have received a certain amount of criticism about the fact that there will not always be yearly elections. I hope that we have found the best way to make elections more frequent and will achieve that.

Business of the House

4.34 pm

The President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mrs. Margaret Beckett): With permission, I should like to make a statement about the business of the House for the first week back after the summer recess.

MONDAY 19 OCTOBER AND TUESDAY 20 OCTOBER—There will be a debate on a motion to approve the conclusions of the Government's strategic defence review.

WEDNESDAY 21 OCTOBER—Until 2 pm, there will be debates on the motion for the Adjournment of the House.

Remaining stages of the Human Rights Bill *[Lords]*.

THURSDAY 22 OCTOBER—There will be a debate on the 10th report from the Environment, Transport and Regional Affairs Committee on housing; followed by a debate on the seventh report from the Trade and Industry Committee on reform of European structural funds. Both debates will arise on a motion for the Adjournment of the House.

FRIDAY 23 OCTOBER—The House will not be sitting.

Sir George Young (North-West Hampshire): I am grateful for notice of the business for the first week back. I welcome the right hon. Lady to her first business questions, and look forward to working with her. In that spirit, may I suggest that she glance at the website at No. 10, whose Cabinet page still shows her as President of the Board of Trade?

Can the right hon. Lady confirm that there will be an oral statement at 11 am tomorrow on the roads review, and explain why all the other oral statements after the comprehensive spending review took place within a few days of it, while this one was held back until the Friday that the House rises? When we return, can we have a debate in Government time on the new role of the enforcer at the Cabinet Office, to give the House a clearer idea of how he will operate and what his remit is? How will he kick-start the stalled programme of welfare reform, caught, as we heard yesterday, between two warring Departments? How will he arbitrate between No. 10 and No. 11 on such issues as the future of the Paymaster General?

When do the Government hope to receive and publish the report of the Jenkins commission on electoral reform? Can we have a debate on it? Will the Labour party do what the Conservatives have done, and place in the Library of a copy its submission to the commission?

On today's costly and revisionist annual report, should the Prime Minister not hold himself to account in the Chamber of the House of Commons rather than in the rose garden at No. 10? Should he not do so before all Members of the House, rather than a hand-picked team of Ministers?

Mrs. Beckett: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for his kind remarks. It is not my first business questions, because I have been shadow Leader of the House. I do not know whether he thinks that I am on performance-related pay but he asked a lot of questions, all of which I will endeavour to deal with. I assure him that there is no significance in—and nothing sinister about—the roads statement being made tomorrow, which is a sitting day. It has not been held back; it is a matter of it being ready. At business questions, Members always want statements, but every other day they do not want them, because they take time from debates. It is always difficult.

The right hon. Gentleman seeks a debate on the role of my right hon. Friend the Minister for the Cabinet Office. I am sure that there will continue to be Opposition days, so it is a matter that he and his colleagues can continue to pursue. I know that they are looking for ways to fill the time, as they have no policy of their own to debate. He will have to consider that.

On the Jenkins commission, I do not know the answer to the right hon. Gentleman's question. I will inquire about the issues that he raised on that. He asked about why my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister's annual report was not presented to the House. He overlooks the fact that, obviously and inevitably in the annual report, the Government report on what has already been done and that a parliamentary question on the annual report was answered. Scrutiny in the House through statements and questions and so on are for future policy. I assure him that all the issues have been aired in the House. I commend the example of producing such a report to the Conservatives, though I am not sure what they would put in it.

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): I am delighted to see my right hon. Friend back at the Dispatch Box—I know that all my colleagues join me in that. I particularly commend her good sense in debating the Select Committee report on housing in the week we return. Having set such a good example, will she also allow us to debate the Select Committee reports on regional airports and other aspects of transport, because they are all equally good?

Mrs. Beckett: Any report produced by a Committee in which my hon. Friend had a role would be worth reading. I shall bear in mind her view that the reports merit examination in the House—but not, I fear, in the first week back.

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall): In welcoming and congratulating the right hon. Lady, may I say how much we appreciate the work of her predecessor as Leader of the House? I hope that she will extend my felicitations to her predecessor.

I remind the right hon. Lady that the Leader of the House has two roles. She must ensure that the Government's business is carried through, but she must also represent the views of all Back Benchers and parties. I draw her attention to early-day motion 1569.

[That this House is appalled at the behaviour of a small but organised group of Tory honourable Members who appear to be acting as 'a party within a party' in blocking the progress of Private Members' Bills that have the support of the House; notes the inability of the leadership of the Conservative Party to deal with these backbench honourable Members who seem to be running the Party; and hopes that the House can find time in this Session to consider and pass those Ballot Bills that were blocked by those Tory honourable Members in the order that they appeared on the Order Paper for 3rd July, namely the Fireworks Bill, a safety measure which would decrease firework accidents, the Energy Conservation (Housing)

[Mr. Paul Tyler]

Bill, which would help people living in cold homes to keep warmer, the Weights and Measures (Beer and Cider) Bill, which would ensure that customers get full measures in public houses, the Breeding and Sale of Dogs Bill, which would help stamp out cruelty in puppy farms, the Energy Efficiency Bill, which would help home buyers insulate their homes and cut fuel bills and the Local Authority Tenders Bill; and further hopes that, if necessary, provision can be made to bring proceedings to a close on each of those Bills after reasonable time.]

A total of 180 hon. Members of all parties have expressed concern about the treatment of private Member's Bills. I appreciate that a debate will not be possible tomorrow, but will she see if some action can be taken in the spillover period to deal with the matter?

Can the Leader of the House give us any information about the timetable for the freedom of information Bill? Will there be time in the second week of the spillover Session for a debate on the White Paper on local government published today and just introduced by the Deputy Prime Minister? During the long recess, when she perhaps has more time for reading than has yet been available to her, will the right hon. Lady carefully examine the recommendations of the Modernisation Committee's first report on the legislative programme, in the hope that they will be of use to her and her colleagues in deciding how next Session's business may be undertaken in the House?

Mrs. Beckett: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his kind remarks. I am aware of the excellent work done by my predecessor, and I know that she will be grateful to him for his observations. She said that the Committee would examine the procedure for private Members' Bills. I hear what the hon. Gentleman says. I am sure that, in due course, the Committee will examine that matter.

I have taken due note of what the hon. Gentleman said about what we might discuss in the spillover. I cannot, I am afraid, cast any light on the timetable for the freedom of information Bill. I hear his concern to debate the White Paper that has just been announced, and I will bear it in mind. I assure him that I intend to take some time during the recess to study the work of the Modernisation Committee.

Mr. Jim Marshall (Leicester, South): May I welcome my right hon. Friend to her new position? When she is thinking about business for next Session, will she consider the possibility of holding a series of debates, preferably opened by the Prime Minister, to give the House an opportunity to debate the performance of each Government Department?

I do not wish to cause my right hon. Friend any embarrassment, but will she ensure that the Department of Trade and Industry is at the top of that list of debates, so that we can highlight its achievements over the past 15 years—*[Interruption.]*—15 months—including the national minimum wage and the White Paper "Fairness at Work"? It is necessary that we highlight those achievements and the work of the previous Secretary of State, who introduced those measures. If we have such a debate opened by the Prime Minister, we shall be able to question him on the reasons why changes were made in that Department recently, as well as in other Departments.

Mrs. Beckett: I am extremely grateful to my hon. Friend for his interesting suggestions for discussions in the House, and for his kind remarks. I take seriously the observations of all hon. Members. I will certainly take seriously his suggestion that we should debate the way in which Government Departments handle their business. He will know that the time of the House, especially with a heavy legislative programme for a reforming Government, is always at a premium, but I am grateful to my hon. Friend for what he said about the achievements of the Department that I previously headed, where a great deal of work has been done. I am confident that work will be taken forward in the future.

Mr. Alan Simpson (Nottingham, South): I look forward to the debate on the strategic defence review. May I ask my right hon. Friend to ensure that a specific issue is raised with the Secretary of State for Defence in the context of the new spirit of openness and open government to which we are committed? I received a reply from him on the 28th of this month about costs relating to the nuclear weapons establishment, in which he declined to come up with the information, on the basis that it was exempt on grounds of commercial confidentiality.

As the information was already available in Companies House, will my right hon. Friend ensure that the full costs associated with the nuclear weapons programme are as available to Members of Parliament in the House as they are to members of the public outside, so that a full and proper debate can take place here?

Mrs. Beckett: I certainly hear the concern that my hon. Friend has expressed. I shall draw his remarks to the attention of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence. All that I would say to my hon. Friend is that, if the material that he describes is available in Companies House, it is available to hon. Members as well as more widely to the public.

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip-Northwood): Can the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster—in the modern vernacular, the enforcer—come to the House at 11 am tomorrow to make a statement on the ethical implications of the appointment of Lord Sainsbury to the Department of Trade and Industry, and how he will dispose of his £1.4 billion of supermarket shares, in view of the fact that his Tuscan tycoon friend the Paymaster General is trying to promote the sale of individual savings accounts through supermarkets, and that is germane to Lord Sainsbury's responsibilities at the DTI?

Mrs. Beckett: There is no question of any need to make such a statement. There are no ethical implications in Lord Sainsbury's appointment. He has already met the permanent secretary of the DTI to discuss the handling of his affairs. The ministerial code sets out roles on avoiding conflicts of interest, and they will of course be followed.

Mrs. Irene Adams (Paisley, North): Early after our return, will the Leader of the House make way for a debate on the increasing number of deaths from drugs

overdoses in Strathclyde this year, especially the recent alarming reports that the deaths may have resulted from heroin taken from a missing batch imported into this country by Customs and Excise for use in tracking drug traffickers?

Mrs. Beckett: I certainly share my hon. Friend's concern at the tragic events that she describes. I am not familiar with the report to which she draws attention, but the Ministers in the relevant Departments may be. If they are not, I shall ensure that it is drawn to their attention.

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): I welcome the right hon. Lady back to business questions. May we have a debate in the spillover period on departmental responsibilities in the Scottish Office? It will not have escaped her notice that the new Minister of State at the Scottish Office has a dramatically lighter work load than that of her predecessor. The reason seems to be that she has been given the "bash the Nats" portfolio.

I welcome the sign of panic from the Labour party. I welcome the recognition that they have been trounced in the polls in Scotland. I even welcome the ministerial changes that acknowledge that, but is there not an issue as to whether a part-time Minister should be given a full-time salary? Should not the Labour party pay for its own politicking rather than ask the public to do it?

Mrs. Beckett: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his welcome. His question seems to be hypothesis piled on hypothesis. I have not studied, I fear, the detailed allocation of work in the Scottish Office, but we have excellent and hard-working Ministers there. I am confident that they will do an excellent job in handling the affairs of the Scottish Office. If that handling has some impact on the electoral fortunes of the hon. Gentleman, I am sure that it will be a job well done.

Mr. Andrew Mackinlay (Thurrock): Looking ahead to business on our return, may I invite my right hon. Friend to make a statement following the resignation comments of Lord Richard, who has implied that it is unlikely that there will be any Lords reform other than setting up the wholly undemocratic, unelected council of life peers? As a proud moderniser and, along with her, diligent custodian of the Labour manifesto—*[Interruption.]*—new Labour manifesto—may I draw to her attention the commitment we gave to set up a Joint Committee of both Houses of Parliament to look into reform? In other words, we gave a commitment that the further reform would be Parliament-led, not Executive-led. Is it not time, first, that we had some specific proposals on the reform of the House of Lords, and, secondly, an indication that we will see this right through to the end, and to a democratically elected House?

Mrs. Beckett: I am well aware that my hon. Friend is a diligent custodian of the Labour party's manifesto. I heard some, though perhaps not all, of the remarks of my right hon. and noble Friend Lord Richard. I must admit that I did not read into them the implication that has been read in by my hon. Friend. The reform of the other place is an issue that will certainly be thoroughly debated in this House, and I am confident that, in the end, my hon. Friend will be satisfied with the outcome.

Mr. Ian Bruce (South Dorset): I welcome the right hon. Lady to her new responsibilities. Will she be able to give us a debate both on the Government's annual report, and on the way in which the Government deal with the House? She will know that I pressed both her predecessor and the former Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, who has also lost his job, to ensure that we found out how long it is taking Ministers to reply to letters from Members of Parliament, but we have still not been given that information.

I know that the right hon. Lady's former Department, the DTI, had one of the best records under her control—indeed, one of the Ministers said that he was sacked because he had achieved too high a return rate for letters from Members of Parliament. Can we have an early debate on that issue, because it does concern all of us, and affects how we can do our job for our constituents?

Mrs. Beckett: I cannot undertake to find time, although I can generously offer that the Opposition might find time, to debate the Government's annual report, but I shall certainly bear the request in mind.

As for the way in which the Government deal with the House and the length of time taken to reply to letters, all Ministers are anxious to get the turn-round as fast as possible. My predecessor will probably have told the hon. Gentleman that, in every Department under the Labour Government, the level of correspondence, not only from Members of Parliament, but from members of the public, and the overall work load has actually gone up like that—almost vertically. That is one of the things that is making it harder to achieve a fast turn-round. When a Government are reforming and modernising, as this Government are, it increases the work load.

Mr. Michael Clapham (Barnsley, West and Penistone): I welcome my right hon. Friend to her new job, and I associate myself with the remarks by my hon. Friend the Member for Leicester, South (Mr. Marshall). Will she look in the new parliamentary year for time for an early debate on health and safety? That would be particularly pertinent, as the first week back is European Safety Week; and the 20th, which is the second day back, is the 21st anniversary of the expansion of the role of the health and safety representative under the Health and Safety at Work Act, etc. 1974.

Such a debate would give us an opportunity to discuss the Health and Safety Executive report on the reporting of accidents in mines, which shows 52 per cent. under-reporting. That figure is contested by the mining unions, which argue that the level of under-reporting is far greater. An early debate would be much appreciated.

Mrs. Beckett: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his remarks. I must admit that I was not aware that it would be European Safety Week when we come back, and I am grateful to him for that information. At present, I cannot undertake to find time for such a debate in that week, but I shall certainly bear his views in mind.

Mr. Edward Garnier (Harborough): I too congratulate the right hon. Lady on her new appointment. May I return to the issue drawn to her attention by my hon. Friend the Member for South Dorset (Mr. Bruce)—that ministerial correspondence is being returned far too slowly?

I wrote to the Minister of State, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, on 4 April, but I have still not had a substantive reply. If a difficult question were posed in the

[Mr. Edward Garnier]

correspondence I sent to the Minister, I could understand the need to look into it with some care, but the correspondence does not deal with a difficult matter. I invite the Leader of the House, as the protector of the interests of Back Benchers, to ensure that Ministers get their heads around their correspondence rather more quickly than they are currently doing.

Mrs. Beckett: I thank the hon. and learned Gentleman for his remarks, but, without knowing the particular issue to which he refers, I cannot know what the reason is for the delay, although I agree that the delay is not usual. It would be a matter for regret in any Department, and I shall certainly draw his remarks to the attention of my right hon. Friend the Minister. However, all I can tell the hon. and learned Gentleman is to repeat that the work load undertaken by Government Departments has, in most cases, quadrupled, and inevitably that has implications for the time it takes to deal with these matters.

Mr. Martin Salter (Reading, West): Does the Leader of the House share the concern of hon. Members, the Playpen Campaign, many parents and child care professionals about the apparently conflicting statements emanating from the Government in respect of child care regulation? On the one hand, the former Secretary of State for Social Security published the excellent Green Paper "Meeting the Childcare Challenge" which made the case for better regulation; but, on the other hand, we had the better regulation task force report, which made the case against better regulation.

Is there not an urgent need for these matters to be clarified? Is there not an urgent need for a debate in the House, so as to ensure that we have no more Louise Woodwards, Helen Staceys and Louise Sullivans?

Mrs. Beckett: All hon. Members on both sides of the House share the concern expressed by my hon. Friend that there should be no more tragedies, but I must admit that it does not appear to me that there is a conflict on the issue. Everyone is well aware of the importance of ensuring the safety and welfare of children; the issue is how best it can be secured. My hon. Friend will know that the consultation document was issued in March. The Government are studying the responses to that consultation, and will come forward with proposals in due course.

Mr. Peter Brooke (Cities of London and Westminster): Now that we have the constitutional innovation of the Government Chief Whip being in the Cabinet, will there be a slot for the House to put oral questions to her?

Mrs. Beckett: That would certainly be a constitutional innovation. I must confess that I had not considered the matter, but I shall certainly do so.

Mr. John McDonnell (Hayes and Harlington): My right hon. Friend will no doubt be aware that, on four occasions, I have raised the case of my constituent Ricky Reel in the House. He was the young man who, last year, following a racist attack, went missing and was found dead in the Thames a week later. There was a Police Complaints Authority investigation into the investigation of his death; that has now come to a conclusion, and it is hoped that the report will be available during the recess.

May I ask that we have a debate on the PCA report as soon as possible after the recess; and that the report be made available, together with all the investigatory evidence? That will ensure that we can have a thorough debate on the case, which will help to restore the confidence of the family in the overall investigation, and to identify where possible what actually happened to Ricky.

Mrs. Beckett: I am well aware of the great interest and concern that my hon. Friend has shown on behalf of his late constituent and his family. I cannot today give any indication as to whether it will be possible to find time for a debate, although it is open to him to seek an Adjournment debate. However, I shall certainly draw his remarks and his request for full publication to the attention of the relevant Department.

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham): Will the right hon. Lady reconsider her reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Ruislip-Northwood (Mr. Wilkinson), and ask the new Secretary of State for Trade and Industry to make an early statement to the House about the role and responsibilities of the new Under-Secretary of State for Science and Technology? She will no doubt be aware that Lord Sainsbury has indicated that, because of his commercial interest, he does not intend to involve himself in matter relating to food technology, and that is welcome.

However, does the right hon. Lady recognise that, to name but a few, plants and soil, wood and metal, textile and garment manufacturing technology are also matters in which, because of Lord Sainsbury's commercial interest, he should in future have no ministerial involvement? An early assurance on that point would be greatly welcomed.

Mrs. Beckett: There will, of course, be opportunities to put questions to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry at Trade and Industry questions in the autumn. I can only repeat what I told the hon. Member for Ruislip-Northwood: there are rules to prevent conflicts of interest arising, and those rules will be followed.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): What has become of the much heralded statement on the proposal for a trial in a third country—Holland—of the Lockerbie suspects? Since Madeleine Albright apparently agreed, the idea that American objections are stopping such a trial is somewhat question-marked. Is it because of the nine-year-old cynicism of the Crown Office in Edinburgh? To put it quite cynically, the last thing it wants is an actual trial to take place, because, if it did, the poverty of the evidence that the Crown Office claims to have would be exposed. Is that the real trouble?

Mrs. Beckett: No. I can assure my hon. Friend, who I know has taken a long and sustained interest in the matter, that the Government continue to give priority to seeing justice done through a criminal trial of those who are accused. There have been discussions about the possibility of trial in a third country. A great deal of work has been and continues to be done on the matter. Complex issues are involved. If and when they are resolved, we shall

make an announcement. I can assure my hon. Friend that the matter is not being held up by any concern of the kind to which he referred.

Mr. Derek Foster (Bishop Auckland): May I, too, warmly welcome my right hon. Friend to her new post, and congratulate her on her outstanding performance in her previous job, which was widely appreciated on the Back Benches. [AN HON. MEMBER: "But not by business."] I refer my right hon. Friend to early-day motion 1589 on freedom of information, which is now signed by 185 colleagues from all parts of the House.

[*That this House welcomes the Prime Minister's statement in 1996 that a Freedom of Information Act 'is not some isolated constitutional reform' but 'a change that is absolutely fundamental to how we see politics developing in this country over the next few years'; congratulates the Government on its Freedom of Information White Paper; expresses concern at the prospect of any delay in bringing the measure forward; and calls on the Government to publish its draft Freedom of Information Bill before the end of the current session and to ensure that the actual Bill is introduced in the coming session.*]

Can we have either a debate or a statement when we return in the autumn, so that we can remind ourselves that, before the election, we campaigned on the basis that a freedom of information Act was crucial to restore trust between Government and the people? I understand that that is a major theme of the Prime Minister's annual report.

Mrs. Beckett: I thank my right hon. Friend for his remarks.

May I say to the Opposition Member—I did not identify the culprit—who said that my stint at the Department of Trade and Industry had not been welcomed by business, that he is wrong, and that I have had a number of nice letters from people in the business community, expressing their appreciation.

Of course I am aware of the great interest across the House in proposals for freedom of information legislation. As my right hon. Friend will know, I cannot promise at this stage an early debate or a statement when the House returns, but I shall bear his views in mind. He is entirely right to say that that pertains to trust, which is central to the Government's record and understanding. The annual report has been published today so that the Government can make it plain how they are delivering against the benchmarks we set ourselves before the general election. I understand why that is so objectionable to the Opposition, just as I understand why they never did it.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): With regard to the House of Lords, has my right hon. Friend seen the comments of her former Cabinet colleague, Lord Richard, who said that an elected second Chamber would undoubtedly be troublesome for the Commons? As Leader of the House of Commons, will she bear in mind that there are differing views about that?

Although I am strongly in favour of getting rid of the hereditary peerages, as there is no justification for such people to remain in the House of Lords, it would be unacceptable, to some of us at least, that there should be an elected second Chamber, which would be a direct challenge to the authority of this House. I hope that that will be borne in mind when the Government consider proposals for the House of Lords.

Mrs. Beckett: I share my hon. Friend's view, as do the whole Government, that the continuation of the hereditary principle in another place, and of it being the basis of the right to vote there, is unacceptable. As he rightly says, there are differences of view about what should be done in place of the present situation. It would be unacceptable for those differences of view to be used as a further excuse to prolong the process of reform, as has happened when the issues have been debated in the past.

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): I congratulate my right hon. Friend on her appointment as Leader of the House. Will she ensure that, before the debate on the strategic defence review in October, the Ministry of Defence publishes all its estimates on expenditure for this year which have not yet been published?

In response to the question from my hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham, South (Mr. Simpson), will my right hon. Friend also ensure that the Ministry of Defence publishes all the costs of nuclear weapons, which under section 13 notices it has tried to hide by refusing to reveal them to the House? Without all the details of nuclear weapons research expenditure by the Ministry of Defence and by my right hon. Friend's former Department, a debate on defence expenditure and its implications would be rather unbalanced.

Mrs. Beckett: I thank my hon. Friend for his welcome. He has made a number of requests for information that he considers should be available before the debate in the autumn. I shall draw those views to the attention of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence, who I am sure will take them on board.

Mr. Christopher Chope (Christchurch): May I join my hon. Friends in calling for an early debate on the Government's annual report, and in particular the choice of illustrations and the words put into the mouths of the people illustrated? I draw the right hon. Lady's attention to page 17 of the annual report, which shows a lady pushing a supermarket trolley owned by the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Industry. The lady is portrayed as expressing views about the Government. Does the Leader of the House think that perhaps she was expressing views about the quality of the supermarket produce?

Mrs. Beckett: I only glanced at the cover and the photographs in the report. My understanding from that glance was that a photographer went around, took photographs of people, and asked them to comment on the Government's record so far. It is therefore wrong to suggest that words were put into anyone's mouth. Those words were, I understand, their words.

Mr. Ivor Caplin (Hove): I join others who have congratulated my right hon. Friend on her new position. May I bring to her attention the issue of private Members' business? Even after just a couple of days, she will be aware that this year little private Members' business has completed all its legislative stages in the House, primarily because of the blocking manoeuvres of the Opposition.

[Mr. Ivor Caplin]

Can the process be examined by the Modernisation Committee? Will my right hon. Friend make a statement about the matter early in the new Session?

Mrs. Beckett: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. I can confirm that my predecessor told the House that she thought that the Modernisation Committee should consider the handling of private Members' business. I am happy to share that view. However, as the Committee has not yet done so, I fear that it is unlikely that we will be able to make a statement early in the new Session. I have taken on board my hon. Friend's comments. I share his view that it is always a sadness, and it is difficult for people outside to understand, when worthy and sensible pieces of legislation are lost as a result of maverick behaviour by Members of the Opposition.

Mr. Christopher Leslie (Shipley): In the current climate of pay restraint, can my right hon. Friend find time for a debate about boardroom pay excesses, in particular the example set by some company directors, including none other than: the shadow Chancellor of the Exchequer who, as a director of Gartmore Shared Equity Trust, gave himself a 13 per cent. pay rise; the deputy leader of the Conservative party, whose board gave themselves a 40 per cent. pay increase; and the shadow Home Secretary, whose board of directors on Aggregate Industries plc gave themselves an astonishing 64 per cent. pay increase?

Mrs. Beckett: My hon. Friend makes a pertinent and powerful point on an issue to which he and others will no doubt wish to return in the new Session.

Mr. Vernon Coaker (Gedling): I welcome my right hon. Friend to her post. In line with the comments of my hon. Friend the Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody), may I ask the Leader of the House whether she will find time in the new Session for a debate on a Select Committee report published today on the welfare of former British child migrants? That excellent report outlines the appalling scandal that took place under the auspices of British Government agencies and the receiving agencies. Many children, supposedly in care, were subjected to appalling physical and sexual abuse.

Mrs. Beckett: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. I am indeed aware of that report, and understand that it identifies some appalling treatment and practice. I share his view that it is an issue of importance. I cannot at present say whether or when we might find time for a debate, but I shall bear his views in mind.

Mr. Gordon Prentice (Pendle): I, too, welcome my right hon. Friend to her new position, after an outstanding stint at the Department of Trade and Industry. Is she aware that today the Association of Professional Political Consultants described Derek Draper as "a rogue elephant" who brought the lobbying industry into disrepute, and that the chairman of the firm that formerly employed him, GPC Market Access, has written to the Prime Minister, the Lord Chancellor and to you, Madam Speaker, calling for a statutory register of lobbyists?

Given that the Prime Minister on Monday issued advice to civil servants on how they should deal with approaches from lobbyists, who are absolutely everywhere these days, is there not a compelling case for an early debate on the role of lobbyists when the House returns from the recess?

Mrs. Beckett: Again, I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his kind remarks. I was not aware of the report to which he has just drawn attention, and I do not think it will be easy to find time for a debate early in the new Session or in the overspill. All I can say is that it is an issue to which various agencies of the House—perhaps even the Modernisation Committee—will have to pay attention at some point, as it seems that it is a developing role.

Sir Patrick Cormack (South Staffordshire): Will the Leader of the House reconsider the answer that she gave to my right hon. Friend the Member for North-West Hampshire (Sir G. Young) about the Government's annual report—this colour supplement to end all colour supplements.? Is she aware that the first page states that it is "presented to Parliament"? Should it not be presented to Parliament by the Prime Minister in person? Should there not be a debate in which he answers to Parliament rather than to a small coterie in the rose garden at No. 10?

If this is to be an innovation—I am not opposed to it as an innovation—does the right hon. Lady agree that there should be an end-of-term debate in Parliament led by the Prime Minister, so that hon. Members from all parts of the House have the opportunity to probe, scrutinise and criticise, and to expose the fallacies within the document?

Mrs. Beckett: I remind the hon. Gentleman that the document reports on issues that have been thoroughly debated in the House—indeed, it makes a point about the scale and size of the Government's legislative programme—and that, in that sense, the Prime Minister has been available to discuss these issues on many occasions. I also remind him that the matter was laid before the House in answer to a parliamentary question. It is, of course, open to the Opposition to use some of their own time to debate the Government's annual report—they have no policies of their own, so they might as well debate ours.

I find it interesting that Opposition Members are so keen for the Prime Minister to lead a debate in the House. It was, after all, during the 18 years of the Conservatives' period in office that it became so rare that Prime Ministers took part in debates. I agree that it is important that the Prime Minister is available to the House to be questioned, and he is regularly, every week. Full advantage is taken of that.

Orders of the Day

Northern Ireland Bill

As amended (in the Committee) considered.

New clause 2

SOCIAL SECURITY, CHILD SUPPORT AND PENSIONS: CONSULTATION AND CO-ORDINATION

'.—(1) The Secretary of State and the Northern Ireland Minister having responsibility for social security ("the Northern Ireland Minister") shall from time to time consult one another with a view to securing that, to the extent agreed between them, the legislation to which this section applies provides single systems of social security, child support and pensions for the United Kingdom.

(2) Without prejudice to section 21, the Secretary of State with the consent of the Treasury, and the Northern Ireland Minister with the consent of the Department of Finance and Personnel, may make—

(a) arrangements for co-ordinating the operation of the legislation to which this section applies with a view to securing that, to the extent allowed for in the arrangements, it provides single systems of social security, child support and pensions for the United Kingdom, and for making any necessary financial adjustments; and

(b) reciprocal arrangements for co-ordinating the operation of so much of the legislation as operates differently in relation to Great Britain and in relation to Northern Ireland, and for making any necessary financial adjustments.

(3) The Secretary of State may make regulations for giving effect to arrangements under subsection (2); and any such regulations may for the purposes of the arrangements provide—

(a) for adapting legislation (including subordinate legislation) for the time being in force in Great Britain;

(b) without prejudice to paragraph (a) above, for securing that acts, omissions and events having any effect for the purposes of the enactments in force in Northern Ireland have a corresponding effect in relation to Great Britain (but not so as to confer any double benefit); and

(c) for determining, in cases where rights accrue both in relation to Great Britain and in relation to Northern Ireland, which of those rights shall be available to the person concerned.

(4) The Northern Ireland Minister may make regulations for giving effect to arrangements under subsection (2); and any such regulations may for the purposes of the arrangements provide—

(a) for adapting legislation (including subordinate legislation) for the time being in force in Northern Ireland;

(b) without prejudice to paragraph (a) above, for securing that acts, omissions and events having any effect for the purposes of the enactments in force in Great Britain have a corresponding effect in relation to Northern Ireland (but not so as to confer any double benefit); and

(c) for determining, in cases where rights accrue both in relation to Northern Ireland and in relation to Great Britain, which of those rights shall be available to the person concerned.

(5) This section applies to—

(a) the Social Security Contributions and Benefits Act 1992 and the Social Security Contributions and Benefits (Northern Ireland) Act 1992;

(b) the Social Security Administration Act 1992 and the Social Security Administration (Northern Ireland) Act 1992;

(c) the Child Support Act 1991 and the Child Support (Northern Ireland) Order 1991;

(d) the Disability (Grants) Act 1993;

(e) the Pension Schemes Act 1993 and the Pensions Schemes (Northern Ireland) Act 1993;

(f) the Jobseekers Act 1995 and the Jobseekers (Northern Ireland) Order 1995;

(g) the Pensions Act 1995 and the Pensions (Northern Ireland) Order 1995;

(h) the Child Support Act 1995 and the Child Support (Northern Ireland) Order 1995;

(i) the Social Security Act 1998 and the Social Security (Northern Ireland) Order 1998.

(6) The following provisions (which are superseded by this section and section (*Social security, child support and pensions: the Joint Authority*)) shall cease to have effect—

(a) sections 177 and 178 of the Social Security Administration Act 1992 (co-ordination and reciprocity with Northern Ireland);

(b) sections 153 and 154 of the Social Security Administration (Northern Ireland) Act 1992 (co-ordination and reciprocity with Great Britain);

(c) section 56(2) to (4) of the Child Support Act 1991 (co-ordination with Northern Ireland);

(d) Article 49(2) and (3) of the Child Support (Northern Ireland) Order 1991 (co-ordination with Great Britain).

(7) Section 189 of the Social Security Administration Act 1992 (regulations and orders: general) shall apply in relation to the power conferred by subsection (3) as it applied in relation to the power conferred by section 177(4) of that Act.

(8) Section 165 of the Social Security Administration (Northern Ireland) Act 1992 (regulations and orders: general) shall apply in relation to the power conferred by subsection (4) as it applied in relation to the power conferred by section 153(3) of that Act.'.—*[Mr. Paul Murphy.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

5.12 pm

The Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office (Mr. Paul Murphy): I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): With this, it will be convenient to discuss the following: Government new clause 3—*Social security, child support and pensions: the Joint Authority.*

Government amendments Nos. 50, 51, 53, 55, 61, 66, 68 and 69.

Mr. Murphy: The amendments that we have to consider today are of two kinds. The first are technical ones, which we hope will improve the drafting of the Bill; the others are part of our response to our consultation with the parties, as well as to the views that have been expressed in the House. As we examine them this evening, I shall be able to give an explanation.

I apologise for the length and complexity of the first group of amendments and new clauses, but they are not as difficult as they might appear on the surface.

As the House knows, social security in Northern Ireland is the responsibility of the Department of Health and Social Services, and therefore passes under the Belfast agreement to the devolved institutions. However, there is close parity between Great Britain and Northern Ireland, and there are close links between the two social security systems. Reciprocal arrangements must exist to ensure,

[Mr. Murphy]

for example, that entitlements to benefit can be transported by someone who moves house. There must also be arrangements for recognition of reciprocal agreements with other states, and there is much practical co-operation between the two systems—for example, the use of UK-wide computer systems.

There is also a question of finance. There are arrangements for topping up the Northern Ireland national insurance fund from its counterpart in Britain so that benefits in Northern Ireland can be paid at the same rates for the same contributions.

New clauses 2 and 3 provide for the Secretary of State for Social Security and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland to make arrangements for co-ordination. They do not require parity, but they provide a means by which the practical consequences of divergence can be managed. If the Assembly decides, for example, to move from parity between Britain and Northern Ireland, the cost would have to be met by the Assembly itself. Arrangements under the new clauses extend to child support and pensions, as well as to other social security benefits. In other words, if the Assembly wishes to vary benefits in Northern Ireland—presumably upwards—it will have to pay.

Government amendments Nos. 50 and 55 deal with another related point. My right hon. Friend the Chancellor announced in March that the Inland Revenue would assume responsibility for national insurance contributions from next April, taking over that function from the Department of Social Security in Great Britain and from the DHSS in Northern Ireland. Amendment No. 55 makes them an excepted matter by adding them to schedule 2, but, of course, we hope that devolution occurs before April—perhaps some time in February or March. The amendments transfer responsibility for these matters to the Secretary of State for Social Security for those few months, or possibly weeks, so that responsibility for the administration of both national insurance funds would transfer to the Inland Revenue at exactly the sane time.

The amendments and new clauses are a sensible way of dealing with the difficulties arising from the transfer of responsibilities and are in line with the agreement. I commend them to the House.

Mr. Clifford Forsythe (South Antrim): I should like to ask the Minister a few questions. New clause 2(1) refers to

"the Secretary of State and the Northern Ireland Minister".

Is that a Northern Ireland Assembly Minister? If it means a Minister from the Assembly, why does the new clause not say that?

New clause 2(2)(a) refers to arrangements

"for making any necessary financial adjustments".

Will the Minister explain in what circumstances it would be necessary to make any financial adjustments? Subsection (2)(b) contains the same phrase.

New clause 2(3)(a) refers to arrangements "for adapting legislation". What does that mean? When would it be necessary to adapt legislation if there is reciprocity between the two systems? Subsection (3)(c) refers to cases where

"rights accrue both in relation to Great Britain and in relation to Northern Ireland".

Will the Minister give examples of where rights would accrue? I concede that people should not be able to receive child benefit in Great Britain and in Northern Ireland at the same time. One cannot have rights to two benefits in different jurisdictions. Can the Minister give an example of the rights that would accrue in Great Britain or Northern Ireland that would require the Secretary of State to decide where the benefit—be it child benefit or any other—would be drawn?

New clause 2(6) proposes some repeals. What is the effect of those? Schedule 15 also proposes repeals. New clause 2 refers to section 177(2) of the Social Security Administration Act 1992, which provides that the joint authority will be the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland and the head of the Northern Ireland Department. However, new clause 3 states that the joint authority will consist of the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, the Northern Ireland Minister and the Chancellor of the Exchequer. The Chancellor is reputed to have interfered in other areas. Why has he been added to the joint authority?

What aspects of social security business can still be raised in the House? What opportunities will be open to hon. Members from throughout the United Kingdom to ask questions on social security matters in Northern Ireland when the Assembly is in place? I hope that the Minister will be able to answer some of my questions. He will probably say that he will write to me. If he does say that, I shall understand.

Mr. Paul Murphy: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his understanding. I shall try to answer some of his questions. He has taken a personal interest in these matters for some years. The reference in new clause 2 to a Northern Ireland Minister means a Minister from the Assembly.

Mr. Forsythe: Why is that not stated in the Bill? Ministers in the Northern Ireland Office are Northern Ireland Ministers. Why does not the Bill say Northern Ireland Assembly Ministers?

Mr. Murphy: The Bill proposes the establishment of the Northern Ireland Assembly, and throughout the Bill it is clear that a Northern Ireland Minister is an Assembly Minister. Of course, if we were debating a social security measure, matters would be different, but in this context we are discussing a Northern Ireland Assembly Minister.

The financial adjustments refer to two matters, the first of which is the use in one country of benefit books that have been issued in another—for example, when someone is on holiday. The other matter relates to the topping up of the Northern Ireland national insurance fund. Adapting legislation allows account to be taken of, for example, waiting days in one country so that they can be counted towards benefit in another. The payment of double benefit would have to be avoided where someone has worked half his life in Great Britain and half in Northern Ireland; the details of who pays his retirement pension have to be worked out.

The repeals in the new clause are duplicated in the Bill and they must appear in the Bill in the right way. As the hon. Member for South Antrim (Mr. Forsythe) said, these

are important matters. It is appropriate to add my right hon. Friend the Chancellor to the joint authority because of the financial implications.

The last point made by the hon. Member for South Antrim was about matters that can be raised here. Northern Ireland Members will have the same rights as other hon. Members to raise issues at Westminster. If I have not covered some of the more detailed aspects, I shall ensure that the hon. Gentleman receives a detailed reply.

Mr. Dominic Grieve (Beaconsfield): The answer to my question should be brief. I should like the Minister to clarify the relationship between new clause 2 and new clause 3. New clause 2 seems to make it explicit that the extent of consultations is a matter for agreement. Therefore, disagreement is possible. However, it is closely linked to new clause 3, which deals with the joint authority. That will have three members, only one of whom will be a Member of the Northern Ireland Assembly. That means that the Member of the Assembly could be outvoted by the two other people on the joint authority. How does the Minister reconcile those two new clauses? They seem to be linked, but one provides for agreement between a United Kingdom Minister and a Northern Ireland Minister while the other suggests that the Northern Ireland Minister would be consistently outvoted.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. For the sake of good order, I remind the House that on Report hon. Members may speak only once and the Minister twice in each debate on an amendment. We may get into difficulties if the debate becomes a question and answer session. However, as a specific question has been asked, the Minister may care to answer it.

Mr. Murphy: Some clarification is required, although it will not necessarily mean altering the new clauses. I shall write to the hon. Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Grieve) about the matter.

Question put and agreed to.

Clause read a Second time, and added to the Bill.

New clause 3

SOCIAL SECURITY, CHILD SUPPORT AND PENSIONS: THE JOINT AUTHORITY

.—(1) The Joint Authority continued in being by section 177(2) of the Social Security Administration Act 1992—

(a) shall consist of the Secretary of State, the Northern Ireland Minister having responsibility for social security and the Chancellor of the Exchequer; and

(b) shall continue in being by the name of the Social Security, Child Support and Pensions Joint Authority for the purposes of the legislation to which section (*Social security, child support and pensions: consultation and co-ordination*) applies.

(2) The responsibility of the Joint Authority shall include that of giving effect to arrangements under section (*Social security, child support and pensions: consultation and co-ordination*)(2), with power—

(a) to make any necessary financial adjustments, including adjustments between the National Insurance Fund and the Northern Ireland National Insurance Fund; and

(b) to discharge such other functions as may be provided under the arrangements.

(3) The Joint Authority shall continue—

(a) to be a body corporate; and

(b) to have an official seal which shall be officially and judicially noticed;

and the seal of the Authority may be authenticated by any member of, or the secretary to, the Authority, or by any person authorised by the Authority to act on behalf of the secretary.

(4) Any member of the Joint Authority shall be entitled, subject to and in accordance with any rules laid down by the Authority, to appoint a deputy to act for him at meetings of the Authority.

(5) The Documentary Evidence Act 1868 shall apply to the Joint Authority as if the Authority were included in the first column of the Schedule to that Act and—

(a) as if any member or the secretary, or any person authorised to act on behalf of the secretary, of the Authority were mentioned in the second column of that Schedule; and

(b) as if the regulations referred to in that Act included any document issued by the Authority.'.—*[Mr. Paul Murphy.]*

Brought up, read the First and Second time, and added to the Bill.

New clause 1

EXAMINATIONS BY COMPTROLLER AND AUDITOR GENERAL

'.—(1) For the purpose of enabling him to carry out examinations into, and report to Parliament on, the finances of the Assembly, the Comptroller and Auditor General—

(a) shall have a right of access at all reasonable times to all such documents in the custody or under the control of the Assembly or any other person audited by the Comptroller and Auditor-General for Northern Ireland, or of the Comptroller and Auditor-General for Northern Ireland, as he may reasonably require for that purpose, and

(b) shall be entitled to require from any person holding or accountable for any of those documents any assistance, information or explanation which he reasonably thinks necessary for that purpose.

(2) The Comptroller and Auditor General shall—

(a) consult the Comptroller and Auditor-General for Northern Ireland, and

(b) take into account any relevant work done or being done by the Comptroller and Auditor-General for Northern Ireland,

before he acts in reliance on subsection (1) or carries out an examination in respect of the Assembly under section 6 of the National Audit Act 1983 (economy etc. examinations).

(3) In section 6 of the National Audit Act 1983, after paragraph (c) of subsection (3) there is inserted—

"(ca) the Executive Committee established by section 16(1) of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 and any other person to whom sums are paid out of the Consolidated Fund of Northern Ireland.".'.—*[Mr. David Davis.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

Mr. David Davis (Haltemprice and Howden): I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to discuss the following: Amendment No. 7, in clause 52, page 25, leave out lines 10 and 11 and insert—

'(1) There shall continue to be a Comptroller and Auditor-General for Northern Ireland.

(1A) The Comptroller and Auditor-General for Northern Ireland shall be an independent person appointed by Her Majesty on the nomination of the Assembly; but for the purposes of this section

the Comptroller and Auditor-General for Northern Ireland in office immediately before this section comes into force shall be treated as having been so appointed.

(1B) A recommendation shall not be made to Her Majesty for the removal from office of the Comptroller and Auditor-General for Northern Ireland unless the Assembly so resolves and, if the resolution is passed on a division, the number of members voting in favour is not less than two-thirds of the total number of seats in the Assembly.

(1C) A person is independent for the purposes of subsection (1A) if he is not subject to the direction or control of any member of the Executive Committee or of the Assembly in the exercise of his functions.'.

Amendment No. 8, in page 25, line 14, at end insert

'; and the accounts so audited shall be presented by the Comptroller and Auditor-General for Northern Ireland to the Assembly and to the Secretary of State, and the Secretary of State shall thereupon lay them before the House of Commons.'.

Amendment No. 9, in page 25, line 16, at end insert

'enacted before section 5 of this Act comes into force or to any Act of the Assembly; but no Act of the Assembly shall have effect which—

(a) prejudices the independence of the Comptroller and Auditor-General for Northern Ireland conferred by Article 3 of the Audit (Northern Ireland) Order 1987, or

(b) reduces the powers of the Comptroller and Auditor-General for Northern Ireland conferred by Part III of that Order or by subsection (2),

unless the provision in question or a draft of it has been laid before the House of Commons by the Secretary of State and approved by a resolution of that House.

(4) The expenses of the Comptroller and Auditor-General for Northern Ireland (including those of the Northern Ireland Audit Office or such other Office as he may from time to time be empowered to maintain) shall be defrayed out of moneys provided by the Assembly.

(5) For each financial year of the Assembly after this section comes into force other than the first, the Comptroller and Auditor-General for Northern Ireland shall prepare, and submit to the Assembly (or, if a committee of the Assembly has been designated by the Assembly for the purpose, that committee), an estimate of the income and expenses of his office.

(6) If the estimate is submitted to a committee of the Assembly, the committee shall examine the estimate and lay it before the Assembly with such modifications as it thinks fit; but if the committee proposes to lay it with modifications, it shall first consult the Comptroller and Auditor-General for Northern Ireland and the Secretary of State and have regard to any advice which they may give.

(7) The Comptroller and Auditor-General for Northern Ireland may assist the Comptroller and Auditor General in reporting any matter to the House of Commons or in providing information or papers requested by the Committee of Public Accounts of the House of Commons.

(8) Paragraphs (1) and (2) of Article 6 of the Audit (Northern Ireland) Order 1987 are hereby repealed.'.

Government amendment No. 43.

Mr. Davis: On Second Reading, I commented on the unfortunate but, as I accepted at the time, necessary speed at which the Bill was going through the House. Hazards are associated with speedy Bills. In 1920, the Government of Northern Ireland Act created problems that lasted 50 years and ended in misery and the end of Stormont in the 1970s. I fear that, if we are not careful with some aspects of the Bill, we will create not necessarily the same problems—

Rev. Ian Paisley (North Antrim): The legislation that the right hon. Gentleman mentions is the Government of Ireland Act 1920. I ask him please not to give all the blame to Ulster. He should remember that the southern part gave a great deal of trouble.

Mr. Davis: I am happy to be corrected, but I was not blaming Ulster: in part, I was placing the blame on the United Kingdom Government of the time and speaking about the problems that can be caused by speedy legislation on serious and complex constitutional issues.

Three matters need further thought. The first relates to guaranteeing the independence of the Comptroller and Auditor-General for Northern Ireland. The second is the problem of long-term corruption in some aspects of Northern Ireland business and the Assembly's ability to deal with it. The third is the rights of the United Kingdom taxpayer as they are reflected—or, more accurately, not reflected—in the Bill.

Amendments Nos. 7 to 9 aim to guarantee the independent appointment, tenure, funding and action of the Comptroller and Auditor-General for Northern Ireland. They underpin that independence by setting it in UK law, rather than in law that is susceptible to change by the Northern Ireland Assembly.

The Minister has been kind enough to write to me on the issue, and he indicated some sympathy with my argument. I elaborated on that on Second Reading, so I will not press it further. I say merely that that is the purpose of those amendments—all today's amendments are probing amendments.

5.30 pm

I move to a more worrying question: long-term corruption in Northern Ireland. We start from a bad base. As the Minister will no doubt be aware, my 1990 study of paramilitary racketeering showed that the Provisional IRA made about £5 million a year from a dozen different scams and rackets that it ran to fund its activities. These days, I suspect that the amount is a little lower because of Government action. Nevertheless, the joint actions of a number of paramilitary organisations probably raise several million pounds, and perhaps more. Many of those rackets focus on the public sector.

A large proportion of the money that is acquired illegally arises from corruption in one form or another in the public sector, be it public works, housing projects, welfare or other matters. That will be familiar to the Minister and, I should think, to almost every hon. Member in the Chamber.

The problem of corruption is compounded by the understandable wish of Ministers and civil servants in Northern Ireland not to let any social project that is aimed at dealing with sectarian problems fail because of lack of money. That means that there is a tendency to throw money at problems, which leads to waste and slackness, which we have seen too many times and which have been reported by the Northern Ireland Audit Office and by the Public Accounts Committee in the past few years.

Systematic waste, fraud and corruption have become a serious and permanent threat in Northern Ireland public expenditure. I am concerned that the Assembly will have difficulty in dealing with those problems because many have their origin, as I have said, in sectarian and paramilitary organisations. Some of those will be represented in the Northern Ireland Assembly by their

political arms, which may have power and executive responsibility for areas that are susceptible to fraud—housing, for example.

Corruption is a threat to any free and democratic system of government. It is a particularly virulent problem when the same party or same coalition stays in power for a long time; we have seen that in local government in our own country. It is also a problem in small communities, so we have a difficulty that is likely to be made worse, not better, by the solution that the Government have, understandably, come up with for Northern Ireland. The form of government that is proposed for Northern Ireland is not very good at dealing with corruption.

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): I appreciate the point that the right hon. Gentleman makes. Corruption in the former Northern Ireland Parliament was minimal compared with what went on even in local government in England, but may I remind him that, when questions were asked in this House about social security payments to Mr. Gerry Adams, we were told that he was not getting such payments, even though the strange claim was made that he was an unemployed barman in Belfast? However, when he had a job to go to, we ultimately discovered, although it was denied in the House, that he was getting social security payments, so the problem affects the Administration here, who do not act on reports of auditors and accountants.

Mr. Davis: The hon. Gentleman helps to make my point. The difficulty is partly the activities of the paramilitaries, but it is also—I reiterate this point—the Assembly's structures, which make it difficult for the Assembly to deal with the problem. The old Northern Ireland Parliament—Stormont—did not have that structure. There are reasons for the new structure—I understand that—but it will have difficulties in dealing with this problem because political parties are still linked to paramilitaries, the structural legislature is poorly designed and there is already some corruption in place.

It would be easy to imagine that this is simply a financial problem, but it is not. Corruption in circumstances such as this has a corrosive impact on the communities that are supposed to be served by the Assembly, and on the political environment.

If hon. Members want an example of that, they can look back simply to post-prohibition American racketeering days and what happened to city and state government as a result of that racketeering. I worry much more about the impact on the politics and the communities of Northern Ireland than about the money itself. That is one reason why I think that this is vital.

Mr. Roy Beggs (East Antrim): It has been suggested that at least £5 million has been misappropriated in Northern Ireland by the activities of paramilitaries. Without close scrutiny by the CAG, who is answerable to this House, that sum may be quadrupled, especially if we end up with a head of a Department and a Minister who represent paramilitary groups?

Mr. Davis: The hon. Gentleman restates in starker language the point that I was making. That is why subsection (7) in my amendment No. 9 would allow the Northern Ireland CAG to assist the United Kingdom CAG in reporting matters to the Public Accounts Committee.

This is not full House of Commons scrutiny—we should not misunderstand this—but it would act as a reserve parachute for Northern Ireland scrutiny if fraud were to become a more serious problem. The Minister is setting up a constitutional arrangement that is supposed to last for generations, one presumes, and we must at least do what we can to ensure that that awful circumstance does not arise.

The last issue that I want to take up is that of the accountability of the House of Commons for the £3 billion or so of UK taxes that subsidise Northern Ireland expenditure. This is the primary reason for new clause 1 and amendment No. 6. I do not expect to persuade the Minister today of this issue, but it is of fundamental constitutional importance, so I am obliged to raise it.

Mr. Peter Temple-Morris (Leominster): The right hon. Gentleman is quoting many figures and raising serious matters that need consideration by the House. I am not asking this in any way other than constructively, but will he give us some idea of where his evidence is for the fraud that he speaks about in Northern Ireland? On what is he basing it?

Mr. Davis: There are two sets of data. I referred at the beginning of my speech—if the hon. Gentleman had listened carefully he would have heard me say this, although I am surprised, given his previous work on the Northern Ireland Committee, that he was not aware of it—to a survey that I conducted in 1990 on paramilitary racketeering. At the time, the Northern Ireland Office handed it out to the press as a guide to what went on. The Public Accounts Committee published a number of reports about waste in Northern Ireland—I could cite half a dozen; I will write to him if he wishes to know the exact number—that showed weaknesses in Northern Ireland, some of which will create opportunities for fraud, which is what we are trying to eradicate.

Mr. John D. Taylor (Strangford): Is the right hon. Member aware that there have been questions on this matter in the House and that three times more disability living allowance is awarded in some constituencies than in others, which suggests that something strange is going on?

Mr. Davis: The right hon. Gentleman is correct. He may be aware that I took the Public Accounts Committee to Northern Ireland and that we met at Stormont to consider that very issue. Disability living allowance claims in Northern Ireland are higher than one could reasonably expect in the rest of the United Kingdom, and I am aware of the problem that he raises.

I now turn to a constitutional issue. The accountability for money spent rests finally with the Parliament that raises the taxes to finance that expenditure. It underpins the most basic of Parliament's functions. It is not a new argument. The provision of supply has been behind Parliament's functions for a long time. Indeed, that argument lay behind the "no taxation without representation" issue that led to the war with the American colonies, so it has some hundreds of years' provenance.

Nearly 40 per cent.—the exact figure is 39 per cent.—of Northern Ireland expenditure is met by the rest of the United Kingdom and not from local taxation. It is obvious

[Mr. Davis]

that it demands severe United Kingdom scrutiny. At this point we run into what I shall call the Scottish dimension. I do not blame the Minister, as I understand entirely where it comes from.

The same argument was applied less dramatically in the Scotland Bill and the Government found themselves in a difficult political position. If they had allowed United Kingdom scrutiny of Scottish expenditure, they would have been outflanked by the Scottish National party for giving in to the English, or some such other slogan, so the Government had to invent a constitutional fiction. They raised a constitutional non sequitur to the level of an argument when they proposed that a Parliament or Assembly that was responsible for primary legislation should scrutinise its own expenditure and that no one else should do so. That is nonsense. Those who raise taxes are accountable for the expenditure. We can delegate power, but we cannot delegate accountability. We are held accountable by the people who elect us, from whom we raise taxes.

The ludicrous nature of the Government's position is shown by amendment No. 43, which states:

"The Treasury may require the Northern Ireland Ministers and departments to provide, within such period as the Treasury may specify, such information, in such form and prepared in such manner, as the Treasury may specify."

In other words, the Executive, through the Treasury, want access to information that the House is being denied. They will not agree funding for Northern Ireland without the right to that information, but the House will be required to approve the funding without access to the information, which demonstrates the paradox of the Government's argument. Yet again, a large sum of taxpayers' money—£3 billion—is being spent outside the control and scrutiny of the House, which is completely against the traditions of the House.

Mr. William Ross (East Londonderry): I have considerable sympathy with the new clause because I believe that the right hon. Member for Haltemprice and Howden (Mr. Davis) has put before the House serious issues that should concern us all. As he pointed out, the House is ultimately responsible not only for raising revenue, but for its expenditure and for protecting public finances and the public purse.

In my experience, the Northern Ireland audit is highly efficient. Every time I have approached the Comptroller and Auditor-General for Northern Ireland, he has been extremely helpful. If the Treasury can second-guess his figures, that information should also be available to the House. There are times when right hon. and hon. Members wish to raise matters of concern to our constituents and to Northern Ireland generally. I would not wish to be inhibited in raising those matters in future by a lack of information.

We all know it is often years before allegations of fraud are investigated and conclusions are reached. However, that is no excuse for giving up our control of the finances of any part of the United Kingdom and I am certainly happy to support what the right hon. Member for Haltemprice and Howden said.

Amendment No. 43, which the right hon. Gentleman read out, refers to the Treasury. I would have been much happier with it had it referred to the Comptroller and Auditor-General as that would have brought it within the ambit of this place. It is not acceptable to me or to my right hon. and hon. Friends that we should be excluded from access to such information.

I believe that the new clause sets the direction in which the Bill should go. I hope that the amendments tabled by the right hon. Member for Haltemprice and Howden will be given favourable consideration by the Government because of the right hon. Gentleman's long experience in these matters. It is not a light matter or even a party political matter; it is a House of Commons, Government matter and we are concerned about the expenditure of UK taxpayers' money for which we are ultimately responsible.

5.45 pm

Mr. Paul Murphy: Obviously, we raised this issue on Second Reading and the right hon. Member for Haltemprice and Howden (Mr. Davis) is right to raise it again. It is extremely important, not just to taxpayers but to democrats throughout the United Kingdom, that if we are to have a devolved system of Administration in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, there should be proper scrutiny of public funds and public expenditure. No one disagrees with that principle.

We should all be aware that the Comptroller and Auditor-General for Northern Ireland has done, is doing, and I am sure will do an excellent job. I agree with the right hon. Gentleman that the independence of that office should be enshrined in statute and we should be able to reach an accommodation between us as to the wording necessary to achieve that. It would be very useful if the right hon. Gentleman and I were to get together with the appropriate officials during August or September to look at this so that the House of Lords can consider any amendments.

The right hon. Gentleman was kind enough to say that he would not press his amendments and I am grateful for that. I am also grateful to him for drawing to my and the House's attention the provisions of the Scotland Bill that place particular emphasis on the independent status of the auditor in Scotland, although we must remember that the Comptroller and Auditor-General for Northern Ireland has been in place for some time now.

I am not so convinced about systemic corruption in the Northern Ireland Administration—if that is the phrase the right hon. Gentleman used, I am not sure whether it is accurate. There have been examples of corruption in public bodies in England, Wales and Scotland. Of course all hon. Members would condemn that, but I do not think that there is a particular difference in respect of Northern Ireland and I hope that there will not be one in future.

Mr. David Davis: I thank the Minister for his constructive approach and I shall certainly not press the amendments. First, I am happy to take up the Minister's offer and talk to him in detail about guaranteeing the independence of the Comptroller and Auditor-General for Northern Ireland. Secondly, he should not take what I said about systemic corruption as a criticism of the vast majority of civil servants or politicians who work in Northern Ireland. However, the assault by paramilitary organisations in particular, as has happened in the past, will tend to corrupt. The Minister will be aware that such organisations have raised large sums of money. I would

not like what I said to be taken as criticism of civil servants and politicians, but rather as a concern about the conditions under which they will have to work in future.

Mr. Murphy: I understand the difference between the right hon. Gentleman's two points. He also raised the question of an Opposition/Government. In this place, the Chairman of the PAC is always a member of the Opposition; there is a great deal of sense in that. In Northern Ireland, the situation is not quite the same. Is there an Opposition? Is there a Government? Parties are entitled to membership of the Executive and to hold ministerial posts based on the strength of their election success and the number of seats that, consequently, they hold.

There is not as obvious a distinction as there is in our system in Westminster. Indeed, it could be said that parties around the table in the Executive would be politically very much opposed to each other. In some ways, that could be reflected in a Public Accounts Committee in the Assembly. We shall certainly be tabling an amendment in the other place that will lay on the Assembly a statutory requirement for a PAC, with all the necessary controls that such a Committee could exercise.

The problem that the Government have with new clause 1 and amendment No. 8 boils down to the question of devolution and accountability. An Assembly in Belfast is of course elected by the people, so the Government of Northern Ireland and their expenditure should be scrutinised by the legislature of Northern Ireland through its own PAC. That is the best way, and it will certainly occur in Scotland. When we meet to discuss these issues, we may find that, on some occasions—I can think of one—we will be able to lay the accounts of the Northern Ireland Assembly before the House of Commons. The accounts would, after all, be a public document. We would have to do so in such a way that Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales were treated equally; so that in no way would devolution in Northern Ireland be weaker, different or less significant than it is in Scotland or in Wales.

Mr. William Ross: The hon. Gentleman is surely forgetting something. He drew attention to the laudable practice in the House of the Chairman of the PAC always being a member of the Opposition. In the concept proposed for Northern Ireland, there will not be an Opposition. The Minister must face that problem. He should pay careful attention to what the right hon. Member for Haltemprice and Howden is saying, because we are talking about where the ultimate responsibility lies; and he should know what is going on.

Mr. Murphy: I agree with the hon. Gentleman; what will happen in Northern Ireland will be fundamentally different from what will occur in Edinburgh where there will be a Government and an Opposition in the sense that he and I know. In the next few weeks and months, we must reflect on how best a PAC can operate in Belfast, who will chair it and what its rules and procedures will be.

Mr. Davis: The Minister drew comparisons with the bodies in Scotland and Wales, yet their treatment is very different. I for one do not see the peculiar circumstances of Northern Ireland as a precedent for either of them, just as Wales is not a precedent for Scotland or vice versa. It is much more important that we get the system in Northern Ireland right than to worry about an inappropriate consistency. If Northern Ireland is consistent with one of the examples that he picked, it would be inconsistent with the other.

Mr. Murphy: There is a big difference between Wales and Scotland because the Scottish Parliament is a legislative body—as will be the body in Belfast. The similarities between the situations in Northern Ireland and Scotland are greater than those between Northern Ireland and Wales. It is clearly important to have some comparability. I agree with the right hon. Gentleman that it does not have to be exact; it has to fit the circumstances—but in such a way that it in no sense demeans the Belfast Assembly. The Assembly must have its own controls and methods of scrutiny that are not in any way derived from the House of Commons. Our job is, obviously, to deal with the United Kingdom Government.

I take the point about subvention. If the people of England, Scotland and Wales have to give extra money to Northern Ireland, that is clearly a matter of interest to the House of Commons, just as it is when they have to give money to Scotland or Wales. The new clause and the amendments would not achieve what I think the right hon. Member for Haltemprice and Howden wants to achieve. Nor would they ensure that, on one hand, proper scrutiny, and on the other, the proper accountability of the Assembly and the Executive which is in everyone's interest.

To sum up, first, we can look very favourably on the idea of putting into legislation some sensible independence of the Comptroller and Auditor-General. Secondly, the right hon. Member for Haltemprice and Howden and I ought to meet in order to deal with some of the matters to which he referred. Thirdly, when the Bill goes to the other place, amendments will certainly be tabled, including one to establish a PAC for Northern Ireland. I hope that the right hon. Gentleman feels able to withdraw his new clause.

Mr. Davis: In view of the Minister's very constructive reply, I beg to ask leave to withdraw the motion.

Motion and clause, by leave, withdrawn.

Clause 4

TRANSFERRED, EXCEPTED AND RESERVED MATTERS

Mr. William Thompson (West Tyrone): I beg to move amendment No. 10, in page 2, line 5, at end insert—

'"the Government of Ireland" means the Government of the Republic of Ireland, as defined in section 1 of the Ireland Act 1949.'.

In Committee, an amendment was tabled so that, in clause 1(2), the Bill would refer to the Government of the Republic of Ireland instead of the Government of Ireland. That was resisted by the Government. The Minister first described the importance of terminology in Northern Ireland, and then explained that the British Government had agreed to the Irish Government's wish to be termed "the Government of Ireland" in British legislation.

I understand that the Minister and the Government believe that they are entitled to make such a change because of the use of the word "may" in the Ireland Act 1949. Clearly, there are those of us who doubt that that is possible under the Act. There needs to be clarification of

[Mr. William Thompson]

the matter. Those of us who are Unionists are very concerned when we see in United Kingdom legislation for the first time the term "the Government of Ireland". It makes us rather suspicious of what is going on.

I have tabled the amendment for clarity. Accepting it would confirm that "the Government of Ireland" means "the Government of the Republic of Ireland", as defined in section 1 of the Ireland Act 1949. That would make clear that references to the Government of Ireland are to 26 and not 32 counties, which would give some solace to those of us who are Unionists.

Mr. Peter Robinson (Belfast, East): I support my hon. Friend's amendment. By far the best way for the Government to deal with the matter would have been to maintain the conventions and precedents of the House and continue to refer to "the Government of the Republic of Ireland" as such. It is an outrage that the Government of the Irish Republic should lay claim to the territory of Northern Ireland in their title.

Although we were told that the Belfast agreement was designed to remove the territorial claim over Northern Ireland, the title that the Government of the Republic have adopted for themselves, and which they require to be used in British legislation, is in itself a territorial claim. The term "the Government of Ireland" clearly suggests that that Government govern the whole of the island, not just part of it. That is the distinction between "the Government of the Republic of Ireland" and "the Government of Ireland" as a whole.

The Minister has therefore allowed the Government of the Republic of Ireland to lay claim to part of the territory of the United Kingdom. If the amendment is not acceptable, the Minister must go back and consider the whole issue of the naming of the Dublin Government, so that the title used clearly shows that they are responsible only for the 26 counties in the Irish Republic.

6 pm

Rev. Ian Paisley: I support my colleagues on this issue. It amazed me that the Minister admitted that during the talks the Irish Republic's representatives were prepared for the first time to use the proper title of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. That is not the title that the Republic uses in its legislation.

I would have thought that, if the Minister was so keen to achieve a balance, he would say to the Republic, "If you want us to use your title in our legislation, you must reciprocate." The trouble is that throughout the Bill the Government have leaned over backwards to accommodate the claims and wishes of the Irish Republic. We see that with the abolition of the 1920 Act, despite the fact that the referendum outcome in the south does not come into operation with regard to the territorial claim until the Republic is satisfied that everything is going according to its wishes. The Minister should have insisted.

I must take up the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Belfast, East (Mr. Robinson)—that the present terminology represents an effort by the Government of the Irish Republic to insist on their territorial claim. The proper name of the south, chosen by itself, is the Republic of Ireland, which defines the 26 counties. Why, when the Republic is supposed to have given up its claim, is the Minister insisting on recognising that claim by putting the title "the Government of Ireland" into the Bill?

Mr. Grieve: There appears to be some force to the amendment, for reasons that I shall explain. I fully understand the Government's position that in the course of the negotiations it was agreed—it was a matter of mutual respect between two sovereign states—that the descriptions used should be those by which each state wished to be known. In one case that description was "the Government of Ireland" and I understand that there is reciprocity in relation to the United Kingdom.

Everybody will know that both those descriptions are capable of interpretation, and that in reality the interpretation of the reference to "the Government of Ireland" is indeed the Government of the Republic of Ireland—as, I suspect, it is defined in section 1 of the Ireland Act 1949. Whether that fact appeared at this point in the Bill or simply in the interpretation clause, it would clear up an ambiguity that seems to have troubled Unionist Members while, I respectfully suggest, in no way derogating from the manner in which, in the text of the agreement and the Bill, proper reference is made to the Government of Ireland.

Mr. Paul Murphy: We went over the ground at some length in Committee, and I do not want to burden the House with a long debate on the issue now. However, the hon. Members for Belfast, East and for North Antrim (Rev. Ian Paisley) attribute much more power to me than I possess; it is not right to suggest that the territorial claim on the north is a consequence of my actions.

Certainly the terms of the agreement are reproduced in the Bill, and during the negotiations leading up to that agreement a great deal of what I consider to be improvement took place in the way in which we describe the countries from which we each come. The Irish prefer the term "the Government of Ireland" and we, of course, prefer our right name—"the Government of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland".

As I told the House some days ago, that was the first time that that had happened, and I think that it was a significant milestone in the way in which we deal with the nomenclature. It is not right to suggest that the terminology represents a territorial claim; it certainly does not. All it represents is a reasonable and sensible compromise—an agreement arrived at in the talks, put into the agreement and now reproduced in the Bill.

If we used anything other than those two terms—"the Government of Ireland" and "the Government of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland"—we would be going against the spirit of the agreement. I cannot accept the amendment because I believe that progress was made on the subject in the talks, so I ask the hon. Member for West Tyrone (Mr. Thompson) to withdraw it.

Mr. Thompson: The Minister has spoken a lot about what went on before the agreement was signed. He has also said that it was agreed that the words "the Government of Ireland" should be used, and those words appear on the face of the Bill. The problem is that those of us who are Unionists are not happy with the use of that term. If "the Government of Ireland" means the

Government of the Republic of Ireland, there seems no reason why the Government cannot use that term, at least when explaining what the words "the Government of Ireland" mean.

Rev. Ian Paisley: Is it not strange that the statement that the Minister has now made was not announced at the talks while they were going on? It was not announced that the two Governments had decided to call each other by those names. If that was such an important matter and there was a great feeling of unanimity, hatchets had been buried and bows and arrows put away, they should have announced it. The people at the talks never heard about it. When we attended the talks the matter was never mentioned, and I am told by those who were in the talks to the end that it was never mentioned.

Mr. Thompson: Those of us who were present for the Committee stage will realise that many of the amendments that were accepted came from the Government, while few if any amendments have been accepted from the Opposition. It should be remembered that those of us who sit on this side of the House represent the vast majority of the people in Northern Ireland. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Lembit Öpik (Montgomeryshire): Am I to understand that, notwithstanding the points that the Minister has made and the fact that the agreement seems to have been quite clear, the term is causing a serious and genuine problem and concern among Unionists in Northern Ireland, and that there is some feeling that the ground has shifted a bit because of the use of that terminology instead of the terminology that would more conventionally be used by people in Northern Ireland?

Mr. Thompson: I heard the hon. Member for South Down (Mr. McGrady) suggesting that we do not represent the majority of the people of Northern Ireland—but 13 Unionist Members of Parliament out of 18 seems to me to be a fair majority.

Mr. Eddie McGrady (South Down): I noticed during our previous debate that the hon. Gentleman had great difficulty in accepting the normal interpretation of mathematics: 71 per cent. is the great majority, not the 29 per cent. that he now represents. May I ask him further to correct his suggestion that the terminology to which he objects and to which his amendment relates was not mentioned in the document but was in some way kept secret? The agreement document states, in bold, clear print, that the agreement is

"between the Government of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the Government of Ireland."

Does the hon. Gentleman accept that the document was sent to every household in Northern Ireland and that the people of Northern Ireland voted to support it?

Mr. Thompson: I am not disputing the words in the agreement. We are discussing what the words actually mean—that is the issue. The Government say that, in the Bill, the Government of Ireland means the Government of the Republic of Ireland—at least, I think that is what they are saying. However, I suspect that when the hon. Gentleman refers to the Government of Ireland, he does not mean the Government of the Republic of Ireland as we understand it—the 26 counties.

Mr. Paul Murphy: I want to put it on the record of the House of Commons that, in this debate and in the Bill, the Government of Ireland means the Government of the Republic of Ireland—of course it means that. The Bill replicates the words of the agreement, so it does not need to be changed.

Mr. Thompson: The Minister has made the position very clear, and it is good to have it on the record, although I suspect that it will not make the hon. Member for South Down (Mr. McGrady) very happy, as he means something different by the phrase. There is no doubt that the words of the agreement are in the Bill, but we want clarification; we want what the Minister said to be confirmed. Why cannot the Government accept the amendment?

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 10, Noes 257.

Division No. 354] **[6.11 pm**

AYES

Donaldson, Jeffrey
Forsythe, Clifford
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hunter, Andrew
Paisley, Rev Ian
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Ross, William *(E Londy)*
Shaw, Jonathan
Taylor, Rt Hon John D *(Strangford)*
Thompson, William

Tellers for the Ayes:
Rev. Martin Smyth and
Mr. Roy Beggs.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Alexander, Douglas
Allan, Richard
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Armstrong, Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Baker, Norman
Ballard, Jackie
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, Rt Hon Mrs Margaret
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, Andrew F
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Boateng, Paul
Borrow, David
Bradley, Keith *(Withington)*
Brinton, Mrs Helen
Brown, Rt Hon Nick *(Newcastle E)*
Browne, Desmond
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Burnett, John
Butler, Mrs Christine
Byers, Stephen
Cabom, Richard
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Canavan, Dennis
Cann, Jamie
Casale, Roger
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Chisholm, Malcolm
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Iain
Colman, Tony
Connarty, Michael
Cooper, Yvette
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Ms Jean
Cotter, Brian
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Crausby, David
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Dalyell, Tam
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, John
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim

Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Efford, Clive
Ennis, Jeff
Etherington, Bill
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Fearn, Ronnie
Field, Rt Hon Frank
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foulkes, George
Fyfe, Maria
Gapes, Mike
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mrs Eileen
Gorrie, Donald
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hancock, Mike
Hanson, David
Heath, David *(Somerton & Frome)*
Heppell, John
Hewitt, Ms Patricia
Hodge, Ms Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Alan *(Newport E)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Ms Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Jones, Ms Jenny *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Jowell, Ms Tessa
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Keetch, Paul
Kemp, Fraser
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Kingham, Ms Tess
Kirkwood, Archy
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Linton, Martin
Livingstone, Ken
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Steve
McCafferty, Ms Chris
McCartney, Ian *(Makerfield)*
McDonagh, Siobhain
Macdonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
McFall, John
McGrady, Eddie
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McNamara, Kevin
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mallaber, Judy
Mandelson, Peter
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury)*
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheff'ld Heeley)*
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin
Moffatt, Laura
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moran, Ms Margaret
Morgan, Ms Julie *(Cardiff N)*
Morgan, Rhodri *(Cardiff W)*
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Ms Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Mowlam, Rt Hon Marjorie
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul *(Torfaen)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
Olner, Bill
Öpik, Lembit
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pendry, Tom
Perham, Ms Linda
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Pound, Stephen
Powell, Sir Raymond
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Quin, Ms Joyce
Rammell, Bill
Raynsford, Nick
Rendel, David
Robertson, Rt Hon George *(Hamilton S)*
Rooker, Jeff
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Ms Joan
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Ryan, Ms Joan
Salter, Martin
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Squire, Ms Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Stevenson, George
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Straw, Rt Hon Jack
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Rt Hon Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Timms, Stephen
Todd, Mark
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Touhig, Don
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Vaz, Keith
Vis, Dr Rudi
Ward, Ms Claire
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Alan W *(E Carmarthen)*
Wills, Michael
Winnick, David
Wise, Audrey
Wood, Mike
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. David Clelland and
Mr. Keith Hill.

Question accordingly negatived.

Clause 6

LEGISLATIVE COMPETENCE

Mr. Paul Murphy: I beg to move amendment No. 11, in page 3, line 20, leave out 'or with Community law'.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to discuss Government amendments Nos. 12, 20 to 22, 44 to 49, 59 and 60.

Mr. Murphy: These are technical amendments, necessary to ensure that certain aspects of the Bill relating to the compatibility of Assembly legislation and ministerial actions with convention rights and community law are dealt with properly, and to ensure that the provisions dealing with religious and political discrimination apply in all the circumstances that they should. I commend them to the House.

Mr. Öpik: I wish to make one point regarding amendment No. 22. I would have been pleased to see a wider definition of equal treatment in that amendment. This matter has been discussed earlier, and I will not rehearse the arguments. However, I hope that the Minister will realise that there is potential on that basis.

Amendment agreed to.

Amendment made: No. 12, in page 3, line 24, at end insert—

'( ) it is incompatible with Community law.'.— *[Mr. Dowd.]*

Clause 11

STAGES OF BILLS

Mr. Paul Murphy: I beg to move amendment No. 13, in page 5, line 16, at end insert—

'( ) Standing orders may, in relation to different types of Bill, modify provisions made in pursuance of subsection (1).'.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to discuss Government amendments Nos. 14 and 15.

Mr. Murphy: Amendments Nos. 13 to 15 would amend clause 11. Clause 11(2) merely provides that the

Standing Orders of the Assembly may include provision for the setting up of a Committee to examine measures or proposals for legislation for their conformity with equality requirements. This is one of the most important safeguards in the agreement, designed to develop an atmosphere of confidence and trust.

Consultation with parties has revealed a feeling that the existing text of the Bill is not sufficiently clear, providing only that Standing Orders may include provision of the Committee. The effect of the amendments is that the Standing Orders must include provision for establishing the Committee, and may also include provision for the details of a Bill to be considered by the Committee in circumstances specified by the order. That will permit paragraphs 12 and 13 of strand 1 of the agreement to be reflected. The Assembly will not be obliged to put every Bill to such a Committee—that is not part of the agreement. I believe that the amendments give effect more precisely to the agreement itself, and I commend them to the House.

Amendment agreed to.

Amendments made: No. 14, in page 5, line 17, leave out from 'orders' to 'such' in line 18 and insert—

'(a) shall include provision for establishing'.

No. 15, in page 5, leave out lines 20 and 21 and insert

'and

(b) may include provision for the details of a Bill to be considered by the committee in such circumstances as may be specified in the orders.'.—*[Mr. Dowd.]*

Clause 14

First Minister and deputy First Minister

Mr. Paul Murphy: I beg to move amendment No. 16, in page 7, line 11, leave out 'The Assembly shall' and insert

'Each Assembly shall, within such period beginning with its first meeting as is specified in standing orders,'.

The amendment provides that there should be a new election of First Minister and Deputy First Minister after every election, and that that election shall take place within a period specified in the Standing Orders. Clearly, that is a sensible arrangement and I commend it to the House.

Mr. Peter Robinson: It occurs to me that the Minister might like to clarify whether there is any mechanism for disposing of First Ministers and Deputy First Ministers. There is none in the Bill, except by their own resignation—which, apparently, has to be forced. Will the Minister consider whether it might be appropriate to have such a mechanism?

Mr. Murphy: I think that the term "disposal" might be a little extreme under the circumstances, but I take the hon. Gentleman's point. They can be excluded under clause 23.

Amendment agreed to.

Mr. Paul Murphy: I beg to move amendment No. 17, in page 7, line 33, after second 'office' insert

'which, together with the code of conduct to which it refers, is'.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to discuss Government amendment No. 56.

Mr. Murphy: These are minor amendments, proposed for convenience's sake. They have the effect of setting out the code of conduct from annexe a to strand 1 of the Belfast agreement in schedule 5 of the Bill. The provision was lifted word for word from the agreement and placed in the Bill. It will be more convenient for those who wish to look at the legislation. It should avoid any possible confusion between the code of conduct that was specifically agreed in the talks and any code of conduct that applies to Westminster Ministers. I commend the amendment to the House.

Mr. Peter Robinson: The amendment is linked to Government amendment No. 16. The code of conduct is part of the pledge. A breach of the pledge could lead to the First Minister and Deputy First Minister losing their places, but there is no other mechanism if they have lost the confidence of the Assembly on a political matter. They can be removed only if they breach their pledge of office or are involved in or support terrorism.

Amendment agreed to.

6.30 pm

Mr. Paul Murphy: I beg to move amendment No. 18, in page 9, line 6, leave out 'or under'.

The amendment is entirely technical. Clause 15 deals with the allocation of ministerial posts by the d'Hondt formula. Subsection (14), as drafted, provides that, if a party is excluded and its period of exclusion has not come to an end,

"the party shall be disregarded for the purposes of subsections (4) to (9) as applied by or under subsection (13)."

On reflection, we believe that the words "or under" are redundant, and the amendment will delete them.

Amendment agreed to.

Mr. Murphy: I beg to move amendment No. 19, in page 9, line 9, at end insert

'or an officer nominated by him for the purposes of this section'.

The amendment concerns the powers of political parties to nominate people to ministerial posts that fall to the party under the d'Hondt formula. It clears up what we believe is an anomaly. Clause 15 provides for the d'Hondt formula to determine how many posts each party is entitled to. The political party that gains the highest figure when the formula is run can then choose a ministerial post. Clause 15 gives the nominating officers—usually, but not necessarily, the leaders—of political parties the power to select a ministerial office and nominate a person to hold it who is a member of the party and, of course, of the Assembly.

Subsection (15) enables the nominating officer of a non-registered political party to delegate his functions under the clause, but it does not enable the nominating officer of a registered party to do the same. There seems to be no good reason for the distinction, and I would expect that most Northern Ireland parties will want to take

[Mr. Murphy]

advantage of the registration scheme when it is finally introduced. The amendment removes the anomaly by giving the nominating officers of registered political parties the same power to delegate their functions.

Amendment agreed to.

Clause 19

COMMUNITY LAW AND CONVENTION RIGHTS

Amendments made: No. 20, in page 9, line 37, after 'act', insert—

'(a)'.

No. 21, in page 9, line 37, leave out 'or' and insert—

'(b) is incompatible'.

No. 22, in page 9, line 38, at end insert—

'; or

(c) discriminates, or aids or incites any person to discriminate, against a person or class of person on the ground of religious belief or political opinion.'.— *[Mr. Paul Murphy.]*

Mr. Murphy: I beg to move amendment No. 23, in page 9, line 39, leave out ', 21 and' and insert 'to'.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to discuss the following: Amendment No. 3, in clause 22, page 11, line 18, leave out from 'equal' to end of line 20 and insert

'consideration shall be given to both the number of Ministers and the number of Chairmanships allocated to the respective parties in allocating the already remaining Chairmanships in an equitable manner.'.

Government amendments Nos. 25 and 26.

Mr. Murphy: I believe that the hon. Member for Montgomeryshire (Mr. Öpik) may want to speak to amendment No. 3, which is closely related to the other amendments. It may be convenient for the House to listen to his points before I wind up.

Mr. Öpik: Ministers seem to have discounted the importance of the points that I made on this matter in Committee. In simple terms, amendment No. 3 would ensure that, in the event of a tie between two parties in the allocation of chairmanships, the number already allocated plus the number of Ministers already appointed would be taken into consideration. The Bill takes account only of the number of chairmanships.

I do not want to go too far into the algebra, for fear of being labelled an anorak, but I can assure the House that the amendment fits exactly into the spirit of the Bill, which seeks to ensure that there is a fair and equitable distribution, in a proportional fashion, of the positions of office in the Assembly.

There is a danger that a large party could easily get an additional chairmanship when a small party has none, but with the smallest of changes that small party could benefit by picking up one chairmanship. If the amendment were made, there would be a genuine opportunity for small parties to increase the likelihood of having a chairmanship in the Assembly.

We must remember that, although the larger parties picked up the lion's share of the vote, smaller parties, such as the Alliance party and others, did very well in terms of the absolute number of people who chose to support them. It would be sensible and popular to make the modification that I have suggested. I hope that the Minister will give us a rather more encouraging response this time. I am looking for an assurance that he will entertain the possibility of revisiting the matter over the summer.

Mr. Peter Robinson: The hon. Member for Montgomeryshire (Mr. Öpik) wants to see that which is fair and equitable, and he wants to be the one to decide what is fair and equitable. He does so in a manner that just happens to be to the advantage of his sister party in Northern Ireland. The reality is that, if a party cannot get enough seats in the Assembly, it cannot expect chairmanships. That is what democracy is all about.

Government amendment No. 25 concerns the allocation of Committee places. I cannot recall our having considered that matter at all. It has been thrown in at the last moment. I wonder why.

Mr. Malcolm Moss (North-East Cambridgeshire): In fact, we discussed the matter on an amendment that we tabled in Committee, where it was amendment No. 14. I thank the Minister and his team for accepting it more or less verbatim.

Mr. Robinson: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for that clarification.

Government amendment No. 25 says that a nominating officer must prefer a Committee on which his party does not have a ministerial post. Is that absolutely necessary when we move from the chairmanships to the deputy chairmanships?

In many cases, who is the Chairman or Vice-Chairman will depend largely on the person's skills, so the nominating officer's flexibility will be curtailed. I see the necessity for the provision in relation to chairmanships, as one wants more objective scrutiny of the Minister's actions, but in the case of deputy chairmanships, I would have thought that the Government could have been more relaxed.

Rev. Martin Smyth: I have some sympathy with amendment No. 3. I would have had more sympathy with it if the same pattern were applied here. In 1982 and 1983, we were told that Northern Ireland parties had four places on Select Committees, and this year we have been cut down because the Government party demanded a majority of two in every Committee, and our Liberal Democrat friends decided that they also wanted places. The harsh reality is as the hon. Member for Belfast, East (Mr. Robinson) described it. Where a party has members, it gets places. My sympathy lies with the amendment, however. The concept of cross-community partnership should run right through the process, and it is strange that a Government who have gone down that road are withstanding the amendment.

Those who berated us in the 1975 constitutional convention for being obscurantists fighting a rearguard action who were not prepared to give places to others of different viewpoints would be surprised to find that

committees then would have been 50:50, with the chairmanships divided equally between the majority group and the minority group. We made that decision because we could not see that any party would ever win control under proportional representation. If the Government want to keep to the spirit of the agreement, they should not treat the amendment as cherry picking, but they have perhaps done some raspberry picking of their own.

Mr. Öpik: I assure the hon. Gentleman and the hon. Member for Belfast, East (Mr. Robinson) that amendment No. 3 applies also to the larger parties. If there is a tie between two large parties, they could benefit from the proportional process. It was not intended simply to help small parties, but to provide an equitable solution in the event of a tie.

Rev. Martin Smyth: I accept that. That is why I sympathise with the amendment. However, the tragedy is that the House of Commons, the mother of Parliaments, has not always followed its own democratic procedures.

Mr. Paul Murphy: I fear that I must give the hon. Member for Montgomeryshire (Mr. Öpik) the same answer that I gave in Committee. The spirit of the agreement is proportionality, and there is an opportunity in the Assembly for smaller parties to exercise responsibility in the large number of chairmanships and deputy chairmanships that will be meaningful jobs there. The hon. Gentleman referred specifically to Ministers, but if there is a tie, the only real answer is to re-run the d'Hondt system. The number of first preference votes for each party would then be reconsidered, instead of the number of seats that it had won in the Assembly. That is a fairer and more proportional system for Northern Ireland.

Mr. Öpik: I have visions of algebra. The amendment refers to chairmanships, and I fear that the Minister slightly misunderstands our intent. The amendment is not intended to create an unfair skew towards small parties, but to increase proportionality in the allocation of positions. I must emphasise that, because the assumption has been made a few times that the amendment is designed to favour small parties. I intend only that distribution should truly be fair.

Mr. Murphy: My understanding was that the amendment would favour smaller parties. That is why we do not favour it, but we may be able to discuss the point, and, when the Bill reaches the other place, perhaps it could be more clearly made. For tonight, however, we must reject it.

Amendments Nos. 25 and 26 provide that Northern Ireland Ministers, and the First Minister and Deputy First Minister, should not also be Chairmen or Deputy Chairman of Committees. That is sensible. Although the agreement is silent on the matter, there is no case for overlap. The amendments also deal with whether Committee Chairmen and Deputy Chairman should come from the same party as the Minister whose Department the Committee is advising and assisting. The hon. Member for North-East Cambridgeshire (Mr. Moss) has referred to the Opposition amendment that would have prevented any overlap, and we agree with the sentiments of that amendment. As I said in Committee, there may be cases in which overlap is impossible to avoid, and that may answer the point made by the hon. Member for Belfast, East (Mr. Robinson) about flexibility.

Amendment No. 25 refers to the nominating officer of a party preferring

"a committee in which he does not have a party interest to one in which he does."

That is not as rigid as saying that he cannot be on one in which he has an interest, but that he should prefer the other. It is sensible to have a spread, and to try to avoid overlap.

Amendment No. 23 is consequential. Clause 19 defines "Minister", for the purposes of clauses 19, 20, 21 and 23, as meaning

"the First Minister, the deputy First Minister or a Northern Ireland Minister."

Government amendments to clause 22 include references to Ministers that need to be construed in the same way, and the amendment extends the definition to cover clause 22.

Amendment agreed to.

Clause 20

INTERNATIONAL OBLIGATIONS

6.45 pm

Mr. Paul Murphy: I beg to move amendment No. 24, in page 10, line 18, at end insert

'and may make provision having retrospective effect'.

The amendment is technical, and would come into play when the Secretary of State made an order under clause 20 revoking subordinate legislation of the devolved authority that was incompatible with international obligations, or that had an adverse effect on provisions relating to accepted matters. It permits such an order to take retrospective effect. There is a natural presumption against retrospective legislation, but it is justified in this case. The House reached that conclusion when it approved a corresponding provision in clause 54 of the Scotland Bill, from which clause 20 borrows heavily.

Mr. Grieve: I seek clarification of one point. I do not object to what the Minister is trying to do, but I am puzzled about where the amendment is being inserted. If the purpose is to provide for retrospective effect to an order revoking legislation, the amendment should be tagged on to the end of line 16. It has nothing to do with reciting the reasons for revoking the legislation, which are dealt with in subsection (5), which includes line 18.

What the Government seek to achieve is that, when an order is made to revoke legislation, there may also be provision for giving it retrospective effect, and I understand the reasons for that. I hope that the point is not too pedantic, but at some point, somewhere, someone will have to interpret the Bill, and it seems that the proper place for the amendment is in line 16.

Mr. Murphy: I shall raise that matter with those who drafted the Bill, because I agree that we need to consider it.

Amendment agreed to.

Clause 22

STATUTORY COMMITTEES

Amendments made: No. 25, in page 11, line 20, at end insert—

'(5A) Standing orders shall provide that—

(a) a Minister may not be the chairman or deputy chairman of a statutory committee; and

(b) in making a selection under the provision made by virtue of subsection (3)(a), a nominating officer shall prefer a committee in which he does not have a party interest to one in which he does.

(5B) For the purposes of subsection a nominating officer has a party interest in a committee if it is established to advise and assist a Northern Ireland Minister who is a member of his party.'.

No. 26, in page 11, line 23, leave out '(5)' and insert '(5A)'.—*[Mr. Dowd.]*

Clause 23

EXCLUSION OF MINISTERS FROM OFFICE

Mr. Paul Murphy: I beg to move amendment No. 27, in page 11, line 29, at end insert 'or'.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to discuss the following: Government amendment No. 28.

Amendment No. 1, in page 11, line 35, leave out 'If the Assembly resolves' and insert

'If a motion is tabled, supported by at least 30 members, stating'.

Government amendment No. 29.

Amendment No. 2, in page 11, line 40, leave out from 'Ministers' to end of line 41 and insert

'following the next Assembly sitting unless and until a resolution expressing confidence in that Party is approved by the Assembly voting on a cross-community basis in accordance with section 4(5).'.

Mr. Murphy: I expect that several hon. Members want to speak on the amendments, and I shall answer their points at the debate's conclusion.

Mr. Jeffrey Donaldson (Lagan Valley): I want to speak to amendments Nos. 1 and 2 in particular, which stand in my name and the names of other hon. Members.

The clause deals with the mechanism for excluding individuals or parties from holding office in the New Northern Ireland Assembly. The mechanism as at present set out in the Bill requires in each instance a vote in the Assembly of cross-community support for a Minister to be excluded from office. The Bill sets out three options by which a resolution may be brought before the Assembly, but in each and every instance, for a motion to lead to the exclusion of a Minister or party, a cross-community vote is required. We believe that it should be the other way round.

On Wednesday I listened to the Prime Minister telling us in response to questions that it was he and he alone who decided who was in his Cabinet. Yet, in reality, in the Executive which will be the Government of Northern Ireland, the only way in which a Minister can be excluded from holding office is if there is a cross-community vote in the Assembly. That means that a Minister who enjoys the confidence of no other party in the Assembly but his own may remain in office, provided that his own party has sufficient numbers to block a cross-community vote. That is unhelpful.

Let me give as an example a Minister who belongs to the SDLP. For the cross-community vote to operate, the SDLP is required to support it because the SDLP represents over 40 per cent. of the nationalist community. Therefore, in effect, the SDLP can veto the exclusion of one of its Ministers under any circumstance. That is unhealthy in a democratic institution.

We believe that, for a Minister to stay in office when a motion is tabled—in respect of amendment No. 1—by at least 30 Members, the Minister or his party has a responsibility to gain the support and confidence of other parties in the Assembly. Otherwise, the mechanism as it is set out in the Bill effectively gives a veto to individual parties. Indeed, it effectively gives a veto to my party on the Unionist side, because at the moment it has more than 40 per cent. of the Unionist seats in the Assembly. Therefore, at least two parties now under the mechanism in the Bill can veto the exclusion of any Minister, including a Minister belonging to their party, even if that Minister has lost the confidence of every other party in the Assembly. The mechanism is unhealthy and unworkable.

The Minister will be aware of our serious concerns, particularly in relation to parties connected to terrorist organisations. We have a deep anxiety that a Minister will be appointed to the Executive who is linked to a paramilitary or terrorist organisation. If those terrorist organisations are in breach of the terms of the agreement—for example, by refusing to co-operate on the international commission on disarmament, by committing murders or carrying out punishment beatings—it will be virtually impossible to have that Minister removed from office or his party excluded from holding ministerial office unless the support of the SDLP is secured. That position does not imbue the Unionist community with confidence in the mechanisms of the Bill.

I ask the Government to think again and to consider accepting amendments Nos. 1 and 2 in the spirit that is intended—to make the institution more workable and to help it enjoy wider confidence than it presently enjoys.

Mr. Peter Robinson: Without changes such as would be effected by amendments Nos. 2 and 3, the Bill and the process becomes a farce.

Last night, when the same criteria as are in this Bill were applied in relation to the release of prisoners, the Government were prepared to close their eyes to the murder of one man, the beating up of many others, punishment beatings and shootings in Londonderry and all other acts of terrorism, and to allow those prisoners to be released. The same criteria applied in this case would allow IRA representatives to be in government. That may be acceptable to the Government, but it is unacceptable to the people of Northern Ireland. I suspect that it is not acceptable to a majority of the elected representatives.

That is not to say that there would not be a significant section who would be prepared to take any action against such Ministers. If the vote were taken today in the Assembly to exclude Sinn Fein members, I have no doubt that a majority would vote for exclusion, but it would not be a cross-community vote sufficient to ensure their exclusion. Therefore, the reality is that we do not have a working Assembly. The Executive cannot work on the

basis that some of those who are within its membership are still associated with death and destruction in the Province.

I notice that the Government have tabled amendment No. 29. I am subject to correction from those on the Opposition Front Bench who were helpful to me last time, but I have not heard it discussed before. I am sorry that the Minister did not say something about it. It has been one of the finest moments in my parliamentary career to see that, on the foot of an amendment that I tabled in Committee, the Government have actually agreed to remove four words from the Bill, although the fact that the Minister said nothing about it deflated me somewhat. However, the fact that he added about 30 extra words which are worse takes away some of the pleasure that I had.

I do not know what the Minister is trying to get at by this amendment, unless he is trying to get at the DUP. Perhaps he can explain it to us. I have never seen this kind of amendment before. The Minister provides for a party and its representatives to be excluded from government if there is

"any likely failure of its members"

to observe their pledge of office. The Assembly will have to look into the future to see what a representative might do if he were in office. No doubt, with crystal ball in hand, it will attempt to predict what a representative might do in government. That goes far too far. In particular, it does not relate to any involvement in terrorism, which is dealt with in paragraph (a). The amendment deals with unrelated, unspecified matters and it is important that we know what they are.

Moreover, as the clause is drafted, what the Assembly might perceive to be the position of one member of a political party automatically disqualifies all members of that political party for a 12-month period. The Minister needs to explain how all the representatives of a political party can be excluded because one member may be deemed in future to be likely not to observe the pledge of office.

Rev. Ian Paisley: When the Minister replies, can he tell us how it will be discovered who might become a Minister? I could well understand the clause and amendment if they dealt with a representative who had become a Minister, but how is it to be discovered who might become a Minister? There is only one way to discover that and it is to say that everybody in the party might become a Minister.

That is a strange amendment, therefore, which at one fell swoop, according to the interpretation given, could put a whole party out of the Assembly. I know that the Government would like to put my party out. During the campaign they said that we would not get there anyway, but then 20 of us turned up, so it is no wonder that they want to get rid of us. It is the strangest of strange amendments to say, without consultation with anyone, that someone could be excluded

"because of any likely failure"

What constitutes a likely failure? It is strange that, when the IRA fails to live up to its pledge to give up violence, and shoots, kills and maims—

Rev. Martin Smyth: If the provision were applied in this House, would any Executive stand for long, bearing in mind all the reports and the fact that a special Committee has had to be set up to investigate the conduct of Members who have not behaved according to the traditions of this place?

7 pm

Rev. Ian Paisley: That is very true. What could offer some comfort to the hon. Gentleman and myself is that we are never likely to become Ministers, so we would not be included in the guillotine.

The Minister must tell us what he is after here. Whom does he intend to catch in the net, and what is the real purpose of the amendment?

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): I should have thought that clause 23 and the amendment are relevant to a matter that has been raised several times—the problem of those who engage in violence. The Unionists, who do not favour the agreement, and occasionally the Opposition Front-Bench team, have argued that there is no basic guarantee that Ministers will be thrown out for engaging in violence. Surely, as has been pointed out, clause 23(1)(a) is clear. The clause states:

"a Minister no longer enjoys the confidence of the Assembly—

(a) because he is not committed to non-violence and exclusively peaceful and democratic means".

Mr. Peter Robinson: Government amendment No. 29 would replace paragraph (b) of clause 23, and refers to

"any other terms of the pledge of office".

Surely that means any terms other than the pledge to non-violence?

Mr. Winnick: Strange as it may seem, I have read the amendment, so I understand the hon. Gentleman's point. I should have thought that the amendment strengthens the position in many respects and makes the clause less vague. At the moment it refers only to "any other reason".

Every one of the pledges in paragraphs (a) to (g) of the pledge of office that has to be given by a Minister, on page 10 of the Belfast agreement, is essential if a Minister is to carry out his terms of office with integrity. The hon. Member for Belfast, South (Rev. Martin Smyth) asked what would happen if that pledge had to be observed in this Parliament. I hope that any Minister in any Government would act according to the requirements in the agreement for Ministers in the Northern Ireland Assembly and I include in that the previous Government and any future Conservative Governments, let alone a Labour Government.

The pledges include:

"to discharge in good faith all the duties of office . . . commitment to non-violence . . . to serve all the people . . . equally, and to act in accordance with the general obligations on government to promote equality . . . to participate with colleagues in the preparation of a programme for government . . . to support, and to act in accordance with, all decisions of the Executive . . . and the Assembly . . . to comply with the Ministerial Code of Conduct."

If the Assembly concludes that a Minister is not likely to comply with those pledges, obviously that must be a matter of concern. I accept that the word "likely" may give rise to difficulties, and I will listen carefully to my hon. Friend the Minister's reply. I accept that it is not as

[Mr. Winnick]

easy to decide what is likely as to decide what has occurred, but the amendment is a safeguard, and I see no reason why it should not be included.

Rev. Martin Smyth: We are not dealing with particular individuals as I understand it. The clause reads:

"If the Assembly resolves that a political party does not enjoy the confidence of the Assembly"—

and the amendment would follow on:

"because of any likely failure of its members who are or might become Ministers to observe any other terms of the pledge of office".

We are talking about the exclusion of a party for that reason, not of an individual or a Minister.

Mr. Winnick: I accept that. Perhaps I did not make it as clear as I should have done. The fact remains, however, that Ministers are part of a political party, and will presumably be appointed because of that fact and because they identified themselves as such when they were elected to the Assembly. That is the position.

If members of a political party who have been elected to the Assembly give the impression—be it Sinn Fein or any other group—that they are not likely to carry out the pledge of office, the amendment offers a necessary safeguard. However, I will be interested to hear the Minister's interpretation of the word "likely". Given what Opposition Members have said about Sinn Fein, I should have thought that they would reach the conclusion that I have reached, which is that the provision offers a safeguard if members of Sinn Fein, or of any other party, become Ministers and are likely not to observe the 10 points in the pledge of office.

Mr. Öpik: I have two points to make about amendment No. 29. First, as the hon. Members for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick) and for Belfast, East (Mr. Robinson) pointed out, the phrase "likely failure" is difficult. It creates a vagueness that someone will have to interpret, which concerns me.

The major problem is that raised by the hon. Member for North Antrim (Rev. Ian Paisley) which is in the wording

"who are or might become Ministers".

Although he said that it was exceedingly unlikely that he would be appointed a Minister in this House, theoretically it is possible. He might become a Minister in this Chamber, and I am sure that there are hon. Members who would welcome that. The word "might" is open to the simple interpretation that any member of the Assembly might become a Minister, and to that extent it genuinely excludes everyone. I understand the intent, but I strongly urge the Minister to think again about the amendment and perhaps table a tidied-up version in another place. As it stands, I would not touch it with a 40-ft bargepole.

Mr. Paul Murphy: The hon. Member for Montgomeryshire (Mr. Öpik) makes an interesting suggestion. I thought that it was a 4-ft bargepole before.

I think that everyone accepts that we had a long and good debate on exclusion in Committee, and I certainly do not intend to reiterate the Government's arguments about that part of the Bill, but simply to say that the basic principles on which clause 23 is based are: first, that it is drafted to reflect the terms of the agreement; secondly, as in the agreement, the decision to exclude from ministerial office is for the Assembly to take, on a cross-community basis; and, thirdly, that clause 23 subsections (6) and (7) reflect the promise made by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister in his Balmoral speech during the referendum campaign, by saying that the Secretary of State must take into account the four factors listed in subsection (7).

On the Government amendments, we were concerned because many parties and others made representations to us about the general nature of exclusion on the basis of the words "for any other reason".

I suspect that the hon. Member for Belfast, East (Mr. Robinson) agrees about the first bit. The purpose of the second part, with which he disagrees, is to put into legislation a much tighter reason for exclusion beyond non-violence and democracy, which are already in. It relates entirely to the pledge of office. They are not words made up out of the blue; they are there as a direct consequence of reading the pledge of office across from the agreement.

We believe that the pledge of office covers all the relevant ministerial responsibilities. It includes the

"commitment to non-violence and exclusively peaceful and democratic means",

but it also other includes pledges

"to discharge in good faith all the duties of office;

to serve all the people of Northern Ireland equally . . . to participate with colleagues in the preparation of a programme for government;

to operate within the framework of that programme when agreed within the Executive Committee and endorsed by the Assembly;

to support, and to act in accordance with, all the decisions of the Executive Committee and Assembly;

to comply with the Ministerial Code of Conduct."

Those pledges were agreed by negotiation. They were put into the agreement in written form and went to every household in Northern Ireland, and were in turn supported by the majority of people in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Peter Robinson: They are also already in the Bill where it deals with the individual. The Minister is talking about requiring all the members of a party to fulfil the pledge of office. If any of them are deemed not to be fulfilling it, all can be excluded and disqualified for 12 months.

Mr. Murphy: The hon. Gentleman will recall that, when we debated party exclusion and individual exclusion in Committee, most hon. Members agreed that the Bill should include provisions for party exclusion. It makes no sense to exclude one person as a Minister—and I mean exclude as opposed to remove—unless similar restrictions apply to political parties. Without that, all that would happen is that one individual would be replaced by another from the same party, because, under the d'Hondt procedure, there is automatic entitlement to positions on the Executive.

Mr. Winnick: Does my hon. Friend agree that if, say, Sinn Fein was found to be involved with violence, apart from our views, the first to cry out for any Sinn Fein Ministers to be excluded would be the very people who

are concerned about this amendment. It is a safeguard. The only doubt in my mind concerns the word "likely". Perhaps my hon. Friend will explain that.

Mr. Murphy: Let me deal with those two points. It is right to deal with issues other than non-violence, because they are equally part of the agreement. The authors of the agreement—the political parties—thought that people who entered the Assembly, if they became Ministers, had a duty placed on them to ensure that the agreement and the assembly worked. That is achieved by signing the pledge of office. The exclusion of parties as well as individual Ministers has been introduced because it would be nonsense if only an individual were affected because that person could keep on being replaced by party colleagues when the reason for exclusion concerned not an individual but that person's party in some way going against the spirit of the agreement and the pledge of office.

On the word "likely", how do we exclude people from office if they belong to a political party that says publicly, through a manifesto or some other method, that it rejects the whole purpose of the agreement and the pledge of office and what it stands for? It can be determined by examining the manifesto and what people say publicly about the agreement. We are not taking about membership of the Assembly, because Members cannot be excluded. If the electorate vote for those people for the Assembly, that is the right of the people in that constituency. We are talking about the holding of office. The agreement specifically says that people cannot hold office unless they sign the pledge. If a political party says that it does not agree with the pledge, it is likely that it will break the pledge because it has said so. That is the reason for the provision.

Amendment No. 1 would allow 30 Members of the Assembly to exclude. That goes completely against the agreement, because it does not encompass cross-community support. Whatever the rights and wrongs of whether 30 Members should be able to do it, the amendment cannot be accepted because it contravenes what the agreement says about exclusion or removal being based on cross-community agreement.

7.15 pm

Mr. Peter Robinson: The Minister is wrong to say that the 30-Member mechanism is contrary to the agreement. It is the essence of the agreement, which uses 30 Members to provide a trigger mechanism on several other issues. The amendment uses the agreement's terminology. Its terminology relating to cross-community support comes in our next amendment.

Mr. Murphy: There is a difference between the simple triggering of a mechanism and amendment No. 1, which gives a different interpretation of the matter. We must ensure that the legislation, as far as possible, mirrors the agreement. Everyone knows that it must be based on cross-community support. That is set out twice in paragraph 25 of strand 1. The amendment does not even replace it with straightforward majority support; it gives a minority the right to exclude another party from ministerial office, and is not compatible with the agreement.

Amendment No. 2 is different, in that the agreement is silent on the length of exclusion. We want to try to implement the agreement, but inevitably a political agreement leaves some practical gaps. We must consider what we think the spirit of the agreement is. The Bill should make some provision for the length of the period of exclusion. The provision should be as flexible as possible and allow the Assembly to vary the period of exclusion on the same basis as the original decision, by resolution with cross-community support. Where there is such support, the Assembly can determine as short or as long a period of exclusion as it sees fit. The decision is up to the Assembly.

We recognised that there might be different views on the period of exclusion to be served, so we sought to provide a basic period which was long enough to reflect the seriousness of the loss of confidence that triggered it but which offered the prospect of a return to ministerial office if the original cause of exclusion was removed. We think that that is in line with the spirit of the agreement. The period would last 12 months from the original vote, unless—this is important—the Assembly resolves to reduce it, or to extend it by successive periods of 12 months. That would be a matter for the Assembly, based on cross-community support.

Amendment No.2 would make the period of exclusion open-ended. It would require a positive vote before a party regained eligibility for ministerial office. I do not think that that is in line with the agreement, because the d'Hondt procedure automatically qualifies parties for entitlement, which is different from any system of which we have experience. That is why we cannot accept the amendment. We believe that nowhere in the agreement is there a requirement for a positive vote of confidence in favour of a particular party taking up ministerial office. That goes against proportionality, but especially against the d'Hondt procedure.

Mr. Donaldson: Has not the Minister just spent some time explaining to the House that there ought to be an amendment to the Bill to enable a whole party to be excluded from holding office if it is thought likely for any reason that it will not hold up to the pledge of office? He is arguing that the d'Hondt rule is sovereign and that there should be nothing to exclude individuals from holding office if their party is entitled to office under the d'Hondt system, yet a few moments ago he argued that, even if a party was likely to be in breach of the pledge of office, there might be a mechanism to exclude it from office. Is there not an inconsistency there?

Mr. Murphy: There is no inconsistency. We have made it clear—the Bill is consistent—that there is provision to exclude or remove from office both individuals and parties, for the reasons that I have explained, if the pledge of office is broken in some way or another. That is true especially of the pledge regarding non-violence, which is specifically mentioned in another part of the clause. Of course, that in itself means that the d'Hondt procedure is interfered with, because the pledge has been broken. Of course I understand that, but here we are talking about the return of such a party.

If the party has during the previous 12 months changed its policy and is committed to peaceful and non-violent means, there comes a time when that party ought to be able to return to the democratic fold. I see nothing wrong with that, but there is provision in the agreement for that 12 months to be extended or reduced if necessary, according to the feeling of the Assembly.

Rev. Ian Paisley (North Antrim): Why then does the Minister change the rule completely in regard to this?

[Rev. Ian Paisley]

There is no mention of its being likely that a person will go back to violence. The word "likely" is not used in those terms, but it is used in regard to the pledge of office. Amendment No. 29 goes further than that. It says "members who are". Well, Members who are doing this can be seen to be doing it, but might become Ministers. Surely, if they are going to become Ministers, you are only pushing yourself out into the future and saying, "If they become Ministers, they are going to do the same thing." How can you prove that?

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael J. Martin): Order. I do not need to prove anything.

Rev. Ian Paisley: I am asking the Minister a simple question. Why is it that the amendment has gone beyond persons in office to those who might be in office and is trying them and hanging them for something that they have not even done?

Mr. Murphy: If a party is saying, and all the world knows that it is saying, to the people of Northern Ireland—

Mr. Peter Robinson (Belfast, East): Give us an example.

Mr. Murphy: It is not up to me to give any sort of example. If a political party goes to the people and says, "We will not accept the conditions of the pledge of office," it is the height of nonsense for that party to be in the Executive—not the Assembly. The Executive is entirely based on an agreement that says that Ministers must sign up to the pledge of office. It does not make any sense. The people will know that a party has said that it will not accept the pledge. If a political party has said so in its manifesto, it is likely that that party will not take office. That is much tighter than what the Bill originally said, which was "for any other reason." It is important that "any other reason" is taken away and in its place are inserted the words in the amendment.

We argued vigorously about "exclusion" as opposed to "removal" in Committee, but if we know beforehand what the policy of the party is likely to be because that is stated in the manifesto, on the radio, on the television or whatever, of course it does not make any sense that the party should take up office that depends on recognition and acceptance of the pledge of office. For those reasons, I commend the Government amendments to the House and ask it to reject amendments Nos. 1 and 2.

The House divided: Ayes 225, Noes 21.

Division No. 355] **[7.24 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Alexander, Douglas
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Armstrong, Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, Rt Hon Mrs Margaret
Bennett, Andrew F
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Boateng, Paul
Borrow, David
Bradley, Keith *(Withington)*
Brinton, Mrs Helen
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Butler, Mrs Christine
Byers, Stephen
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Canavan, Dennis
Cann, Jamie
Casale, Roger
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Chisholm, Malcolm
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Iain
Colman, Tony
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cooper, Yvette
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Ms Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Denham, John
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Efford, Clive
Ennis, Jeff
Etherington, Bill
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Field, Rt Hon Frank
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foulkes, George
Fyfe, Maria
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mrs Eileen
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Hain, Peter
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Heppell, John
Hewitt, Ms Patricia
Hill, Keith
Hodge, Ms Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Hoon, Geoffrey
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howells, Dr Kim
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Ms Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Jones, Ms Jenny *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Jowell, Ms Tessa
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Kemp, Fraser
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kingham, Ms Tess
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Linton, Martin
Livingstone, Ken
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Steve
McCafferty, Ms Chris
McDonagh, Siobhain
McDonnell, John
McGrady, Eddie
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McNamara, Kevin
McNulty, Tony
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mallaber, Judy
Mandelson, Peter
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury)*
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheff'ld Heeley)*
Mitchell, Austin
Moffatt, Laura
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moran, Ms Margaret
Morgan, Alasdair *(Galloway)*
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Ms Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Mowlam, Rt Hon Marjorie
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul *(Torfaen)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
Olner, Bill
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Pendry, Tom
Perham, Ms Linda
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris

Pope, Greg
Pound, Stephen
Powell, Sir Raymond
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Quin, Ms Joyce
Rammell, Bill
Raynsford, Nick
Robertson, Rt Hon George *(Hamilton S)*
Rooker, Jeff
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Ms Joan
Salter, Martin
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Rt Hon Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Spellar, John
Squire, Ms Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Stevenson, George
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Rt Hon Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Todd, Mark
Touhig, Don
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Vaz, Keith
Vis, Dr Rudi
White, Brian
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*
Wills, Michael
Winnick, David
Wise, Audrey
Wood, Mike
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Clive Betts and
Mr. David Hanson.

NOES

Baker, Norman
Beggs, Roy
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Burnett, John
Cotter, Brian
Donaldson, Jeffrey
Fearn, Ronnie
Forsythe, Clifford
Gorrie, Donald
Keetch, Paul
Kirkwood, Archy
Öpik, Lembit
Paisley, Rev Ian
Rendel, David
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Taylor, Rt Hon John D *(Strangford)*
Thompson, William
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Wilshire, David

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. William Ross and
Mr. Peter Robinson.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Amendments made: No. 28, in page 11, line 31, leave out from 'office;' to end of line 32.

No. 29, in page 11, leave out line 39 and insert—

'(b) because of any likely failure of its members who are or might become Ministers to observe any other terms of the pledge of office,'.—*[Mr. Dowd.]*

Clause 28

DISQUALIFICATION

Mr. Paul Murphy: I beg to move amendment No. 30, in page 14, line 36, after 'that', insert—

'(a)''.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to discuss Government amendment No. 31.

Mr. Murphy: The amendments refer to the disqualification for Assembly membership of clergymen of the Church of Ireland and of the Roman Catholic Church and would bring the Northern Ireland Bill into line with the Scotland Bill.

We do not believe that the disqualification is necessary in the Northern Ireland Assembly. It is anomalous as the disqualification does not apply to dissenting Ministers, who play a significant role in Northern Ireland politics, both in this House and, as I am sure they will, in the Assembly. I cannot say whether many clergy will take up the opportunities offered in the amendments, but we believe that it is in the best interests of the electorate to give the broadest possible choice of candidates by removing all inessential grounds for disqualification. Ultimately, it is for the electorate to decide who represents them.

Amendment agreed to.

Amendment made: No. 31, in page 14, line 37, at end insert

'; or

(b) he is ordained or is a minister of any religious denomination.'.—*[Mr. Dowd.]*

Clause 31

PRESIDING OFFICER

Mr. Paul Murphy: I beg to move amendment No. 32, in page 16, leave out line 6 and insert—

'(c) the Assembly elects from among its members a person to hold office as Presiding Officer or deputy in his place.'.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to discuss Government amendments Nos. 33 and 34.

Mr. Murphy: The amendments deal with replacing the presiding officer. Under clause 31 as it stands, it would theoretically be possible for the Assembly to dismiss the Presiding Officer or a deputy without appointing a successor. Although it is highly unlikely in practice that there would be cross-community support for such a move without there being support for an agreed successor, we have to provide for all contingencies. We cannot afford a vacancy in the Presiding Officer post: a vacuum would make the Assembly's business impossible and it would be unable to hold the necessary election for a replacement.

These are useful, tidying amendments and I commend them to the House.

Amendment agreed to.

Amendments made: No. 33, in page 16, line 7, after 'office', insert

'(otherwise than under subsection (2)(c))'.

No. 34, in page 16, line 18, leave out from 'under' to 'without' in line 19 and insert 'subsections (1) to (3)'.—*[Mr. Ingram.]*

Clause 36

POWER TO CALL FOR WITNESSES AND DOCUMENTS

Mr. Paul Murphy: I beg to move amendment No. 35, in page 18, line 29, after 'to' insert

'a person who is or has been'.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to discuss Government amendments Nos. 36 and 37.

Mr. Murphy: The amendments tidy the provisions for calling witnesses and documents. Subsection (4) makes it

[Mr. Murphy]

clear that the Assembly does not have the power to summon Ministers of the Crown or persons in Crown employment about the discharge of their functions before the appointed day. It is a sensible provision that mirrors the Westminster convention that Ministers are not given sight of material shown to their predecessors.

Amendment agreed to.

Amendments made: No. 36, in page 18, line 30, after 'person' insert

'who is or has been'.

No. 37, in page 18, line 38, at end insert—

'( ) a person discharging functions of any body whose functions relate to excepted matters, in connection with the discharge by him of those functions;'.—*[Mr. Ingram.]*

Clause 45

PAYMENTS INTO THE FUND: TAXES

Mr. Paul Murphy: I beg to move amendment No. 38, in page 22, line 36, leave out from beginning to end of line 17 on page 23.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to discuss Government amendments Nos. 39 to 42.

No. 6, in clause 51, page 25, line 9, at end insert—

'(3) Subject to subsection (4), no payment shall be made under section 45(1) or 46 unless a draft budget for the financial year to which the payment relates has been approved under subsection (2) and has been laid before the House of Commons at least ten sitting days before any motion is made in that House for the approval of a grant of supply out of which the payment is to be made.

(4) Nothing in subsection (3) shall prejudice any grant of supply for the purposes of making good to the Consolidated Fund of Northern Ireland any issue which may be authorised out of that Fund under section 47.'

Government amendments Nos. 52 and 67.

Mr. Murphy: Amendments Nos. 38 to 40 and 52 respond to representations made to the Government by a number of right hon. and hon. Members, including the First Minister. They abolish the present system whereby the Consolidated Fund of Northern Ireland is financed from two sources. The first, which is represented by clause 45, is the so-called attributed share—the share of the total of UK taxes that comes from Northern Ireland. The second, in clause 46, is the additional payment made because the money raised from the attributed share is insufficient to meet Northern Ireland's needs.

In Scotland, these matters are not presented in the same way as they are for Northern Ireland. We see no reason for a difference; we therefore tabled the amendments to abolish the clause. It will make no difference to the total amount provided for Northern Ireland, but it is an important presentational point.

Amendments Nos. 41 and 42 remove the requirement for the draft budget to be laid before the Assembly by a specific date in December. The requirement was originally included to coincide with departmental and Treasury planning cycles, which change from time to time. We did not want the dates to be altered, nor did we want the Assembly to be so tied down. The amendment merely requires the draft budget to be laid and considered before the start of the financial year. In practice, I expect the Assembly to deal with it before each Christmas to give Northern Ireland Departments time to allocate money internally for the new financial year, as we do at present.

Amendment No. 67 is consequential on the repeal of the Government of Ireland Act 1920.

Amendment agreed to.

Clause 46

PAYMENTS INTO THE FUND: SECRETARY OF STATE

Amendments made: No. 39, in page 23, line 18, leave out 'may' and insert 'shall'.

No. 40, in page 23, line 20, at end insert

'of such amounts as he may determine'.—*[Mr. Ingram.]*

Clause 51

DRAFT BUDGETS

Amendments made: No. 41, in page 25, line 3, leave out

'on or before the first working day after 9th December in each year'

and insert

'before the beginning of each financial year'.

No. 42, in page 25, line 5, leave out 'the next financial' and insert 'that'.—*[Mr. Ingram.]*

Clause 53

PROVISION OF INFORMATION TO TREASURY

Amendment made: No. 43, in page 25, leave out lines 17 to 21 and insert—

'.—(1) The Treasury may require the Northern Ireland Ministers and departments to provide, within such period as the Treasury may specify, such information, in such form and prepared in such manner, as the Treasury may specify.

(2) If the information is not in their possession or under their control, their duty under subsection (1) is to take all reasonable steps to comply with the requirement.'.—*[Mr. Ingram.]*

Clause 57

RESTRICTIONS ON APPLICATION OF RIGHTS

Amendments made: No. 44, in page 27, line 6, after '19(1)' insert '(a)'.

No. 45, in page 27, line 9, leave out first 'the' and insert 'a'.

No. 46, in page 27, leave out lines 14 to 20 and insert—

'(3) Section 6(2)(d)—

(a) does not apply to a provision of an Act of the Assembly if the passing of the Act is, by virtue of subsection (2) of section 6 of the Human Rights Act 1998, not unlawful under subsection (1) of that section; and

(b) does not enable a court or tribunal to award in respect of the passing of an Act of the Assembly any damages which it could not award on finding the passing of the Act unlawful under that subsection.

(3A) Section 19(1)(a)—

(a) does not apply to an act which, by virtue of subsection (2) of section 6 of the Human Rights Act 1998, is not unlawful under subsection (1) of that section; and

(b) does not enable a court or tribunal to award in respect of an act any damages which it could not award on finding the act unlawful under that subsection.'.—*[Mr. Ingram.]*

Clause 62

DISCRIMINATION BY PUBLIC AUTHORITIES

Amendments made: No. 47, in page 29, line 28, at end insert—

'( ) Subsection (1) applies to the making of subordinate legislation only if—

(a) the legislation contains a provision which discriminates against a person or class of person on the ground of religious belief or political opinion; and

(b) the provision extends only to the whole or any part of Northern Ireland.

( ) Where it is alleged that subsection (1) applies to the making of subordinate legislation, subsection (2) shall not apply but the contravention may be relied upon in legal proceedings relating to validity of the subordinate legislation.'.

No. 48, in page 29, leave out lines 31 to 33.

No. 49, in page 29, line 36, after 'authority', insert

'(other than a Northern Ireland department)'.—*[Mr. Ingram.]*

Clause 66

PARTICIPATION IN NSMC AND BIC

Mr. Donaldson: I beg to move amendment No. 4, in page 31, line 41, at end insert—

'(3) No executive function shall be discharged under this section, by a Minister or Ministers, without the prior approval of the Assembly voting on a cross-community basis in accordance with section 4(5).'.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to discuss amendment No. 5, in clause 68, page 32, line 20, at end insert

'but may not be made without the approval of the Assembly voting on a cross-community basis in accordance with section 4(5).'.

7.45 pm

Mr. Donaldson: The terms of the agreement in strand 2 dealing with the north-south ministerial council state:

"Northern Ireland to be represented by the First Minister, Deputy First Minister and any relevant Ministers, the Irish Government by the Taoiseach and relevant Ministers, all operating in accordance with the rules for democratic authority and accountability in force in the Northern Ireland Assembly and the Oireachtas respectively."

The amendment would make explicit in the Bill the requirement for democratic authority to be granted to Ministers as they enter into discussions and reach decisions in the north-south ministerial council with their Irish counterparts. It must be clearly understood that Ministers are operating with democratic authority, as laid down by the Assembly, and that they are accountable to the Assembly for executive decisions taken after discussions in the north-south ministerial council.

Amendment No. 5 applies to clause 68, which deals with the implementation bodies that will be agreed and established by the north-south ministerial council. Subsection (4) states:

"Where the Secretary of State has made or proposes to make grants under subsection (3), an order under this section may make provision corresponding to paragraph 7 of Schedule 8".

The amendment would add the words

"but may not be made without the approval of the Assembly voting on a cross-community basis in accordance with section 4(5)."

The agreement makes it clear in the provisions under strand 2 that funding for the implementation bodies is to be provided by the two Administrations—the Northern Ireland Assembly and the Irish Government—

"on the basis that the Council and the implementation bodies constitute a necessary public function."

Our amendment seeks to take account of the provisions of the agreement, which would require the Assembly, voting on a cross-community basis, to bring into effect the funding for the implementation bodies. If the Assembly is to have real control over its budget, it is important that it should have control over the funding of the implementation bodies.

I hope, therefore, that the Government, honouring the spirit of the agreement and its terms, particularly in relation to the functions of the assembly, will accept the amendments. They cannot argue against the amendments on the basis that they are not in the agreement, because they clearly follow the explicit terms of the agreement. The amendments would create more confidence in the accountability of the north-south institutions to the Assembly.

Mr. Peter Robinson: We are dealing with one of the twin pillars of the agreement, to which the Prime Minister directly referred when he came to Northern Ireland and when he gave commitments in the House and elsewhere. He made it clear that the Assembly would be democratic and that the north-south bodies would be accountable to the Assembly.

I shall be frank. Throughout the referendum campaign, I made it clear that I did not see anywhere in the agreement what the Prime Minister was saying. The Bill is a faithful representation of what the agreement says, but it is not a faithful representation of how the agreement was interpreted by the Prime Minister for the people of Northern Ireland—it was, after all, based on the interpretation of the Prime Minister that the people of Northern Ireland voted in the referendum.

This is the Prime Minister's Government, and I suppose that it must be recognised that they will want to make good the Prime Minister's pledges. On 20 May—that famous occasion—the Prime Minister came to Northern Ireland, complete with his poster hoarding, and personally signed his five pledges. One was that the power to take decisions would be

"returned to a Northern Ireland Assembly, with accountable North/South co-operation."

That pledge contains two elements—accountability and co-operation—but the Bill makes it very clear that the north-south bodies are not accountable to the Assembly, and that they will be performing executive functions.

I remember that, in Committee, the Minister attempted to say that the north-south bodies were accountable because Ministers were accountable. If he is relying on

[Mr. Peter Robinson]

that argument as his get-out clause for what the Prime Minister said, I have to tell him that it is very weak. He knows as well as I do that Ministers are not accountable in the sense that Ministers would be accountable in this Chamber. A majority cannot get rid of a Minister or overturn a ministerial decision. In this set-up, it requires a consensus vote and, in many cases, the Minister's party could veto any move against him or against his decision. There is no real accountability. If accountability applies only to the Minister, not to his actions, that makes the position even weaker.

I hope that the Minister will recognise that he has not resolved the issue that is central to the concerns of many Unionists in the House and in Northern Ireland, and that he has to do better. The provision cannot remain in the Bill and enjoy the support of the Unionist community in Northern Ireland.

Mr. McGrady: It seems that the amendment seeks to ensure that democratic accountability resides with the Assembly of Northern Ireland in respect of the involvement of members of the north-south ministerial council. I refer the proposers of the amendment to paragraph 6 of strand 2 of the agreement, which reads:

"Each side to be in a position to take decisions in the Council within the defined authority of those attending, through the arrangements in place for co-ordination of executive functions within each jurisdiction. Each side to remain accountable to the Assembly and Oireachtas respectively".

The degree of accountability is clear, and the Bill reflects that accountability. I refer the House to clause 15 in part III, which deals with the executive authority of the First, Second and any other Ministers.

The Bill states that the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister will present to the Assembly a programme of executive action and budgetary control. Clause 15(2) states:

"A determination"

in respect of policy, intended executive action and a proposed budget

"under subsection (1) shall not have effect unless it is approved by a resolution of the Assembly passed with cross-community support."

The thread of authority flows directly from the Assembly, through cross-community approval to Ministers and the participating persons in the north-south body, which, by its very nature, is constrained by that which has already been approved by the Assembly. Although I understand the fears expressed by the proposers of the amendment, I submit that they are fully covered by the Bill.

Mr. Öpik: Liberal Democrats raised this issue at earlier stages of our consideration of the Bill. There is great concern in certain quarters that there is no specific reassurance in the Bill that executive functions discharged by Ministers under the strand 2 arrangements require cross-community approval, as outlined in the amendment.

The hon. Member for South Down (Mr. McGrady) made it clear that his interpretation of the Bill, especially clause 15 and related clauses, is that it contains sufficient conditions to ensure that no significant decisions can be made by Ministers before those decisions have received the approval of or ratification from the Assembly. I understand his cogent argument, but it would be extremely helpful if, for the sake of the record, which will be used to interpret the Bill, he could give a reassurance that it is his clear expectation that Ministers could not embark on important executive decisions without the clear authorisation of the Assembly.

This debate and its consequences could cause friction in the future, and we have to navigate it carefully. One of the advantages that we have is that we shall review procedures in the not too distant future, once the Assembly has had some time to function. I seek the Minister's reassurance that he will be willing to revisit the matter if it seems that there are continuing difficulties with strand 2, and that, if it becomes clear that there are deficiencies, he will return to the House with proposals to overcome them.

Mr. Temple-Morris: This issue was discussed in Committee. I welcome the amendment moved by the hon. Member for Lagan Valley (Mr. Donaldson), and I have a great deal of sympathy with the concern expressed by the hon. Member for Belfast, East (Mr. Robinson). This provision needs to be drawn as tightly as possible, and there are gaps between the Bill and paragraphs 9 to 13 of strand 2 of the Belfast agreement, which is what concerns Opposition Members.

I might be reinforcing that point by saying that, if I remember rightly, during our previous debate my hon. Friend the Minister undertook to examine the wording of clause 66. I am sure that clause 68, which is allied to it, will form part of that research. In other words, the Minister has already given an undertaking, which will no doubt be repeated now and which will form part of the busy summer that he is rapidly taking upon himself.

My substantive point is that although we need to get things right, I see no cause for alarm. Paragraph 13 of strand 2 of the agreement states:

"It is understood that the North/South Ministerial Council and the Northern Ireland Assembly are mutually inter-dependent".

The idea that a functionary of the Assembly can participate in these bodies without the broad consent of the Assembly before, after or during is not at issue. I am sure that the Assembly will control that which it has to control, whatever the drafting of the particular clauses. If it does not, it will not work. It is as simple as that.

However, I agree that there must be sufficient resemblance between the Bill and the Belfast agreement. The accountability is there, as is the legislative authority that has been transferred to the Assembly. Anything that any Northern Ireland Minister does in one of these bodies has to be approved in legislation by the Assembly. In common-sense terms, that is sufficient, but we should perhaps improve the clause to allay any fears that might exist in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Paul Murphy: We debated this matter at some length earlier in the week and on Second Reading. I take account of the points that were made by my hon. Friend the Member for Leominster (Mr. Temple-Morris) and by other hon. Members. I shall deal with the two amendments and then make some general comments.

Amendment No. 5 is unnecessary because it deals with orders that will be made during the transitional shadow period to give effect to arrangements that will have been agreed by the Northern Ireland Administration. The Secretary of State's power to make orders under the

clause are needed to enable the Government to meet their responsibility to set up the implementation bodies that are envisaged in strand 2. They will be identified and agreed between representatives of the Northern Ireland transitional administration and the Irish Government operating in the north-south ministerial council. Of course, they will be set up by order in the House.

8 pm

Amendment No. 4 goes beyond the Belfast agreement by insisting on prior approval of every ministerial function. Paragraph 6 of strand 2 clearly states:

"Each side to be in a position to take decisions in the Council within the defined authority of those attending, through the arrangements in place for co-ordination of executive functions within each jurisdiction."

The amendment goes against that. However, I sympathise with much of what hon. Members have said, because, although to my mind it is clear that the north-south ministerial council must be properly accountable to the Dail and to the Assembly, there is a case for looking more carefully at the wording of the relevant clauses to ensure that accountability is clear. I think that the meaning is implicit, but there is a need to look at the matter again.

Some days ago I said, and I repeat, that no Minister on the north-south ministerial council who is worth his salt would return to the Assembly in the knowledge that he or she would not have its backing. For example, money would have to be provided for any scheme and legislation might be required, and those are matters for the Assembly. There is a case for revisiting the clauses and I shall be grateful if the amendment is withdrawn on the understanding that we shall look at the wording in another place.

Mr. Donaldson: In the light of what the Minister has said, I am prepared to withdraw the amendment. I hope that the Minister will pay careful attention to what has been said. We stand ready to assist him with the wording in whatever way we can. I hope that he will take on board our arguments on this important aspect of the Bill. The Government must understand that if there is to be confidence among many people the Government must address this matter. I welcome the speech by the hon. Member for Leominster (Mr. Temple-Morris) in that regard.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Clause 73

PROVISIONS FOR PURPOSES CONSEQUENTIAL ON ACTS ETC.

Amendment made: No. 50, in page 34, line 32, at end insert—

'( ) Provision may be made for transferring to a United Kingdom authority, with effect from the appointed day, any functions which—

(a) immediately before that day are exercisable by an existing Northern Ireland authority; and

(b) appear to Her Majesty to be concerned with a matter which is an excepted matter by virtue of paragraph 9A of Schedule 2.'.—*[Mr. Ingram.]*

Clause 77

ORDERS AND REGULATIONS

Amendments made: No. 51, in page 36, line 33, leave out '45(3)' and insert

'(*Social security, child support and pensions: consultation and co-ordination*)(3)'.

No. 52, in page 36, line 36, leave out '45(4) or'.

No. 53, in page 36, line 39, at end insert—

'( ) Regulations under section (*Social security, child support and pensions: consultation and co-ordination*)(4) shall be subject to negative resolution (within the meaning given by section 41(6) of the Interpretation Act (Northern Ireland) 1954).'.—*[Mr. Ingram.]*

Schedule 2

EXCEPTED MATTERS

Mr. Paul Murphy: I beg to move amendment No. 54, in page 40, line 8, leave out from 'whole,' to end of line 14 and insert

'stamp duty levied in Northern Ireland before the appointed day and taxes substantially of the same character as that duty'.

This is a simple, technical amendment, and I ask the House to accept it

Amendment agreed to.

Amendment made: No. 55, in page 40, line 14, at end insert—

'9A. National insurance contributions; the Northern Ireland National Insurance Fund and payments into it; reductions in and deductions from national insurance contributions; national insurance rebates; contributions equivalent premiums; rights to return to the state scheme.'.—*[Mr. Ingram.]*

Schedule 5

PLEDGE OF OFFICE

Amendment made: No. 56, in page 44, line 7, at end insert—

'CODE OF CONDUCT

Ministers must at all times:

observe the highest standards of propriety and regularity involving impartiality, integrity and objectivity in relationship to the stewardship of public funds;

be accountable to users of services, the community and, through the Assembly, for the activities within their responsibilities, their stewardship of public funds and the extent to which key performance targets and objectives have been met;

ensure all reasonable requests for information from the Assembly, users of services and individual citizens are complied with; and that Departments and their staff conduct their dealings with the public in an open and responsible way;

follow the seven principles of public life set out by the Committee on Standards in Public Life;

comply with this code and with rules relating to the use of public funds;

operate in a way conducive to promoting good community relations and equality of treatment;

not use information gained in the course of their service for personal gain; nor seek to use the opportunity of public service to promote their private interests;

ensure they comply with any rules on the acceptance of gifts and hospitality that might be offered;

declare any personal or business interests which may conflict with their responsibilities. The Assembly will retain a Register of Interests. Individuals must ensure that any direct or indirect pecuniary interests which members of the public might reasonably think could influence their judgement are listed in the Register of Interests.'.—*[Mr. Ingram.]*

Schedule 6

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY COMMISSION

Mr. Paul Murphy: I beg to move amendment No. 57, in page 44, leave out lines 15 to 31.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to discuss Government amendment No. 58.

Mr. Murphy: The amendments are technical and relate to the Northern Ireland Assembly Commission. We included in paragraph 2 of schedule 6 provisions that were borrowed from the Scotland Bill, which empowers UK Ministers to make certain transfers of property to the Scottish equivalent of the commission. However, in our case property is specifically dealt with in clause 74. In particular, the buildings that will be used initially by the Assembly already belong to the devolved system.

Amendment agreed to.

Amendment made: No. 58, in page 45, line 5, at end insert—

'( ) holding property;'.—*[Mr. Ingram.]*

Schedule 11

DEVOLUTION ISSUES

Amendments made: No. 59, in page 52, line 23, at end insert 'or'.

No. 60, in page 52, line 25, leave out from 'be,' to end of line 28 and insert

'invalid by reason of section 19'.—*[Mr. Ingram.]*

Schedule 13

MINOR AND CONSEQUENTIAL AMENDMENTS

Amendment made: No. 61, in page 60, line 30, at end insert—

"*Social Security Administration Act 1992 (c.5)*

. In section 189 of the Social Security Administration Act 1992 (regulations and orders: general)—

(a) in subsection (9), for "175 and 178" substitute "and 175"; and

(b) in subsection (11), for "any of sections 177 to 179" substitute "section 179".

Social Security Administration (Northern Ireland) Act 1992 (c.8)

. In section 165 of the Social Security Administration (Northern Ireland) Act 1992 (regulations and orders: general)—

(a) in subsection (10), for "152 and 154" substitute "and 152"; and

(b) in subsection (11), for "any of sections 153 to 155" substitute "section 155".—*[Mr. Ingram.]*

Mr. Paul Murphy: I beg to move amendment No. 62, in page 60, leave out lines 33 to 36.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to discuss Government amendments Nos. 63 to 65.

Mr. Murphy: The amendments are technical and are consequent on the dissolution of the Northern Ireland Disability Council. They make appropriate changes to the part of the schedule that relates to the Disability Discrimination Act 1995, which established that council. They also make good some omissions in the earlier draft of the Bill relating to the titles of the Northern Ireland Disability Council and the new Equality Commission for Northern Ireland. I have pleasure in asking the House to accept them.

Amendment agreed to.

Amendments made: No. 63, in page 60, line 37, after 'Schedule 8', insert—

'(a)''.

No. 64, in page 60, line 38, leave out

'the Northern Ireland Equality Commission'

and insert

'the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland'.

No. 65, in page 60, line 38, at end insert—

'(b) for paragraph 33(1) substitute—

"33.—(1) In sections 50 to 52, for "the Council" substitute, in each place, the "Equality Commission for Northern Ireland".

(1A) Section 50(1) and (8) shall have no effect."; and

(c) for paragraph 52 substitute—

"52. Schedule 5 shall have no effect."'.—*[Mr. Ingram.]*

Schedule 14

TRANSITIONAL PROVISIONS AND SAVINGS

Amendment made: No. 66, in page 62, line 18, at end insert—

'Social security and child support

. Any regulations made under any enactment repealed by virtue of section (*Social security, child support and pensions: consultation and co-ordination*) shall have effect, with any necessary modifications as if they had been made under subsection (3) or, as the case may require, subsection (4) of that section.'.—*[Mr. Ingram.]*

Schedule 15

REPEALS

Amendments made: No. 67, in page 63, line 7, column 3, leave out 'and (2)'.

No. 68, in page 63, line 52, column 3, at end insert—

'Section 56(2) to (4).'.

No. 69, in page 63, line 52, at end insert—

'S.I. 1991/2628 (N. I.23).	Child Support (Northern Ireland) Order 1991.	Article 49(2) and (3)
1992 c.5.	Social Security Administration Act 1992.	Sections 177 and 178. Schedule 8.
1992 c.8.	Social Security Administration (Northern Ireland) Act 1992.	Sections 153 and 154. In section 167(1), the definition of "Joint Authority".'.

—*[Mr. Ingram.]*

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael J. Martin): With permission, I shall put together the motions relating to delegated legislation.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 118(6) (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation),

LOCAL GOVERNMENT FINANCE (SCOTLAND)

That the Special Grant Report (Scotland): Grant in aid of expenditure on rural public passenger transport for 1998–99 (HC 941), which was laid before this House on 9th July, be approved.

HIGHLANDS AND ISLANDS SHIPPING SERVICES

That the draft Undertaking by the Secretary of State for Scotland with the consent of Her Majesty's Treasury and P & O Scottish Ferries Limited and the Peninsular and Oriental Steam Navigation Company for the provision of passenger ferry services to Orkney and Shetland, which was laid before this House on 16th July, be approved.—*[Mr. Dowd.]*

Question agreed to.

PETITIONS

Jewish High School (Leeds)

8.7 pm

Mr. Fabian Hamilton (Leeds, North-East): I am grateful for the opportunity to present the petition of the Leeds Jewish High School Trust, its supporters and 3,000 citizens of Leeds. The petition declares:

that the establishment of a Local Authority Jewish High School for the City of Leeds would benefit not only the substantial Jewish community but all the citizens of Leeds as well.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Secretary of State for Education and Employment to approve the application for a Jewish High School in Leeds.

To lie upon the Table.

New Prison (Ashford)

8.8 pm

Mr. David Wilshire (Spelthorne): I have pleasure in presenting a petition from some 1,100 of my constituents who live near the site for the proposed new women's prison at Woodthorpe road Ashford in the county of Middlesex. They are united in their opposition to the Government's plan. They and many others whom I represent understand and support the need for additional prison accommodation, but they are adamant that it should not be sited in the middle of a large residential area and must not use up one of the rare areas of open space in Ashford.

The petition states:

That the proposals by the Secretary of State for the Home Department to build a Women's Prison at Woodthorpe Road, Ashford, Middlesex will be detrimental to the interests of local residents and is contrary to their clearly expressed views as communicated to Her Majesty's Government by their Member of Parliament.

Wherefore your Petitioners pray that your honourable House shall urge the Home Secretary to consider the harm that will be done to residents of the Spelthorne Constituency and cancel his plans.

To lie upon the Table.

Ladydale, Leek

8.9 pm

Charlotte Atkins (Staffordshire, Moorlands): I have pleasure in presenting this petition, which has been signed by more than 680 of my constituents, who wish to preserve the beautiful tranquillity of a delightful area on the edge of Leek. Known as Ladydale, that lovely wooded area surrounds an ancient well. Residents wish to protect the area from future housing and development plans for themselves and the future generations of Leek. The petition states:

Wherefore your Petitioners pray that your honourable House urge the Secretary of State for the Environment Transport and Regions to call in the Staffordshire Moorlands Local Plan Housing Policy No. FMOD-H1 and take whatever action is required to safeguard Ladydale II and Ashenhurst Way from any future development plans.

To lie upon the Table.

Genetically Modified Crops

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Betts.]*

8.10 pm

Mr. Anthony Steen (Totnes): I am sure that the House—the bit that is left here—will be delighted to learn that this important debate has come on so early in the evening that hon. Members who wish to intervene in what is a matter of great public importance will have an opportunity to do so without seeking the permission of the Minister or you, Mr. Deputy Speaker—such is the time that we have to relax to discuss this important matter.

Somehow or other, I have managed to secure the good will of the Speaker this evening, who has selected this debate. I thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and Madam Speaker for allowing me the opportunity to raise a matter that causes considerable concern to a sizeable number of the electorate, both in my constituency and, I suspect, throughout the country.

The problem is that any number of Departments are involved in genetic engineering. They include the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions, the Department of Health and the Department of Trade and Industry. However, I am glad that the Government have wheeled in for this debate the Minister of State, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, a respected sparring partner of mine over the past 25 years. It is very good that he is here to answer this debate.

This is a crucial moment for agriculture. This year, the first wave of genetically modified crops in commercial operation will be loosed upon our environment. This is a make-or-break moment for the Government and for everyone who is concerned about the food that we eat.

The Government have a problem; they have a number of problems, but they have a particular problem here. They have allowed 1,200 experimental crops to be planted, including 163 genetically modified crops, short-circuiting regulations prescribing a four-year trial period for all new crops. In effect, the Government have been telling applicants for seed trials that they have dispensed with the regulation that the seed producer must first do his own two-year trials to produce data.

Under those regulations, only after the seed producer has done those trials can the Government decide whether further trials are necessary. Those trials, as I understand it, are administered by the Minister's Department. I do not know whether I have understood that correctly, but I think that is the situation for genetically modified crops or any other crops. There is a four-year trial: two years of trials are done by the producer seed company, and two years are done under the auspices of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food.

The Court of Appeal judgment on 21 July in a case brought by my constituent Guy Watson, an organic farmer from Staverton, threw up the fact that all the 1,200 experimental crops, including 163 genetically modified crops, have been unlawfully planted. The Government have flouted the seed regulations; or, if not flouted, they have ignored them. There may be good reason for that, but they have done so.

Not only that, but under the Environmental Protection Act 1990, the person who receives consent to release a genetically modified crop into the environment should be the same person who implements the release. That is the law, as I understand it. The Act gives consent to a particular person to release a genetically modified crop into the environment and that person should be the same person who implements the release; but I understand that the Advisory Committee on Releases to the Environment—ACRE—is granting permission to seed companies for trials that are being carried out by the National Institute of Agricultural Botany.

It seems that that is also against the law, or certainly against good practice. Consents and permissions that are granted under the Act to one person should not be passed on to another.

The Minister might comment on what has been going on, although it is not the responsibility of his Department. As I explained at the outset of my speech, the problem with genetically modified crops is that so many Government Departments are involved. Just when we think that we have got hold of the right Government Department, some other Minister pops up.

The Environmental Protection Act is the relevant Act, so it is not the responsibility of the Minister who is here to answer this debate, but I am sure that he can find an answer to this problem. I do not want to organise another Adjournment debate to find out the answer.

The Court of Appeal judgment means that the Minister cannot just ride roughshod over rules and regulations. I am not suggesting that he consciously did so. Clearly, he was not aware that this was going on, and I am sure that he is delighted that the matter has been brought to his attention. However, like anyone else, MAFF has to comply with the law.

The first question is: what are the Minister and the Government going to do to legalise the 1,200 experimental crops that are blowing in the wind, or in a gale, having been illegally planted throughout the country? Driving down the motorway, people look out and think, "That field has been beautifully prepared." Little do they know that none of those plants should be there. They are all illegal. The police should be called in. Those plants should be cleared because they are not lawful.

Clearly, all hon. Members in the Chamber want to hear before the House rises—this is why this debate is so relevant—what the Minister is going to do about this. Those crops are illegal and the Minister has got to make them lawful or pull them up; he has to do something. Perhaps he can tell us what he is going to do on that point. The House will be interested in what he feels is possible.

As the regulations are drafted, the characteristics of these crops that are waving around in the wind—not just the genetically modified crops, but all the crops that are being experimented on—would normally be tested in the first two years by the company that creates the seed. Normally, in those first two years, the company would have looked at the yields, how well the crops grew, their resistance to disease and other things. Those things would be tested first by the seed companies and, after them, by the Government.

As a result of short-circuiting the process, MAFF has absolutely no data because there are no company trials. In the past, the Department used the data to reject companies' applications on the grounds that the initial two years had shown that the crop was not worth testing any further, so unproductive or useless seeds could be weeded

out. Of every 100 varieties that the seed companies entered into the trials, only 80 per cent. ever made it into the national seed listings. The rules and regulations that were passed by the House were of real advantage as they represented a sluice gate. They gave companies the opportunity to see how a seed reacted and to examine the data on it before submitting it to the Government for a further two-year testing. Now, however, the lack of prior testing means that any seed manufacturer can insist that his crop is submitted to the national seed trials.

Prior to the rules and regulations being passed over, seed manufacturers had to do the work themselves and produce the data before asking the Government to look at their crop; if the Government did not think much of it, they could throw it out. Since the rules and regulations have been bypassed, companies can and do demand that their crops go forward to the national seed trials. Genetically modified crops receive no special evaluation. Without the data obtained from initial trials, the Government have been unable to do any weeding out at all; they have to trial every variety of seed, genetically modified or not, because there are no rejection criteria or prior data.

This year, for the first time in Britain, genetically modified seeds have been presented to the Department for trial. This is the first of two years of trials. After the experimental period ends next year—the second year of trial—genetically modified crops could be widespread. If they get on to the national seed register, such crops could be waving around in fields all over the country and the seeds could be available for purchase.

We could end up with a country of genetically engineered crops. As we drive down the motorway, instead of seeing unlawful crops as we do now, we will see genetically modified crops instead. Therefore, it would be helpful if the Minister would explain who is supervising the genetically modified crop trials. Is it the National Institute of Agricultural Botany, the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food or the British Society of Plant Breeders? It is a bit like an Agatha Christie novel. There are so many organisations—some of them quangos, some of them private, some of them independent and some of them governmental—and one has to work to find out who is supervising what, including genetically modified crop trials.

The next equation relates to the Environmental Protection Act 1990 which controls the release of any substance into the atmosphere. Genetically modified crops are evolutionary anomalies. They are not the products of natural or artificial selection, but are genetic hybrids. They are manufactured organisms jumbled together out of fish, animals, bacteria and other plant species. For that reason, if a seed company wishes to plant a genetically modified crop, it has to have the permission of ACRE—the Advisory Committee on Releases to the Environment. ACRE is administered by the biotechnology unit in the Department for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, so here we jump into another Department's responsibility.

As far as one can tell, no applications to ACRE for permission to release a genetically modified substance into the environment has ever been refused. So I am not sure what ACRE does—because it just rubber-stamps everything. Bearing in mind the fact that there are now 163 trials of genetically modified crops, including about 20 varieties of each of those crops with an average of eight trials of each variety, does the Minister feel that perhaps the rubber-stamping process should be halted so that we can look into the effect of genetically modified crops being released into the environment? Perhaps the trial period should not be left at two years.

The matter appears especially important now that the experimental period has been truncated to two years. If the Minister intends to make lawful all the crops that are waving around all over the country, how does he propose to do it? Will he say that the two years of MAFF experiments must be followed by another two years of trials by the seed manufacturers? Will he go for four years, or will he be content with two years and pass rules and regulations to that effect? There may be a strong case for two years for all experimental crops other than genetically modified crops. If he intends to change the regulations—and he has to do something—will he distinguish between ordinary seed and genetically modified seed?

As things stand, seeds—whether they are genetically modified or ordinary seeds—will be on the national seed list next year. If the Minister takes no action, genetically modified crops could be readily available. Crops on the national seed list have been approved by the Government, so anyone can go out and buy them. Genetically modified crops would then be widespread throughout the country, altering the genetic make-up of traditional and organic crops. The situation is akin to that of the grey squirrels and the red squirrels, and we all know what happened to the latter.

I now turn to the issue in my constituency of Totnes. The Court of Appeal judgment concerns a crop planted a stone's throw from the Watsons at Riverford farm—one of the largest organic farms in the United Kingdom with 800 acres devoted to organic food. It has a splendid farm shop which sells the most delicious produce, attracting people from miles around, including me. It sells not only fruit and vegetables, but wonderful meat and sausages, ham and bacon. I think that the sausages won the *Guardian* award for the best sausage in Britain last year or the year before. The shop is certainly worth a visit.

How could ACRE officials have selected a trial site for genetically modified maize a few hundred yards from an organic farm? Clearly, those ACRE officials need their heads examined. Furthermore, they have trespassed on the good will of a well respected local farmer, Jack Connabeer, who perfectly legitimately has been letting out his land for seed trials. I am sure that he would be horrified if he learned that ACRE was using some of his land so close to his good neighbour and the organic farm to plant experimental, genetically modified maize.

The problem is that Mr. Connabeer is unlikely to have known about it because, before planting the crop, ACRE did not follow the normal procedures for notification—another twist in the story. It behaved as if it was organising a cover-up. ACRE announced the trial through a very small advertisement in the local paper, whereas the full procedure that should have been followed would have been to notify all local farmers of the plans and to ask for objections—but it did not do that. ACRE decided that there was very little risk involved in the planting of maize, and the proper procedures were not followed.

Would the Minister be good enough to undertake that such short-circuitry does not happen again? The problem that involved the Court of Appeal and led to tonight's

[Mr. Anthony Steen]

debate was caused by the fact that the ACRE officials were so shortsighted and narrow minded that they allowed genetically modified crops to be planted on that site. Had they not done so, I doubt whether the debate would be taking place, and the country would be the poorer for that. In fact, we should thank officials for planting genetically modified crops so close to an organic farm because that has brought the matter to public attention.

There is enough time for the Minister to deal very fully with whether he will ensure that, in future, ACRE advertises in newspapers and notifies local farmers of its plans so that objections can be discussed. If there had been proper advertisement, the farmers in the area would have said, "Look here; this is not the thing to do. Go and take your genetically modified maize somewhere else." As the procedures were not followed, an unfortunate situation has arisen.

Not only is the Minister disregarding his own rules and regulations, but the Advisory Committee on Releases to the Environment, which is part not of his Ministry but of the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions, is short-circuiting accepted requirements. It probably would have got away with it but for the fact that it stupidly chose the wrong spot; and local environmentalists, of whom, I am glad to say, my constituency is full, alerted the Watsons on their organic farm.

Having taken the story thus far, I should like to bring in the Soil Association. It has said that, at 200 m away, had the whole of the trial site been genetically modified, it would have expected one in 1,000 kernels in Mr. Watson's crops to be contaminated with genetically modified crops. On this occasion, only a small proportion of the trial site was genetically modified, so the contamination may be diluted to about one kernel in 40,000. In a year or two, organic farmers face the prospect that all the crops next door to them will be genetically modified—with a commensurate increase in contamination. This year, because the Watsons were alerted and have a very large farm, they planted their maize crop as far away as possible from the experimental maize. Their crop is about 1.5 km to 2 km away from the GM maize even though the two farms' fields are only about 100 m apart at the nearest point.

The Government must outlaw any planting of genetically modified crops near organic farms. That must be in the Minister's mind, given this afternoon's announcement of a considerable increase in grants for organic farming and the fact that the Government must be aware that it is no good helping organic farmers whose crops are surrounded by genetically modified crops. I am sure that the Minister will explain that there must be some no-go areas where GM crops are prohibited due to the dangers of cross-pollination.

We must be aware that pollination is not the only way of achieving what is known as horizontal gene transfer, on which the Minister is probably an expert. The biotechnology industry uses bacteria and viruses—what it calls vectors—as a means of introducing DNA from one sort of a plant or animal to another. Vectors are the transport system, but they are rather hit and miss because they remain present in the crop. There has been very little research on the matter, but what there has been shows that such bacteria enter the soil.

We know that, in some cases, the industry even uses antibiotic-resistant varieties, such as the one grown in Devon last year. The concern is that it takes only an earthworm to ingest the bacteria and a song thrush to pick up the worm and move it two miles away for dangerous organisms to be moved around the country very quickly. When DNA modifications contain herbicide-resistant, antibiotic-resistant or sterility genes, there could be a knock-on effect on the environment about which we do not know. Those concerned with the environment obviously feel very strongly about that.

I see the GM issue as of a different scale from previous problems. We are talking about living organisms. Even DDT will fade away eventually, as do other chemicals sprayed on plants. But GM organisms work in the opposite direction; they are likely to increase and multiply. English Nature, the Government watchdog, is calling for a five-year moratorium, because an evaluation of the possible effects on the environment has yet to be completed.

What are the risks? Many genetically modified crops have an antibiotic-resistant gene built into them. That is the worry, because, as we all know, susceptibility to antibiotics is already weakening in the population as a result of people eating livestock that have been fed with too many antibiotics. Now, there is the possibility that antibiotic resistance will be added to by plant-based foods. That must be of long-term concern to the House and the country.

We very rarely operate the precautionary principle in this country. We often say that we do not have evidence for holding back, but problems often emerge only after some time, following widespread use of a technology or an agricultural practice. We are witnessing a fundamental shift in agricultural practice. One could say that the use of pesticides after the second world war constituted a second agricultural revolution. We are seeing the dawn of a third agricultural revolution, which is on a completely different scale.

Genetic engineering is altering the building blocks of life. That does not mean that we should necessarily fear it. It could produce high yields. Frost-resistant strawberries could be grown throughout the year in Britain, wheat that is resistant to draughts could be grown in the Sahara or anywhere affected by global warming, starvation could be prevented all over the globe. Genetic engineering could represent a wonder drug. One could argue that breeding plants that are resistant to pests will mean that no pesticides will be necessary in future, but by breeding plants with in-built pesticides, we may cause a build-up and over-use of natural pesticides, which may have a knock-on effect on wildlife and the environment generally.

We are on the threshold of a major development in the agricultural world. The biotechnology industry might be able to produce crops to feed the planet and be of major benefit to farmers, but do we really need them? I ask that question because I gather that 10 per cent. of available farm land in Europe is already set-aside land. We as taxpayers are paying farmers not to grow food; we are paying them to do nothing. As the boundaries of Europe stretch, even more land will be made available.

It seems curious that we are experimenting with super-crops when we already have too much food. Perhaps the future of genetic engineering will benefit

other countries in the world that are not as fortunate as ours. We should not be for ever increasing subsidies to enable farmers to grow more and more food which we cannot eat.

The Court of Appeal judgment effectively warned the nation and the Minister to be cautious and to test such potentially damaging crops for longer. They may be damaging, or they may herald a new revolution—but we do not know which. What can be good can equally be bad. We must all show a little caution when re-working the very building blocks of nature.

8.38 pm

Mr. Alan Simpson (Nottingham, South): I congratulate the hon. Member for Totnes (Mr. Steen) on obtaining this Adjournment debate, and on the fact that it is taking place on a day on which we have more time than we would normally have expected. I want to make a few limited points, partly in relation to my early-day motion 1583, of which I am sure the Minister is aware.

There are important issues at stake here which require ministerial clarification, and would benefit from a more substantial parliamentary debate. The Court of Appeal ruling has rendered the status of the 1,200 field trials of genetically modified crops somewhat ambiguous. The trials are illegal, but there was no ruling obliging people to dig the crops up. Moreover, there was no clarification of the legal responsibility for the knock-on consequences on other crops grown on adjacent land, in terms of mutations and cross-pollination.

What worries me most is the fact that our current approach to genetically modified crops does not acknowledge the widest context in which we as a society should be assessing them. The nature of the trials has not properly assessed the wider consequences in terms of environmental impact and effects on human health.

We are talking about a paradigm shift in the nature of our agricultural practices. Throughout history, farmers have propagated crops and saved seed. Usually they have shared seeds, and in doing so they have generally added to the strength of the biodiversity to which we have access. The consequences of their actions have been understood and usually spread over long periods.

We are now entering a time in which it is possible to engineer change on a much more substantial scale and in a much shorter time frame. If we choose to do so, we must ensure that we are fully aware of the wider consequences. In both agriculture and medicine, one of the great strengths of the way in which we have approached change is that we have been ruled by the precautionary principle—that is, until we know the fullest and widest consequences, it is best not to allow out of the bottle something that we may have serious difficulty in putting back inside it.

However, that principle does not seem to be applied to our approach to field trials of genetically modified crops. The hon. Member for Totnes is right to warn the House that as yet we do not know enough about the consequences of the transgenic mutations or the impact that strains of genetically modified crops which are resistant to herbicides, antibiotics and pesticides, and have strains of bacteria and viruses built in, will have on other crops in nearby parts of the farmed countryside.

We should recognise that there is an element of folly, which the House and the Government ought to resist with all their might, in the belief that we have miracle crops that will provide the answers to all our immediate fears—crops that are resistant to drought, blight and cold.

It is possible for genetic engineering to produce such seeds and crops, but it is naive and irresponsible for us to believe that such change does not carry its own consequences. For instance, we already know that drought-resistant wheat tends to be more water-thirsty than ordinary wheat. That has its own results in the demands that it makes on the land, and in terms of sustainable agriculture.

We also know that nature abhors a vacuum. By and large, we have had a period of seven, 10, or even 15 years in which a new seed variety may be blight-free, but we know from the whole history of agricultural change that at the end of that period the new plant varieties will produce their own toxins, and new blight varieties will follow on to attack them. That is in the nature of the way in which the planet works.

We have benefited from the fact that we have had a period of grace in which to adjust to such developments, and one of my fears is that we are now in serious danger of running so far ahead of ourselves in the mistaken belief in our own omnipotence, that we will not be prepared for the consequences of the new blights and toxins—or nature's next response—on the scale on which we have sought to pursue change.

As the hon. Member for Totnes pointed out, we are not sufficiently aware of the consequences of the way in which the genetically modified crops are likely to affect other traditional crops. I have to confess to a serious worry about the specific dimension of the problem to which the hon. Gentleman drew attention—the proximity of genetically modified crops to organic crops.

That effect may be further complicated by changes already being pushed through in America, where people are trying to redefine the term "organic" to include genetically modified crops. That is the sort of contradiction in terms that makes a mockery of language. We are almost at the Alice in Wonderland stage, in which we say that words mean what we choose them to mean.

It cannot be acceptable for the growing movement of consumers who are rightly concerned about food health, food standards and environmental impacts, and who are beginning to exert pressure so as to be able to exercise an informed choice in the shops, to be denied the right to exercise that choice because we have colluded in a process that makes a mockery of the very word "organic".

It is incumbent on the Minister to try to bring a sense of clarity and sanity to the debate. I am encouraged in that hope because we are fortunate in having a Minister whose personal qualities of clarity, sanity and honesty make a great contribution to the post that he holds. I hope that he has wider support in the Cabinet, to make a significant impact on the process of bringing that sanity into the public debate.

We must ask the Minister to do two important things. First, he should make a statement to clarify the status of the illegal field trials. If the crops have to be removed so that we can have as a starting point a position of legality, and proceed through stages of legality, in which public protection is the paramount concern, so be it.

[Mr. Alan Simpson]

Secondly, there is a compelling argument growing outside the House that calls for a moratorium on field trials until there has been the widest possible debate on how we can begin to evaluate the impact that genetically modified crops could have. That is not necessarily to resist change or to oppose a broadening of the base of biodiversity, but to insist that we do not undertake such developments in a naive way, ignoring the knock-on consequences that must surely follow. We must accept responsibility for the effects not only on adjacent fields but across the whole of our society, possibly for generations to come. That is the lead that I hope the Minister will give tonight.

8.49 pm

Dr. Ian Gibson (Norwich, North): I am pleased to participate in this debate, as I have been trying for some months to have the matter discussed in the House. I was privileged to be a member of a parliamentary delegation that met parliamentary delegations from Germany and the United States—genetically modified crops were one of the three subjects that we had to penetrate. Tonight, we have a great opportunity to raise the matter, and I congratulate the hon. Member for Totnes (Mr. Steen) on securing the debate.

Genetically modified foods have been entering British supermarkets over the past year, and the outcome has been mixed. The public have accepted some without hesitation—vegetarian cheeses and the paste made from genetically modified tomatoes, for example—but others, such as the flour made from genetically modified soya beans, have caused controversy. We must ask why that is. After all, products such as insulin, interferon and growth hormones—which are all made in bacteria or in genetically modified animal cells and from which many people have medically benefited—have been accepted by the consumer without question. If it is okay to use GM products for medicine, why are there questions about producing food using that technology?

We have, of course, been modifying crop plants for centuries by traditional processes of plant breeding. As the hon. Member for Totnes said, what is new is the development of a technology whereby a gene can be moved from one species to another. Soya was genetically modified by the introduction of a gene from a soil bacterium to make the plant resistant to a particular herbicide, so that the herbicide, which has been in use for some years, can be sprayed on the crop after the plant is above ground, when a single application is sufficient. That replaces the previous practice of spraying not only before emergence, but afterwards with a second, more selective herbicide. The company, Monsanto, claims that a smaller amount of a safer herbicide is used and that the yield is higher—no one has refuted it.

Herbicide-resistant soya has real advantages for a farmer; the new crop accounted for 2 per cent. of the yield in 1996, 15 per cent. in 1997 and, it is predicted, about 40 per cent. in 1998. I believe that the new crop is here to stay; modified soya is now entering the United Kingdom. A number of other crops are in field trials in the United States—as was made clear in our discussions with Congressmen and scientists—including disease-resistant rice, which, it is argued, will be important for the developing world.

The question that we, and the consumer, must ask is whether the new soya crop is safe. Before a crop can be used in Britain, it needs Government approval. Ministers take the advice of the Advisory Committee on Novel Foods and Processes. That expert committee, which includes a consumer representative and an ethical adviser—we could argue that that is insufficient for the process of assessment—advised the Minister that the new product was as safe as conventional soya, although we could argue about that for some time.

The public have been equally or even more concerned about the effect of GM crops on the environment. They ask whether the crops will lead to an increase in the use of herbicides, whether the modified genes will escape into the environment to fill our fields with resistant rape or whether the genes will spread to other species. Those matters are regulated by the Advisory Committee on Releases to the Environment, which includes a wide variety of skills and views, including green ones. It works on a case-by-case basis, but is now looking at the net effect of several releases—it is evolving an attitude to the new technology.

Even if the new crop is as safe as unmodified soya and we can control any adverse effects on the environment, people still ask whether they really want to eat it. There are several reasons why there has been so much consumer concern about the absence of choice. Scientists bear some responsibility for it; certainly, the expert approval processes are no longer trusted as they once were. Washing powder is recommended no longer by the man in the white coat, but by a consumer.

The public are largely unaware of the development of the careful scientific methods of assessing risk, such as the use of hazard analysis, which can come much closer to an objective evaluation of risk. Risk is an extremely difficult concept for people to understand, as we saw in the case of beef on the bone. It is hard to know how great a risk has to be before one is concerned about it politically. Risks such as a billion to one and a million to one are often equated with the chance of winning the lottery, and everyone thinks that they will win the lottery. Scientists do not agree with the public's concept of risk analysis. BSE has affected the way in which we think of risk.

Mr. Steen: The hon. Gentleman mentions risk. My particular concern—on which I hope he can throw some light—is antibiotics. Doctors offer people antibiotics, tranquillisers and sleeping pills; millions of antibiotics are used every day. Like some meat, some GM crops have built-in antibiotics. What are the dangers to society's health of developing GM crops that could create resistance to antibiotics? Will the antibiotics that we are given by doctors be less effective?

Dr. Gibson: I thank the hon. Gentleman for raising that point, about which I have strong views. I do not believe that the antibiotic gene will necessarily be chosen, because, as he says, that process can pose risks. Other genes can be used as a marker for the particular gene that one wants to be expressed in the plant or organism. I accept his criticism—we have learnt that the antibiotic gene is not the answer and that it should not have been used.

As I was saying, scientists and the public have different assessments of risk. To some extent, the public do not understand scientists; they feel that scientists are

somewhat arrogant. Scientists have a responsibility to explain what they are doing, as the Minister and I agreed during another interchange in the House.

As we have heard in this debate, there is hostility to high-intensity agriculture. A major public concern is that the international agri-food business has been consolidated into about six companies. Decisions about the future of our food are being taken in the United States or in Switzerland. Consumers feel that they have lost control, which they blame on technology. GM food seems to have become a lightning rod for many modern concerns, but my point is—I think that it is accepted—that the problem is not the science, but the way in which it has been organised, and its relationship with society.

We must explain precisely what is going on. There must be no secrecy in terms of the scientists. It is to be hoped that we will shortly have a major conference in this country to discuss the issue in a broad-based way, and many people can come and express their views. There have been such conferences, but they have tended to be polarised and have not moved the process forward. We must open the regulatory process, as I am sure my hon. Friend the Minister will agree. Nothing must be hidden—there is no reason to hide anything.

The other issue is the question of choice between the traditional product and the new product. That choice has to be put before people, as has happened in supermarkets in this country. People have, to some extent, voted for something that they have seen labelled. Choice is so important, and I think that we can offer genetically manipulated products and the other, more traditional product. People will then taste and feel it, and determine by price and other factors which they think is better. I have also mentioned the safety factors and the process that we go through to make sure that the choice is safe and honest.

Labelling is so important. People must know what a label means and that it speaks the truth. We must monitor the matter to make sure that there are no unexpected problems. I do not want to be a scientific pointy head, but it is possible to engineer a plant where the process of pollination is engineered out. I am not saying that science is wonderful and can cure everything, but if there are problems—as the hon. Member for Totnes has illustrated—scientists have to take them on seriously and find a way to allay the fears of hon. Members and consumers. We have a long way to go before we are absolutely sure.

In the Swiss referendum, it was interesting that when the scientists took off their white coats, came out of the laboratories and explained what was going on, they won the ballot. In the next few months, this major issue will be fully and effectively addressed, and I think that this Government will be at the front of the debate.

9 pm

Mr. David Drew (Stroud): I congratulate the hon. Member for Totnes (Mr. Steen) on securing the debate, and I apologise for not having a word with him beforehand. This is an important issue, and some of us have been trying to get a debate on it for weeks. It is very helpful to have such a debate tonight. As I had originally intended to keep my remarks to an intervention or two, I shall be brief.

I am sorry that I missed the very start of the hon. Gentleman's speech, but I thought that the points he made were invaluable in laying out the case. My hon. Friends the Members for Nottingham, South (Mr. Simpson) and for Norwich, North (Dr. Gibson) also made good contributions.

Quite simply, I receive more letters in my postbag on this topic than on any other bar hunting. My constituency may be unusual, but that fact shows that people out there in the real world are concerned and are voicing their opinions. As my hon. Friend the Member for Norwich, North said, people want a choice, and they feel annoyed and threatened when that choice is taken away. We start from a position of widespread ignorance and considerable concern. As my hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham, South said, that has not been helped by the decision of Monsanto—in collusion, it appears, with the US Department of Agriculture—to redefine organic crops to include GM crops. That seems to be short-sighted and unfair.

Part of the worry is about the lack of choice, and that comes through in two ways. First, those of us who do not have a scientific background find it difficult to explain why segregation could not have taken place at the outset, and why difficulties now seem to arise all the time. More particularly, people are concerned that there cannot be labelling. People want to know what they are eating—a basic requirement of food safety.

Iceland has taken the decision not to sell GM food in its supermarkets. It is to be congratulated, but I understand that it may be able to do that only until 2000, after which time all of the soya crop is likely to be modified. In simple terms that is scandalous.

The precautionary principle should be applied. If there are difficulties with the experimentation, the polluter should pay. There are many examples of GM companies breaching their consents. That was stated in an article in the *New Scientist*, and I managed to pick it up through the Co-operative Wholesale Society's magazine *Co-op Horizons*. Offenders include Monsanto, Nickerson Biochem, AgrEvo, Plant Genetic Systems, the Scottish Crop Research Institute and the National Institute of Agricultural Botany. They have all either provided too small a buffer zone, planted in the wrong place or surrounded their plot with unsuitable crops that could be modified by the influence of the GM crop.

I share hon. Members' confidence in the Government's, and especially the Minister's, ability to deal with the issue. We are up against the forces of global capitalism and big business. Most people are alarmed by our inability to enforce controls not only on this island but at European Union level. Whenever it is mentioned that there may be a need to rein in the companies, there is a threat of our being in breach of World Trade Organisation rules or other rules that may be invoked to threaten Governments.

Mr. Steen: To have two interventions in an Adjournment debate that one started is a great luxury. Is the hon. Gentleman aware that the Austrian Government, who are soon to take up the EU presidency, intend to put genetically engineered crops high on their list of matters for discussion? The Minister has a wonderful opportunity to take a lead before Austria takes up the presidency and to explain what Britain is doing on a matter that concerns many people.

Mr. Drew: I thank the hon. Gentleman for that helpful intervention. I had heard that, but it would be good to see exactly what it means and how the British Government will respond.

[Mr. Drew]

When the companies concerned are criticised, their response seems sometimes to be to deny the right of others to put their arguments. I am aware of the scientific approach taken by my hon. Friend the Member for Norwich, North, but I am seriously worried by the companies' willingness and apparent ability to spend millions of pounds on a public relations campaign that even parties in general elections can only dream about. They have serious resources, and that should be understood.

We are dealing with a force that needs to be exposed. I am not totally against genetically modifying crops, because there may be arguments for it in the third world or in our future, but the precautionary principle should be applied and people should be given a choice and know that the matter has been properly discussed and scrutinised—then we will see the true value of the process—because otherwise people will regard it as an enormous threat to their very existence.

9.8 pm

The Minister of State, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr. Jeff Rooker): I congratulate the hon. Member for Totnes (Mr. Steen), not on his luck in the draw, because we all know how Thursday Adjournment debates are chosen—that shows the importance that Madam Speaker attaches to the issue—but on his selection of subject.

I thank my hon. Friends the Members for Nottingham, South (Mr. Simpson), for Norwich, North (Dr. Gibson) and for Stroud (Mr. Drew) for their speeches. My great wish would have been to have a couple of hours' warning that we would have the joy of an extended Adjournment debate. I could then have been in a better position to respond to the important points made on both sides. That was not to be, and I shall respond to the subject of the debate as reflected in the title, which refers to the recent Court of Appeal decision, on which I can speak in detail. I cannot respond in such detail to the other points made, but they deserve comment from the Government.

If ever there were a case for a nanny state to monitor change that can affect all of society, genetic modification of the food chain is it. We must assess whether we have the right controls and the right regulatory framework. I have to say to my hon. Friends, without criticising them in any way, that some people will use the term "precautionary principle" when it suits them, but will on other occasions yell that the nanny state should get out of the way to let them do their own thing. Theirs is a simplistic view, and we must be more adult than that in our politics.

The hon. Member for Totnes was absolutely right to say that many organisations and more than one Department are involved with genetically modified food. The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food is a key player. The Departments of Health and of the Environment, Transport and the Regions are also involved. The Department of Trade and Industry sponsors the Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council, which has an important role. Other Government offices use science to formulate policy, which ensures that decisions have a good audit trail.

During my time at MAFF, we have been required to comment on or make decisions about aspects of genetic modification. If cases are taken in isolation, one can feel robust about the line one takes, but the difficulty lies in seeing where the bits fit into the big picture. The dozen or so advisory committees that service MAFF and the Departments of Health and of the Environment, Transport and the Regions were set up for a specific purpose, but are required to deal with genetic modification. They will deal with it within the rules, whether considering pesticides or other matters. Pesticides for genetically modified crops are obviously a matter for consideration, and it is necessary to see the big picture.

I can honestly say that all the Ministers and officials in MAFF who deal with the genetic modification issue, from the beginning of the growing of crops to the end of the food chain, have discussed how to make better decisions on genetic modification.

The issue has been raised with me on my visits to farms and, more particularly, research institutions in the public and private sectors. Indeed, I have asked about the regulatory process and how the Government can check what is in food, including, for example, whether there is a genetically modified ingredient in a made-up supermarket food. I have asked how we can check that soya may be only 5 per cent. of the product and whether what is on the label is true.

Science is moving fast in laboratories that can police any regulatory system that is put firmly in place. On the other hand, as laboratories will freely admit, and rightly so because this is leading-edge science, there is a whole host of other crops coming along that can be genetically modified in perhaps two or three years, but which would take up to 50 years to produce through ordinary breeding techniques.

I accept the argument that genetic modification is not simply speeding up a natural process. It cannot be when genes are mixed from different species. Clearly, there is a difference. Nevertheless, the process is accepted in medicine. As hon. Members have said, some of the new wonder drugs have been accepted, and I think rightly so. There is some comfort in the regulatory process for medicine which, I admit, is not in place for food and agriculture.

Hon. Members spoke of the need for science to be open. That is crucial and fundamental. There cannot be any secrecy. It is in scientists' own interests to go on a mission to explain. That is important. It cannot necessarily be done by the Government or individual companies. It requires a team effort, operating on many fronts. There must be an ethos of openness and transparency. The excuse of competitive edge must not be used. Sometimes, commercial confidentiality can be used as a smokescreen for competitive edge to keep things quiet, but, in this area, we must be careful before we go down that road.

I opened the vegetarian food fair in the midlands last autumn. The stallholders were, by and large, small firms—some were family businesses and some had turnovers of a few tens of millions of pounds. The issue of source of supply of ingredients was raised with me. Some firms had sources of GM-free soya and maize for their products. I said that it was early days for me at the Ministry, but that I kept being told by the big players that they could not get separation. Obviously, I was concerned that if small firms could do that, big firms should be able to. As a result, early in January we held a meeting in MAFF with a couple of dozen people from the big players in the retail food industry and the small firms dealing with

health food shops and the vegetarian food sector. It was as useful for me and my officials to listen to the discussion between the players as it was for them to participate.

As a result of that meeting, my officials and scientists went away to think about what the Government could do either unilaterally or with our partners in Europe to make acceptable progress on the issue. A couple of months ago, MAFF published a list of 47 suppliers of GM-free soya and maize. We put it on the internet so that people in the food business in this country and in Europe could find out where in America and Canada there was a niche supplier. It was not always easy. In fact, the last time that I checked, there was a list of 58 suppliers. People were queueing up to get on the MAFF GM-free list because they could see niche markets opening up.

I remain convinced that market pressures could be used to force the large American suppliers to segregate. The Americans understand market forces, if they understand nothing else. Also, they are beginning slowly to understand that the consumer ethos in Europe is different from that in the United States. People in Europe want to know more about their food and want effective labelling, showing the ingredients and the methods of production.

There is not that clamour for information in the United States—if the Food and Drug Administration says that it is okay, it is. Europe is slightly different, and European consumers are putting pressures on individual Governments, which are causing different aspects to come into play. I cannot comment on what has been said about the view of the Austrians. They took the presidency on 1 July and have had it for only one month. I do not know whether the issue is on their agenda.

Before I deal with the points raised by the hon. Member for Totnes, I hope that I have shown hon. Members—in this respect, I would call them all hon. Friends—that we are seized of the importance of the issue, and that we will not rush to a judgment on it. No individual Government Department can run with the issue, as it crosses all Government boundaries. In our internal discussions, we are trying to find a framework within government in which to discuss the issue more widely.

The ethical dimension is crucial and, as has been said, the Advisory Committee on Novel Foods and Processes has always had an ethics adviser—a new person has recently been appointed following a retirement. As we make progress on our proposals for the Food Standards Agency, we will consider the overall make-up of the advisory committee network. We will start a new committee on animal feedstuffs later this year—five years since it was recommended and accepted as necessary, but not established, by the previous Government. I am not criticising, but merely setting the record straight and pointing out that the idea has been around for a long time.

Aspects of animal feedstuffs slip between existing advisory committees, and we need to plug that gap. One such issue could be the use of genetically modified crops as animal feedstock.

My hon. Friend the Minister for Public Health and I have operated jointly on issues such as labelling since we set up the joint food standards and safety group last June between MAFF and the Department of Health, with 300-plus civil servants, many of whom are graduates and science-based, dealing with food regulation—contaminants, surveillance, labelling and so on. One of our first decisions was to change the instructions of the British negotiators in Brussels regarding the labelling of foods containing GM ingredients. It has taken a while to get a decision in Europe, and it is not acceptable to everyone, but, from this September, new rules will apply to labelling, particularly that of soya and maize. We have avoided having a label that says, "This product may contain genetically modified ingredients". That is the cop-out for everyone, and we could envisage it being abused throughout the food industry. If there is no genetically modified ingredient in the final product, but genetic modification was used in the manufacturing process or refining, the label cannot state that the product contains genetically modified ingredients. We have to take a view on that to get honesty and transparency in the labelling. The process of manufacture is a separate issue. In time, we will have to address manufacturing techniques and how foods are produced, so that people have more information. That means making the science open and creating the opportunity for people to have a choice.

No one will ever claim that items are perfectly safe. I do not want to get into an esoteric argument about what "safe" means, but it was put to me earlier today—I hope that I have remembered it because I did not write it down—in a British Standards Institute document that safe means something that is not an unacceptable risk. It is safe to cross a road; there is a risk, but it is not unacceptable. We have to be on guard all the while in considering the use of science.

My introductory remarks were born out of my experience of discussions in the past few 15 months as a Minister and are not part of a set brief, although I speak for the Government. They give some idea of how the Government are considering how we can examine the wider issue and not be trapped into looking at each issue in isolation and then wondering what went wrong when we see the big picture. We need to see the big picture as the bits of the jigsaw are put in place, whether it is health, food, pesticides, animal feed or techniques. It is a much bigger operation than a simple new technique or product.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Totnes, who made a coherent, detailed speech on an important issue born out of something that affected one of his constituents and led to a major court case and a decision in which, in one respect, my Ministry was found wanting. I was wondering how he could have cut his speech if we had started at 10 pm and had only 30 minutes. I worked out that I would have had three minutes to reply to him.

The central issues that the hon. Member raised touch on some of those to which I have referred. The recent Court of Appeal judgment addressed the three issues that he mentioned. The questions are whether the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions adequately took account of the risk of cross-pollination of Mr. Watson's organic sweet corn; whether a consent issued by the DETR to Sharpes under the Environmental Protection Act 1990 could lawfully cover a national list trial conducted for the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food by the National Institute of Agricultural Botany; and whether the national list trial was invalid because MAFF had not complied with regulation 11(3) of the Seeds (National Lists of Varieties) Regulations 1982 as amended—the national list regulations—by requiring the applicant to provide the results of two replicated trials with the application. The court was asked to order the destruction of the trial crops.

[Mr. Jeff Rooker]

I was concerned when the hon. Member started his speech, because he mentioned many figures on GM trial crops that did not ring a bell with me. Trial crops and experimental crops are separate. Tonight, I am dealing only with trial crops. I do not say that experimental crops are all over the place, but there are a considerable number. Some may be only the size of the Dispatch Box to start with. In considering the appeal, the court drew a distinction between the health and safety implications of releasing genetically modified organisms, which are dealt with by the Environmental Protection Act 1990, and the national list trials, which are about seed marketing. The court noted that that particular case involved both regimes, while, ordinarily, the national list trials do not.

Research field trials of genetically modified crops, such as the one in Devon, must have prior approval from the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, under section 6 of the Environmental Protection Act 1990 and the associated regulations. Before approval is granted, the company proposing the research has to provide full information about the genetically modified organism and carry out an assessment of the possible risks to human health and the environment and how those risks will be avoided. The application is scrutinised by the independent Advisory Committee on Releases to the Environment, to which reference has been made, which advises on whether consent should be granted or whether additional precautions should be taken to minimise the risk.

Two issues were raised in the Court of Appeal on the GMO legislation. The first concerned the holder of the consent, who has responsibility for the safety of the GMO throughout the period of the consent. The Court of Appeal confirmed that a series of people might be involved in the research work authorised by the consent—for example, staff at the National Institute of Agricultural Botany carrying out a national list trial—but that, at all times, the consent holder was responsible for ensuring the safety of the GMO. The second point concerned the way in which the risk of cross-pollination with other maize crops was assessed, and, again, the Court of Appeal judged that the procedure was followed satisfactorily.

In the case of the national list trials of maize in Devon, there are six plots of genetically modified maize, among the total of 1,163, more than 2 km from Mr. Watson's sweetcorn. That is the issue which the hon. Gentleman raised at MAFF Question Time a month ago. I was not certain which farm it was, but I had already read one of the briefs. The matter is important to us because the issue went to court. I do not know how the 2 km gap came about. It was assessed on 200 m and deemed to be okay by ACRE. In the event, the gap is 2 km. Perhaps the 2 km gap came about because, as the hon. Gentleman suggested, someone found out about it and moved the crop. I should be interested to know whether that was the case. I should welcome more information on that. Although there is a theoretical possibility that some pollen might travel that far and cross-pollinate with the sweetcorn, I am informed that, in practice, the risk is likely to be zero. That is the view of the risk at that distance.

There are no specific requirements under the current legislation controlling the release of GMOs to consider organic farming when field-testing GM crops. That may come as a surprise to the House, but that is a fact. However, where needed, release consents have specific measures attached that are designed to limit cross-pollination of neighbouring crops, whether or not they are organic. As the hon. Gentleman kindly reminded the House, the Government are very much in favour of organic farming. I can honestly say that it was a top priority of my right hon. Friend the Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham), who, until Monday, was the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. Moving our budget around for both research and conversion has not been easy. Over the past 12 months, we have made a modest contribution, but it is in the right direction. We favour organic production and want to do what we can to assist conversion.

I want to make it absolutely clear that my Ministry and the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions will be working with the farming community and representatives of organic farming to ensure that the expansion of organic farming is not compromised by the introduction of genetically modified crops. I might have rambled in my introduction and deviated from my brief, but I want to make it clear that that is the most important sentence that I shall say this evening. I genuinely mean that—those are not words to be put in *Hansard* and forgotten about; I shall follow through.

I do not want to end on a completely different argument, but it could be said, in connection with the rules on organic production, that Mr. Watson's argument is essentially with the Soil Association rather than with the Government. Because it gives them a niche and a competitive edge, private sector bodies can always demand tighter rules than those laid down in either UK or European law. It comes down to a question of commercial judgment or, in some cases, to an ideological stance, whereby people say that, whatever the science, they are against genetically modified crops and food. Let me make it clear that that is not the Government's position. It is a legitimate position for people to adopt, but it makes it far more difficult for people such as myself to discuss how to take matters forward. It is a respectable position and I do not criticise it, but consequences flow from it.

There are no fully worked-up EC standards for organic crops, as the hon. Gentleman will know from the research he did before coming to see me recently with a delegation. I hope that he and his colleagues found the meeting helpful; I certainly did, and so did my officials. Pending the introduction of EC standards for organic production, the regulatory authority—the UK Register for Organic Foods Standards—has explicitly prohibited the use of GMOs and their derivatives in organic production. Until recently, the ban did not extend to GMO products containing no genetic material, but that exception has now been removed—in other words, the rules have got even tighter. That action reflects a practical position that has been adopted, but I ask the hon. Gentleman and those following our debate to acknowledge that it presents considerable difficulties in terms of possible future discussions.

All that does not gainsay what I have said about our desire to ensure that the introduction of GMOs on a trial basis, an experimental basis, or even a full-crop basis, in no way damages organic farming. Given the extremely tight public expenditure restrictions to which we are subject as part of our contract with the electorate, it would be stupid for the Government to push more money into

converting to organic farming while allowing the farmers who take that brave step to be damaged by other actions within the process that I have described.

In considering the national list regime, the Court of Appeal said that MAFF had acted unlawfully by not requiring the applicant to submit the results of two replicated trials with his application. However, it rejected the application to order the destruction of the trial on those grounds, and said explicitly that the Minister could not properly destroy or require destruction of the trial. The court was critical of my Department for not enforcing regulation 11(3), and, in commenting on the wider implications, concluded that the position

"needed to be resolved speedily and across the board."

On behalf of the Government, let me say straight away that I accept the court's criticism, but I shall take the opportunity to explain to the House why my Ministry took the line that it did. Regulation 11(3) states that

"no application shall be entertained for the entry in a National List of a variety . . . unless in each case the applicant submits to Ministers with the application the results of . . . replicated trials".

I should make it clear that neither that provision nor any of other tests and trials required for national list purposes has any relevance in assessing the environmental or safety aspects of genetic modification. It takes a while to get one's head round the fact that the information from trials is not used for that purpose. Those trials have no role whatever in assessing the environmental or safety aspects of genetic modification. Those very important issues are dealt with under separate legislation—the Environmental Protection Act 1990 and the regulations made under it.

No variety is accepted into national list tests and trials unless the appropriate release consent has been issued under the Environmental Protection Act 1990, and tests and trials are carried out according to any release conditions that may have been imposed under the consent.

The requirement for replicated trials information was first introduced in 1979, to act as a brake on the number of varieties entering the trials system. The aim was to encourage breeders to do their own pre-entry trials to screen out for themselves those varieties unlikely to be successful in full national list trials, rather than relying on the national list system, which was heavily subsidised by the taxpayer, to do it for them.

The aim was to alleviate the pressure on the statutory system, which was becoming overloaded with varieties that were being tested unnecessarily at the taxpayer's expense. I repeat that replicated trials data were never used in making decisions about whether to add varieties to the national list. That was—and is—done on the basis of data from official tests and trials, which is a separate issue.

Following a review in 1992–93, a streamlined system of what were known as value for cultivation and use—VCU—trials was introduced, which reduced the burden on the trials system and led to the staged reintroduction of fees for official trials in 1994 and 1995. During that review, the British Society of Plant Breeders was advised informally by senior officials that the national list regulations would be amended at the first available opportunity to remove the wholly procedural requirements of regulation 11(3).

By April 1995, when the full weight of the reintroduced VCU charges was felt, the practice of submitting VCU data had diminished significantly. The requirement to submit replicated trials data had no value once the pressure on the system was relieved. Because of the charges, plant breeders were not queueing up, the taxpayer was not being ripped off and there was no need for the regulation.

It was decided—from a common-sense point of view, having spent some time considering the matter, I agree—that a requirement to provide information that served no useful purpose and which was not used placed an unnecessary and unjustifiable burden on applicants; therefore, the information was not sought.

Who made the change? Where and when? Where is the paperwork? The answer is that we are still trying to find it. We cannot find any paperwork from 1992-93, when the decision was made, showing who authorised the change at the time. Nevertheless, that was clearly carried out. It follows from what I have said that parliamentary time was never found to change the regulation.

The national list system, which was created shortly after we joined the European Community in 1972, is based on EC directives on the marketing of plant varieties. They are essentially concerned with the agronomic value of varieties and the end-use quality of the crop—for example, milling in the case of wheat, and malting in the case of barley. There are about 1,000 agricultural varieties on the national list, and none of them is genetically modified. We have some 900 varieties at varying stages of tests and trials for addition to the national list, only 20 of which are genetically modified.

I intend to set in hand immediate action to amend the regulations to remove the requirements of regulation 11(3). I make it clear that we are operating regulation 11(3) as from the court's judgment. The requirement for replicated trials is being operated because that is the law and the court has said that we must follow it. However, having examined it, we still see no useful purpose in regulation 11(3) and will seek to amend it. That involves a statutory process which will involve consultation. There will be no fast tracking; for the foreseeable future and until the regulation is amended, we will operate it.

Mr. Steen *rose—*

Mr. Rooker: To pre-empt the hon. Gentleman's third intervention, I shall say something about what should be done to resolve the position in respect of varieties already on the national list or currently in trials. The issues raised are complex, and we are examining them very carefully. I told my officials on Monday that I wanted to come to the House tonight to explain the issues, because I thought that the hon. Gentleman's constituents and the wider industry deserved an answer as quickly as possible.

I am not in a position to inform the House about how we shall deal with the matter, but I can say that it is under active and urgent consideration by those who are colloquially called m'learned friends. It is a very complex legal matter, and there are many varieties on the national list that are being grown as crops. They are perfectly safe and—I emphasise this—have gone through the regulatory process in respect of environmental and food safety. They conform fully to the Environmental Protection Act 1990. By definition, some will not conform to regulation 11(3). That is an important point, and I am grateful to the hon. Member for Totnes for having raised it and to my hon. Friends who have spoken in this debate.

Mr. Steen: I thought that I would catch the Minister before he sat down. This has been a fascinating debate

[Mr. Steen]

and he is making a fascinating speech. The whole House has been riveted by his command of the subject. We are grateful to him for being here and for what he has said, but he has skirted around one issue—the genetically modified crops that are in their first year of trials. They will be on the seed-testing list next year unless something is done to put them through further trials. In view of the Minister's fascinating preamble to his prepared speech, will he say something, not only to vegetarians but to those who are concerned about food safety in general, about whether he is planning to extend the trials so that genetically modified crops do not go on the seed list only two years after the trials?

Mr. Rooker: That is the very question which I cannot answer, because it relates to crops undergoing trials and have perhaps not undergone two replicated years, or are already on the list. I said that there are no GM crops on the list, but there are 20 undergoing trials. I do not know all the details of the 20 or whether any had replicated years, but, clearly, people were being told that that was not necessary. It is a complex issue.

I do not want to be accused of short-circuiting the House—no one will ever accuse me of doing that; The Government do not want to do that. We have to take legal advice on the matter. The Court of Appeal decision in respect of regulation 11(3) has gone against the Government for the reasons that I have explained.

I do not know whether the industry is fully seized of the implications of the judgment. I have not been on the receiving end of massive representations from people growing crops that have been through the system, complaining that the court has said that the system did not conform to the law. Those are non-genetically modified organism crops. We must find a way to regularise the system. We are debating a substantial industry and not a few trials. Crops are being grown and harvested, and seeds are being sold. We are looking urgently at the matter.

As the House begins the summer recess tomorrow, I shall not be able to report back to hon. Members, but I assure them that the matter is being dealt with daily and that that will continue during the recess. Datelines are looming by which we must know how to deal with this complex issue. We are taking much advice on the matter and do not seek in any way to circumvent the court's decision. The court found that we had been acting wrongly, and we accept that. The matter is more serious than I suspect most hon. Members realise. We shall move as quickly as we can to rectify the situation.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at nine minutes to Ten o'clock.

House of Commons

Friday 31 July 1998

The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PETITIONS

Moray Health Trust

9.34 am

Mrs. Margaret Ewing (Moray): I present a petition that has been signed by more than 16,000 of my constituents. It relates to the reconfiguration of health trusts in the Grampian area and the desire to retain a unitary trust in the Moray area. It reads:

Wherefore your Petitioners pray that the honourable House will take notice of the wish of those served by the Moray Health Services Trust that the Trust be regarded as a special case, enabling the continuation of an integrated, locally-managed health service.

And your Petitioners, as in duty bound will ever pray, etc.

To lie upon the Table.

Genetically Modified Organisms

Mr. John Austin (Erith and Thamesmead): I have a petition that has been signed by several of my constituents from Erith and Thamesmead, from Greenwich and Woolwich, from Eltham and elsewhere. It expresses mounting concern at the impact of genetically modified organisms on the environment and at the fact that the risks to public health from those organisms have not been clearly established, and expresses the belief that it is crucial to safeguard the British landscape and its diverse flora and fauna. The petition states:

The humble petition of the Members of The Charlton and Blackheath Amateur Horticultural Society,

pray that your honourable House determines that no further consents should be granted to grow genetically modified crops until a full public inquiry has been carried out.

And your Petitioners, as in duty bound, will ever pray, etc.

To lie upon the Table.

Hunting (Wild Mammals)

Mr. Michael Jabez Foster (Hastings and Rye): It is perhaps an opportune moment, on the last day before the summer recess, to present this petition, which calls for the abolition of hunting with dogs, an issue which will not go away simply because the Bill of my hon. Friend the Member for Worcester (Mr. Foster), my namesake, has not been successful this Session. The petition states:

The Petition of the Residents of Hastings and District

Declares That the hunting of wild mammals with dogs is a cruel and unnecessary activity which has no place in modern Britain And having supported the Wild Mammals (Hunting With Dogs) Bill which sought to outlaw the practice but which Bill had insufficient time to pass through Parliament albeit attracting the free support of the overwhelming majority of Members in the House.

The Petitioners hereby request that the House of Commons in recognising the widespread public support for the measure shall call upon the Government to allocate sufficient time in the next session of Parliament for such measures to pass through the House.

Nearly 10,000 residents in or around my constituency have signed the petition, and it has my full support.

To lie upon the Table.

Xenotransplantation

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark, North and Bermondsey): It is obviously a week for petitions on matters ethical and related. In that context, I present a petition of 26,000-plus people—members and supporters of the Society of Doctors and Lawyers for Responsible Medicine—on the subject of transgenic transplant experiments. The petition

Declares that we are gravely concerned at the very real risk of creating new and catastrophic human epidemics through the proposed transplanting of animal organs (genetically engineered or otherwise) into humans, thereby giving rise to the possibility of inevitably unknown viruses crossing the species barrier, a single instance of which could unleash an irreversible chain reaction of unimaginable proportions, and we are particularly concerned that action is urgently needed since transplants are planned to commence by the autumn of this year.

The Petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons request the Secretary of State for Health to take action to bring to an end these health and life threatening experiments.

And the Petitioners remain, etc.

To lie upon the Table.

Concessionary Travel

Mr. Patrick Hall (Bedford): I am pleased to present this petition of more than 600 signatures from residents of Bedfordshire, in particular Bedford and Kempston, who declare

that access to concessionary travel in Britain is unequal and varies widely.

The Petitioners therefore respectfully request that the House of Commons calls upon the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions to bring in the necessary measures to create a nationwide travel pass available free of charge to all pensioners and people with a registered disability.

May I quickly add that I recognise and welcome the significant measures that were announced in the recent transport White Paper to establish a national minimum standard for concessionary travel? This petition can be seen as a contribution to that debate. The White Paper is an important first step towards the free travel that is sought by the petitioners.

To lie upon the Table.

Orders of the Day

Northern Ireland Bill

Order for Third Reading read.

9.39 am

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Marjorie Mowlam): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read the Third time.

We are grateful for the overwhelming support that the House has shown for the Bill, following the substantial backing for the agreement in Northern Ireland itself. Once the Bill is finally approved, the requirement of the triple lock, which successive Governments have agreed should apply to any settlement, will be satisfied.

The Bill is the culmination of a great deal of work in Northern Ireland. We have put a number of Bills before the House this year. The key developments show how much the Northern Ireland political landscape, which is the context in which this Bill will operate, if passed, has changed in the past 12 months.

It is instructive to remember that this time last year the talks participants were still deadlocked on the decommissioning question. They had not addressed their substantive agenda; they began that only in October. Once they did begin, the pace accelerated, culminating in the Good Friday agreement on 10 April. Since then, we have had a referendum, an election, an Assembly, a policing commission, a criminal justice review and a decommissioning body, as well as passing the Northern Ireland (Sentences) Act. We have also acted on our commitments on the Irish language.

Now the House is considering and, I hope, will shortly pass this Bill. It is major piece of constitutional legislation, which has been prepared in record time. We have been happy to acknowledge that further changes may be necessary, while still taking some pride in the Bill as it stands. It is, we believe, an essentially sound framework for the agreement institutions to operate within.

I crave the indulgence of the House for a moment as I want to thank the civil servants. The list that I have just given shows how much work has been done by Northern Ireland civil servants over past months. I also pay tribute to the many political party leaders, to the Prime Minister, to the Taoiseach and, above all, to the people of Northern Ireland who have given their support and encouragement to making progress with the Bill.

Of course, we respect the doubts that have been expressed about the agreement within the House and outside it. Those who doubt have often shown courage, too. However, I believe that people are ever more widely coming to the view, whatever their original reservations, that the agreement must be made to work. The Government will continue to do all that they can to ensure that the agreement comes fully into operation, in all its aspects. In doing that, we will listen to all shades of opinion, for the agreement or against it. We will work closely with the new authorities established in Northern Ireland. Those comments apply especially to the Bill, just as they do to other aspects of the agreement. We are anxious that the Bill should reflect the agreement as faithfully as possible and, within its terms, provide the most effective and flexible machinery possible.

We have always declared our willingness to look again at the provisions of the Bill to achieve those objectives. As a result, we made changes before its introduction on the basis of consultation, and we have made further substantial changes in Committee and on Report. For example, we have omitted a number of sections in the consultation draft that were questioned, such as the default powers of the Secretary of State; we have made the criteria for exclusion of Ministers and parties tighter, consistent with the agreement; we have sharpened many of the human rights provisions, so that, for example, all Assembly Bills will now go to the Human Rights Commission; the commission will advise the Assembly as well as the Secretary of State; the appointment criteria for commissioners better reflect the agreement text; and we have made clearer the scrutiny role of Assembly Committees, in line with the agreement.

While the debate has continued in the House, we have continued to listen. We shall reflect over the summer on a number of the points made in the House. In particular, we will look at the human rights provisions to see whether there are further ways in which the Bill can be strengthened, consistent with the agreement; we will look again at the criteria for early dissolution and for prorogation of the Assembly; and we will look again at some of the Order in Council-making powers. We will also consider audit arrangements. We cannot promise anything, but we will look at those and other areas carefully and with an open mind. My hon. Friend the Minister of State is already arranging further meetings in September with the parties to discuss their views. We shall then introduce any necessary amendments in another place.

I thank colleagues for their forbearance in accommodating the lengthy discussion of the Bill at such a late stage, and for the hard work they have put into it. It has been a civilised debate, for which I thank hon. Members—I know how strongly some of them feel. I hope that that bodes well for the future. On this last day of the Session, and after the intensive work of recent months, we all feel the need for a period of rest. I hope that hon. Members get a couple of weeks—but after that there is a great deal of work ahead both for the parties in the Assembly and for their lordships, who are to consider the Bill further.

9.45 am

Mr. Malcolm Moss (North-East Cambridgeshire): I shall be brief, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I, too, want to contribute to the civilised nature of the debate. If the Secretary of State wants to find me in a couple of weeks, I shall be long gone—

Mr. Jim Dowd (Lord Commissioner to the Treasury): But not forgotten.

Mr. Moss: It is kind of the hon. Gentleman to say so.

As the Secretary of State said, this is a major piece of constitutional legislation. It fits in with the rapid pace of change in Northern Ireland during her tenure of office. The Bill has gone through the House in record time. We know the reasons for that—commitments were given, and it has been part of a fluid and continuing process.

The Opposition have taken a bipartisan approach, while giving the Bill full scrutiny. We recognise the need to get the Bill on the statute book, because at the heart of the process is the agreement. Whether or not we like the agreement, or think it will work to fulfil expectations, is irrelevant at this particular time. The agreement was arrived at by the various parties in the talks in Northern Ireland, and in that sense it is a local agreement. We are simply giving a statutory framework to what was agreed on Good Friday. It therefore ill behoves us to try to rewrite the agreement, and that has been the theme throughout our discussions over the past week or two.

I, too, want to give some praise to the civil servants in Northern Ireland, who have pulled out all the stops to get the Bill to this particular juncture in record time. It builds on the framework of existing Northern Ireland legislation, even though that legislation may now be on the shelf for some considerable time. The Bill introduces considerable new powers that reflect the agreement.

The Secretary of State said that the Government still recognise that a considerable amount of tidying up remains to be done, and discussions need to continue over the summer months. The Bill has yet to progress through the other place. The Opposition certainly intend to table amendments then to try to improve the Bill.

There have been few areas of disagreement, for the reasons that I have already outlined. The two areas of disagreement that remain concern clause 23, relating to the exclusion of Ministers from office, and clause 60 and related clauses on the Equality Commission. As we said during our debate the other evening, clause 23 is closely related to the release of prisoners and proscribing—or specifying, as the Bill puts it—certain terrorist organisations.

We recognise that the legislation is a matter of interpretation for the Secretary of State, and that it is her right to interpret it as she will, based on the information she possesses and her overall knowledge and perception of events in Northern Ireland. Occasionally, we will beg to differ on that interpretation. That principle has been the basis for the limited opposition that we have brought to bear.

I realise that clause 60 deals with a matter that is very dear to the Secretary of State's heart and that she would like, if at all possible, to proceed on it as stated in the Bill. However, she is aware, as are we all, of the disquiet that is still being expressed by some of the bodies th... will be influenced by, and be party to, the change—particularly the Equal Opportunities Commission, the Commission for Racial Equality and the Northern Ireland Disability Council. Those three bodies are still very concerned at the implications of clause 60 and of the Bill generally.

We are pleased in some ways that the Minister, in his reply to the debate on those clauses, said that consultation and discussions will be continuing over the summer. We welcome that. It is important to try to arrive at a sensible compromise on which all parties can agree, rather than simply to push through provisions that currently seem not to have been subjected to the full range of consultation that was promised, or even expected.

The Opposition put down the marker that further amendments will be tabled in the other place, particularly amendments dealing with the matters that I have just adumbrated. On balance, we realise that the legislation gives statutory powers as agreed in the Good Friday agreement, and we shall be voting for it on Third Reading.

9.51 am

Mr. Eddie McGrady (South Down): The House will be well aware that the great desire of the people of Northern Ireland is, first, to have a cessation of violence and to create the circumstances in which violence will not recur; and secondly, to provide a framework whereby economic and social development can occur. Northern Ireland Members will recall the euphoria that swept Northern Ireland on the morning of 10 April when the agreement was reached, and also when the referendum received the support of more than 70 per cent. of the people of Northern Ireland. That support is the reason why all Northern Ireland Members should be supporting the Bill. The Bill contains the agreement that was reached by the vast majority of parties and peoples and endorsed by those peoples.

I recall also the ceasefire of 1994—the great burden that was lifted off the shoulders of Northern Ireland, and the physical feeling of relief, which was to be dashed by a subsequent reversal—and then the renewal, in 1997. Surely the Bill, which embodies the agreement in its entirety, will give us an opportunity to develop constitutional political stability, economic development, new investment, confidence and social development. At long last, all those matters can now be administered locally and tailored to meet the needs of the people.

As I said in previous debates, after 30 years of violence it cannot be switched off overnight. Many people in our community have used violence—executed people in the most horrible way, maimed and killed people, and destroyed property—and they have been desensitised to normal modes of behaviour and acceptance of the rule of law. It is highly probable, however unpalatable it might be, that those people—if they are in some way thwarted, either personally or by events—will express their opposition in violence.

I make a plea, particularly to the family of Unionist parties, not to use those singular acts of violence as a reason to bring down the whole delicate edifice of constitutional and democratic institutions that we have so painfully built up over the past two years. It is a very difficult and sensitive matter. It is a matter of grave judgment, one way or the other, whether a person or party is involved in violence for the purpose of pursuing political objectives. We must not confuse that violence with personal violence, with implementation of personal vendettas, or even with group vendettas.

In an earlier debate, the right hon. Member for Strangford (Mr. Taylor)—I do not want to take his name in vain again—cited 58 incidents of republican violence and 53 or 54 incidents of loyalist violence. Such events will happen. I hope that, by working and growing together, our communities will be able to eschew such behaviour and develop an ethos of peace and co-operation. We can do that only by working together.

I know that some representatives of parts of the Unionist community have a fear of the agreement—that in some way it will overtake them and their aspirations and traditions. Nothing could be further from my mind. The agreement is, first, a matter of co-operation.

[Mr. Eddie McGrady]

Unless there is co-operation—not only in the agreement itself and in the legislation, but in their implementation—the agreement will fall apart and nothing will happen.

The greatest strength that any Northern Ireland party has is the ability to say no—which I know is a rather dangerous thing to say in Northern Ireland politics. However, in the context of participating, there is always a veto for those parties. The Bill contains so much protection in ensuring that one will is not imposed on another, or that one group, community or tradition does not win a victory over another. That was the spirit driving the negotiations and the mechanisms embodied in the Bill, giving everyone enough confidence to participate.

This morning, even at this late stage, if there is a Division on Third Reading, I urge those persons and representatives who are opposed to the agreement—which has been endorsed by the people—to say, "Yes, we have reservations about this. We will continue to fight our corner and, from our viewpoint, to safeguard the views of the people we represent. But we will give it a chance." The Bill is one chance, in the centuries and decades of violence, to make progress, and it affords the confidence of knowing that protections are fully built into it. Furthermore, the people have clearly and unambiguously said, "Please do this for us."

I welcome the Secretary of State's mention for human rights, language and culture. I thank the Secretary of State and the Minister for their own openness in consultation and readiness to listen to what has been said by hon. Members on both sides of the House; and for their promises and undertakings to pursue further dialogue during the five short weeks until 14 September, when the Assembly will reconvene for very formal and important decisions. I thank also "the back office" people who constructed the Bill. Although it is very difficult to translate political terminology into statutory terminology, it was done reasonably well in the Bill, which can be amended later in greater detail.

Much has been said about the Bill. My main concern is that the people's will should be endorsed, and that—because of that will—an ethos of peace should be created. The violence that we have had must never recur, and at long last we will have an opportunity to strengthen economic development, inward investment, social advancement and a better standard of living. I sincerely believe that the Bill is a vehicle by which those goals can be achieved.

9.59 am

Mr. Lembit Öpik (Montgomeryshire): What a marathon this has been. I congratulate Ministers on the pace at which they have moved the Bill forward. The Liberal Democrats welcome the Bill whole-heartedly and believe that it is the vital ingredient which will turn the agreement into reality.

During the past two weeks, the House has witnessed the transformation of the Belfast agreement into tangible legislation that will guide the new Northern Ireland Assembly, which is a good thing. It is also great to see some true innovations: Northern Ireland stands to lead Europe on a number of human rights issues, especially those challenging prejudice.

However, the Government have not accepted amendments that we would have liked. I know that there is strong concern on the Ulster Unionist Benches about the Assembly's ability to ratify important decisions made by the North-South Ministerial Council. The Belfast agreement clearly states that the council remains accountable to the Assembly. I am pleased that the Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office, the hon. Member for Torfaen (Mr. Murphy), gave a serious commitment in yesterday's debate to revisit that matter in another place.

I have also been concerned about the allocation of chairmanships. It is a drum that I have been banging during the Bill's long parade through the Chamber, and I hope that the Government will honour their commitment to examine that, too.

The summer provides an opportunity to fine-tune what is basically a very good Bill. The Northern Ireland parties know better than any others the aspirations of the people of Northern Ireland to make the Assembly work. It is important that the Northern Irish public are able to consult, through their parliamentary representatives, during the informal period of summer.

We need to remember what we are doing all this for. It is to normalise Northern Ireland and make it an even better place in which to live than it is already. From the point of view of tourism, Northern Ireland is probably Britain's best-kept secret, from the beautiful glens of Antrim to the mystery of Giant's causeway, from Strangford's character and its ferry—or is it a barge?—to the mountains of Mourne—

Mr. McGrady: What about South Down?

Mr. Öpik: There are many other areas that I shall not mention in order to prevent another lengthy debate. If one were to design a country for tourism, one would come up with Northern Ireland.

The point is that we have to turn the opportunity of Northern Ireland into a reality, for the people who live there and for those who visit. Many people who visit the Province return to it. Those who have not visited it do not know what they are missing.

Personally, I have learnt a few things during the passage of the Bill—something about our procedures, a bit about the problems faced by Northern Ireland representatives here, and a great deal about attitudes.

There is an old saying that you cannot talk yourself out of a problem that you have behaved yourself into. To some extent, Northern Ireland had behaved itself into a problem. The biggest problem is that people stop listening. I have to admit that I am thinking of myself the other night when I was a bit of a grumpy old hon. Member. I have learnt that people listen least when they are the least confident about their position or that of others, and when they feel threatened. Perhaps that is something to which we should be sensitive.

We have to recognise the enormous stress placed on Unionist and nationalist representatives here. They are the ones who have to make the process work. They are on the front line and have to face the individuals who are most affected by what we have decided.

I look forward to the Assembly meeting in September. I hope that it will be able to work with the Bill and that the review which has been promised will iron out any teething problems that we come across as the Assembly implements the procedures.

Scars run deep, and there is much bitterness and many tragic memories in Northern Ireland, but I hope that all the parties that have been so constructive in our debates will recognise that it is up to all of us to make this work. Let us not think of the future in terms of failure, but plan for success. By doing so, we shall make it much more likely that that success occurs.

10.5 am

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said that the House had been very busy making sure that the Bill is passed. We may have been busy in the past 10 days, but we have been nowhere near as busy as she and her able team of Ministers, who, with single-minded determination, have made sure that an agreement was reached.

I shall make three brief points. First, since Northern Ireland came into existence, there has never been a satisfactory way of governing that part of the United Kingdom. Stormont was wrong, and I doubt whether any Unionist politician would now stand up and say that what occurred at that time could possibly be defended or justified in any way. Direct rule was necessary, but there was a tremendous democratic deficit. The agreement is the fairest possible way in which Northern Ireland can be governed.

Secondly, the position of Northern Ireland in the United Kingdom has been reinforced. The idea that the agreement somehow paves the way for a united Ireland without the consent of the people who live there is simply paranoia. The notion that the North-South Ministerial Council is a halfway measure to a united Ireland without the agreement of the majority of the people of Northern Ireland is absolutely without foundation. Articles 2 and 3 of the Irish constitution have been removed. On virtually every occasion, Unionist politicians have said that they should be removed, for reasons that we understand. There is no question of the agreement bringing about a unitary state in Ireland without the consent of the majority of the people. That fact is reinforced in the Bill.

Thirdly—I choose my words with care and speak simply as a Back Bencher—for more than a quarter of a century, the British people, like the House, refused to give way to terror or to accept terrorist aims and activities on the ground, either in Northern Ireland or on the mainland. We never accepted that we should surrender or say in effect that the IRA would triumph and that a united Ireland would be brought about without the consent of the majority of people in Northern Ireland. We have held that position for a quarter of a century, regardless of what happened in Northern Ireland—for example, at Enniskillen and many other places—or on the mainland in Warrington and in Birmingham, where so many people were butchered in November 1974. The British people refused to give in to terror. As far as I know, none of us—certainly not me—received any—

Mr. William Thompson (West Tyrone) *rose—*

Mr. Winnick: No, I shall not give way. I said that I would be brief.

None of us received letters from constituents suggesting any course other than fighting terrorism.

However—I choose my words with care—one should not take the consent and tolerance of the people of Britain for granted. Had there been a referendum on the mainland about the agreement, there would have been an even larger majority in favour than there was in Northern Ireland. There is absolutely no doubt about that. If the agreement were destroyed, or if there were attempts to destroy it by influential sections of the Unionist community, I believe that the British people would take a rather different attitude to Northern Ireland.

As I said, the British people have stood up to terror. They have refused to give way under any circumstances for more than a quarter of a century. The agreement is the fairest possible way for representatives of the two communities to govern the people of Northern Ireland, and it has been endorsed by an overwhelming majority in Northern Ireland. Understandably, the British people would find it difficult to understand the agreement being destroyed by the very people who constantly say that they are part of the United Kingdom and that they accept the rule of law and parliamentary democracy. If those people are arguing as politicians who do not like the agreement, so be it. Many things happened in the past 18 years which we, in opposition, did not like, but the democratic process must always be observed. I hope that that point will be taken on board by all hon. Members, whether they are for or against the agreement.

This is an excellent measure. I hope that it will succeed and that the people of Northern Ireland can live in peace.

10.8 am

Mr. Jeffrey Donaldson (Lagan Valley): It has long been the desire of the Ulster Unionist party to have proper democratic and accountable government restored to Northern Ireland, and we have worked hard over many years for a Northern Ireland Assembly that will give elected representatives a real say over local affairs.

We welcome the opportunity to have a form of accountable government restored to Northern Ireland, but we have concerns which we have expressed. We make use of the democratic process, which is our right, and we are committed to exclusively peaceful means of pursuing our concerns. Let no one be in any doubt about that. However, it is legitimate and right in a democratic society that elected representatives of the people should voice concerns. It is true that the agreement was endorsed by a majority of the people voting in the referendum in Northern Ireland, but that does not mean that the almost 30 per cent. of people who voted against have no say in the future of Northern Ireland and how the institutions develop. It is significant that not one right hon. or hon. Member on these Benches who voted for the agreement is here today to defend it and to advocate support for the Bill. Where are they?

We are here representing the people who elected us, and we will continue to do that, but we will do it in a democratic fashion because, for 30 years, we have watched as terrorists have tried and failed to undermine democracy in Northern Ireland. We have watched as they have carried out their terrorist acts here in Great Britain, and our condemnation of those acts is equal to our condemnation of the actions of terrorists in Northern Ireland.

My party stands against terrorism and against those who would use violence for supposedly political objectives. The question is: can we fudge the lines

[Mr. Jeffrey Donaldson]

between democracy and terrorism. Can we blur those lines in a democratic society? The chief reason why I personally voted against the agreement was that I believe that aspects of it blur the lines between terrorism and democracy. I reiterate that today. There are also aspects of the Bill that blur those lines. We have sought to clarify the lines—not to wreck the agreement and the institutions, as some hon. Members have suggested, but to ensure that adequate safeguards are built into the legislation to protect those institutions from people who have used violence in the past and who continue to use violence to further their political objectives.

I acknowledge what the hon. Member for South Down (Mr. McGrady) said. He argues that one cannot condemn an organisation simply because the actions of certain individuals, but he will know, as I do, that those individuals do not act in isolation. He will know that the Provisional IRA is the most disciplined terrorist organisation in these islands and to suggest that murders are carried out without some sanction from the leadership of such organisations is wrong and naive. Our responsibility is to ensure that the institutions that have been created are protected from those who have used violence and continue to use violence for political objectives.

When the Prime Minister came to Northern Ireland during the referendum, he promised the people of Northern Ireland that those who have used violence would not be allowed to hold ministerial office if they had not given up violence for good. He also promised that the prisoners would stay in gaol unless violence had been given up for good. In light of the decision taken by the Government in respect of the release of terrorist prisoners, it is highly legitimate to argue that the release of IRA prisoners, UVF prisoners and UDA prisoners in the wake of on-going violence by all those organisations demonstrates the point that we have made—that the provisions are inadequate and need to be strengthened.

If there is not to be a fudge between terrorism and democracy, we cannot have elected representatives holding ministerial office who are connected to, or are members of, a terrorist organisation that is continuing violence in the pursuit of its political objectives. That may well become a reality in the weeks ahead. It will not have my support. I will not support a system that places in government over me and my family those who continue to support or engage in terrorist violence. That is why we believe that the mechanisms in the legislation need to be strengthened to ensure that that cannot come about. I urge the Government to look again at that.

The hon. Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick) said that the Bill represents an opportunity for Northern Ireland to have a Government who have the support of the majority of the people. As he said, Stormont failed because it did not win the allegiance of a significant proportion of the population. I make the argument back to him that the agreement and the institutions created under it must command even wider support than they have to date. Up to 30 per cent. of the people have not so far given their allegiance. The same number withheld their allegiance to the Stormont Parliament for 50 years. I ask the hon. Gentleman to think about that and not to dismiss the legitimate concerns of people such as myself and simply say that because 70 per cent. gave their allegiance, the other 30 per cent. should do the same. Our allegiance also has to be won. Our trust and our confidence have to be created and it is the responsibility of those who engage in violence and terrorism to persuade us that they have given up violence for good and to do so in a tangible manner.

Violence must be given up for good. That includes the decommissioning of terrorist weapons, as provided for in the agreement. It also includes the dismantling of terrorist organisations and an end to the punishment beatings, as the Prime Minister said at Balmoral. None of that is happening in Northern Ireland. It must happen if we are to have any confidence that those engaged in violence have ended their violence for good.

In respect of north-south co-operation, we have asked for proper accountability and that the Assembly exercises its authority to ensure that those elected by the people of Northern Ireland control the rate and extent of co-operation. That is important because there is a view that Irish nationalists, in pursuit of their objective of a united Ireland, will cease to use the North-South Ministerial Council and the implementation bodies to create an all-Ireland framework that will be the basis on which the political unification of the island of Ireland will be built. That is not paranoia. It is simply a statement of concern by many Unionists. If co-operation is to take place, it must be on the basis of mutual respect and understanding, and not in pursuit of a political agenda that is about usurping the wishes of the majority. The only provision for real consent in the Bill is on the final question of Northern Ireland's constitutional position as part of the United Kingdom. Consent on the development of north-south co-operation can be exercised only through the Assembly and the elected representatives. That is why accountability is crucial. I welcomed the Minister's commitment last night to look again at the issue. I hope that he will strengthen the lines of accountability for the Assembly.

As a Unionist, I believe that Northern Ireland should remain part of the United Kingdom because that is the wish of the greater number of people who live in Northern Ireland. I hear what the hon. Member for Walsall, North says about the impatience of those who live in Great Britain. Perhaps one can begin to understand that, given the difficulties that we have had in Northern Ireland, but I hope that he accepts that although the people of Northern Ireland, who have endured 30 years of terrorist violence, long for peace, they want to ensure that democracy and the rights of all are upheld.

Constitutionally, only the people of Northern Ireland can determine whether they remain within the United Kingdom. It is unhelpful to imply that impatience could lead to a different outcome. It would not be right for the people of Great Britain to eject the people of Northern Ireland from the United Kingdom. It would certainly not be right under the Bill. My understanding—perhaps I am wrong—is that it is for the people of Northern Ireland alone to determine whether they remain part of the United Kingdom. I hope and pray that they will long continue to take that positive decision to remain within the United Kingdom, because that provides the best future for them.

10.21 am

Mr. Kevin McNamara (Hull, North): I understand and appreciate the pain and concerns that the hon. Member for Lagan Valley (Mr. Donaldson) feels as a member of

a minority. I hope that he and the people whom he represents never have to go through the same abuse and fear that members of the other minority went through during the period up to the granting of civil rights and beyond. I do not wish that on anyone and I want to respect his position, his attitudes, his tradition and his ideas in a way that was not granted to other people in the past.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn) has said, the Bill that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and her Ministers have successfully piloted through the House represents a moment of history. Like most moments of history in this place, it goes through in exactly the same way as if we were legislating for the width of a drainpipe. The aim of the Bill is to bring together two different traditions and to bring about understanding and compassion between them, overcoming past prejudices and promoting respect for different loyalties. Those who have been involved in seeking to achieve that deserve the support of the whole House.

I welcome the undertaking that the Government gave in Committee to look again at strengthening the provisions for the Human Rights Commission. I also welcome the undertaking to consider putting into the Bill the provisions in the agreement for statutory impact assessments by public authorities.

We were all moved by the speech of my hon. Friend the Member for South Down (Mr. McGrady). I should like to pay tribute to the leader of his party, my hon. Friend the Member for Foyle (Mr. Hume), who, for 30 years, has argued for peace, respect for traditions, the constitutional way forward and the acknowledgement and welcoming of diversity. At times, he has been pilloried, even in this House, when he sought to bring the men of violence away from the path that they were pursuing and into the constitutional system. We should note and honour his role in seeking to bring people together. The House should regard with shame the treatment that he was given in this place when he was working on the momentous task of bringing Sinn Fein away from the path of violence and into democratic dialogue.

The Bill is only the start and we must not be too euphoric. A lot will have to happen in Northern Ireland. Drawing up the procedures of the Assembly, and agreements on cross-border institutions will take a lot of hard negotiation, compromise and skill. Having seen the work done by the right hon. Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble) and my hon. Friend the Member for Newry and Armagh (Mr. Mallon), I have confidence that, given the good will of the Assembly, they will be able to achieve that aim.

The position of the Unionists is guaranteed not by the Act of Union, which has now gone, but by the people of Ireland. It is guaranteed by all the people of Ireland under the agreement. I should like to read out the proposed changes to the Irish constitution. The new articles 2 and 3 are a fundamental change from the old attitude that nationality was based on the ownership of territory, not on a union of peoples. My hon. Friend the Member for Foyle has continually pointed out that a bit of land is not worth fighting about, but unity in diversity of peoples is worth seeking.

Article 2 says:

"It is the entitlement and birthright of every person born in the island of Ireland, which includes its islands and seas, to be part of the Irish nation. That is also the entitlement of all persons otherwise qualified in accordance with law to be citizens of Ireland. Furthermore, the Irish nation cherishes its special affinity with people of Irish ancestry living abroad who share its cultural identity and heritage."

That is a fine statement and a great banner for the people of the Irish diaspora. Article 3 is a powerful statement of the attitude of the people of the Irish republic. It says:

"It is the firm will of the Irish nation, in harmony and friendship, to unite all the people who share the territory of the island of Ireland, in all the diversity of their identities and traditions, recognising that a united Ireland shall be brought about only by peaceful means with the consent of a majority of the people, democratically expressed, in both jurisdictions in the island."

That could not be clearer. The threat of the old articles of the Irish constitution—which I always thought was an imagined threat—will be gone. The new articles give a ringing declaration of the nature of the Irish nation and the wish of the Irish people to achieve their aims by peaceful means only. We should all welcome that.

10.28 am

Mr. Peter Robinson (Belfast, East): This is a sad day not just for Northern Ireland and the Union but for the House. Instead of crowing at the Despatch Box, the Secretary of State and her Ministers should hang their heads in shame.

This Bill is a victory for the men of violence. No matter what the hon. Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick) says, terrorism caused the Government to bring forward the legislation. Some standing up to terrorism to give terrorists places in government; some standing up to terrorists to let them all out of gaol while they continue their violence! Everyone in Northern Ireland knows that the House did not stand up to IRA terrorism; it caved in to it and is bringing forward the Bill as a result of it in an attempt to buy off the terrorists.

I well understand how the conscience of the Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office, the hon. Member for Torfaen (Mr. Murphy), who does not like the words that I am uttering, may twinge. Everybody in Northern Ireland from the Unionist community will know that the Bill will become a broken pledges Act. It is not a settlement Bill; it is a recognition of and a monument to the Government's political immorality and deception.

The hon. Member for South Down (Mr. McGrady) said that the Bill is the enactment of the wishes of the people of Northern Ireland. It is far from it. The people of Northern Ireland voted on the basis of clear promises made by the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom and the leader of the Ulster Unionist party. Those pledges indicated that there would be substantial decommissioning before any prisoners were released or any Sinn Fein-IRA terrorist representatives were allowed to participate in the government of Northern Ireland. The Bill breaks those pledges.

Furthermore, the Prime Minister and the leader of the Ulster Unionist party indicated that violence would have to be given up for good before terrorist representatives could benefit from the agreement. The Bill shows very clearly that terrorists can continue with their violence—continue killing and continue the so-called punishment beatings—and still benefit from the agreement both through the Northern Ireland (Sentences) Bill and this so-called settlement Bill.

The Prime Minister and the leader of the Ulster Unionist party told the people of Northern Ireland that north-south bodies would be wholly accountable to the

[Mr. Peter Robinson]

Northern Ireland Assembly, yet that is not stated in the Bill. The commitments given by the Prime Minister and the leader of the Ulster Unionist party have clearly been broken; they are not honoured in the legislation. The people of Northern Ireland were conned, and I am glad that the majority of the Unionist community now realise that and are moving away from supporting the agreement.

Of course there were those in Northern Ireland who told us that the Union would be more secure as a result of the agreement. The hon. Member for Hull, North (Mr. McNamara) said that not only had the Government of Ireland Act 1920 gone, so had the Act of Union 1800. How can there be a more secure Union if the Act of Union is gone? The Bill states:

"The Government of Ireland Act 1920 is repealed".

yet the Union is supposed to be stronger. The Bill fundamentally weakens the union between Northern Ireland and Great Britain. Anybody with a modicum of sense will recognise that.

There are those in the House who, although they supported the agreement and retailed it to the community in Northern Ireland, seek to distance themselves from its implementation. At one stage, they told us that they had a 40 ft barge pole with which they would not touch the agreement. But, within a few days, they signed up to that agreement. They went around the country advocating that people should vote yes in the referendum on the agreement, but now they are saying that they have misgivings, and are attacking the Government for implementing the agreement, the successful implementation of which they pledged to work for. No matter how much they wring their hands, the finger of accusation points at them. They are the guilty men, they are the ones who advocated support of the agreement when their colleagues and others in the Unionist community made abundantly clear that the agreement meant exactly what the Bill says that it means.

The right hon. Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble) said in the House many days ago that the legislation was something of a mess. He pointed his finger at the draftsmen, but said, "You should have seen the earlier draft; it was a greater mess." The draftsmen are not to be blamed because the greatest mess of all is the agreement of which he was one of the architects. I do not in the least blame the draftsmen for the difficulty that they have had in interpreting the agreement.

I say again in the House that the Bill faithfully represents what the agreement says and others have interpreted, but does not faithfully represent the pledges given by the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom and the First Minister designate of Northern Ireland. The Bill is not what the people of Northern Ireland voted for. In such a form, it will not work.

10.35 am

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Inverclyde): We have just listened to a characteristically bleak and dismal speech by the hon. Member for Belfast, East (Mr. Robinson). It was a speech of a politician whose world is changing radically. We share his detestation of terrorists—I have said that often enough in the House—but we part company dramatically and radically on our reaction to the Bill. I welcome the Bill. Over the past 15 months, we have seen the beginnings of a radical transformation of the United Kingdom. If one links the Bill with the Government of Wales Bill and the Scotland Bill, it is fair to say—on this I agree with the hon. Gentleman—that the United Kingdom will never be the same again; nor will these islands in which we live.

The three Bills have profound implications—both intended and unintended—for Northern Ireland, Scotland, Wales and the United Kingdom as a whole, as well as for the House. Of the three Bills, the Northern Ireland Bill is the most remarkable, thanks to the people of Northern Ireland, their political representatives and our Ministers. I never thought that we would come this far in so short a time. For me, the statement on the Bloody Sunday tribunal was a defining moment. The legislation has gathered pace.

We understand some of the concerns of Opposition Members although to us the principle of consent holds in this context just as it does in Scotland. We have said to the people of Scotland in the context of the Scotland Bill that if a majority chooses to separate from the rest of the UK, we would not thwart that desire. Similarly, that holds in Northern Ireland. A majority of the people will determine the future of the nations that make up the multinational state that we call the United Kingdom.

I should like to make three brief points. First, every effort must be made by those elected to the Assembly to avoid the institutionalisation of sectarianism in that body and associated organisations. Secondly, the Government must examine clause 81 of the Scotland Bill, which removes in an honest and fair-minded way the flaw of future Scottish representation in this House. That is a very thorny question, but it must be understood, not only in Scotland but in Northern Ireland and Wales. There ought to be at least a discussion of that question in the other place.

Thirdly, perhaps also in the other place, the Government should seriously consider setting up a consultative council that comprises senior Ministers and senior representatives of Opposition parties in Northern Ireland, Wales, Scotland and the rest of the UK.

The aim of such a council would be, inter alia, to establish harmonious and efficient working relationships and practices between the two Assemblies, the Scottish Parliament and Westminster. I know that the Procedure Committee is seeking to consult us on matters connected with what I have outlined, such as the continuing role of Select and Grand Committees, Question Time in this place, and legislation. There are still matters to be determined, and relationships need to be established on an harmonious basis.

The Council of the Isles has an utterly different role to play in the scheme of things, so I urge the Secretary of State to give serious consideration to the idea of a consultative council. I do not have time to go into detail about the idea now, but I believe that Ministers and the leaders of the opposition parties in all four bodies will need to come together so that we can avoid, among other dangers, references to the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council. Our representatives, in both government and opposition parties, can establish a fair passage for the two Assemblies and the Parliaments.

I finish by offering my compliments to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and her colleagues, and others on both sides of the House, especially members of the Social Democratic and Labour party, for their work

over the years. I have long admired those who argue in a peaceable and democratic way for dramatic constitutional change. That is why I have long admired my hon. Friends in the SDLP who sit on the Government Benches with me.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Hull, North (Mr. McNamara) said, this is a remarkable moment in our history. The legislation that we are passing will have profound consequences, both intended and unintended, and this United Kingdom of ours will never be the same again.

10.41 am

Mr. William Ross (East Londonderry): The closing sentence by the hon. Member for Greenock and Inverclyde (Dr. Godman) was deadly accurate: the United Kingdom will never be the same again—because it will not exist. That is the inevitable consequence of the three constitutional Bills that have been passed in this Session of Parliament, and we had better come to terms with it. I think that the hon. Gentleman and some of his hon. Friends are now starting to realise, albeit dimly, what the consequences will be. It will certainly mean that, over the years ahead, the United Kingdom will cease to exist as we know it—or, indeed, at all.

I have to say to the hon. Member for Hull, North (Mr. McNamara), who is sitting grinning on the Back Bench, that when he talked about the changes in the Irish constitution and about uniting the diverse elements within Ireland, it would have been better if he had adopted the traditional Unionist position, which was that this archipelago of islands was one natural geographic, cultural and political unity, from which great good could flow, and did flow when it was united. It will be immeasurably diminished not only by the Bill before us but by the other constitutional Bills that have gone through the House this Session.

I remind those who have spoken from the Government Benches that the Social Democratic and Labour party, as an Irish nationalist party, walked out of Stormont—26 years ago, I believe—over the shooting of two persons in Londonderry. It then transferred its reason for withdrawal from that issue to bloody Sunday, whenever the issue arose. We need to look carefully at the history, and at the rewriting and revision of history that has taken place in some quarters.

Much of the debate about the Bill has revolved round the question whether the Prime Minister's criteria for membership of the Northern Ireland executive have been met. We have exposed the hypocrisy of the words and guarantees given. Although that debate was largely about whether the IRA and the other terrorists met the criteria set by the Government and the agreement, my objections—and, I suspect, those of many others—to the agreement and the Bill run far deeper.

I refer to the nature of the governing structure, which is far removed from the policies set out and followed by the Unionist party for many years. It is also far from the position set out by the Ulster Unionist party leadership on entering the talks. My right hon. Friend the Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble) said on 20 July 1998, as is recorded in column 828 of the *Hansard* report, that, in order to reach agreement with the SDLP, we had to move towards a form of Executive—a massive shift from the position that the Unionist party had taken up.

The arrangement is far from the sort of local government structure on which we stood for election. It is a full-blown power-sharing structure. I have never been in favour of that: I never put it in my election manifesto, and I never will. My right hon. Friend also told us on 20 July that he supported the concept of an effective coalition with the SDLP in 1975. At least we can give him credit for being consistent in that respect. At that time, he was a member of the Vanguard party with Mr. Bill Craig, and went along with his concept of a voluntary power-sharing arrangement.

The arrangement in the Bill is very different, and goes much further. It creates a coalition not between the Ulster Unionist party and the SDLP, but between the Unionist party, the SDLP and Sinn Fein. The First Minister and his deputy are in effect Siamese twins, who must agree before any action is taken. I cannot see the hon. Member for Newry and Armagh (Mr. Mallon) allowing anything that would upset Sinn Fein, because those two Ministers, like the Ministers who are chatting on the Front Bench now, are intent on keeping the IRA aboard.

Given the practical workings of the power-sharing arrangement, I fear that my right hon. Friend the Member for Upper Bann, the leader of my party, has placed himself in a very weak position with regard to what he can actually do in the Assembly. In that classic form of power-sharing we have not rule by the majority, but rule by the minority, who can always wreck things by walking out if they do not get their way.

I believe that the whole edifice is not only an insult to normal democratic standards but unworkable. Indeed, not many years ago the power-sharing concept was described as unworkable by the hon. Member for Foyle (Mr. Hume). That is on the record. Because the arrangement is unworkable it will fail, creating misery that could and should have been avoided by setting our sights on achieving what is workable rather than trying to create what is inherently unstable and unworkable.

The House will recall that my right hon. Friend the Member for Strangford (Mr. Taylor) said during our debates that if no satisfactory amendments were made he would vote against. Unfortunately my right hon. Friend is absent this morning, but his is advice which, despite his absence, we are content to follow with regard to the Bill.

10.47 am

Mr. Peter Temple-Morris (Leominster): I am under severe time pressure, although I would very much like to debate with the hon. Member for East Londonderry (Mr. Ross). Suffice it to say that as I listened to his speech, and one other speech that I have heard this morning, I saw but a continuation of the violence and the desperate situation of the past 25 years, rather than the cure to it, which the Bill gives us the best chance for years of bringing about.

I shall make three quick points. First, I reiterate and underline what the hon. Member for South Down (Mr. McGrady) said—that it would be a tragedy if we so construed events of violence, and went chasing after them to such an extent, that we excluded from the process those who can bring about its success.

We must look at violence as it occurs in the real world. The right hon. Member for Bracknell (Mr. MacKay) talked about the difference between so-called military activities and so-called civil—I prefer the word "criminal"—activity. We have to look at such activities in the light of what they actually are, and their intention. There is no naivety whatever in what I say.

[Mr. Peter Temple-Morris]

Secondly, a continuation of the bipartisan approach is absolutely essential. The Opposition have handled the Bill admirably and the spirit in the Chamber has been very good. The Opposition were perfectly within their rights to move amendments to the legislation and it is significant that clause 23, the area of the Bill that refers to violence, is a central concern. When the Bill is passed and the Assembly is up and running, the House must stand back from the inevitable disputes that will occur within it. It will not help the Assembly if we involve ourselves in those inevitable internal disputes. We must let Assembly Members sort them out for themselves.

Lastly, the Minister made it clear that the British-Irish Council is a body with Executive membership. That leaves the way clear for interparliamentary activity and, as my hon. Friends the Members for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick) and for Falkirk, West (Mr. Canavan) have said, for a continuation of the British parliamentary body—a committee of which will meet in this building in 10 minutes. That body involves two sovereign Parliaments and that arrangement should continue. Further interparliamentary activity with the devolved Assembly is an admirable, but a different, thing.

10.50 am

Rev. Ian Paisley (North Antrim): We have heard some amazing statements in this debate. The hon. Member for Leominster (Mr. Temple-Morris) made the accusation that hon. Members on this side of the House will cause the same sort of violence in Northern Ireland that we have seen over the past decade. That is an outrageous statement for any hon. Member to make about his colleagues opposite, and of course it is completely and totally false. However, some of us would not expect very much more from the hon. Gentleman. He went on to say that we should not chase individual acts of violence, but I suggest that it is violent people who are chasing and killing the innocent. Thus it is outrageous to say that hon. Members should not expose acts of violence.

The hon. Member for Montgomeryshire (Mr. Öpik), the Liberal Democrat spokesman, also made an amazing statement when he said that the legislation will restore normalisation to Northern Ireland. There is nothing normal about this legislation. Even the hon. Member for Greenock and Inverclyde (Dr. Godman) conceded that it is an amazing Bill and he referred to its intended and unintended consequences. I do not know what the latter might be, but that was also an incredible statement.

The hon. Member for Hull, North (Mr. McNamara) said that the hon. Member for Foyle (Mr. Hume) should be congratulated. The hon. Member for Foyle told me at least 100 times that the first IRA ceasefire was for real, and then we had the Canary wharf bombing. When I talked to him about the second supposed ceasefire, I asked, "How are we expected to believe you when you told me 100 times that the first ceasefire was for real when it was not?" How can we believe that this ceasefire is for real?

We have seen the IRA continue with violence. Although it is an outlawed organisation under the terms of the legislation that we considered recently, it is immune from any judgment by the Government and its terrorist prisoners will be allowed out of gaol and on to the streets. The hon. Member for Greenock and Inverclyde referred to the bleak speech made by my hon. Friend the Member for Belfast, East (Mr. Robinson). However, it will be a very bleak day when terrorists—some of whom have committed multiple murders—are on the streets of Northern Ireland inside 24 months.

If the people of Northern Ireland are supposed to support the legislation so much, why is there a plea about insensitivity? The right hon. Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble), who advocated this position to the Unionist people, is not here to vote for the legislation. His deputy, the hon. Member for Newry and Armagh (Mr. Mallon), is not here to vote for the legislation and the two Members of the Ulster Unionist party who support the right hon. Gentleman are not here either. However, all the other Unionists are present in the Chamber and they will vote against the legislation. That is the message that the House must wake up to: it needs a baptism of reality.

I have learned from my experience in the House over many years that hon. Members do not want to be told things that they do not want to hear. However, they need to hear that the people of Northern Ireland are not overwhelmingly behind this Bill or this Assembly. That might be a source of great glee to the Minister, who sits and laughs on the Front Bench. However, there will be little laughter when people are murdered on the streets and the Secretary of State excuses those murders at the Dispatch Box by saying that she has made a balanced judgment and that the murderers may stay on in the Government of Northern Ireland.

No one in Northern Ireland with any sense wants terrorists in the Government and we will have no truck with their governing the people of Northern Ireland.

10.55 am

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): In the few minutes remaining before the House divides on the Third Reading, I want to record that this is an extremely historic occasion. Many congratulations are due to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland on all that she has done since taking office to introduce the Bill and offer the hope of peace and reconciliation within the six counties of Northern Ireland. She has provided some hope to the young people of that Province.

Labour Members should also pay great tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Hull, North (Mr. McNamara) who has done much to promote the issue of Ireland in debates within the party, especially when he was an Opposition spokesman for Northern Ireland. He correctly drew attention to the role played by the hon. Member for Foyle (Mr. Hume) in securing the Hume-Adams accord, which I think has been the basis of the second ceasefire and, ultimately, the process of reconciliation in this very balanced, but very complicated, legislation. It encompasses economic, human rights and equal opportunities issues and many other elements that offer real hope for the future.

I have the honour to represent a constituency which comprises a large Irish community. Many of those people have come to this country in order to escape the poverty of Ireland, but they have often found poverty and discrimination here as well. They and many others look forward to a time when discrimination is behind us and there is real hope and equal opportunities for all the peoples of Ireland.

It occurs to me that the House has debated the subject of Ireland more than any other in the hundreds of years since the British invasion of that country. There have been many problems throughout that period and some people have claimed that Ireland has no future and have sought to promote sectarian divides. Last week, I was given a copy of the 1799 secret report on Ireland—another example of the long debate on Ireland—which reproduces the entire statement of the Founding Conference of the Society of United Irishmen. It sets out the aim of uniting Catholic and Protestant people in the hope of achieving a united Ireland that is equal and represented throughout the island of Ireland. In that spirit, I hope that the House will agree to the Third Reading of the Bill. We look forward to peace, hope and reconciliation in Ireland in the future.

Question put, That the Bill be now read the Third time:—

The House divided: Ayes 215, Noes 8.

Division No. 356] **[10.58 am**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Alexander, Douglas
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Armstrong, Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Barron, Kevin
Beard, Nigel
Begg, Miss Anne
Bennett, Andrew F
Benton, Joe
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Boateng, Paul
Borrow, David
Bottomley, Rt Hon Mrs Virginia
Bradley, Keith *(Withington)*
Brake, Tom
Brinton, Mrs Helen
Brown, Rt Hon Nick *(Newcastle E)*
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burnett, John
Butler, Mrs Christine
Byers, Stephen
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Canavan, Dennis
Casale, Roger
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chisholm, Malcolm
Clapham, Michael
Clelland, David
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Iain
Colman, Tony
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cooper, Yvette
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Corston, Ms Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cran, James
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, John
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Efford, Clive
Etherington, Bill
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Field, Rt Hon Frank
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Gapes, Mike
Garnier, Edward
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Godman, Dr Norman A
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mrs Eileen
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Hain, Peter
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hammond, Philip
Hawkins, Nick
Heppell, John
Hodge, Ms Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howells, Dr Kim
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Ms Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Jones, Ms Jenny *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Jowell, Ms Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Kemp, Fraser
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Key, Robert
Kidney, David
Kingham, Ms Tess
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Love, Andrew
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCafferty, Ms Chris
McCartney, Ian *(Makerfield)*
McDonagh, Siobhain
McDonnell, John
McGrady, Eddie
McIsaac, Shona
McNamara, Kevin
McNulty, Tony
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Madel, Sir David
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury)*
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Meale, Alan
Michie, Bill *(Sheff'd Heeley)*
Mitchell, Austin
Moffatt, Laura
Moran, Ms Margaret
Morgan, Alasdair *(Galloway)*
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Ms Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Moss, Malcolm
Mowlam, Rt Hon Marjorie
Murphy, Paul *(Torfaen)*
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
Olner, Bill
Öpik, Lembit
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Pendry, Tom
Perham, Ms Linda
Pike, Peter L
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Primarolo, Dawn
Quin, Ms Joyce
Rammell, Bill
Raynsford, Nick
Reid, Dr John *(Hamilton N)*
Robertson, Rt Hon George *(Hamilton S)*
Rooker, Jeff
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Ms Joan
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Rt Hon Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Spellar, John
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Squire, Ms Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Taylor, Rt Hon Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Vis, Dr Rudi
Ward, Ms Claire
Waterson, Nigel
White, Brian
Wicks, Malcolm
Wills, Michael
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wise, Audrey
Wood, Mike
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. David Jamieson and
Mr. Keith Hill.

NOES

Donaldson, Jeffrey
Forsythe, Clifford
Hunter, Andrew
Paisley, Rev Ian
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Ross, William *(E Lond'y)*
Swayne, Desmond
Thompson, William

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Roy Beggs and
Rev. Martin Smyth.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Bill read the Third time, and passed.

It being after Eleven o'clock, MADAM SPEAKER *interrupted the proceedings, pursuant to Standing Order No. 11 (Friday sittings).*

Roads Review

11.9 am

The Minister of Transport (Dr. John Reid): With permission, Madam Speaker, I will make a statement about our strategic review of trunk roads, the report on which, "A New Deal for Trunk Roads in England", is published today. I begin by paying tribute to my right hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, East and Musselburgh (Dr. Strang) and to my noble Friend Baroness Hayman for their tremendous work on the review, of which I and my colleagues have been the beneficiaries. Copies of the report explaining our decisions will be available in the Vote Office after this statement. I have sent details to all Members of Parliament with English constituencies.

The Government are committed to modernisation and prudent public finances. Those themes formed the backdrop to the roads review. The outcome is not the grandiose but impractical notions of our predecessors, but realistic, practical decisions that will help business, help people and help Britain.

Trunk roads are vital for business and personal travel. They carry a third of passenger traffic and more than half of freight. Traffic is expected to grow over the next 20 years by about 50 per cent. By 2016, a quarter of our trunk roads will be seriously congested if we do nothing, so to do nothing is not an option. We need a new approach, building on that set out in our integrated transport White Paper. "A New Deal for Trunk Roads in England" is based on the fundamental principle that trunk roads must have a central role in our integrated national transport system.

There are four other key points in our approach. We will make better use of the existing network—building new roads will not be the first option—help motorists by investing more in road maintenance; reduce the negative impact of trunk roads on people and the environment through safer roads and less noise, pollution and intrusion; and ensure that trunk road planning is integrated with regional land use and transport strategies.

We are giving the Highways Agency new objectives, putting more emphasis on its role as the operator of the network rather than simply a road builder. We intend to consider options for charging users on trunk roads and using the revenue to maintain and improve the network and provide new income streams for the Highways Agency. We have already announced that we are considering continuing charging on the Dartford crossing and using the income to help to deliver integrated transport objectives on the M25. Today, I can announce that projects to make better use of the network will benefit from 60 per cent. more funding by 2001-02.

Roads are a vital national asset which has been poorly maintained. Without a change in direction, the state of the roads will worsen. We shall begin to put that right. We have already increased the provision for capital maintenance of roads by 50 per cent. for the current year. I am pleased to tell the House today that, in addition, maintenance spending overall will go up by a further 20 per cent. by 2001-02. We shall progressively tackle the backlog and maintain trunk roads at minimum whole-life costs. Together with our proposals to encourage less damaging six-axle lorries, that strategy will save money, enhance safety and reduce disruption.

The trunk road network has a good safety record and we shall establish targets to reduce road casualties further. I am pleased to announce that we have set up a ring-fenced budget for small safety projects that will grow steadily to £50 million in 2001-02.

Well-planned bypasses and certain other road improvements can improve the environment and transform towns and villages without doing serious harm to the countryside. The key is to ensure that the environment is given full weight from the outset. From now on, there will be a strong presumption against new roads affecting environmentally sensitive sites.

In that context, the House will be pleased to know that we are reducing the number of sites of special scientific interest affected by the programme from 49 to eight. We will also use low-noise surfaces for new roads and, where appropriate, when an existing road is resurfaced. We will also have a dedicated budget to tackle some of the most difficult existing noise problems.

Getting the planning framework right is absolutely crucial. I can outline three measures to ensure that such a framework is put in place. First, future trunk road planning will be part of the regional planning system and set in the context of the overall transport and land use strategy for each region.

Secondly, we propose to transfer about 40 per cent. of the existing trunk road network to local highway authorities. Those roads should be managed by local authorities as part of local transport plans.

Thirdly, we have ended the discredited "predict and provide" approach to road building. Instead, our new appraisal approach is based on the five criteria of integration, environment, safety, the economy and accessibility. The new approach will become an increasingly important tool for appraising alternative options across all forms of transport.

For the first time ever, we conducted a wide-ranging public consultation on our review of the trunk roads programme, with meetings in each region, in which my right hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, East and Musselburgh played a prominent part. My noble Friend Baroness Hayman met Members of Parliament to hear their views. About 14,000 written representations were received. Together, that gave us a clear picture of regional priorities.

For the first time ever, we analysed objectively the problems that we were seeking to address using broadly based criteria; for the first time ever, we have provided financial stability through our three-year spending programme and seven-year transport investment plan, which will enable our programmes to go ahead; for the first time ever, we have a practical and focused programme. Gone is our predecessors' massive wish list of 150 schemes, most of which would never have been built, over a time scale that was never specified and for which money was never assured.

We have considered the schemes that could be started in the foreseeable future and produced a programme that is funded and delivers our objectives. That comprises the 37 schemes in our targeted programme of improvements, all of which can be started within seven years.

The largest category is safety and healthier communities, reflecting the importance that we attach to those objectives. The programme includes much-needed

bypasses that will take large volumes of traffic out of towns and villages, thereby improving the quality of life. It also includes schemes designed to improve sections with poor accident rates.

The next category, regeneration and integration, includes junction improvements to remove bottlenecks that are hampering development; dualling schemes to improve access to remote areas; and schemes to facilitate access to a rail freight terminal and an airport. The final category, jobs and prosperity, includes schemes to deal with bottlenecks and other schemes needed to support economic growth in particular locations.

Many of the schemes not gone ahead with reflect serious transport problems that need to be addressed. There will be a programme of studies to consider practical options and develop integrated transport solutions. The House will not expect me to give details of every scheme, but I should cover two particular issues.

The motorway network is the core of the road system and is essential to the nation's economy. A number of schemes for widening the existing motorway network were under consideration. We had to balance their potential economic benefits against the impact on the environment and local communities. In some cases, such as proposals to widen the M6 between junctions 11A and 19, we propose to study all integrated transport options, including shifting traffic from road to rail, in order to develop the best integrated transport solution to deal with serious problems on that important route between Birmingham and Manchester. For the first time, we have brought together Railtrack and the Highways Agency under a concordat that allows them to work together on such problems.

The M25 is a strategic motorway important to the entire country. It is severely congested, and that is bad for the economy and the environment. There are no easy answers. We need a package of measures including traffic and demand management and attractive public transport alternatives. We are setting in hand a major study to develop such solutions. Meanwhile, we propose a number of short-term measures, such as closed circuit television cameras covering the whole motorway and the extension of variable speed limits. We shall also investigate using the hard shoulder as a climbing lane, subject to safety considerations.

However, problems between junction 12, with the M3, and junction 15, with the M4, are so acute that providing some extra capacity has to be part of the strategy. It is the most heavily used section of our motorway network, with flows of up to 200,000 vehicles a day. The most up-to-date traffic management measures have already been applied to that section. More capacity is needed to allow a breathing space while wider integrated transport policies take effect, and to allow for gradual introduction of necessary traffic and demand management strategies. We have concluded, therefore, that the widening scheme should go ahead, but we are cancelling two other widening schemes on the M25 between junctions 15 and 19.

One other scheme brings together economic, environmental and heritage issues. Stonehenge is unique. It is a world heritage site. Yet its setting has been described by the Public Accounts Committee as a "national disgrace". The solution developed by my Department, by the Department of Culture, Media and Sport and by English Heritage is to put the 2 km section of the A303 that passes the stones in a cut and covered tunnel. At least a third of the costs will be found from heritage sources. The scheme will have major heritage and environmental benefits. It will remove a bottleneck and improve traffic flow on the A303. Above all, perhaps, it shows what can be achieved by cross-departmental working and integrated transport thinking.

Judgments about roads are never easy. The policy that I have announced today is good for the economy because it gives priority to maintenance, to making best use of an asset, and to investing in a number of urgent schemes. It is good for safety and the environment. We have dramatically reduced the number of sites of special scientific interest affected by the programme. It makes good financial sense with a practical, deliverable, programme for the future. "A New Deal for Trunk Roads in England" sets out a radical approach to trunk road policy that is based firmly on our integrated transport strategy. I commend it to the House.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard (South-West Norfolk): I thank the right hon. Gentleman for making available to me a copy of his statement and the report at the correct time. All hon. Members will have found it helpful to have had individual copies of the parts of the report appropriate to their constituencies. I also welcome the right hon. Gentleman to his new responsibilities. I congratulate him, and I wish him well. We regret that his post has been demoted from Cabinet rank, feeling that that illustrates the Government's attitude to transport. However, I am sure that the right hon. Gentleman will perform his task well. I only hope that his ministerial career will not be affected by the poisoned chalice that he has been handed today. I am delighted that he has made an oral statement. It has come at the last possible moment, but that was not of his doing.

The previous Conservative Government laid down the principles on which an integrated approach to transport policy should be based, as the Secretary of State was generous enough to acknowledge last week. There was general agreement that road building must be carefully appraised, and responsible use of the car encouraged. The previous Government also indicated an end to the predict and provide strategy.

If we felt that the roads review was doing all that, we would welcome it. However, it demonstrates that the Secretary of State lacks the clout to establish transport as the priority promised before the general election. Even given the hugely increased spending plans announced in the comprehensive spending review, the Secretary of State was rolled over by the Treasury. As a result, the travelling public are getting a triple whammy. Road users will pay more in fuel taxes, congestion charges, workplace parking charges and motorway tolls; there will be no early improvement in public transport to encourage people to use the roads less; and, today the right hon. Gentleman has announced that the main strategy to achieve his Department's aim is to force people off the roads by increasing congestion and jams.

I have a number of questions for the right hon. Gentleman. Will he confirm the answer that the Minister for Transport in London gave on 27 July to my hon. Friend the Member for North Essex (Mr. Jenkin) that less money will be spent next year on road construction and

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maintenance than was spent this year? If the position has altered in the light of his announcement, can he tell us by how much and in what way?

The right hon. Gentleman confirmed that only 37 of the 140 schemes under consideration have been given the go-ahead. He said that construction of those schemes is due to begin during the next seven years. However, the comprehensive spending review identified spending totals only for the next three years. What assurance can he give that the 37 schemes will both start and reach completion?

Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that the Chancellor of the Exchequer made no increase in the comprehensive spending review for local authority spending on roads maintenance? What message does he think that conveys to local authorities when he is proposing that they take on greater responsibility for the roads network? Will he define "minimum whole-life costs"?

Does the right hon. Gentleman accept that the so-called extra funds for maintenance are derived either from reducing subsidies to privatised rail companies—if he does, will he be generous enough to withdraw his Government's objection to the principle of privatisation—or from the total removal of subsidy from London Underground by 2000? I asked the Secretary of State last week, but he was unable or unwilling to answer, what investment is expected from the private sector between now and 2000 to justify that removal. What happens if it is wrong? Does Rail Maritime Transport share the Secretary of State's aspirations?

The answer given by the Minister for Transport in London on 27 July states that spending on bypasses is to be halved next year, from £157 million this year with one start, to £82 million next year. Does that mean a half start? What hope does the right hon. Gentleman hold out to the 500 communities that, with Friends of the Earth, see relief from congestion and pollution arising from properly planned and constructed bypasses? How many of those communities will today be disappointed?

What contribution does today's statement make to the Government's ability to meet their stated carbon dioxide emissions targets and their commitments under the Kyoto agreement?

We welcome the setting up of properly resourced and equipped regional traffic control centres. Given that so many of the road schemes that the Minister has today delayed or scrapped have been the subject of reviews because of congestion problems, how quickly does he envisage road users experiencing real improvements on, say, the M1 and the M6? Many will be listening to his reply as they sit in jams and I do not think that further studies will be much comfort to them.

One notable exception to the Government's general approach to road improvements and road building, for which the right hon. Gentleman gave some explanation, is the M25. I am sure that he would like to confirm to the House that the Government have changed their mind, and widening that road is no longer lunacy.

Now that the Government have published a transport White Paper designed to reduce dependency on the car, will the Department be publishing revised forecasts for traffic growth, based on the success of their policies?

The Deputy Prime Minister said that the country was in the mood for radical change in transport policy and that he was in the mood to give it to them. After all his promises of immediate benefits for the travelling public, all the hype, the glossy publications and the media opportunities for the right hon. Gentleman to prove his public transport credentials by standing at a bus stop before sweeping off in the ministerial Jaguar, the radical change amounts to more taxes for motorists, less investment in transport overall and the certainty of more gridlock on the roads. The long-delayed roads review, far from achieving the immediate benefits that the right hon. Gentleman promised, is in fact delivering more delay, more planning blight and yet more Government reviews. Jams today, jams tomorrow, jams until after the next election—that is the Government's transport policy.

The Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (Mr. John Prescott): One hundred and fifteen questions.

Dr. Reid: I shall attempt to answer only 110 of those questions. First, I thank the right hon. Member for South-West Norfolk (Mrs. Shephard) for her congratulations and am deeply moved by her concern about my future career prospects, but I think that I would rather take care of them. The fact that no less a person than the Deputy Prime Minister is in charge of the Department is a sign of the priority that we place on transport. As for the right hon. Lady's other questions, I shall avoid answering those that were merely personal abuse.

The right hon. Lady asked whether less money was being spent on investment in, and the maintenance of, trunk roads next year and the answer is no. Spending will increase by £52 million during the next year, as I have managed to discover in the 72 hours that I have been in the Department, so I am glad to be able to enlighten the right hon. Lady on that matter. There will be an extra £470 million for trunk roads in the next three years—the comprehensive spending review period—and, in addition, in the longer term, extra money will become available from our income streams.

On privatisation, we have made it plain that an integrated transport policy means the integration of all forms of transport, cross-departmental working and a partnership between the public and private sectors. The difference between the previous Conservative Government and our Government is that we are not driven by a blind ideology down the pathway of one form of ownership. We want the public and private sectors to work together.

On the Kyoto summit, we shall be producing a document to outline our detailed response in the autumn. As for road maintenance, we have restored the cuts that took place under the Conservative Government.

Mr. Bernard Jenkin (North Essex): What about money for local authority roads maintenance?

Dr. Reid: The hon. Gentleman has a cheek interrupting as he does, when the Conservative Government, after 18 years, left us in a worse mess than any other Government have done. I shall give one example. The right hon. Lady had the brass neck to criticise us implicitly about bypasses. We have given the go-ahead for

15. The highest number in any year during the 18 years of Conservative control of the transport system was 16, so this year, we have almost reached the highest figure that the Tories ever managed to achieve. Their record in their last three years was as follows: in 1994-95, they started the sum total of three bypasses; in 1995-96, they started one; and in 1996-97, they started one. So, this year we are starting three times more than they did in their last three years and they ought to consider those figures before they speak.

In reality, the previous Government had 18 years during which they did not even begin to think about such issues. They did not carry out an annual review and, indeed, did not even carry out one every decade. They spent tens of millions preparing schemes and then dropped them when they realised that they could not afford them, for example when they prepared their grandiose plans to build link roads around the M25 only to abandon them. They said that they did not believe in predict and provide, but acted as though they did during that period. Every year, they produced a fantasy football league of hundreds of road schemes, which were never funded, planned or carried out and for which no time scale was delivered. We are offering a policy programme based on a rational analysis, which is practical, and which is funded—we have laid out the funding—and can be delivered within a specified time. That is a marked improvement on the 18 years of the previous Government.

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): Is my right hon. Friend aware that this is the first sane and sensible attempt, certainly for the past 20 years, to get a transport policy that will deliver not only safety schemes but improvements that will have an immediate economic and environmental benefit? It will be most warmly welcomed throughout the United Kingdom. The situation as regards road maintenance is now dangerous, as he will be aware, and we welcome his commitment to do something about it urgently. Finally, any Government who are prepared to put road safety, environmental planning and the commitment of ordinary householders to a peaceful life at the top of their list of action should be wholly commended.

Dr. Reid: I thank my hon. Friend, who is the Chairman responsible for transport on the Select Committee on the Environment, Transport and Regional Affairs, and whose views on those matters we always listen to with respect. I welcome her comments about a more rational balance and a planned and integrated approach. I entirely agree that far too little attention has been paid to maintenance. Finally, as I understand from a brief comment she made as she entered the Chamber that she has not yet received her letter, I am pleased to be able to inform her that one of the 15 bypasses that I mentioned is in her area and I am sure that she will welcome that news.

Mr. Matthew Taylor (Truro and St. Austell): I begin by congratulating the Minister on his new role. However, in presenting the report, the right hon. Gentleman needs to be clear in his own mind whether it is an announcement of a huge cut in the road programme, as he started off by saying, or whether it is a massive increase, as his final comments to the Conservative Front-Bench spokesman suggested. The truth is that the majority of schemes have been not cancelled but delayed, and the outcome of the reviews will establish whether this is really a new deal on roads.

Can the Minister explain why the Government, who, pre-election, described widening the M25 and the Birmingham northern relief road as "madness" have gone ahead with both? That expenditure is unwise when some important village bypasses have been cancelled. Most importantly, if this is joined-up thinking and an integrated transport strategy, can he detail how much has been saved by the postponement and cancellation of road schemes and how much is being spent on increased investment in public transport as a result of the announcement? It seems that the Chancellor has done better out of this than the new Minister and that the statement is rather more Brown than green.

Dr. Reid: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his comments. I know that he is the Liberal transport spokesman. I presume that they are as united on transport as on every other thing, so I await the six other views on transport from those on the Liberal Benches.

On joined-up thinking, in comparison with what went before, and with the Liberals, this is not merely joined-up but positively seamless. It starts with a rational review and a policy basis rather than what has happened in the past: a long list largely determined, in practice, by the Treasury and determined presentationally by choosing a number and doubling it. We want to get away from that. It involves hard choices.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned that I had talked about the volume of the road scheme. I did not claim at the end that it was a massive increase. I talked about the fantasy football league figures used previously in the Tory wish list, which sometimes had 150 schemes; they were up to 500 at one stage. If we wished to continue that, we could announce that, at some indefinite stage in the next millennium, we had 1,000 on our list and cost them at £12 billion or £15 billion like the Tories did but everyone, especially business men, motorists and the Road Haulage Association, would know that none would be delivered because they were purely presentational. We are taking hard decisions, but we believe that it is better to be honest with people than to try to delude them by presenting large numbers.

I am sorry if the hon. Gentleman has not received his letter but glad that he did not get it before asking his question. We could not start the A30 Bodmin to Indian Queens improvement, which he supports, sufficiently quickly—within the seven-year period—to make it one of the 36 roads in our targeted improvement programme. We shall give it full appraisal. After that, and the statutory procedures, it will be taken forward without delay.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett (Denton and Reddish): I welcome the statement. It is particularly welcome that we are getting rid of the idea that we move traffic jams around the country. Each new bypass merely moves the jam from one place to the next. If we are to make much better use of our trunk roads, can my right hon. Friend address two problems: controlling speed and making sure that limits are observed for the safety of the people living close to roads; and ensuring that roads are not so often blocked by thoughtless parking?

Dr. Reid: My hon. Friend is Chairman of the Environment Sub-Committee of the Environment, Transport and Regional Affairs Select Committee. He has

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expertise on both speed and parking. We are looking at those issues. There is a review of speed limits and variable speed limits.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley (South-West Surrey): I much regret that the right hon. Gentleman's first statement in his new job should be such an appalling announcement. If he cared to drive from Scotland to Portsmouth, he would find that the first traffic lights are at Hindhead. That is the only single carriageway stretch on the A3 and holds the secret to the regeneration of Portsmouth. It is landscape of international significance. The pollution and the danger to local people are appalling. The time for studies is over. The threat of tolls will be regarded with contempt by local people who already face the rat runs. Can anything persuade him, after delegations, Adjournment debates, petitions and representations from environmentalists, business interests and the residents' association?

Dr. Reid: I understand the right hon. Lady's disappointment. She had a project on what I described earlier as the large wish list. I hope that her disappointment has not jaundiced her view of my whole statement. The problem with wish lists is that they went on indefinitely without dedicated funding. They were unspecified. Perhaps one reason for her disappointment is that, for many years, her project was on such a list. It was never implemented. She was a member of the Government who did not implement it, although she had some influence with the Government and the Department of Transport. I recognise her disappointment, but all the years of Conservative Government with the project on their list are a perfect illustration of how putting presentation above substance, as they did on those matters, ultimately creates only disillusionment. The scheme could not start sufficiently quickly to be considered for our targeted investment programme. It is not completely abandoned but on hold. It will be considered in the proposed A3-Hindhead study.

Mr. John McDonnell (Hayes and Harlington): Heathrow is in my constituency, and the Minister will appreciate the concern of many of my constituents that the announcement of the widening of the M25 is a trigger for building terminal 5 at Heathrow. Given that concern, and the integral link between the M25 and terminal 5, why was the widening of the M25 not referred to the terminal 5 inquiry for the inspector to comment on? Can he give a categorical assurance to the House and to my constituents that this in no way pre-empts the decision on terminal 5 development?

Dr. Reid: My hon. Friend knows that any schemes associated with Heathrow terminal 5 development are being considered at the public inquiry. This was a separate study. The decision was taken on its own merits. It was a free-standing study. It would not have been appropriate to link it in any way with another project in the same area for which a public inquiry was already under way. Junctions 12 to 15 are in the targeted programme for improvement, and the scheme will be accompanied by an effective demand management and traffic control strategy.

I realise that my hon. Friend is on the losing side of the argument on this matter, but I point out that we considered the whole scheme in great detail. He knows that there was a much more extensive proposal for widening the M25, large sections of which were rejected by us because of the wider considerations. We should like to have been in a position where it would have been possible to consider not proceeding with widening. That would have been a better world for all of us, but we inherited not that world but the one we got from the previous Government. On that section of the M25, the congestion is so bad and so many things have been tried that there was no alternative but to proceed.

Sir Nicholas Lyell (North-East Bedfordshire): I congratulate the right hon. Gentleman at least on inheriting and continuing Conservative policy on the Great Barford bypass and the Clapham bypass, on the decision to seek private money for the Bedford western bypass and on the go-ahead for the Tempsford flyover. However, may I ask him to clarify something in the context of this new deal, which makes us fearful that it is a new deal of less money for bypasses? Can the citizens of Great Barford expect an early start to a bypass that is necessary on every one of the five criteria that the Government have put forward?

Dr. Reid: There is never a greater exercise in circumlocution than a Conservative with good news from a Labour Government trying to make out that it is all the product of the previous Conservative Government. The right hon. and learned Gentleman will no doubt welcome the fact that the Clapham bypass and the Great Barford A421 bypass, which he supports, are in our targeted programme. The Tempsford junction improvements, which he supports, have been given the go-ahead following a positive recommendation by the inspector who held the public inquiry in February. I should have thought that it would be sufficient just to give plaudits to the Government for their wise decisions without demanding the exact day on which the schemes will start.

Mr. John McWilliam (Blaydon): I congratulate my right hon. Friend both on his statement and promotion; mind you, it is the first time that he has been PC in his life. Will he confirm that the improvements, which are being designed with the local authority, to the A1 bypass in my constituency in the vicinity of the Metro centre are in the programme, because I have not received my letter yet, and whether the necessary safety improvements to the A1 north of Morpeth, which is an extremely dangerous road, are in the programme as well?

Dr. Reid: I thank my hon. Friend for his politically correct remarks. I have to admit my ignorance on that particular scheme. I will see him immediately afterwards. I have not, in the three days that I have been at the Department, been able to remember all 137 decisions, but I shall ensure that the answer is communicated to him as quickly as possible.

Mr. Robert Key (Salisbury): I warmly welcome the Minister's commitment to build the Stonehenge project within seven years. He knows that he can rely on me to give him every encouragement to ensure that it actually happens. Will he join me in thanking the National Trust for its constructive and helpful attitude in abandoning its objections to the building of a road on inalienable property? Will he ensure, however, that a grade separated

junction is built at the western end, and that not only the Winterbourne Stoke bypass, for which we are very grateful, but the Chicklade bypass is built? Perhaps more important, will he explain how the one third of funding for the project is going to come out of the budget of the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, and whether that will mean national lottery money, or money that is taken directly from the Department's budget?

Dr. Reid: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his welcome for the scheme. On its funding, the details of which I shall communicate to him, I think that he is mistaken, but I shall want to clarify the exact technical details of it and write to him. The scheme does include the bypass of Winterbourne Stoke, as he said. I have noted his comments on the other matters that he has raised.

In general terms, today's decision on Stonehenge is very good news for the House. It shows that we have moved away from the days when we regarded trunk roads or other roads in an isolated fashion, just as concrete and as the only solution on every occasion. We have been able to highlight today our integrated approach by cross-departmental agreement, for which I pay tribute to the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, but we have also been able to illustrate that transport is much more than just a link between areas: it is a method of access to elements of our history and heritage and therefore makes a major contribution to the quality of life. We have been able to do that today with the Stonehenge announcement, which is welcome news for the House as well as for the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Christopher Leslie (Shipley): May I express my delight at the fantastic, magnificent and far-sighted announcement that the A650 Bingley relief road has been given the go ahead by a Labour Government—something which the Tories failed to do over such a long period? Will my right hon. Friend confirm that that scheme will improve the health and environment of my constituents and bring improvements for integrated public transport?

Is my right hon. Friend aware that plans are already in the offing in Bingley to commemorate the local heroes from the ministerial team at the Department? St. John of Bingley is one suggestion that has been made.

Dr. Reid: Because of my hon. Friend's work, this, perhaps of all the announcements, will give greater delight throughout the House than any other. I know that we traditionally have a Father of the House; I do not know whether we have a Child of the House. However, the rational but active and dynamic campaign that my hon. Friend has run on this issue has been a credit to him. Although he has been in the House for only a short period, it bodes extremely well for his future.

The Bingley relief road, of which my hon. Friend has been the most serious and effective advocate, is in our targeted investment programme. It will improve safety and the environment, and I am very glad that we were able to announce the scheme in our statement. Had it been on the list of the previous Government, he may have got it somewhere around his 74th birthday. I am glad that we shall be able to deliver that somewhat earlier.

Mr. Douglas Hogg (Sleaford and North Hykeham): I congratulate the right hon. Gentleman on his promotion.

With regard to the A46 Lincoln to Newark road, I think that the Minister will understand the concern in the county of Lincolnshire. Would he be good enough to tell the House whether he can guarantee that the bypass will be started before the end of the seven-year period, and can he in particular tell us when it will start?

The right hon. Gentleman will also know that three Lincoln roads have been detruncked: the A17 to King's Lynn, the A15 to the M180 and the A57 to Sheffield. They now become the responsibility of the local authority. Is he proposing to transfer to the local authority money to maintain those roads equivalent to what is currently spent under the national responsibility?

Dr. Reid: On the general decision, I thank the right hon. and learned Gentleman for his comments. The A46 Newark to Lincoln improvement is in the targeted programme for a number of reasons. Rational decision making is assisted by the five criteria: accessibility, safety, environment, economic development and integration. This scheme will improve safety, and journey reliability and assist in the regeneration of Lincolnshire, so it was very important that it went through.

On the start date, if we did not believe that the bypass would start within seven years, it would not have been in the target list. We have made hard decisions and schemes were excluded, not because we thought that they were not worthy schemes, but because we had to set a reasonable time frame for the start of schemes before we gave concrete promises. Therefore, I cannot give the right hon. and learned Gentleman the exact date when it will start, but I can assure him that it will be in the programme.

On local authorities, there will be methods of ensuring that a fair amount of money is transferred for maintenance. That will be dealt with in further documentation.

Mr. Kevin McNamara (Hull, North): While joining in the congratulations to my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister on the decisions he has taken, I want also to congratulate him on listening to the earnest pleas of Hull Members of Parliament for the Hedon road improvements, which are important to the economic integrity of Yorkshire, to the full opening of the port to ensure better facilities for our trade with northern Europe, and to the development of land in the area to improve employment prospects. It is a good decision.

When the Minister comes to consider the main motorways, I urge him to promote a campaign for lane discipline. So often on the M1 and the M6, the inside lane is empty while motorists are hogging the central lane, which not only causes great delays but encourages dangerous driving, with people trying to overtake on the inside. It also encourages road rage. A campaign for lane discipline on motorways would go a great way towards solving some of the problems.

Dr. Reid: I have noted my hon. Friend's thanks to our right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister. The scheme is included in the programme because it met the criteria. It is a good and important scheme which will relieve congestion and create jobs and prosperity. I am glad that the Hedon road scheme on the A1033 is part of our targeted list.

On my hon. Friend's point about the M6, the problems that he identified are important matters of management, which we will be looking at carefully. In a more general

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sense, it is precisely one reason why we are shifting the Highways Agency from simply being a road building agency to being an agency that will have to look at and give effect to much wider considerations, including management. It will have to deploy a tool kit of ideas and practical proposals that span a much wider area than just road building. Management, maintenance, upkeep and rational use of our resources have been ignored for years.

The M6 exemplifies the problem. A railway line that is underused runs almost parallel, for miles and miles, to a road that is greatly overused. Surely it is a matter of common sense and balance to consider the two together and determine how to make best use of present resources, as well as considering future road building, rather than exhibiting a knee-jerk reaction to everything and saying, "Let's build a new road." To do that would leave many of our roads in the mess that so many of them were left in when the previous Government left office.

Mrs. Caroline Spelman (Meriden): I wish the Minister Godspeed in dealing with all the studies to which he has committed himself today. There is no time scale for the west midlands area study. For how long will business commuters and home owners continue to suffer from the uncertainty over proposals for motorways in their area?

Dr. Reid: I am aware that the hon. Lady is concerned about blight in her area. The widening of the M42 has been remitted to the west midlands area study, which will address congestion and environmental problems in and around Birmingham and the black country. It will consider the wide range of measures to which I referred earlier, including those that have already been included in the metropolitan transport package.

The hon. Lady need not doubt my capacity for study. I have always taken the simple view that it is better to think before acting—although I understand that that has not always been regarded in every quarter as rational.

Mr. John Hutton (Barrow and Furness): I warmly congratulate my right hon. Friend the Minister on his appointment and I wish him well for the future. I strongly welcome the strategies and principles that underpin the roads review that he has announced today. At long last, the Government are getting a grip on the shambles we inherited from the Conservative Government.

My right hon. Friend will be aware that the Government have today announced that they will not be proceeding with the immediate construction of the Low High Newton bypass on the A590, which is near my constituency—even though the existing plans were endorsed and approved by a full planning inspector's report two years ago. Can my right hon. Friend confirm that the review of the environmental impact of the road on the Lake District national park—a perfectly understandable review—will be injected with a sense of urgency so that my constituents can look forward to improvements to that stretch of the road, for which they have been waiting for a long time, and which the previous Government failed to deliver?

Mr. Jenkin: It was in our programme.

Dr. Reid: Everything was in the previous Government's programme, but nothing was ever delivered.

I am glad that my hon. Friend appreciates the nature of the problems with the A590 High and Low Newton bypass, to which he has given great support. A balance must be maintained between the economy and the impact on both the built and natural environment. That is one reason why we shall remit the scheme for further study of safety and environmental impacts.

I could not hear whether my hon. Friend mentioned the A66 Temple Sowerby bypass, which I know he has supported previously. It has not been considered for the target list because its time scale is not sufficiently advanced. However, I am glad to tell him that the A66 Stainburn and Great Clifton bypass, which he also supports, has been included in the target list. That should be some compensation.

Judging by the list of roads that my hon. Friend supports, I can only assume that the large campaign that he ran—when, in my previous incarnation, I was Minister for the Armed Forces—to get two huge aircraft carriers through the strategic defence review now requires him to build at least two huge roads to Barrow-in-Furness, where he will hope to build those carriers.

Mr. Edward Garnier (Harborough): I join other hon. Members in congratulating the Minister on his move to his new post, and thank him for the announcement about the A6 Great Glen bypass in my own constituency of Harborough. The pity is that it is not to be started this year, as was intended under the previous Government.

Mr. Prescott: We did not take it out.

Mr. Garnier: If the Deputy Prime Minister would like to leave the Chamber now, I am sure that we should be delighted to see him go.

What are the funding arrangements for the detrunked A6? Will the money be ring-fenced? Will the Leicestershire county council highways authority be required to ensure that the A6 detrunked road competes for money with its other roads programmes? Will the Minister assure us that the money that is to be set aside for the Great Glen bypass will be available, although we are not quite sure when within the seven-year envelope the road is to be built?

Dr. Reid: I thank the hon. and learned Gentleman for his—I think it was a welcome. I was not quite sure whether he was saying that, because he wanted the Great Glen bypass last year, our decision to proceed with it now is fatally flawed and he wants us to withdraw it?

Mr. Garnier *rose—*

Dr. Reid: Perhaps the hon. and learned Gentleman would like to explain to me later whether he was requesting that we change our mind and not proceed with it. However, I shall take it that he was not asking for that. I have already said that there will be a fair exchange on money for local authorities—which, as we have clearly stated previously, will be done through the standard spending assessment.

Mr. Michael Jabez Foster (Hastings and Rye): I thank my right hon. Friend for the small mercies of the decision on the Lamberhurst bypass, which will enable people to

travel a little more speedily to Hastings. May I invite him to come to Hastings to see the problems there of deprivation, low skills and high unemployment? The greatest gift would have been the bypass that we so much needed. I appreciate that, in his letter, he said that he is

"still minded to make orders for that scheme, subject to options in improving access to Hastings."

The argument for a bypass has already been made, over many years. Will he ensure that a very early decision is made on implementation of any review? What time scale is likely to apply?

Dr. Reid: I thank my hon. Friend for his welcome for the Lamberhurst bypass, and realise his deep disappointment on the other matter. Everyone knows—from my short time at the Ministry, even I know—that no one has fought harder than he for his case. He has been absolutely assiduous and energetic in making it. I am also under no illusions that he will now drop his views on the matter, and I realise that he perhaps thinks that we have got it wrong in an extremely important matter. I assure him that either the Secretary of State or I will be pleased to receive representations on the matter should he wish to see us again. I realise just how much importance he places on that specific decision, and I am sorry that I could not be wholly positive about it today.

Mr. Philip Hammond (Runnymede and Weybridge): It seems unfair that, so shortly after his appointment, the Minister should have to come to the Dispatch Box to announce, in respect of the M25 in my constituency, precisely the widening which was described by the Labour party in opposition as "madness", which Labour's then spokesman promised to scrap, and which the Labour candidate in my constituency in the general election promised would be scrapped on day one of a Labour Government. The Minister might want to reflect on police statistics which show that people who do U-turns on motorways seldom survive to tell the tale.

However, I welcome the Minister's acknowledgement that a legitimate use of the billions of pounds in tax that the Government are raising from motorists is the alleviation of the environmental impact on the communities through which motorways pass. Will he confirm to my constituents in Thorpe and Egham that when that section of the M25 is widened, the very latest, state-of-the-art absorbent sound barriers and the best possible porous asphalt surfaces will be used to minimise the impact on them?

Dr. Reid: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his comments. He would be churlish not to accept that, unlike the previous Government, the present Government have made it clear that noise abatement will be a serious component of our consideration of new roads and the maintenance of old roads, and an important element in the practical remedies.

As for the M25 decision, the hon. Gentleman should be in no doubt that I am not in the least disappointed to be at the Dispatch Box—I am not only pleased but honoured to be here. Lest the hon. Gentleman should be in any further doubt, let me say that there has been no U-turn. The principles that we applied to our consideration outlined before the election by my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister are still the principles on which we take decisions. The Deputy Prime Minister has led the team and the review with consistency throughout.

Unfortunately, we cannot ignore the reality of the world left to us by the Government whom the hon. Gentleman supported. Just one section of the M25 is so bad that there is no conceivable alternative to going ahead with the widening. To do anything else would mean inflicting on something like 200,000 motorists a day more of the misery that they had to suffer during the 18 years of the previous Government.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Madam Speaker: Order. The statement has been running for more than an hour. I recognise its importance to Members, but I can let it run for so long only if I have Members' co-operation, which I am not getting. Instead, I am getting long statements and long questions. I want brisk questions to the Minister, and I think that I shall have the Minister's co-operation when he responds. I want to do right by Back Benchers who have an interest in the matter, but they must do right by me and by the House.

Jane Griffiths (Reading, East): I thank my right hon. Friend for his statement, especially for not including in it any schemes that have a direct impact on my constituency. The last thing the Reading area requires is more roads. The Thames valley is already congested, and the solution is not to build more roads.

I am pleased to welcome my right hon. Friend's statement that we require an holistic approach to our transport problems. Will he reassure me that the proposed London to Reading corridor study will take an holistic and cross-departmental approach and will not just consider the need to increase capacity along that corridor?

Dr. Reid: Agreed, welcomed and assured.

Mr. Eric Forth (Bromley and Chislehurst): Does the Minister recognise that the vast bulk of traffic, both private and business, will continue to use the roads as a result of individual decisions made by private motorists and businesses? Will he give the House an undertaking that he will not seek to penalise and to drive off the road, either through neglect of the road system or by other penalties, the vast majority of decision makers who want to use the roads for their own purposes?

Dr. Reid: What will drive people off the roads is the awful congestion in some places. The Government fully support real freedom of choice, but that means the ability to move one's car at more than 2 mph, which is impossible in many parts of the country. Of course we have no intention of adopting a dictatorial or penal attitude. We want to give the motorist and the business man choice, but, in order to do that, we have to use the full range of the assets that we have for moving from A to B. That means taking an integrated, holistic approach involving persuasion, education and putting money into other forms of transport as well as the road network. Throughout, we have followed a broad and balanced approach; it is right for the motorist, for the business man and for our quality of life—as well as for the number of journeys undertaken.

Mr. David Taylor (North-West Leicestershire): The people of Kegworth in north-west Leicestershire will welcome the fact that safety and health remain the criteria

[Mr. David Taylor]

for decisions on bypasses. They will be deeply disappointed, however, that it was not possible to go ahead with the A6 bypass, because the projected line of that route and the need for it have existed for 50 years. Will the Minister reassure the people of that area, which lies at the congested heart of the east midlands transport infrastructure, that it might be possible to go ahead with the A6 element of the rather wider scheme in respect of junctions 23A to 25 of the M1, about which I am agnostic? The need for the A6 bypass remains acute.

Dr. Reid: The schemes have not been abandoned, but put on hold for further study. It would have been the easiest thing in the world to have a 50-year timetable and simply add names to the list. The reason schemes were taken off the list was that we were not convinced that they could start within seven years and we did not want to make illusory promises. However, they have certainly not been entirely abandoned.

Mrs. Eleanor Laing (Epping Forest): My constituents in Epping Forest will be disappointed that the planned improvement to the M11 motorway there has been cancelled. Although I appreciate that the Minister has been in his post for only a few days and may not have had a chance to consider this aspect of the Government's policy, they will be more concerned that he has given no indication as to whether he plans to revise the congestion forecast, because it does not appear that anything said today or last week will improve congestion at all. Can the Minister confirm that today's announcement proves that the Government are willing to sacrifice the efficient and effective road network upon which business and industry depend in order to please Swampy and his friends?

Dr. Reid: The whole thrust of what I said today is that we have to tackle congestion, but the previous approach of using one exclusive instrument—building more roads—has patently failed. We have to achieve our objective through a breadth of measures and by taking an holistic and integrated approach to all forms of transport.

Mr. Ian Pearson (Dudley, South): Can the Minister confirm that proposals for a western orbital motorway drawn up by the previous Government are now totally dead and will not form part of the west midlands area study? It does not take a genius to recognise that in a hugely densely populated and industrial area such as Birmingham and the black country, building new roads is not the answer. There is no space for priority bus lanes, so an effective network of light and heavy rail is absolutely essential. I welcome my right hon. Friend to his post in the hope that his departmental officials will tell him that although light rail does not provide value for money compared with buses, it is the only possible solution for 3.5 million people in the west midlands.

Dr. Reid: There are a lot of questions there. We are building the Birmingham northern relief road. I shall pass on my hon. Friend's comments to my officials, who have no doubt heard them already. I shall write to him on the other detailed points.

Sir David Madel (South-West Bedfordshire): I strongly support what the Minister has said about new roads, which will promote economic growth and sustain industry and employment. With that in mind, will he end the delay over Dunstable's A5 north-south bypass; and could we proceed with new, urgently needed roads in south Bedfordshire to sustain industry and employment?

Dr. Reid: The study about which I have written to the hon. Gentleman will also consider the A5 at Dunstable.

Mr. Derek Foster (Bishop Auckland): I warmly welcome my right hon. Friend to his post and I agree with the thrust of his statement. I also welcome what he has said about the A66 and the decisions that have been made since the Government came to power. Does he accept that a new deal for the A66 would require dualling from Scotch Corner to Penrith? There has been an all-party campaign on that for the past decade and a half, with the full support of the CBI.

Dr. Reid: We recognise that there is a serious problem and we shall carry out a safety study of the A66. It will be for the regional planning conference to consider its priority for investment.

Mr. Nick Hawkins (Surrey Heath): May I add my congratulations to the Minister on his promotion? Given that there are no schemes approved or even targeted for my constituency, will he confirm that shire counties such as Surrey will have a proper increase in the budget transferred under the standard spending assessment in the way that he has described? Will he be prepared to meet delegations from areas such as Surrey, where long delayed bypass schemes have now been put further into the future? If the Chancellor cuts the budget further after three years so that even some of the seven-year schemes miss their target, will he apologise to the House and the country?

Dr. Reid: The hon. Gentleman speaks as though the previous Government had a 10-year agreement, or even a three-year agreement. They had a one-year agreement. We have an agreement for at least three years of stability—and up to seven years with investment. The previous Government never remotely approached that.

The news about the A3 Hindhead improvement will be disappointing for the hon. Gentleman, but the project could not be started in sufficient time for us to include it in the target list. Under the old method, it would have been on a list, like every other project, but that would have been a list of paper roads leading nowhere. We would rather put up practical proposals that are feasible and funded.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): On the question of providing jobs and employment, has my right hon. Friend looked at the recommendations of the coalfields task force, set up by my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister? The recommendations involve road programmes that will lead to the prospect of many jobs—15,000 in north Derbyshire. Will those projects be given priority?

Dr. Reid: I have announced a number of improvements in the coalfield areas. We are studying that issue further. A report is coming in October.

My hon. Friend properly points out that we have to consider economic development, jobs and regeneration. We are having a balanced review. For many decades,

Governments took only one view, irrespective of the environmental consequences. It would be wrong to swing the other way and say that every decision had to be based on environmental consequences, irrespective of the effects on jobs and regeneration. Throughout the Department, led by my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister, we are trying to promote a balanced view, an integrated transport system, interdepartmental work and an holistic solution to the problems—because the old way did not work.

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham): Although the inclusion of the A41 Aston Clinton bypass in the targeted programme of improvements is welcome—I genuinely thank the Minister for that—does he recognise that my constituents will be gravely disappointed that the previous construction date of 2002 has been scrapped? I remind him in no spirit of political partisanship—my Government did not construct the bypass either—that my constituents have waited 61 years. There has been a 40 per cent. increase in traffic flows over the past five years and there are now 30,000 vehicle movements each day through the village. In the light of the diet of accident, injury and death that my constituents have had to swallow, will the Minister bear in mind their pressing claim for the earliest possible construction date for the bypass?

Dr. Reid: I am very glad that we have been able to proceed with the bypass at Aston Clinton. From memory, it should take about 70 per cent. of traffic out of that village. I hear what the hon. Gentleman says about the importance of proceeding early. In the same non-partisan spirit with which he made his remarks, I should point out that, of the 61 years that we have been waiting for the bypass, we have had Tory Governments for 50.

Mr. Nigel Beard (Bexleyheath and Crayford): I welcome my right hon. Friend to his new post, and I welcome today's statement. Does he agree that high priority should go to schemes under which an unimproved stretch of road prevents full realisation of the true value of earlier road investment? There is an example of that in my constituency on the A106, which is the south Thames development road that runs between Greenwich and the M25. It is the main access to the Thames gateway, which presents an important economic opportunity for south-east London and north Kent. Traffic on the road has increased by 50 per cent. in the past five years. Thames road, Crayford, which is a short stretch of road, is the only part of the main artery that has not been dualled. It is creating a bottleneck and substantial difficulty in the area. Would my right hon. Friend be good enough to look again at proposals for widening it?

Dr. Reid: May I, at this stage, respond just to my hon. Friend's general point? Perhaps we could correspond on the specifics. I very much agree with him, which is why we place such stress on maintenance of roads and better use of the existing network. Such priorities must rank alongside consideration of building new roads.

Mr. Desmond Swayne (New Forest, West): The Minister has announced plans to build on eight sites of special scientific interest, yet it was a Labour commitment not to build on any. Can he explain that?

Dr. Reid: Yes, I can explain. We did not say that we would not build on any SSSIs; we said that we would be reluctant to build on them. The fact that we have reduced their number in this context from 49 to eight must, even to the most churlish Conservative, be an indication that we have carried out what we said we would.

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): The Minister will be aware that the House has twice passed road traffic reduction measures and has signed up to the Kyoto summit targets on reduction of pollution and greenhouse gas emissions. Is he prepared to undertake a study of expected traffic growth in the light of today's statement and its long-term pollutive effect?

Dr. Reid: Such matters of course rank in importance. My hon. Friend will be aware that the Deputy Prime Minister not only attended the Kyoto summit but played a major part in it. These matters are already under consideration, and a document on sustainable development will be published in the autumn.

Dr. Jenny Tonge (Richmond Park): I have stood up many times in the hope of catching your eye, Madam Speaker; it was certainly wonderful exercise. Does the Minister realise that, as a consequence of his decision to widen the M25 between junctions 12 and 15, the champagne will be flowing in the BAA boardroom this lunchtime? Is he serious about reducing congestion and the number of cars on that stretch of motorway? Has any consideration been given to designating a lane of the existing motorway for buses, other public transport and laden cars?

Dr. Reid: I think that the people who will be celebrating are those who now have to deal with the rat-running alongside the M25 that makes their lives a misery. That is one of the factors that we had to take into consideration in reaching the decision. As for the hon. Lady's more general points, the answer is yes. I will clarify further details for her if she wishes to communicate with me.

Mrs. Ann Cryer (Keighley): I thank my right hon. Friend for his statement. Many of my constituents will be extremely pleased with his comments about the Bingley relief road, and they will also wish to join me in congratulating my hon. Friend the Member for Shipley (Mr. Leslie) on his well-organised and forceful campaign. In the long term, although the relief road is welcome and I am pleased about it, it cannot be a solution in itself. The Aire valley is narrow, and we need to consider improving bus services and rail services on the Aire valley railway. We could even consider using the Leeds-Liverpool canal.

The statement tells us that the A650 Hard Ings road improvement will be replaced by a scaled-down solution. That is a narrow stretch of road between two lots of dual carriageway, and it forms a dreadful bottleneck right in the middle of my constituency. How scaled down will the solution be?

Dr. Reid: I can write to my hon. Friend about her last question. As for her second point, she will know that transport provision other than the roadways is already being considered. I have already paid tribute to the

[Dr. Reid]

campaign for the Bingley relief road, but, at the end of the day, like all the other schemes, the plan met the new criteria that we have outlined; that is why it is there.

Mr. Tom Brake (Carshalton and Wallington): In what respect will the widening of the M25 be good for the environment; and in what respect is it integrated?

Dr. Reid: The hon. Gentleman will understand that those factors need to be balanced, and none of them can be taken in isolation. Even the strongest opponent of motorway building and widening would accept that there is a particular problem with that stretch of road. If he is asking me about the pollution effects, he will know about those as well as I do. Thousands of cars parked together belching smoke into the air present what is probably the most obvious example.

Mr. David Drew (Stroud): I add my congratulations to my right hon. Friend, and welcome in particular what he said about the help with combating noise pollution. I pay tribute to the previous Minister responsible for roads, Baroness Hayman, who was interested in and concerned about that matter. I urge my right hon. Friend to deal with the problem facing my constituents who live at Upton St. Leonards alongside the M5. Their houses are far too close to the motorway, and have no protection against the noise. I am sure that that situation is replicated throughout the length and breadth of this country.

Dr. Reid: I thank my hon. Friend for his comments. He will have noted that we are emphasising for the first time a commitment not only to examine noise pollution but to do something about it.

Mr. Edward Davey (Kingston and Surbiton): I welcome the Minister's statement that he plans to ring-fence investment funds for safety measures and target them on small-scale improvements. Will he review the criteria now used to prioritise safety improvement schemes, because to some of us they seem both byzantine and counter-intuitive? When he has done that, and based those criteria on common sense, will he take another look at the case for safety barriers on the Kingston A3 bypass?

Dr. Reid: I think that it would test the patience of the House if I spontaneously announced yet another review of the criteria used to review safety elements, but I am glad that the hon. Gentleman welcomes the scheme to spend up to £50 million on safety measures, with a maximum, I think, of £5 million for any one scheme over a number of years. If the hon. Gentleman wishes to write to me I shall take his comments into consideration, but I would not like to promise another review ad hoc.

Mr. Kelvin Hopkins (Luton, North): I congratulate my right hon. Friend on his appointment and welcome his roads statement today. I welcome especially his decision to withdraw from the roads programme the widening of the M1 between junctions 10 and 14 where it passes through my constituency. I am sure that the Minister realises that that is one of the few places along its route where the M1 passes very close to dwellings. As a result of the uncertainty generated by the previous Government, a deal of blight has been created and many residents are very upset. The correct decision has been made today; but will my right hon. Friend give sympathetic and urgent consideration to dealing with that blight in the near future?

Dr. Reid: Yes. My hon. Friend makes the point and gives the reasons for our decision as well as, if not better than, I could.

Mr. David Kidney (Stafford): I congratulate my right hon. Friend on his impressive performance at the Dispatch Box on a tricky subject so soon after his appointment. While the widening of the M6 motorway through Staffordshire is on hold pending studies, will my right hon. Friend confirm whether three things will happen? First, will the trunk roads that are possible alternative routes be maintained and improved? Secondly, will the west coast main line be upgraded to attract more passengers and freight? Thirdly, I know that my right hon. Friend's Department has studied the genuine bottleneck on the M6 between junctions 10 and 6. Will there be action as a result of that study?

Dr. Reid: My hon. Friend threw three questions at me. I think that the answers are: yes, yes and yes. There will be action when we have completed the study.

Mr. Michael Wills (North Swindon): I, too, congratulate my right hon. Friend on his appointment, his performance today and his statement. I welcome particularly the Government's decision to launch a study of traffic problems in Blunsdon, in my constituency. A bypass scheme there was cancelled by the previous Government, much to the horror of my constituents. The results of that cancellation have been growing traffic congestion in the area, a choke point on the strategic trunk road between the M4 and M5, the bisection of a village and pollution.

We welcome the fact that the scheme is no longer dead and buried. However, I seek my right hon. Friend's assurances on two points. First, will there be an early start to the study? Secondly, will the bypass option enable Swindon borough council and the Highways Agency to retain the land that they own and which is needed for the bypass? If they have to sell that land, we would be denied the possibility of a bypass for at least 25 years.

Dr. Reid: On the first point, I assure my hon. Friend that we will begin as soon as possible. On his second point, I do not think that he would expect me to give a firm assurance on what appears to be a very complicated land ownership and planning development matter that also involves my portfolio. I am afraid that it will be another few days before I have mastered that brief.

Mr. Jim Cousins (Newcastle upon Tyne, Central): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. I have heard reports this morning about the closure of a brand new Siemens micro-chip factory on Tyneside, with the probable loss of up to 1,000 jobs. That is the first big strike at British manufacturing industry as a consequence of the collapse of prices and markets in the far east. The shock and anger on Tyneside will be very great—indeed, more than I can express properly now. I appreciate the present circumstances of both the House and the Government, but

have you, Madam Speaker, been informed that the Government intend to make a statement about the matter today?

Mr. Derek Foster (Bishop Auckland): Further to that point of order, Madam Speaker. I rise to support the request by my hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, Central (Mr. Cousins) for a statement by a Minister. This could be the worst piece of news for the north-east of the past decade or so, and it demands an urgent ministerial statement.

Madam Speaker: I must inform the right hon. Member for Bishop Auckland (Mr. Foster) and the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, Central (Mr. Cousins) that I have not been advised that a Minister is seeking to make a statement about that matter.

Mr. Prescott: Further to that point of order, Madam Speaker. I have only just heard the news, which, if it is correct, would be a terrible development. I visited the Siemens plant quite recently and it is a wonderful facility. I am sure that the people in that region will be very concerned. I shall take it upon myself to communicate with the Departments involved, including the Department of Trade and Industry and my own, to see what we can do in the circumstances.

Madam Speaker: I am extremely grateful to the right hon. Gentleman.

ROYAL ASSENT

Madam Speaker: I have to notify the House, in accordance with the Royal Assent Act 1967, that the Queen has signified Her Royal Assent to the following Acts:

Finance Act 1998

Crime and Disorder Act 1998

Government of Wales Act 1998

National Minimum Wage Act 1998

Lloyds TSB Act 1998.

NON-SITTING FRIDAYS

Ordered,

That the Order of 19th May 1997 relating to non-sitting Fridays be amended by adding 'and Friday 23rd October.'—*[Mr. Robert Ainsworth.]*

ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON SERVICE CANDIDATES

Resolved,

That the Resolution of the House of 18th February 1963, relating to the appointment by the Home Secretary of an Advisory Committee to examine every application for release from the armed forces for the purpose of contesting a parliamentary election, and to report to the appropriate Service Minister, in each case, whether or not it is satisfied that it is a bona fide application, be rescinded.—*[Mr. Robert Ainsworth.]*

TREASURY COMMITTEE

Ordered,

That Mr. Malcolm Bruce be discharged from the Treasury Committee and Dr. Vincent Cable be added to the Committee.—*[Mr. McWilliam.]*

Nuclear Weapons (India and Pakistan)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Robert Ainsworth.]*

12.39 pm

Mr. Harry Cohen (Leyton and Wanstead): Thank you, Madam Speaker, for granting me this Adjournment debate—the last business of the House before the summer recess. I thank the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, my hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Central (Mr. Lloyd) for delaying his holidays to respond to the debate.

Both India and Pakistan have rich histories and proud and diverse cultures. I have taken an interest in that part of the world for many years, and I am a member of the all-party groups on both India and Pakistan. I have a constituency interest also, as many who came to this country from India and Pakistan have settled in Leyton and Wanstead, where they have contributed enormously to the local community. Along with my wife, I have visited both countries and regard them and their people with considerable affection.

India and Pakistan are relatively young states, having spent generations freeing themselves from colonial rule. The independence struggle took place at a time when Britain had a very different view of its place in the world. One of my predecessors as the hon. Member for Leyton, Reg Sorenson—later Lord Sorenson—was a great advocate in this place of Indian independence.

The subsequent division between Pakistan and India at the time of independence in 1947—in which Lord Mountbatten, on behalf of the UK Government, played an important role—left many dead and destitute, and there is a continuing legacy of resentment between the two countries. That resentment has, on three occasions in the past, spilled into war. Any student of the area knows that it could easily lead to another.

Having gained independence, India and Pakistan were treated poorly by the rest of the world, being constantly patronised and belittled. They were regularly used as pawns in the cold war. That was no way to treat proud cultures.

As well as having a close interest in south Asia, I also oppose nuclear weapons around the world. I have repeatedly spoken in the House for nuclear disarmament and arms control, and I am currently the convenor of Parliamentary Labour CND. Nuclear weapons are immoral and wasteful of precious resources.

Hiroshima day is next Thursday, 6 August. The destruction of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, where nuclear weapons were used, was on a truly horrendous scale. Current nuclear weapons are multiple Hiroshimas. We should be working for a world free from nuclear weapons. That places an obligation on nuclear weapons states to reduce and eliminate their arsenals. By logic, that must mean that no new country should become a nuclear weapons state.

It made me immensely sad, therefore, when India carried out its nuclear tests in May. The tests were rightly and roundly condemned by the world and led to the imposition of a variety of sanctions by a number of states such as Japan and the United States, where there is law to make such action automatic when there is nuclear weapons proliferation.

The first test on 11 May took most of us by surprise, although hindsight shows that there were several warning signs, including some nationalistic comments by Bharatiya Janata party politicians, who form the new Government in India. The Indian Government stated that they had carried out three simultaneous test explosions, although there may in fact have been only one explosion, and a judicious politician's use of words to imply that three weapons had been tested.

It is difficult to carry out tests simultaneously, as the slightest mistiming in triggering any of the devices can mean that one or more could be damaged by the explosion of another, and not detonate or, worse still, scatter its contents over a wide area. Because of the technical difficulties, it has never been done by the United Kingdom, and the United States has tried it very rarely.

The Indians carried out two more tests two days later. Sadly and alarmingly, the Indian Government's actions were met with acclaim by the population: opinion poll after opinion poll showed that, in the initial few weeks, there was popular support for the tests, although that has since declined. At the time, I felt that that was misguided and misdirected nationalism—I still think so—and that such joy would be more than matched by bitterness and despair if the weapons were used. That may be reflected in the future in millions of individual personal histories, because the money wasted on these useless weapons could have been used to save lives or vastly improve the quality of life of whole communities.

The world's response was not all that it could have been. Sanctions were not implemented quickly or tightly enough, and many states delayed their decision on how to respond. Several of the major powers gave the impression that they might be prepared to soften their attitude and weakly accept the new status quo as inevitable. Pakistan was put in an unenviable position and it was perhaps inevitable that it would carry out tests of its own. Those happened on 28 and 30 May. Again, there is a doubt about precisely how many tests were carried out.

The tests are symptomatic of the regional security situation, which has been characterised by provocation and retaliation. Disputes, most notably over Kashmir, have brought the two states into conflict. As a consequence, their military bills represent a sky-high proportion of their national resources.

The Indians, especially, like to argue that it is not for outsiders to preach about what should be done about conflicts such as Kashmir. My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary has said that the conflict should be resolved bilaterally, but has offered assistance that may be acceptable to India and Pakistan to help to achieve a settlement.

It is perhaps worth noting at this point the valuable help given by outsiders in our own seemingly intractable problems in Northern Ireland. Senator Mitchell of the United States was the most prominent, but not the only, outsider to be involved in efforts to bring peace, and his contribution is rightly applauded. India and Pakistan should not have a closed mind to outside assistance in resolving the problem of Kashmir.

The resolution of the tensions between India and Pakistan is primarily a matter for the states themselves, but the introduction of an overt nuclear weapons capability means that the rest of the world will be affected if anything goes wrong, so the rest of the world has a

direct stake in what happens in the region. If India and Pakistan want to tell us that we should not interfere in their internal affairs, they should be left in no doubt that their holding of nuclear weapons is likely to lead to an opposite world reaction.

I am not saying that nuclear war in south Asia is an early likelihood. I am sure that the leaders of the two countries are too sensible to start a nuclear war deliberately, but the misapplied nationalism, of which there have been plenty of examples, could lead to a frenzy of hatred in which nuclear weapons just might be used. In a period of tension, there is always the danger of a misjudgment or an accident. History is littered with wars that everyone was confident would never happen.

The effects of nuclear war know no boundaries. A single nuclear weapon detonated anywhere in south Asia would have political and environmental effects a long way away. Some sheep in Wales are still controlled because of the effects of the Chernobyl accident 12 years ago. The work done on nuclear winter during the cold war proved that it was possible to cause major changes in the world's climate with only a small number of nuclear weapons.

Possession of nuclear weapons by any state is a global issue. The greatest threat to the 21st century would be proliferation of nuclear weapons until they were in the hands of many states, some of them unstable, or even in the hands of terrorists. Non-proliferation must be taken seriously in the other nuclear weapons states as well as in India and Pakistan. It is immoral for India and Pakistan to say that they will go non-nuclear when others do. They are making the great leap in proliferation. They are contributing to an immensely dangerous world in the next century. If proliferation is unchecked, they will not be unscathed.

Developments in south Asia put five other Governments around the world in a difficult position. Britain, France, the United States, Russia and China possess nuclear weapons, and their criticism of India and Pakistan is serious weakened by that. If the five want to stop proliferation to make sure that the world is safer, they must move unequivocally towards elimination of their own nuclear weapons. The Government have made some positive steps by reducing the number of operational warheads. Cuts announced in the strategic defence review were welcome. They offer an opportunity for dialogue with India and Pakistan, but we must pursue the theme of nuclear weapons reduction and elimination, not parity.

Sir David Gore-Booth, our high commissioner in India, has today decided to leave that post for a career in business. I fervently hope that our new high commissioner will play an active diplomatic and political role in pressing for the stop of nuclear weapons. There must be no weakening of that position. Will the Minister comment on how he expects the new high commissioner to argue against India's nuclear weapons policy?

The Minister appeared last week before the Select Committee on Defence. He accepted that Britain was poorly placed to complain because of our possession of nuclear weapons. He said that the key difference between the United Kingdom and India or Pakistan was that

"we inherit the situation that we are in rather than being in the process of creating it."

That distinction is useful, but it does not stop the United Kingdom being serious about stopping worldwide proliferation of nuclear weapons. We must move ahead on our manifesto commitment to international negotiations on nuclear arms reduction.

As well as possessing nuclear weapons, the five states that I mentioned have permanent seats on the Security Council of the United Nations. It seems that one follows the other, but that should not automatically be so. In recent years, India has felt that a country of its size should have a permanent seat. I have always felt that the Security Council's composition, which is based on the winners of the second world war, is biased towards the west. It is archaic to have two western European seats. If the council had been updated, India, because of its size, population, role in the world and future significance, would have been a prime candidate for a permanent seat. The nuclear tests have changed that. India's aspiration for a permanent seat is forlorn for the foreseeable future. I could not support such a move. Other states that wanted such important influence at the UN might also develop nuclear weapons as their route to the Security Council.

Pakistan and India have proclaimed themselves nuclear weapon states—they are clearly states that possess nuclear weapons—but that is a specific term, defined in the 1968 nuclear non-proliferation treaty to mean a state that tested a nuclear device before 1 January 1967; that date has long gone. There must be no redefinition of the term to accommodate India and Pakistan, as that would fatally weaken the treaty, making it near worthless in the face of any new nuclear testing state. There must be no alteration to the treaty.

As well as the immediate tension between India and Pakistan, wider issues are involved with China to the north and Iran to the west. India has had long-standing border disputes with China, the worst of which led to an invasion by China in the early 1960s. The poor performance of the Indian army at the time may well have been a deciding factor in the start of the drive for nuclear weapons development. India's relations with China have been improving, not least with the introduction of a series of confidence-building measures in the border areas in the past few years. Overt nationalism by India risks fresh disputes on a larger and much more dangerous scale.

China's closeness to Pakistan, including allegations of nuclear assistance, is clearly of concern to India. Pakistan may be encouraged in its relations with China by its fear of India's superiority in conventional arms. Those three countries need to get together and adopt a joint security pact. It is also time for them to consider a joint economic pact. It is time for direct action to avoid the use of the rivalries that flow from misguided nationalism in all those three important states.

Iran shares a border with Pakistan, whose test site was only about 80 miles away. While it is early days, how the tests will influence the Iranian Government remains an issue. Iran is a party to the nuclear non-proliferation treaty, but it has been alleged—mainly by the Americans—that it has been trying to acquire nuclear weapons. It is impossible to tell how true the allegations are, but if any part of the Iranian Government has nuclear pretensions, its hand can only have been strengthened by the recent events. If Iran attempted to get nuclear weapons, what would be the impact on Israel? Clearly, nuclear problems cannot be contained, and they move between regions.

One other problem that has not been mentioned but could affect the rest of the world is that the economy of Pakistan is weak. There is a danger that the Government could collapse and we could be facing a situation similar to the one that occurred at the end of the cold war with

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the collapse of the Soviet Union—the potential for loose nukes. In such circumstances, nuclear weapons and their components may slip from Government control and end up on the black market. That may also be true of India as, last week, three people were arrested and 6 kg of uranium seized in Madras. The quality or grade of the uranium is not clear, but the incident should be taken as a warning of dangers to come.

The possession of nuclear weapons by India and Pakistan increases the risk of weapons-grade material falling into the hands of terrorists. Both countries have extensive problems with poverty and corruption. Whenever aid projects in Pakistan and India are organised through non-governmental organisations, our Government should not hesitate to remind those countries that, while we favour money being spent to alleviate hardship and poverty, we will not allow any hidden subsidy so that the Governments of India and Pakistan can divert money to their nuclear weapons programmes.

As a vice-president of the Royal College of Midwives, I am concerned that India has more than 25 per cent. of the childbirth-related deaths in the world. I emphasise that I do not want any direct poverty alleviation work halted, but every diplomatic opportunity should be taken to remind the Indian and Pakistani Governments of their duties to their people. We should finance only non-governmental organisation projects and end all Government-to-Government aid such as military and police training.

What can be done? We must make concerted efforts to show that the world will not tolerate nuclear proliferation. We cannot let the 21st century turn into a century of proliferation. There are some encouraging signs of contact between the two states. Two days ago, the Prime Ministers of India and Pakistan met privately during a regional summit meeting in Sri Lanka. By all accounts, it was a barely lukewarm meeting, but at least both promised that senior diplomats from each side would meet in the near future to arrange further dialogue. That should be developed more fully.

Other forms of contact, such as trade, must be encouraged. The Foreign Secretary told the House:

> "At present, India and Pakistan trade only 1 per cent. of their gross domestic products with each other. In the modern world, where prosperity is based primarily on trade, external investment and the exchange of technology, that kind of barrier to trade makes no sense for the prosperity and development of those two countries."—[*Official Report*, 14 May 1998; Vol. 312, c. 524.]

Dialogue and trade must be encouraged between them, and between China and India.

It is clear that the pressure must be kept up. Last week, the Indian Defence Minister told his Parliament that there was no question of his country "buckling" under external pressure to review its nuclear policy. They must be under no illusions; there will be serious consequences. If there were no pressure or consequences, the Indian and Pakistani Governments would not buckle, but would continue with their dangerous nuclear strategies. Sanctions must be kept tight.

Worryingly, the United States is relaxing some of its sanctions on trade in grain after protests by American farmers. Talk in Congress is of loosening the law imposing automatic sanctions on proliferating states. That would be a step towards letting the nuclear proliferation genie out of the bottle. Any replacement policy must be equally punitive or the wrong signals will be given to India, Pakistan and any future potential nuclear weapon state.

We must ensure that no form of aid can be used to subsidise nuclear weapons programmes. Soon after sanctions were introduced, the Prime Minister of Pakistan called for Pakistanis around the world to send money to his country. We should examine whether currency restrictions or other measures could be introduced to ensure that the effects of sanctions are not reduced through such action. His appeal should be countered and discouraged. It is, after all, in their terms, an interference in our countries. If the money is not for direct support of family or alleviation of poverty, it should be discouraged.

Further sanctions could be implemented. Military training and co-operation with the two countries should be suspended by all states. All foreign involvement with the military in India and Pakistan should be prohibited. There should be an international regime to restrict foreign investment so that it does not allow any diversion of resources for military purposes. Perhaps postgraduate nuclear physics students from India and Pakistan in this country and others should have their studies suspended until the situation is resolved. Perhaps we should refuse to give visas to scientists, engineers and technicians known to have worked on the nuclear weapons programmes. I also favour support in various forms for the people in both countries who believe in, and will campaign for, a non-nuclear future.

As well as the sanctions for change, which are admittedly negative but necessary, a positive approach is needed. Direct aid to alleviate poverty via NGOs, not the Governments, should continue, but it should also be pointed out how much more both Governments could do if they did not waste their resources on weapons. A non-nuclear future and a settlement of the disputes would be rewarded with greater security and greater prosperity for both countries. I hope that the United Kingdom Government, with the rest of the world, will be able to present a clear picture of the costs to India and Pakistan of keeping nuclear weapons, and the enormous benefits of not having them.

India and Pakistan have made the world a much less safe place. Natural allies of the two countries, such as I, have been put in a difficult position. Many people with a natural inclination to support India and Pakistan are unable to support the spread of nuclear weapons. The world is more secure with fewer nuclear weapons, not more; it is more secure still with none at all. Pakistan and India would be more secure without nuclear weapons.

Pakistan missed a big economic opportunity when it responded to India with its own nuclear tests. That opportunity should remain available, accompanying a decision to abandon nuclear weapons.

It is immensely sad that the first of those tests was carried out by India, the country of Mohandâs Gandhi, the Mahatma, and a country with so much potential for promoting good in the world, in accordance with Gandhian principles. Nuclear weapons are a betrayal of the Gandhi tradition of non-violence.

I hope that there will be a sensible rethink in both countries and that a non-nuclear approach to resolving disagreements will be re-established and reaffirmed in the interests of nuclear non-proliferation, a safer south Asia and a safer world in the 21st century.

1.6 pm

Dr. Jenny Tonge (Richmond Park): I congratulate the hon. Member for Leyton and Wanstead (Mr. Cohen) on securing this debate on the last day of the Session. It is incredibly important, but it poses a huge dilemma for the world and, in particular, for the British Government.

The hon. Gentleman has ably described the contrasts in India and Pakistan. In many ways, they are very industrialised and have a high standard of technology in some sectors, yet, in most of India and Pakistan, people do not have access to clean water. In India and Pakistan, there is a brilliant and ancient culture and superb universities, yet a huge proportion of the people in both countries are illiterate and have no access to education.

Medical technology is of the highest quality in both India and Pakistan in their medical schools and teaching hospitals. Indeed, this country has benefited tremendously over the years from Indian doctors and surgeons working in this country, yet, as the hon. Gentleman has described, in India, the figures on infant mortality and the perinatal mortality of mothers are appalling. Both countries are areas of huge contrasts that are to be deplored.

Nearly half of the world's poorest people live in India. India receives the largest proportion of overseas aid that we give. As hon. Members will know, this year's Department for International Development White Paper said that we were concentrating on alleviating poverty among the poorest people of the world, not the poorest countries. That is what presents us with this dilemma: how can we put pressure on India and Pakistan without endangering the aid that we give to the poorest people in the world?

It all boils down to whether there is peace in the area. All the time the hon. Gentleman was speaking, something that we used to sing at school was going through my head; I think that it is from Judas Maccabeus by Handel:

"Oh lovely peace with plenty crowned".

The only solution to poverty is peace. I urge the Government to do everything that they can to stabilise the area and to encourage India and Pakistan to reach a peaceful settlement.

1.9 pm

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Leyton and Wanstead (Mr. Cohen) on securing this debate and on the way that he introduced it. I shall be brief so that the Minister has time to reply. I declare an interest as I hold a lifetime membership of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, which I joined at the age of 16 and, I am proud to say, of which I am still a member. Indeed, I am a member of its national council. I passionately believe that the world would be a better and safer place if there were no nuclear weapons, and that we should set an example by not having any ourselves.

Next Thursday, 6 August, will be Hiroshima day; three days later it will be Nagasaki day. They are the only times that atomic bombs have been used in war—in anger—against people. People are still dying from cancers caused by the fallout from very small explosive powers compared with those that are available to this country, the United States, France, China, Russia and, now, India and Pakistan. The work of the peace movements around the world has at least focused attention on the possibility of getting rid of nuclear weapons.

In all the recent discussion and debate on the Pakistan and Indian nuclear tests, which I deplore, many people in Pakistan and India have felt that it is a bit rich to get lectures from Europe, the United States, Russia and China on why they should not be undertaking nuclear testing, when, for example, this country has just rapidly expanded our nuclear capability with the introduction of the Trident nuclear missile system. The 200 warheads have far more destructive power than was previously available under the Polaris system. Although I support what the Government have done in trying to persuade both India and Pakistan of the error of their ways, we would make far better progress if we were seen to be getting rid of our nuclear weapons.

The background to India and Pakistan's promotion of a nuclear capability and the vast arms race is, in part, a hangover from the cold war. The Soviet Union supported and heavily armed India, while the United States supported Pakistan; now, China is helping to develop nuclear missiles in Pakistan, while Russia—and many other countries—continues to try to sell nuclear material and technology to both countries. The bloodthirsty arms trade around the world is more interested in the profits that can be made from selling arms to both those countries than in dealing with the desperate and terrible poverty of people in India and Pakistan.

The running sore of the inability of the United Nations, since 1948, to deal with the issue of Kashmir provides the pretext in which the military establishments of both countries can put enormous pressure on their own Governments, who can then use the populist argument of the need to be fully armed in order to protect, invade, liberate—or whatever other word one cares to use—in order to resolve the issue of Kashmir. I am aware that my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary did his best to promote talks on the issue of Kashmir. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will be able to give us some further news on that. Promoting a greater UN involvement in Kashmir, or any other form of mediation, must be the way forward.

Although I appreciate what my hon. Friend the Member for Leyton and Wanstead said about the fact that both Prime Ministers met at the SARC summit in Colombo a few days ago—it is good news that at least they met—unfortunately, no agreement was reached at the end of that meeting and both sides are still committed to building a nuclear capability. India has tested five nuclear devices while Pakistan has tested six. India appears to have the capability to build a modern day thermonuclear device, while Pakistan appears to be developing a uranium-based atomic bomb. The capability is enormous. India appears to have stocks of highly enriched uranium and about 300 to 400 kg of reactor grade plutonium. Official sources estimate that by the year 2000, India's stockpile of weapons grade plutonium could rise to 450 kg. Pakistan has slightly less such material, but it has sufficient to manufacture a significant number of atomic bombs. Perhaps more importantly, Pakistan now has a missile system capable of delivering those bombs to another country, making the situation more dangerous.

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West Germany, France, Britain, Canada, China, Belgium, Libya, Holland and Switzerland have all supplied various parts of nuclear technology to Pakistan. The United States, France, Britain, West Germany, Canada, Russia and China have all supplied significant amounts of high-technology material to India, so that it would be able to develop its nuclear capability.

We have to look for a way forward. The gut reaction was that sanctions should be applied against India and Pakistan for undertaking nuclear tests. I should welcome anything that will stop further tests, and promote the peace process in both countries and the eventual removal of all those nuclear weapons. However, as India and Pakistan have such desperate poverty, high rates of infant mortality and communicable diseases, low levels of life expectancy and a lack of basic necessities—such as clean drinking water, never mind basic food and education—I am concerned that many of the proposed sanctions would not hurt the military, the hierarchy or those who are promoting the arms race between the two countries, but would punish the very poorest people, in some of the poorest states on earth. I am therefore concerned that nothing would be gained by imposing sanctions.

Sanctions would probably enhance the popularity of the Bharatiya Janata party, which promoted demonstrations in support of nuclear tests. We should therefore be extremely cautious about using a sanctions process that would hurt the poorest people in India.

I hope that we will hear in the reply to the debate what the British Government have been doing to try to deal with the Kashmir issue, which is the biggest running sore between India and Pakistan, and to promote universal adherence to both the nuclear test ban treaty and the non-proliferation treaty. Adherence is the kernel of the issue.

Above all, we have to work towards creating a world in which the United Nations' authority is enhanced, and its ability to sort out countries' basic disputes and to promote a long-term disarmament process is increased. Nothing could be more obscene than a well-stocked and well-equipped military in a country filled with desperate poverty and people who are unable to gain a basic subsistence. Another obscenity is populist politicians saying, "We have to defend ourselves against the enemy across the border", thereby enhancing still further the military's role at the expense of the very poorest people in those countries.

We live a world that is deeply divided between north and south. Unless Britain, France, China, Russia and the United States do far more to reduce their own nuclear capability—I should prefer that we got rid of it in its entirety—lectures from us to poor countries about why they should not have nuclear weapons will fall on deaf ears. The likelihood of other states around the world openly developing a nuclear weapons capability will be enhanced if they do not know where nuclear weapons are currently targeted or at whom missiles are currently aimed.

As we come towards the end of the 20th century—in which so many millions have died in so many wars, many of which were entirely and utterly useless; and in which the arms trade is burgeoning as never before—perhaps we should stop for a moment and do our very best to disarm ourselves as a way of encouraging a disarmament process around the world. The alternative is unthinkable. The alternative is some mad colonel or general pressing the button that will start the thermonuclear war that we all grew up dreading during the dark days of the cold war.

1.19 pm

Mr. Gordon Prentice (Pendle): I had no intention of joining in this debate, but I was prompted to rise to my feet by the common sense that we heard from my hon. Friend the Member for Leyton and Wanstead (Mr. Cohen).

I recall that on the day Pakistan exploded its nuclear devices, I was speaking about Kashmir at a community centre in Brierfield in my constituency. I walked through the swing doors to find a party atmosphere, almost a celebration. People whose views I respect—members of the Asian community whom I know well—told me that it was a triumph that Pakistan had exploded those devices. I found that dispiriting and depressing, and said so in my speech. I said that it was madness to take that route, but I was told that nuclear weapons would help stability in the region. That is absolute nonsense. If nuclear weapons increase stability, why do we not give them to Turkey and Greece, to Iran and Iraq? Let us spray them around the entire middle east and then see long we survive on planet earth.

We need India and Pakistan to sign the nuclear non-proliferation treaty and the test ban treaty, and we in Britain need to wind down the nuclear arms race. We read in the newspapers today that the old Polaris fleet targeted 58 cities in the old Soviet Union, but no one knows what the Trident missiles are targeting—obviously, we are not going to hear that from the Minister.

The payload carried by Trident is being reduced. It was announced as part of the comprehensive spending review that we would save £100 million. I wrote to the Minister of State about that to say what a missed opportunity it was. Instead of making the announcement as part of the comprehensive spending review, why did we not say that we were never going to use our nuclear weapons, that they cost us an arm and a leg and that we would disarm progressively? That could have been our contribution, but we did not do it.

My hon. Friend the Member for Leyton and Wanstead, being the optimist that he is, said—I am paraphrasing—that he saw no prospect of an early nuclear conflict in south Asia. I do not know about that. The experts who pronounce on these matters tell us that it is possible for one or other of the countries to win a first-strike nuclear war. There are no hardened concrete silos containing missiles 50 ft underground there. Neither India nor Pakistan has the equivalent of the Trident fleet—they do not have their deadly nuclear weapons 300 ft under the Indian ocean. The experts say that there is a trip wire and that the mad people in India and Pakistan who think that it is conceivable that one can win a nuclear war might press the button. Is not that impossible? Are not the politicians and army leaders there too rational? Judged by the standards in the United Kingdom, are they not too rational?

I remember Pakistan's Foreign Minister appearing on "Newsnight" after India had detonated the nuclear devices. He made an incredible speech that was almost a

come-on to India. He said that Pakistan's population of 120 million was dispersed in villages across a very wide area and could absorb a nuclear strike from India. I repeat that it was the Foreign Minister of Pakistan who was speaking in such a juvenile, infantile way. I have many constituents of Kashmiri or Pakistani origin and I find it appalling that people are prepared to embrace those sentiments.

My hon. Friends the Members for Leyton and Wanstead and for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn) described Kashmir as a festering sore. Since 1947, there have been three wars between India and Pakistan, but we still have not got to grips with the problem of Kashmir. Pakistan wants to internationalise the issue and bring in other countries to help broker an agreement, while India resolutely maintains that it is an internal matter, that Kashmir is an integral part of the Indian state and it will not brook any interference from outside.

I stand here in the House of Commons and I wish that I had an answer, but I do not. The problem has to be mediated in some way, through the United Nations or, as I say for the umpteenth time, by Britain as a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council and a lead member of the European Union. Although we are a small country, we still have huge influence overseas. I shall be interested to hear what my hon. Friend the Minister has to say about that.

I should like to see a nuclear-free world. There were five declared nuclear weapon states and there are now seven. God knows how many more could develop nuclear weapons at the drop of a hat—such as Brazil, Argentina and Israel—so the whole world is very unstable. If countries choose to become nuclear weapon states, there must be consequences. We cannot learn to live with the bomb. What I found so dispiriting after the explosions in India and Pakistan is the fact that we have all got used to the idea that there are no longer five but seven nuclear states. People think that it is no big deal, that it is all happening halfway round the globe and does not affect us. People are not as agitated, upset and angry about it as they should be. We are learning to live with it and we should not. We have to say to the people of India and Pakistan that there are consequences.

The hon. Member for Richmond Park (Dr. Tonge) spoke about the deep poverty in that part of the world. It is a disgrace that 70 per cent. of the 120 million people in Pakistan are illiterate, yet 50 per cent. of the budget is spent on the military and on servicing debt. That is an absolute disgrace. There are comparable figures for India. I do not carry them about in my head, but the point has been made.

Finally, Britain can have an influence as an honest broker. Our history is tied up with India and Pakistan. People in my constituency say that Britain must act because we were responsible for what happened in Kashmir. My response is that we do have a responsibility, but it happened 50 years ago and the present generation in Britain cannot for ever be held responsible for decisions that were taken by politicians half a century ago. It requires good will on all sides and I very much hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will be able to respond positively to the points raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Leyton and Wanstead in his excellent speech.

1.28 pm

Mr. John McDonnell (Hayes and Harlington): I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Leyton and Wanstead (Mr. Cohen) for raising today's Adjournment debate. Let me say to my hon. Friend the Member for Pendle (Mr. Prentice) that the issue of consequences arose not with regard to the recent proliferation, but in respect of the seventh nuclear state, the state of Israel. We are in our current situation because we imposed no consequences on Israel for introducing nuclear weapons.

I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Leyton and Wanstead for two reasons. First, there are voices that have not been heard in the debate. He referred to the support of people in Pakistan and India for the development of nuclear devices by their countries. We have seen that in the media, but the voices that challenged that development went unheard, including those of many of our constituents, particularly those from Punjab. Many of those born in Punjab, deriving from there or with families still there, believe that the development of nuclear weapons by India and Pakistan could result in Punjab becoming a nuclear battle ground. They urge us to impress on India and Pakistan that not only should the nuclear devices be removed, but that Punjab should be fully demilitarised. Only in that way can they secure the future of their families, the region and, in some instances, their human rights. I urge my hon. Friend the Minister to do all that he can to ensure that the British Government impress on the Indian and Pakistani Governments that the demand comes from the British Punjabis, who have a concern for their original homeland and for their families.

Secondly, I have listened to Defence Ministers informing the British people that unilaterally abandoning the use of landmines—we all whole-heartedly support the legislation that was given Royal Assent today—would give the British Government a moral authority to impress on other states that the use of landmines was abhorrent and should be denied to those states. The British Government should assume the same moral authority on the issue on which my hon. Friend the Member for Leyton and Wanstead has been campaigning for so long—the unilateral nuclear disarmament of this country.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn) has said, we are accused by the Indian and Pakistani Governments, and by many of our constituents who derive from those areas, of cant and hypocrisy when we call on those Governments not to develop nuclear weapons while we are stockpiling and upgrading them. I support the plea of my hon. Friend the Member for Leyton and Wanstead on behalf of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament and for the development of new systems of negotiation and representation at the United Nations so that we can start the debate. Now that the British nose has been rubbed into the issue of nuclear disarmament because of the proliferation of nuclear weapons on the Indian subcontinent, we can start the debate on reform at the United Nations and initiate the first steps towards the handing over of nuclear weapons to a central authority and eventually to the scrapping of all such weapons.

I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Leyton and Wanstead for introducing the debate. He has given us an opportunity to voice opinions that have not been heard so far.

1.32 pm

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr. Tony Lloyd): I join other hon. Members in congratulating my hon. Friend the Member for Leyton and Wanstead (Mr. Cohen) on raising such an important matter in the last debate in the House before the summer recess. Hon. Members have referred to next week's anniversary of the bombing of Hiroshima. Like many hon. Members, I have been to that city. Anyone who has seen the peace memorial in the middle of Hiroshima graphically understands the destruction caused by nuclear weapons there and the threat of small-scale and larger-scale nuclear annihilation. None of us can be sanguine about the existence of nuclear weapons. The Government seek the global elimination of nuclear weapons.

In that context, I should point out that India and Pakistan are tied to this country through history, culture, common populations and genuine friendship. Like many other hon. Members, I have constituents whose origins lie in India and Pakistan. The ties are indissoluble; they will be with us not just for years but generations to come. We therefore have an interest in these matters not simply as members of the same planet but as people who are much more intimately tied. Any remarks that we make are in the context not of hostility but our deep and abiding friendship.

The issue is important not just to the security of Pakistan, India and their immediate neighbours but to the future prospects for global non-proliferation of nuclear weapons, which concerns us all. International reaction to the nuclear tests in India and Pakistan has been almost uniformly negative. Outside the sub-continent itself, it is hard to find anything other than condemnation. The tests caused deep-seated concerns for two reasons. First, they fly in the face of international efforts on non-proliferation and, secondly, they have undoubtedly heightened tension in south Asia.

Hon. Members on both sides of the House—the Opposition are very ably represented by the hon. Member for Richmond Park (Dr. Tonge)—will recall the statements made by my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary on 14 May and 1 June, in which he told the House that we in Britain, with our long and close ties and as friends of both countries, were nevertheless appalled at the risks and costs to the peoples of the sub-continent of a nuclear arms race.

Hon. Members have asked what the Government have done since. Since the statements, Foreign Ministers of the Group of Eight countries have met in London on 12 June at the invitation of my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary and the Government. They were joined by Foreign Ministers and representatives of China, Argentina, Brazil, Ukraine, South Africa and the Philippines. All those countries viewed the tests as a major challenge to international security and were as determined as we were to encourage India and Pakistan to reduce regional tension and adopt non-proliferation measures, and to offer practical assistance wherever possible.

As a result of the meeting, it was agreed to set up a task force to take matters forward. Its composition demonstrates that the international consensus against nuclear tests goes beyond the five acknowledged nuclear weapons states. That is an important dimension which hon. Members should take on board. Apart from G8 countries, task force members include China, Australia, Austria, which currently holds the European Union presidency, and the Philippines, which is the current chair of the Association of South East Asian Nations.

Particular value is added by the membership of states that have renounced the nuclear option. My hon. Friend the Member for Pendle (Mr. Prentice) said that Brazil and Argentina have a potential nuclear capability. I must firmly state that the role of Brazil and Argentina is significant because they formally renounced, in a mutually binding treaty, nuclear weapons development, and so ridded the continent of Latin American of nuclear weapons for—we hope—ever. I must add that the role of Ukraine, which has also renounced its nuclear weapons, is welcome and important, too. The three countries have valuable experience to offer in resolving regional security issues through political engagement rather than the nuclear option.

The initial focus of the group is naturally and rightly on non-proliferation, although it is also reviewing the wider security picture in south Asia to reduce tension and build confidence between India and Pakistan. The task force's first meeting produced a clear sense of common purpose among the diverse group of countries.

On arms control, the task force welcomed, as the House will, the moratoriums on testing announced by both India and Pakistan—but those were welcomed only as a first step to signature of the comprehensive test ban treaty by both countries. Clearly, that is what we must seek. Members agreed that it was a priority to press both countries to sign the treaty immediately and without conditions. There can be no question of amending the treaty, as that would serve as a reward for nuclear proliferation. I am pleased to say that there have been more encouraging signs from both countries that that may be one of the more readily achievable goals.

My hon. Friend the Member for Leyton and Wanstead asked about the role of the British high commissioner. He, together with Britain's general diplomatic efforts and the other members of the task force, will be deployed in moving towards that ambition.

Task force members also agreed to press for a quick start on something important to the British Government—the fissile material cut-off treaty negotiations at the conference on disarmament in Geneva—and to call on India and Pakistan to announce a moratorium on further production of fissile materials in the meantime. Again, we are encouraged by the flexibility and constructive approach that both India and Pakistan are showing, and we hope that that will soon lead to results in Geneva.

High on the task force's agenda was how to avoid the further highly dangerous increase of tension that deployment of nuclear weapons would bring. The group agreed that India and Pakistan should be pressed not to assemble or deploy nuclear weapons. Clear definitions of what is meant by "non-weaponisation" and non-deployment are urgently needed, in the form of binding and verifiable confidence-building and security-building measures.

Mr. Corbyn: That is extremely important. Have either of the two countries accepted any form of international inspection of either the development or the potential loading of weapons on to missiles?

Mr. Lloyd: No; at this moment that is not the case. However, I was about to say that the international

community stands ready to assist. We want to see binding and verifiable confidence-building and security-building measures. Those would give mutual confidence, and also confidence throughout south Asia.

My hon. Friend the Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn) asked about proliferation beyond India and Pakistan. Of course the task force discussed how to prevent further damage to global non-proliferation regimes being caused by exports of nuclear technology and know-how from India or Pakistan.

Both countries have made welcome statements on their respective export policies, but what is needed now is national legislation, incorporating the policy guidelines and control lists of the two major export control regimes—the missile technology control regime and the nuclear suppliers group. The first of those serves to limit missile technology and the second places limitations on the export of nuclear technology, as well as dual-use technology that could assist in nuclear development. The task force agreed to pursue ways of giving India and Pakistan practical help and advice to assist in achieving that goal.

Beyond the arms control aspect, there is the new and disturbing dimension to bilateral relations between India and Pakistan and their historic differences. The international community has emphasised the importance of India and Pakistan addressing, as a matter of urgency, the root causes of tension between them, including that raised by many hon. Members—the long-standing issue of Kashmir. We have urged both sides to make a fresh start in their bilateral relations and restore momentum to their dialogue.

In that context, we welcome the meeting between the Prime Ministers of India and Pakistan in Colombo on 29 July. That was an important step forward in bilateral relations, and we hope that the follow-up talks now planned between senior officials will lead to early progress on the issues that divide those countries.

Only through bilateral dialogue will India and Pakistan find durable ways of solving the problem of Kashmir, but Britain has always stressed strongly the fact that, although we do not and cannot seek to internationalise the problem, we and the rest of the international community stand ready to help to look for practical solutions to the problems in Kashmir, if that would be helpful to India and Pakistan.

Kashmir inevitably remains a source of tension between India and Pakistan, and a solution must be found through the dialogue route that hon. Members have requested. To endure, any solution that is acceptable to both sides must take account of the wishes of those who live in Kashmir. Many people of Kashmiri origin live in this country and continue to take a strong interest in the future of Kashmir within the Indian subcontinent. Hon. Members have mentioned the need for both sides to behave responsibly, and we appeal to both India and Pakistan to ensure that the rhetoric is about seeking solutions, not creating tensions.

The regional security dimension of the tests was clearly recognised at the task force meeting. The group agreed to encourage implementation by India and Pakistan of existing confidence-building and security-building measures, to which hon. Members have referred. A great many of those measures have been agreed by the two sides over the years, but have not been put into operation. The best way to build confidence and reduce tension would be for India and Pakistan to take the non-proliferation steps urged upon them by the international community and make early progress in their bilateral dialogue.

Britain is actively seeking nuclear de-escalation, so we now have the authority to demand that others also examine their roles. Specifically, as my hon. Friends have said, the strategic defence review contains several points of real significance. We have reduced the stockpile of available warheads and there is only one Trident submarine on deterrent patrol at any time. It carries 48 warheads, which is half the ceiling announced by the previous Government. It may interest my hon. Friend the Member for Pendle to learn that the missiles will be de-targeted. No cities are targeted, which means that it would be several days before the missiles were ready to fire. That is a genuine confidence-building measure.

There is no need for Britain to buy more Trident missiles. We have declared missile levels—a declaration that is unique among nuclear weapons states—and our total stocks of fissile materials. We have also declared the limited amounts of material that will be held outside safeguards for defence purposes, and we are transferring into safeguards material that is no longer required for that purpose. Those measures are designed to build a climate and a framework in which transparency is the order of the day. We must make it clear to other nuclear weapons states exactly where Britain stands.

We also intend to pursue with considerable vigour several specific points. Mention has been made of the fissile material cut-off treaty. We believe that that is the logical next step, and we shall pursue it vigorously both because we want to see India and Pakistan involved in the negotiations in Geneva and because we are prepared to be involved in those negotiations. We want the United States, Russia and China to ratify the comprehensive test ban treaty, and we want India and Pakistan to sign the treaty, which would allow it to come into operation and, significantly, trigger the verification mechanisms that would span the planet. That is a massively important step forward, which is real and achievable.

We are exploring the possibility of improving security assurances to some non-nuclear weapons states beyond the existing nuclear weapons-free zones. We have already agreed to work on security assurances within the conference on disarmament. The British Government are taking practical measures that we believe will enhance the climate of confidence and make the world a safer place. In that light, we are in a position to condemn the nuclear tests by India and Pakistan. However, we urge our friends in those countries to step back from the nuclear threshold, even at this late stage, and to join Britain in actively searching for ways of making the world safer, of decelerating the nuclear arms race and of seeking the mechanics of achieving a practical global elimination of nuclear weapons.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at eleven minutes to Two o'clock.

House of Commons

Wednesday 2 September 1998

The House met at half-past Two o'clock, notice having been given by MADAM SPEAKER, *pursuant to Standing Order No. 13 (Earlier meeting of House in certain circumstances).*

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Omagh

2.34 pm

The Prime Minister (Mr. Tony Blair): With permission, Madam Speaker, I will make a statement on the bomb in Omagh.

At 3.10 pm on 15 August, a car bomb consisting of 200 to 300 lb of home-made explosive blew up in Market street in the centre of Omagh as a community festival was in progress. The explosion brought devastation and tragedy to the heart of the town. Twenty-eight people were killed—the highest death toll in any single incident in Northern Ireland. Seventeen were Roman Catholic, 11 were Protestant, 11 were under the age of 18. The dead included three from the Republic, and two from Spain. Over 200 people were injured, many very seriously. More than 50 continue to receive medical treatment in hospitals around the country.

The whole House will want to join me in expressing our disgust, outrage and total condemnation of those who were responsible. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."]

There was a telephone warning at 2.30 pm to Ulster Television. It spoke of a bomb close to the courthouse in Main street. The Royal Ulster Constabulary responded accordingly and moved people away from the courthouse down Market street. The bomb went off 400 yd from the courthouse in Market street, in the very area to which people had been directed. The bomb was in a car in the street outside busy shops at a busy time of a busy day. The resulting carnage was inevitable. We reject with contempt the excuses of those who have tried to explain it away.

The atrocity was later admitted by the so-called Real IRA, a renegade republican group. All the political parties in Northern Ireland condemned the attack unequivocally. Hon. Members from Northern Ireland and those of us who have been to Omagh, including myself, the Deputy Prime Minister and the Secretary of State, have seen the terrible pain and grief that were inflicted, and the trauma that has resulted for many. No one can fail to have been moved by the sight of the procession of coffins that we saw on our television screens as those who were killed in the explosion were buried. Again, the whole House extends its deepest sympathies to the victims of this wicked attack, and to all their families and their friends.

We should also take this opportunity to appreciate once again the magnificent work that was carried out by the emergency and health services. In dreadfully difficult and distressing circumstances, they did their utmost to rescue the victims of this outrage, to tend to the injured and to comfort the shocked. They went through experiences that no one should have to face. Their courage and dedication were remarkable. They are remarkable people, and we in the House salute them.

When I visited the Royal Victoria hospital the following day, I saw for myself not only the professional skill of the medical staff but the hugely important comforting and counselling role that they played. They have my and our whole-hearted admiration and respect.

I also believe that the RUC deserve the highest praise. On many occasions in the past, their skill and courage have prevented similar scenes of carnage, but, perhaps as a result, the warning times have been shortening. On this occasion, they were helpless in the face of the misleading warning that was given by those cowards who carried out this attack, but the RUC's subsequent actions attracted deserved gratitude from all sides of the community.

We have known tragedy in Northern Ireland many times before; but this was an indiscriminate attack on a whole community, bringing nothing but further grief to the long-suffering people of Northern Ireland. It was a deliberate attempt, by a small group of extremists with no moral or political support anywhere, to wreck the Good Friday agreement and the foundation for a lasting and peaceful Northern Ireland which the agreement offers. It was a cynical attempt to provoke a violent reaction from others.

Those aims, however, have not succeeded, and they will not be allowed to succeed. That has been the response not only of the two Governments and the political parties but also, overwhelmingly, of the people of Omagh and elsewhere in Northern Ireland and the Republic. It was on the lips of virtually all those to whom I spoke, even those who had suffered most, when I visited Omagh just over a week ago.

The aim of those bombers was, as I say, not just to kill innocent people but to strike at the very heart of the peace process. The best response that we can give, therefore, is not to abandon the Good Friday agreement but, on the contrary, to carry it forward vigorously, to deny these people the very objective they seek, and to continue to work for a better future for Northern Ireland that puts the past behind us.

The agreement reached on Good Friday was emphatically endorsed in referendums north and south. The election in June underlined the wish of the majority of people in Northern Ireland to reach for a new and peaceful future. Those who continue with terror have no support, no votes, no mandate from any part of any community in the whole of the island of Ireland.

Both we and the Irish Government are fully committed to implementing the will of the people of Ireland, north and south. Further political progress is by far the best answer to violence, and, as I have said, it is what the people of Northern Ireland demand and deserve.

I therefore welcome the efforts to achieve this of the right hon. Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble) and the hon. Member for Newry and Armagh (Mr. Mallon)—the First Minister and First Deputy Minister designate of the new Northern Ireland Assembly—and of other politicians in Northern Ireland. I welcome yesterday's statement by Sinn Fein, making clearer than ever its rejection of violence and commitment to peaceful means, and the initiative of the First Minister and the First Deputy Minister designate in calling a meeting of the leaders of all the political parties next week.

[The Prime Minister]

I welcome, too, the latest announcement today of the appointment of Martin McGuinness to work with the Independent Commission on Decommissioning to facilitate the process of decommissioning. This is a practical, important step forward in the implementation of all aspects of the Good Friday agreement. Under that agreement, the decommissioning of paramilitary weapons within two years is a vital part of a lasting settlement.

This is a difficult process, and there will be many more difficulties along the way; but I have no doubt that things are on the move, and moving in the right direction. In the wake of Omagh, people of both communities are determined as never before to overcome past divisions and to build new confidence and trust, and we shall do all we can to help this process.

But we must also take strong and decisive steps to deal with this unrepresentative minority who want to use violence to undermine this peaceful future. Amid what I believe to be unprecedented co-operation between Governments and police forces, we continue to provide maximum support to the RUC and the Garda as they hunt for those responsible for the Omagh bomb and other outrages. I can assure the House that the investigation to bring to justice those responsible is being pursued with the utmost intensity and with complete unity of purpose between the British and the Irish authorities.

To complement and reinforce those security operations, both we and the Government of the Republic propose to strengthen our anti-terrorist laws to help bring to justice those who are still dedicated to violence. I am grateful to you, Madam Speaker, for agreeing to this recall of Parliament to enable early action to be taken. The Irish Parliament is also meeting today to discuss a wide range of new proposals designed to strengthen its own terrorist legislation and, in many respects, bring it into line with our own.

The House will shortly be debating our own proposals. My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary will explain the full details, but I believe that they are a proportionate, targeted response to deal with small, evil groups of violent men who seek to wreck the hopes for peace for which the great majority yearn and have voted. Our basic aim is to make it easier to achieve convictions for membership of the organisations concerned, in particular by changing the rules of evidence in a way that is tough but is fully thought through, and fully in line with the rule of law and our commitments under the European convention on human rights.

The House is also well aware that terrorism is an increasing threat world-wide. The horrific bomb attacks on the United States embassies in Kenya and Tanzania in early August brought that home yet again, as did the more recent bomb in a restaurant in South Africa. As I know from my own discussions with other leaders, not least in Europe, the international community is and should be determined to respond uncompromisingly. Britain must play an active part in the international battle against terrorism, and avoid becoming any kind of haven for international terrorists and their supporters. We are therefore taking the opportunity of Parliament's recall to put into law long-held plans to make it a criminal offence of conspiracy to commit offences outside the UK.

We will not forget the horror of Omagh, but I say this to those who perpetrated that outrage: "You sought to wreck the agreement, and you failed. You sought to divide the community, and you failed. You sought to win new support, and you failed. You failed because violence and terror represent the past in Northern Ireland, and democracy and peace represent the future in Northern Ireland." [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."]

There are few more important challenges to democracy, and therefore to this House, than terrorism in all its forms. We must fight it vigorously wherever it appears, while holding fast to our democratic principles and the rule of law. We must also redouble our efforts to carry through the political settlement in Northern Ireland, which alone can bring lasting peace. That is the approach that I commend to the House.

Mr. William Hague (Richmond, Yorks): When the Prime Minister speaks of the outrage and horror of the Omagh bomb, he speaks for both sides of the House. Each one of us has been appalled by the scenes of destruction in Market street and the tragedy wrought by the violence. Each one of us has been moved by the courage and professionalism of the emergency services and the Royal Ulster Constabulary, as the Prime Minister described. Each one of us has been given hope by the determination shown by the people of Omagh not to let the men of violence win.

Like the Prime Minister, we utterly reject the excuses of those who carried out that atrocity. Like him, we extend our deepest sympathy to the devastated families involved. Like him, we wish to see no effort spared to bring to justice the evil murderers responsible for that.

The answer to one question above all must be clear in our minds. Why did those murderers commit their terrible crime? Why did they do it? The answer is cold and simple: they are prepared to do anything to prevent the people of Northern Ireland from living in peace, in the hope that they can achieve through violence what they know they cannot achieve through democratic persuasion.

Does the Prime Minister agree that anyone who thinks that has misjudged the people of Omagh, the House and the people of the entire United Kingdom? Is he aware that the Government will have the support of the Opposition if they do everything that they can to ensure that the terrorists do not succeed? He will also continue to have our support in implementing the Good Friday agreement and in carrying through the efforts of this Government and the Government of my right hon. Friend the Member for Huntingdon (Mr. Major) to bring lasting peace.

Does the Prime Minister agree that, although we should welcome the words of the Sinn Fein president yesterday, tough words must now be matched by clear deeds, as the Good Friday agreement effectively links progress on decommissioning with the early release of convicted terrorists and membership of the Northern Ireland Executive? We welcome the first move by Sinn Fein to co-operate with the decommissioning commission by appointing a representative to work with it. I welcome what the Prime Minister said in his statement about the importance of the decommissioning of all paramilitary explosives and guns over the next two years, as agreed under the Good Friday agreement, supported by Sinn Fein and the loyalist paramilitaries.

If Sinn Fein's words are to ring true, we must now look for the actual dismantling of the apparatus of terror that paramilitaries on both sides have held over the people of

Northern Ireland for so long. Can the Prime Minister assure us that terrorist prisoners will not be released early until the process of giving up guns and bombs has actually begun?

The Opposition will support the Government's legislation today, but can I put to the Prime Minister two specific concerns? The first is that, although today's proceedings and those in the Irish Republic will bring the law north and south of the border more closely in line, there will be one glaring difference. As such store is now being set by having the same laws in the United Kingdom and the Irish Republic, does the right hon. Gentleman not agree that it was a mistake last autumn, as we argued then, to remove from our statute book the reserve power of internment, a power that is retained in the Irish Republic?

The second concern is that, although we support the legislation because everything possible needs to be done to combat terrorism, we inevitably worry about the effectiveness and the operation of any legislation that is so hastily conceived and executed. Will the Prime Minister agree to a full review of the effectiveness of this legislation, to be published before the Government come back to the House to seek its renewal in 12 months' time?

I welcome the release announced today of Guardsmen Fisher and Wright. The Prime Minister will know that my colleagues and I have raised their case many times, and we are delighted that their cases have been reviewed and that they are now free.

The Prime Minister: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for his response, particularly for the words that he said about the emergency services and the RUC. It is also right that we should not forget the role of the Army in this. The Army and RAF helicopters also played a vital part in moving people from the scene of the incident, and the death toll would have been considerably higher had they not done so. Anyone who has travelled in and visited regularly Northern Ireland knows the debt of gratitude that we owe our armed forces for the work they do there.

I agree with the right hon. Gentleman that those who think that violence is the way forward have misjudged the mood of people. I was struck in Omagh by the fact that people from all parts of the community and those who supported all different political parties within Northern Ireland were unanimous in their view that the Good Friday agreement was the way forward. I pay tribute to the work that was done before this Government came to office by the right hon. Member for Huntingdon (Mr. Major) to try to bring about a process of peace.

I also agree with the right hon. Gentleman about the Good Friday agreement itself, and the words that are in it. All the parts of the agreement have to be read as a whole, whether on prisoner release, decommissioning or any of the rest of it. It is worth pointing out that, contrary to what some people sometimes say, decommissioning is part of the agreement. It contains an obligation for all weapons to be decommissioned within a two-year period. I hope that the process begins as soon as possible. We welcome what has happened today as a practical step on the way to that.

The right hon. Gentleman raised two specific concerns about the legislation. We had to make a judgment about internment. We have made it clear that we do not rule anything out for ever, but my judgment is that the history of internment as it operates here and in the Irish Republic is different.

All the way through, we are trying to take carefully targeted measures that allow us to deal with these terrorist groups, but do not provoke such a backlash in other parts of the community that they undermine the fight that we are trying to secure. I agree that that is a matter of judgment, but that is our judgment; although, as I say, we rule nothing out for the future, should things be necessary. Although the Irish Government have the power of internment on their statute book, they do not intend to implement it at this stage.

As for the points about measures being hastily conceived, I believe that again, as a result of having targeted the measure carefully, we have steered the right course between a knee-jerk reaction that introduces measures that are not well thought through and measures that will give us practical help and assistance in trying to deal with those people who are members of the relevant proscribed organisations.

But, of course, this has to be seen against the background of the review of the terrorist legislation which is going on at present and will be published in due course by my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary. I think that the publication date will be within the next six months. I cannot promise to have it done before the House reconvenes, but it will allow us to examine the ambit of terrorist legislation, how it works and how this particular legislation is operating. It will also give us the chance to consider some of the proposals being made by the RUC and the Garda for further tightening measures.

The process is already under way that allows us to analyse what we need to do for the future, but I believe that people expect us to do two things in the wake of Omagh. One is to take what security measures we responsibly can to try to deal with the small remaining groups engaged in terror. The second is to continue with the political process. I believe that the events of the past two weeks have shown that the will exists right across the community in Northern Ireland, and certainly in the House, to do both those things.

Mr. Paddy Ashdown (Yeovil): I echo the comments already made, without necessarily having to repeat them, about the atrocity of Omagh, and especially the welcome given to Sinn Fein's helpful statement yesterday. Perhaps out of the horrors of Omagh we are at last going to see a real and historic opportunity for the people of Ireland to come together to build a peace for the future. In so far as this legislation is aimed at that purpose, we support it.

We are, however, glad that the Government appear to have amended the original draft legislation that we saw, because there were and remain some concerns. We are especially glad that the Government have agreed that there needs to be more than the statement of a single police officer to deal with the issue of proscribed organisations. We are also glad that there will be an opportunity annually to review and renew the legislation.

Many of the concerns will have been answered, but is the Prime Minister aware that one, it seems, has not? It is the Government's decision to add into the legislation matters that are nothing to do with Northern Ireland. I deeply regret that. I regret that, by adding complicating extra measures, which are, in my view, unnecessary, the Government will not have given the House a full and ample opportunity to debate the matter properly.

Nevertheless, the Government can count on our support, because we believe that these are exceptional times, which require exceptional actions—for three

[Mr. Paddy Ashdown]

reasons. First, having maintained the cross-party unity on Northern Ireland matters that has subsisted in the House for 25 years, it would be wrong to allow it to be destroyed by the blood and atrocities of Omagh. The second reason is that precisely parallel legislation is now going through the Irish Parliament. We have long been in favour of that, and it would be a tragedy if the first attempt ended in failure when it ought to be a model for the future. I hope that the Prime Minister will confirm that that is what he would like.

Finally, the atrocity committed on that terrible day in Omagh was not against the actions of a single Government whom one group of people may or may not support, but was designed to undermine and destroy the sovereign will of the Irish people, who, in a referendum, overwhelmingly expressed the desire for peace. We cannot allow that to succeed.

The Prime Minister: On the right hon. Gentleman's points about the legislation, it was always our intention that the statement of a police officer could not of itself alone secure a conviction. I think that an annual review is simply sensible in legislation of this sort.

There are two reasons for the international measures. First, they have long been on the stocks, as it were. Under the last Government and under this Government, we have been waiting for the right opportunity. People expect us to be taking action not merely in respect of acts of terrorism within the United Kingdom but in respect of people here conspiring to commit such acts abroad. I think that, after the events of the past few weeks, that feeling is stronger rather than weaker.

In respect of the legislation in the Irish Republic, of the many differences between the situation now and that which has existed over a considerable period in Northern Ireland, one stands out above all others—the co-operation between ourselves and the Government in the Republic. We are working together. One of the reasons that we thought it right to seek the recall of Parliament is not just that it would, I think, be unwise for us to proceed without legislation, but that it is right to proceed step by step with the Irish Government, showing that there is a determination, in the Republic of Ireland and in Northern Ireland, to hunt down those responsible and to bring them to justice, recognising that this is a different situation and that those people have no support and no votes anywhere.

Mr. Chris Mullin (Sunderland, South): Does the Prime Minister recognise that every sensible person will share his desire to see the perpetrators of the terrible atrocity at Omagh and their supporters behind bars, but that there is no substitute for patient detective work, resulting in credible evidence and the conviction of the right people? If we get this wrong, we shall end up creating a political base for a tiny, isolated sect, which has no political base at the moment. That is what has happened in the past, and we must avoid it in the future.

If we are to avoid that happening again, we must have credible evidence, capable of belief in court. Therefore, will the Prime Minister consider accepting two of the amendments that I have tabled, one of which would require the RUC to take audio recordings of interviews with suspects—which, incredibly, it has resisted for years? The second would require the presence of a solicitor, as is required in most of the rest of the United Kingdom. Will my right hon. Friend make the Bill conditional on that happening? He will find that all the mainly bogus objections raised to such matters will melt away like snow on a volcano if those provisions are a condition of being allowed to arrest people in the way that the Bill proposes.

The Prime Minister: First of all, my hon. Friend's concerns are perfectly reasonable—I accept that. I accept, too, that we have to beware of repeating any mistakes made in the past. As I said, we do not want to provoke a backlash which will give those people a political base. However, we must also recognise that we are dealing with a different situation—with a very small group of people who have no base and no support, but who have the capacity to engage in the most appalling acts of terror, as we have seen. Measures have to be focused, targeted and responsibly done.

I take it that my hon. Friend accepts the need for some form of legislation. On his first point, on audio recording, that is now the law, and it is being introduced as quickly as possible. I have no doubt that my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary will say some more about that.

On the presence of a solicitor, it is precisely to deal with the European convention on human rights that we made it a condition that people have to see a solicitor. My right hon. Friend will also draw attention to the other safeguards that exist in respect of the presence of a solicitor. We do not believe that it is right to amend the legislation in that way for reasons that my right hon. Friend will give, but we are acutely conscious of the need to steer a path between carefully targeted action and action that could result in the miscarriage of justice. Obviously, we do not want the latter, and that is why we have been so careful to frame the legislation in that way.

Mr. William Thompson (West Tyrone): First, I welcome the Prime Minister's statement. All hon. Members who have spoken reflected the view of the whole House this afternoon when they offered their sympathy and condolence to the people of Omagh, especially all those who have lost loved ones and those who are still recovering from serious injuries—many are still in a serious condition.

Omagh is in my constituency—indeed, it is my home town. I was born close by, and have spent all my life there. I went to school in Omagh and was employed by the local council for nine years, after which I had a business which has served the people of Omagh for the past 30 years. It is a town where people have always got on well together, and, despite several bomb attacks and a number of murders of security personnel and others during the years of our troubles, in the main those good relationships have remained.

Saturday 15 August was a busy day in the town. The weather was good, and many mothers and children were together, no doubt buying school uniforms and getting ready to go back to school. Indeed, as the Prime Minister said, a festival was taking place too, and a number of floats were expected to parade through the town at 3.30 pm.

Just after 2.30 pm, a male caller made a call to the Ulster Television newsroom saying that a bomb had been placed outside the courthouse at the top of Main street,

and it was due to go off in about half an hour. Three minutes later, a second call was made stating that the bomb would go off in 15 minutes. A further call was made to the Samaritans.

The police immediately went into action and expeditiously cleared the area round the courthouse, routeing many people to the bottom of the town into Market street, where they believed they would be safe. Later, a policeman standing in the centre of the town was expecting the bomb to go off to his right, at the courthouse—but it went off to his left, and he realised that the blast had taken place not at the courthouse but in Market street where the people had assembled.

That policeman quickly made his way down to Market street, but he was not prepared for what he met; it was utter carnage. He and his police colleagues were met with horrific sights, screams for help and mangled bodies, terrible injuries and blood everywhere. A water main had burst, and the water was washing parts of bodies down the side of the street. No doubt those sights will remain with them and with fellow officers who were quickly on the scene to help; those memories come back in their sleep at night as they relive the events they saw.

Like the Prime Minister, I wish to put on the record the excellent work done by the emergency services—the police, the Army, the RAF, the fire brigade and the ambulance men, and especially the members of the public who rushed to the scene and did everything asked of them.

The scenes at the local hospital were equally harrowing, as the numbers of the injured increased and relatives thronged the corridors searching for their loved ones whom they knew had been in the town and were unaccounted for. Again, I place on the record the valiant work done by the surgeons, the other doctors and nurses, the paramedics, and everyone else at the hospital. They did excellent work in stabilising many of the injured, in performing emergency life-saving surgery, and in making people ready for transfer to other acute hospitals.

There were also the ministers of religion and the people from the social services and the district council, who were called upon at short notice to deal with traumatised people, and who quickly made counselling services available. An incident centre was soon set up at the local leisure centre, and the work of collating information and identifying the dead and injured went on right through the night and the next day.

No one who was there will forget the scenes at the centre, as lists of the identified victims from the various hospitals were put on notice boards. Above all, there was the anguish of those whose relatives were unaccounted for, and who waited with decaying hope for news of their loved ones.

I pay tribute to the various hospitals that took the injured: Altnagelvin hospital, Erne hospital, South Tyrone hospital, the Royal Victoria hospital, Musgrave Park hospital, the City hospital and the Ulster hospital all readily received victims, and did magnificent work in treating them.

In all, as the Prime Minister said, 28 people lost their lives. Bombs are indiscriminate: they kill Protestants, Roman Catholics and Mormons; they kill all types of people; they kill children, mothers, grandmothers, sons and daughters. There are many people in Omagh today who mourn the loss of their loved ones.

I should like to thank the Prime Minister, the Deputy Prime Minister and the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland for coming and visiting us in Omagh. I should also like to thank the Prince of Wales for coming. He has known something of sorrow and distress, and when he came to Omagh, he readily identified with us there, and we felt that he empathised with us in our tragedy.

I pay tribute to the press and the other media. Sometimes they are criticised, but, except for one unfortunate programme, they behaved with extreme decency, were very understanding and did a good job.

Every decent person in Northern Ireland wants that bomb to be the last. We never want to see a bomb outrage like that again. The Real IRA has claimed responsibility for the bomb outrage. The security forces are convinced that the bomb was a deliberate attempt to kill men, women and children, and I agree with their assessment. It is hard to believe that people with such evil intentions are in our midst, but it is true. They have killed before, and they are quite prepared to do it again. They must be stopped.

I therefore welcome, as far as they go, the changes that will be made in the law in order to help defeat terrorism. Of course they are too late and too little, and no doubt, when we debate the Criminal Justice (Terrorism and Conspiracy) Bill, there will be an opportunity to say more about that.

I thank all hon. Members for their sympathy and their condolences this afternoon, which I am sure will be very much appreciated by my people in Omagh.

The Prime Minister: I am sure that everyone will respect and agree with the sentiments expressed by the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): In view of the criticism, which a number of people have made, that the Government are going too far, what would have been the position if, following the terrible tragedy at Omagh, and against the background of what the Irish Government are proposing at this very moment in the Irish Parliament, the British Government had taken no further action against terrorism? If that had been the position, how would that have gone down among those in Omagh who lost their loved ones, and others who wait at the bedside while their dearest and loved ones receive the most urgent medical treatment, and, for all we know, may be seriously injured for the rest of their lives?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is right; I do not think that it would have been understood if we had not responded. We must respond carefully and responsibly, but respond we must; first, to show that, both in the Irish Republic and in Northern Ireland, we will have the toughest possible responsible measures against terrorism. Secondly, because this is a group with absolutely no interest in the political process, it is important to have measures that enable us to deal with its members on the basis of stopping them committing these appalling acts of terrorism.

Mr. Tom King (Bridgwater): If it is our dearest wish that this is the last such outrage that ever occurs in Northern Ireland or in the island of Ireland, and as, if terrorism is to be eradicated, it will be necessary for co-operation of the closest kind between the Irish and

[Mr. Tom King]

British Governments and people to continue, will the Prime Minister accept my support for the fact that Parliament meets today, on the day that the Dail is meeting, to discuss legislation that can combine against the common enemy? Will he recognise that, although, over the years, there have been periods of good co-operation, it has often been difficult to sustain it throughout that period? As the two Governments are joint trustees of the Good Friday agreement, I very much hope that it will be the wish—I am sure it is—of the House that that close co-operation in dealing with any remaining terrorists will be fully sustained.

The Prime Minister: I agree with that entirely. As the right hon. Gentleman knows better than anyone else, the fact that the British and Irish Governments are working so closely together, and the fact that public opinion in the whole of the island of Ireland, in the Irish Republic and in Northern Ireland, in the United Kingdom—all that opinion—is behind the agreement, is vastly different from anything that has been known before. Those elements provide the context within which these measures can be carefully targeted—made to work—but they act alongside a political process that gives us a chance of a lasting, peaceful settlement.

Mr. John Hume (Foyle): May I express my deep appreciation to the Prime Minister for what he has said today, and also to the leaders of the two main Opposition parties? I have no doubt that, as the hon. Member for West Tyrone (Mr. Thompson) made clear, what they have said will also be deeply appreciated by the people of Omagh.

In the past 30 years, the people of Northern Ireland have suffered terribly. One in 500 has lost a life, and one in 50 has been maimed or injured—yet far the worst atrocity in all those 30 years is what happened in Omagh, where 28 people lost their lives, some of them children. I have seen many of the deaths, but one of my worst experiences was looking at the coffins of those children, with life in their faces as they lay dead in their coffins.

As the Prime Minister rightly said, the objective of the people who did that was to derail the agreement that had been endorsed so overwhelmingly, not by this House alone, but by the people, north and south. The powerful reaction of the people—the people of Omagh in particular, but the people north and south—demonstrated that our common humanity entirely transcended the divisions of our people.

It is our duty now to translate that common humanity into reality by working to implement the agreement that others tried to derail, to create a society in which the differences of our people are fully respected and in which we work together—and, by doing so, to build an eternal monument to those who have lost their lives on the streets of Omagh: that they will be the last generation to have so suffered.

I received a copy of the legislation that is before us just as I arrived here. It is detailed, and very important. Given the statements about it that have been made by leading lawyers and human rights groups, my party and I will have to study it in depth before responding to it; we should not respond in a hurry. I call on everyone, however, to give full support to the authorities on both sides of our border, so that those who carried out this terrible atrocity can be brought to justice.

The Prime Minister: I fully share the vision of the future that the hon. Gentleman has set out, and has done so much to promote. As for the legislation, of course it is important. It very much follows what I said when I went to Omagh myself, but of course it is important for us to study it, assess it and see how it works. That is precisely why we shall have to keep it under review and renew it each time, as a House. There is that built-in mechanism to ensure that it works properly, and in the way we intended it to work.

Mr. Peter Brooke (Cities of London and Westminster): I welcome the Prime Minister's statement. On top of today's Bill, however, can he be more specific about the improvement in security co-operation with the Irish Government since Omagh, to which the Secretary of State referred in an article in *The Observer* on Sunday?

The Prime Minister: Without going into the details of the co-operation—which I know the right hon. Gentleman would not expect me to do—I can say that the actual working together of the Garda and the Royal Ulster Constabulary, and the services on either side of the border, has been immensely close. That has applied both to the attempt to track down the people responsible for this—to track down the members of this organisation—and, in particular, to working extremely closely in respect of any intelligence that can be gathered to prevent any similar attacks in the future.

Most of the people I have talked to who are engaged in the police or the security services in Northern Ireland say that the co-operation is closer than anything they have ever known. I think that—as the right hon. Member for Bridgwater (Mr. King) said a moment ago—that co-operation is in part driven and underpinned by the will of the people, north and south, which is the importance of the Good Friday agreement and the referendum. Those two elements, in combination, give us the best chance.

Mr. Tony Benn (Chesterfield): While sharing everything that the Prime Minister said about the horror of the Omagh bombing, may I plead with him to take an historical perspective? Violence has characterised the relations between Britain and Ireland over many years, and many of us have sat in this House when anti-terrorist legislation has been introduced, yet the only gain there has ever been was when this Government had the wisdom to open negotiations with the nationalists, which made possible the Belfast agreement, the referendum, the Assembly and the prospect of peace in the future. May I urge the Prime Minister not to take any action that might look as if it were going back to some of the old legislation, which was repressive and ineffective, and did not contribute?

On the wider question of terrorism world wide, the world was shocked by the bombings in Nairobi and Dar es Salaam. However, I was astonished that the Prime Minister supported the bombing of Sudan and Afghanistan, as it is contrary to the UN charter and international law that any country can bomb any other country in reprisal for anything done to its own nationals in a third country.

I finish on the historical perspective. Will the Prime Minister remember that, 100 years ago today, 10,000 Sudanese were killed by the Army under General Kitchener? We may not remember that, but people in Sudan do. They were bitterly disappointed that we did not support them when their factory near Khartoum was bombed by the United States, which has been quite unwilling to agree to an inspection of that site to see whether the bombing was justified.

The Prime Minister: On my right hon. Friend's latter point, I am afraid that I simply have to disagree with him. Countries that are state sponsors of terrorism must recognise that action will be taken if they sponsor terrorism and if terrorists based in their country take action against their nationals abroad. I believe that article 51 of the UN charter provides a justification for that. I also point out that, although no one was killed in the strike against the Al Shifa factory in Sudan, almost 300 people were killed in Kenya and Tanzania in those bomb outrages—95 per cent. of whom were innocent passers-by.

On my right hon. Friend's first point, my view is that we must learn from our history, but we should not be mesmerised by or live in it. We must recognise the importance of targeting the measures carefully and of taking account of the possibility of a backlash in the republican community. That we have done.

We must also recognise the two big differences in the present situation. First, we march in step with the Irish Government. As we have said before, that is a huge difference from previous situations, and a huge difference from the history of the past 30 years and measures which have been taken. Secondly, we are not dealing with terrorist groups with a political basis, as was the case with the old terrorist groups which operated in Ireland for a long period. They had real support, real votes, and a political basis. We are talking about people who have no support anywhere and no votes, yet are prepared to use weapons of terror. In the circumstances, we must be prepared for a carefully moderated, sensible and well-targeted response.

We can have all the political processes in the world, and we can have complete agreement across all the mainstream political parties—indeed, we have that now in Northern Ireland—but the terrorists could carry on operating. In the exceptional circumstances that exist, I believe that we are right and justified in saying that we have a political process that must work, but that we must take exceptional measures to mop up the last recalcitrant and renegade terrorist groups that are prepared to threaten the future of Northern Ireland.

Mr. Elfyn Llwyd (Meirionnydd Nant Conwy): In fully endorsing what the Prime Minister said about the vile acts perpetrated on the people of Omagh and about the real and urgent need to bring those responsible to book, may I say that the time allotted for scrutiny of the Bill is totally and utterly inadequate? If there has been an intention for some time to combat international terrorism, why has it not been mentioned in any Queen's Speech since I have been a Member of this place?

The Prime Minister: On the last point, measures to make conspiracy to commit acts of terrorism abroad a criminal offence here have been discussed in this House over a long period. The previous Government had a Bill. There was a private Member's Bill; there was a discussion about that. We have always made it clear that we support action on that front. I think that it is the right time to do it, given that we have measures that we are taking against terrorism ourselves, and measures that are necessary to defeat terrorism abroad, examples of which we have seen just in the past few weeks.

As for the time for scrutiny of the Bill, again, let me emphasise: the parts of this that we have done—evidence of a senior police officer being admissible and inferences that can be drawn from the refusal of people to mention facts that they later rely on—were, of course, highlighted in precisely the terms in which they are in this legislation in the statement that I made at the time of Omagh; both of them are here before us.

We have said that we will review at greater length other measures that have been proposed by the police and security services on both sides of the border, precisely because we have been concerned not to rush into legislation, but in the end those two specific things that are in the Bill are very carefully measured and very carefully targeted. They march us, as I say, completely step by step and in line with what is happening in the Irish Republic.

People simply would not understand it if the Irish Government were meeting today and the Dail was meeting in session passing laws that allowed them to act against these terrorist groups in the Republic of Ireland, and we were not meeting here to do the same in the United Kingdom's House of Commons.

Mr. Denis MacShane (Rotherham): In welcoming my right hon. Friend's statement, I also thank you, Madam Speaker, for agreeing to the recall of Parliament, because, unlike the biblical law of an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, a body for a body, this shows law being passed in this Parliament to deal with terrorism. I also welcome the fact that we are meeting at the same time as the Irish Parliament—again, I think, for the first time. Perhaps in our British Isles, the different nations, peoples and faiths can at long last learn to live and to co-operate together.

Is my right hon. Friend satisfied that this legislation is fully in accord with the European convention on human rights and other international conventions, and that what we are about here is the creation of some new international law, acting jointly with Ireland and other sovereign democracies, against that threat of terrorism?

The Prime Minister: Yes. Our view is that it is fully in line with the European convention on human rights—in particular, it is in line with the safeguards that arise as a result of the Murray case before the European Court of Human Rights. We believe that it is, as I say, a targeted and judicious response to the acts of terrorism with which we are faced.

Mr. David Trimble (Upper Bann): I endorse everything that has been said by hon. Members about the atrocity in Omagh, particularly the comments of my hon. Friend the Member for West Tyrone (Mr. Thompson), but in looking at the situation at Omagh does the Prime Minister agree that the tragedy there came as no surprise and that there had been, over the previous months, a series of bombs planned and planted by the group calling itself

[Mr. David Trimble]

the Real IRA? Indeed, just a fortnight before Omagh, a bomb in Banbridge could have had exactly the same consequences. It too had a misleading warning and could have resulted in carnage, had not a member of the RUC been vigilant enough to spot what had happened.

As the Prime Minister has said, this was done, obviously, with the intention of destroying the hopes that people in Northern Ireland have that we are coming out of violence and coming into a new era in which people will be able to work together, and I agree entirely with what he has said about the need to ensure that those hopes are not frustrated. I am sure that by far the greater number of people in Northern Ireland are determined to ensure that those hopes are realised, but, in pressing on with the agreement, does the Prime Minister agree that it is important that we ensure that the integrity of the agreement is sustained? There are a number of things that are linked together and the need for those who have been involved in terrorism to show they have left that clearly and decisively behind is underlined by what has happened. That is why it is necessary for us to focus again on issues such as decommissioning.

On that, I welcome the step that has been taken today, provided that it is only, as it should be, a first step and that it will be soon followed by other steps. We, of course, will take what opportunities we have to press on the leadership of Sinn Fein and other paramilitary-related parties the need for them to take this issue seriously now.

Is there not also a case for the Government to look more closely at some of their own procedures? I am thinking about prisoner releases. There are safeguards, but there is a need to scrutinise them more carefully to ensure that none of those released goes to augment any dissident group. Is the Prime Minister disturbed to learn, as I was, that a leading member of the Real IRA was released—I think by the Irish Government—some months ago as a so-called confidence-building measure at the request of Sinn Fein? We must ensure that that does not happen again.

We shall deal later with various security measures that are being brought forward. The Prime Minister has mentioned other matters. The House will be aware that the Chief Constable of the RUC has mentioned half a dozen measures that he considers important. I appreciate that the Government are looking at that list, although it is the same as the previous Chief Constable's list. We have been waiting five years for one Government or another to take action on it. Can we have an indication of the time scale on which the Government will consider the measures?

The Prime Minister has referred to the desirability of moving in tandem with the Irish Republic. I welcome that, but he should bear it in mind that the Irish Government have said that they do not rule out resorting to internment without trial if that becomes necessary. My judgment is that, if the measures that are being enacted in the Dail and, we hope, here in the next few days are ineffective—as I fear that they will be—the Irish Government will want to move to that quickly, particularly if there is another major incident. It would be gravely embarrassing if the Irish Government were prepared to intern but found that they could not do so because there were no parallel measures in the United Kingdom, allowing members of the Real IRA to flee to a safe haven in the United Kingdom. Must we not ensure that that does not happen?

The Prime Minister: On that last point, as we have shown today, we can act without delay if necessary. I have made it clear that we rule nothing out for the future. My judgment was simply that this is not the right moment. I entirely agree with what the right hon. Gentleman has said about the Good Friday agreement. For the integrity of that agreement, all parts of it have to be implemented in full. The existing safeguards on prisoner releases have to be followed through and obeyed. We shall ensure that they are.

The measures put forward by the Chief Constable of the RUC will be looked at. A working party is examining them with the Chief Constable, in conjunction with what is happening in the Irish Republic. That can form part of the review of terrorist legislation that my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary will bring forward in the not-too-distant future.

I agree entirely with what the right hon. Gentleman says about not frustrating people's hopes. I congratulate him on the work that he has done over some time to move the process forward. Over the past 15 months, I have learnt that there are two groups of people when it comes to Northern Ireland: there are those who say that there are tremendous difficulties, therefore it is all hopeless and we should give up; and there are those who say that there are tremendous difficulties, so let us overcome them. The fact that the right hon. Gentleman is in the latter group shows his courage and commitment to the process.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): In his response to my right hon. Friend the Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn), the Prime Minister surely was not implying that article 51 covered a country sending cruise missiles to another country without warning.

Was the American evidence on the role of the Sudanese pharmaceutical factory taken on trust before British support was given? Have the Government been shown compelling and convincing evidence on that point since? What support did Britain give at the United Nations to the Sudanese request for an early site inspection of the pharmaceutical factory? Would the Government consider sending a team from Porton Down to make a technical assessment? What steps will the Foreign Office take to resume diplomatic relations at ambassadorial level with Khartoum, bearing in mind the exposed nature of the British community in Sudan and the UK's close involvement with the UN relief work?

The Prime Minister: On my hon. Friend's last point, the staff were withdrawn after two of them were actually ordered to leave by the authorities there. The view taken was that it was best for the protection of the rest that they leave. The Americans do have strong evidence of attempts to manufacture chemical weapons in Sudan for use by terrorists, and that evidence has indeed been shared with us. Indeed, bin Laden himself lived in Sudan for some four years and has retained extremely close links with the regime.

Those states that sponsor terrorism must expect to have action taken against them. In respect of the Al Shifa plant, no one was actually killed; but, as a result of those bombs that went off in Nairobi and Dar es Salaam, almost 300 people were butchered—wholly innocent people. It

is important and it is justified for states to take action to make it quite clear that those who take terrorist action against their citizens will not do so with impunity.

Rev. Ian Paisley (North Antrim): I should like to associate myself with the remarks made today by hon. Members on both sides of the House in respect of those who have been bereaved and those who are still suffering from the results of the Omagh massacre. We are all indebted to the hon. Member for the constituency, the hon. Member for West Tyrone (Mr. Thompson), for his moving and touching speech. The hon. Member for Foyle (Mr. Hume) mentioned that he was moved by the coffins and the little corpses of babes. I was moved by the coffins that could not be opened, because they contained only parts of the bodies recovered. As one of my own Sabbath-school teachers was one of the victims, it was brought home to me in a very real way indeed.

No doubt, in the coming debate, there will be an opportunity to deal with the matters on the minds of Members from Northern Ireland, but I should like to put one point to the Prime Minister. I am sure that, when he read the reaction of the Royal Ulster Constabulary to the atrocity, he was aware that four men were arrested who were known by the security forces to be members of the so-called Real IRA: I refer to the brothers O'Hagen, Francis Curran and Shane Mackey. They were released. There is one question on the mind of the people of Northern Ireland today and they would like the Prime Minister to answer it. If the laws that he is now saying we must pass today had already been in operation, could those four men have been kept in custody and brought to trial to prove whether they were guilty or not guilty when the security forces said that they were members of the organisation that committed the atrocity?

The Prime Minister: I cannot comment on individual cases of individual people and it would be wrong if I did so. What I can say is that we believe that the legislation gives us a far better chance of being able, where people are members of the proscribed organisations, to prove that membership, because we have dealt with two of the major problems that the police have with proving such a charge.

I also say that, of course, the very purpose and object of the bomb were to wreck the agreement and produce a violent reaction from others. We all have a responsibility to make sure that that does not happen.

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Inverclyde): In his statement, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister said that the best way forward is by way of continuing political reform. I agree with him. I also agree whole-heartedly with his view that strong and decisive steps must be taken against those murderous fascists who committed that terrible atrocity. However, he must take cognisance of the genuine and utterly legitimate concerns of many people that the implementation of the legislation might harm the civil liberties of decent ordinary citizens.

We need sustained, methodical police investigation on both sides of the border to track down these dreadful, evil people. The Government must fulfil their promise of the early creation of a human rights commission for Northern Ireland with strong investigative powers. That is surely essential as part of the continuing political reform to which my right hon. Friend referred.

The Prime Minister: It is precisely because of our recognition that, with any such legislation, there will be genuine, legitimate concerns about whether the balance between strong action and protection of civil liberties is right, that we have taken the measures that we have. Those measures are specific. There are also forfeiture provisions, but in evidential terms the changes are twofold: the admissibility in evidence of the word of a senior police officer, and the right to draw inferences from the failure to mention certain facts. Both those powers are carefully circumscribed. I think that we have got the balance right.

The human rights position is set out in the agreement and we will proceed accordingly. There is now a different context in which the British and Irish Governments take measures together. In the past 20 or 30 years, measures taken by the United Kingdom Government were fiercely resisted, not only by large parts of the community in Northern Ireland, but by many in the Republic, where they had no political support and there was no political base for them. The context today is completely different.

I urge on my hon. Friend, as I did on my right hon. Friend the Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn), that, while we must learn the lessons of the past—that is why we are moving in step with the Irish Government and the measures are so carefully targeted—we need to have an answer to the problem of small groups of people who will carry on with terror irrespective of the political process. The ordinary, decent people who expressed their democratic will in referendums in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland have a right to the protection of the law in so far as we are able to give it to them.

Mr. Robert McCartney (North Down): I, too, welcome the sensitive manner in which the Prime Minister expressed the sympathy of the House for the victims at Omagh, but certain aspects of the Bill are disturbing in the light of what he himself has said. There seems to be a distinction between small terrorist groups committing acts of terror with no political support and larger groups of terrorists who may, broadly speaking, have such support.

Do we now have a two-tier system under which the proposed measures will apply to groups such as the Real IRA but not to Provisional IRA, which, through its alter ego, Sinn Fein, has considerable public support? Since the Belfast agreement was signed, there have been 37 murders: 28 at Omagh and nine outside that outrage. There have been 29 punishment shootings and about 57 brutal beatings, inflicting terrible injuries. Almost every one of those crimes was committed by what might be called the good terrorist groupings that are party to the agreement: Provisional IRA and the loyalist paramilitaries. It seems that the new provisions would not apply to what might be called the major terrorist groupings prior to the advent of the Real IRA. Will the police be called upon to make a preliminary determination as to whether one is a wicked terrorist of a small group that is outside the process, or a good terrorist who belongs to a group within the process and, having so determined, apply the new provisions? If that be the case, we are entering a two-tier system of terrorist opposition and a two-tier system of the administration of justice, and many people would regard that as a grave mistake.

The Prime Minister: Obviously, we have to make a judgment in respect of any group about whether it qualifies under the provisions. There is a provision, which

[The Prime Minister]

we are entitled and able to use should the situation change in respect of any group, to add that group to this list. It is simply not correct to say that there is a division between one group of terrorists which operates according to one rule and another group which operates according to different rules. There is provision to change the list if that becomes the right thing to do. Our judgment in the round is the one that we have expressed about the activities of the Real IRA and other groups.

Kali Mountford (Colne Valley): Justice for victims cannot be achieved by providing a safe haven for terrorists; nor can it be achieved by miscarriages of justice such as have occurred in the past. I welcome the Prime Minister's words about the admission of evidence and about the European convention on human rights. What further assurance can he give that the process will lead to a full and fair trial so that justice can be done and be seen to be done?

The Prime Minister: The short answer is that the standard and burden of proof remain exactly the same. As I have said, this is an attempt to amend the law simply in these two respects. They are important respects, because we know perfectly well that, on occasions, it has not been possible to convict people of these offences, precisely because of gaps in the law. We have very carefully attempted to steer a path between some knee-jerk reaction, by which we would bring in a whole range of measures that, on examination, cannot be justified, and ending up not acting at all in circumstances where people would not expect that. The fact that that is the collective view, not just of this Government but of the Irish Government too, is some earnest not merely of our good intent, but of the fact that we have been able to deliver the intent in practical legislation.

Mr. Michael Mates (East Hampshire): May I say with the greatest respect to the Prime Minister that what he said a few moments ago about internment is wrong? It is not a matter of judgment: it is a matter of fact that internment's only use is as an element of surprise and a weapon of surprise if a situation arises in which it has to be used. We all hope that that will not happen; but if it should we would be in a ludicrous position, because the Irish Government would be ready to exercise that surprise and act decisively but we would have to come here to debate the matter for a couple of days, during which all that we should be doing is bolting the doors on empty stables. Will the Prime Minister reflect on that and perhaps consult his right hon. Friend the Home Secretary? I make the point seriously. We are rightly following the Irish and agreeing with them on joint measures for the island. This is a glaring exception and we ought to put it right.

The Prime Minister: I do not agree with that view, for the reasons that I have expressed. It is a matter of judgment as to whether reintroducing internment at present would help the situation. The hon. Gentleman was part of the previous Government for a long period and I notice that they did not do that. *[Interruption.]* They did not actually introduce the power, they did not actually implement the power, and I believe that the judgment that we have made is the right judgment. If we got that judgment wrong, the danger would be precisely the danger to which we have drawn attention—that there would be set up a series of reactions in other parts of the community that would undermine the very thing that we want to achieve.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Madam Speaker: Thank you. We must now proceed with the business of the House.

BILL PRESENTED

CRIMINAL JUSTICE (TERRORISM AND CONSPIRACY)

Mr. Secretary Straw, supported by the Prime Minister, Mr. Secretary Prescott, Mr. Chancellor of the Exchequer, Mr. Secretary Cook, Secretary Marjorie Mowlam, Mr. Adam Ingram and Mr. Alun Michael, presented a Bill to make provision about procedure and forfeiture in relation to offences concerning proscribed organisations, and about conspiracy to commit offences outside the United Kingdom: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time today, and to be printed [Bill 244].

3.50 pm

Mr. William Cash (Stone): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. I am given to understand by the Clerks in the Public Bill Office that there may be some difficulty in tabling amendments for the Committee stage where the amendments, though going to the objectives that the Prime Minister has just outlined, are thought to be inconsistent with the long title. Is there any way in which we can ensure that, in the course of these rather rushed proceedings, we have the flexibility to ensure that the Prime Minister's objectives are achieved?

Madam Speaker: As the hon. Gentleman and the House know, the Chairman of Ways and Means will select amendments in due course. There will be ample time for such amendments to be tabled and for hon. Members to be guided by the Clerks because they will be accepted during Second Reading. The Chairman of Ways and Means will be generous in the selection of amendments so that there is proper scrutiny of the legislation.

SITTINGS OF THE HOUSE

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 25 (Periodic adjournments),

That this House, at its rising tomorrow, do adjourn till Monday 19th October.—[*Mr. Dowd.*]

Question agreed to.

Business of the House (Criminal Justice (Terrorism and Conspiracy) Bill)

Motion made, and Question proposed,

That—

1.(1) Proceedings on the Criminal Justice (Terrorism and Conspiracy) Bill shall be taken and concluded at today's sitting; and for this purpose—

(a) as soon as the proceedings on this Motion are concluded, the order for Second Reading of the Bill shall be read;

(b) notices of amendments, new Clauses and new Schedules to be moved in Committee may be accepted by the Clerks at the Table before the Bill has been read a second time;

(c) when the Bill is read a second time it shall stand committed to a Committee of the whole House, and the House will immediately resolve itself into a Committee on the Bill;

(d) proceedings in Committee on clauses 1 to 4 shall be brought to a conclusion, if not previously concluded, three hours after the conclusion of proceedings on Second Reading;

(e) remaining proceedings on the Bill shall be brought to a conclusion, if not previously concluded, six hours after the conclusion of proceedings on Second Reading;

(f) at the conclusion of proceedings on the Bill at today's sitting the Speaker shall adjourn the House without putting any Question.

(2) For the purpose of concluding proceedings in accordance with sub-paragraphs 1(d) and (e), the Chair shall forthwith put the following Questions (but no others)—

(a) any Question already proposed from the Chair;

(b) any Question necessary to bring to a decision a Question so proposed;

(c) the Question on any amendment moved or Motion made by a Minister of the Crown;

(d) any Question necessary for the disposal of the business to be concluded.

(3) On a Motion made for a new Clause or a new Schedule, the Chair shall put only the Question that the Clause or Schedule be added to the Bill.

(4) If two or more Questions would fall to be put under sub-paragraph (2)(d) on successive provisions of the Bill, the Chair shall instead put a single Question in relation to those provisions.

(5) Standing Order No. 82 (Business Committee) shall not apply to proceedings on the Bill.

2. At the sitting tomorrow—

(a) any message received from the Lords relating to the Criminal Justice (Terrorism and Conspiracy) Bill shall be considered forthwith;

(b) proceedings on any message shall be brought to a conclusion, if not previously concluded, one hour after commencement;

(c) the Speaker shall not adjourn the House until she has notified the Royal Assent to any Act agreed upon by both Houses; and

(d) the Speaker shall then adjourn the House without putting any Question.

3. Standing Order No. 15(1) (Exempted business) shall apply to proceedings on the Bill at the sittings today and tomorrow.—[*Mr. Dowd.*]

3.51 pm

Mr. Richard Shepherd (Aldridge-Brownhills): I regret the fact that this motion appears on the Order Paper. We have heard a most profound and important statement from the Prime Minister today, giving voice to the views of many in Britain about the fears that we as a people suffer in the face of terrorism, and to the suffering that was experienced by one of the communities within the United Kingdom.

This is a land of laws and of due process, and that due process applies to the House of Commons. I am here only because of the liberties secured for me by preceding generations. We are all conscious of that as elected representatives of defined parts of this realm. This is important, therefore, because the process by which we conduct our business is the very process that has secured our liberty.

I say this with the greatest regret because I understand the urgencies that we often feel in our fear in the face of terrorism. We are being asked to consider, in the shortest possible space of time, measures that affect our profound liberties and our civil and criminal justice systems. That is a corruption of the ideal. We have a duty to weigh most solemnly and carefully every contention that is set before the House.

The Standing Orders of the House set out the way in which, by tradition and custom, that has been done by the House. A Bill is deposited before the House so that we, the elected representatives of the citizens—the generality of us all—may consider and weigh the contentions in it. All day yesterday, I, along with many hon. Members, telephoned the Home Office and the Northern Ireland Office and demanded to know when the draft of the Bill could be seen: first, it was to be by 12 o'clock, then before 2 o'clock, then some time between half-past 4 and 5 o'clock; finally, it reached the Vote Office at ten minutes to 6 yesterday.

Until ten minutes to 6 yesterday, all that I knew about the Bill was what I believe the country will come to detest more than anything—the manipulation, the spin, the press releases and all the covert ways of trying to secure the legislation of this country without reference to Parliament. I knew only what I was told by anonymous press spokesmen.

The matter goes further than that. We were told with a sort of laudable intent that the Bill would be draconian. Leaving all that aside, that is how long it took the House, assembled in London, to gain possession of the Bill. I am a representative from the west midlands, but how long would it take those from Scotland, Northumberland, Cornwall, Wales and Ulster to gain possession of the Bill?

We are assembled at half-past 2 to discuss the Bill. Before us is a motion that insists that we conduct an examination of the intents of the Bill and weigh the processes of the House. Can that process be borne? Is it worth bearing it, and for what purpose?

The House should reject the motion. In the face of terrorism, we should not abandon the freedom to discuss these matters. It is essential that we think about them. This is a new House of Commons, and it has almost become a House of Commons of acclamation. The contentions that we shall consider on Second Reading are such that we will come to regret them if we accept them in their present form.

I have been in the House for 19 years. I have seen every manner of expression and hallelujah and law. I opposed them as best I could, and I noticed that I had the support of the Prime Minister when he was shadow Home Secretary; I noted the words of the present Home Secretary in respect of these matters.

[Mr. Richard Shepherd]

On 30 October last year, the Home Secretary gave us to understand that a consultation paper on terrorism would be issued by the beginning of the year. Throughout the year we have inquired about it—it was to be available early this year, then a couple of months later and then a couple of months after that. We were told not to worry. We were told that in October a consultation paper would be issued on some of the principles contained in the Bill. The Prime Minister now says that he cannot promise us when the consultation paper will be issued—and it is only a consultation paper, not a Bill or a White Paper.

Throughout the year, the Home Office and its officials told us that the issues involved were dynamite. We were told that the matters would have to be weighed, and the views of the House would be needed. Yet the Bill is drawn up as though there were no need for consultation or for the House to reflect on the measures proposed to deal with terrorism.

I take the matter extremely seriously. I want the House to reflect on it. Will we have added one jot? What will we have accomplished by assembling at the beginning of September? Why have we assembled? The stately order of our business does not require us to be here. I noticed that in his statement, which at times was more like a speech in a Second Reading debate, the Prime Minister did not make a serious case for the House being assembled today and called out of turn. He said that the Irish Dail is sitting today. I wish the Dail well, and I hope that we march with it in this Bill. The Dail may have prepared the ground for it, but we as a House have clearly not done so.

This is no way for the House to conduct its business. The Government are acting manipulatively. The House does not countenance terrorism, but we have been knee-jerked here. There is much talk about considered, rational legislation, but all too little ability for the House to consider it reasonably.

Hon. Members should reflect on the contents of the Order Paper and on what we are asked to do. How do we table an amendment to the Bill? The Order Paper states:

"notices of amendments, new Clauses and new Schedules to be moved in Committee may be accepted by the Clerks at the Table before the Bill has been read a second time".

The Bill was read the First time a few minutes ago, so the House has had only a few minutes to table amendments properly and in good order. We have all served on Committees and are familiar with the Committee stage of Bills. We may want to table amendments during the Committee stage, but the Order Paper does not allow for that. How do we deal with amendments? Are they to be tabled four or five minutes before the end of Second Reading? If an hon. Member tables a manuscript amendment, how will the rest of the House obtain a copy of it? How will we be able to read the amendment and relate it to the content of the Bill?

I am astounded that the Leader of the House did not think it worth her while to explain to the House why there should be a guillotine that would condense discussion of the entire Bill into six hours. Clauses 1 to 4 are to be dealt with in the first three hours, and the rest—Report and Third Reading—is to be disposed of in another three hours. How do we treat those assembled in the other place—the Law Lords of this land, some of the finest legal minds? How do we treat any amendment that they deign to send to us? All Lords matters will be disposed of in one hour.

I plead with the House. Ours is a great nation, a nation founded on freedom and liberty. We are the elected representatives of this nation. We should have a pride in our process, for in our process we defend our liberty in the face of these terrorists.

3.59 pm

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): Lest it should be thought that the hon. Member for Aldridge-Brownhills (Mr. Shepherd) speaks alone, I should say that I have grave reservations about the speed with which the Bill is to be debated. I hope to move an amendment that will deal with some of the points that particularly concern me, but I believe that the House of Commons ought to give itself time to think.

In a long career in the House, I have realised that, brilliant though we may be, we are not the repository of all wisdom and that occasionally there are those outside in the United Kingdom who can give us advice and help and point out that what we believe to be targeted and precise may in legislative terms be imprecise, vague and, in the final analysis, not worthy of a democratic assembly. I hope that we will think. I am aware of the pressure on Members as a result of the horrendous and appalling events, but I hope that we will think seriously that, when we rush through legislation and cease to put on the statute book ideas and views that have been properly tested by the time to debate, to examine and, indeed, often to understand what we are doing, we are not fulfilling our proper task.

I have very grave reservations about the way in which our proceedings today are being organised. I hope that it will be clear that they stem not from objection to the need to do something urgent about the horrendous terrorism but from something stronger that can be summed up in a very simple phrase—my misgivings about legislation that is rushed and probably will not, in the final analysis, be capable of doing that which we demand of it.

4.1 pm

Rev. Ian Paisley (North Antrim): My party received a fax at about 10 o'clock yesterday morning from the Secretary of State to say that, if we rang a number at Stormont, we would be supplied with a copy of the Bill. I immediately rang that number and the civil servant informed me that the Bill had been printed, but that changes were being made and that it had to be completely reprinted. I was told that it would be available shortly after noon. I rang again at noon and he said that he was sorry, but it would not be available until later on. It was only later last night that we received a copy. I must say that the Northern Ireland Office faxed us a full copy.

Hon. Members know my attitude to terrorism, but terrorism is not the issue before the House. The issue is how we deal with business that is very, very important. Hon. Members should bear in mind the fact that the Bill affects all my constituents: it does not affect only people who call themselves the Real IRA. Anybody can be lifted under the terms of the Bill. Therefore, I as a representative of those people have a right to defend their interests, and where should I defend them? I should do so in the House.

If we are to meet today, why did we not have a two-day sitting? Why bring us all here and then more or less say, "Snub your nose at the House of Lords for it does not

matter what it says anyway"? If we had any respect for the other House, we would wait and hear its report and debate it. We should have had two days at this Bill.

The leader of the Social Democratic and Labour party made a similar point when he said that his party would like more time to consider the Bill. In the circumstances, I should have thought that we should have as much time as possible to consider it, and there are ways in which that could be done. I therefore agree entirely with the hon. Members who spoke before me on that issue.

4.4 pm

Mr. Tony Benn (Chesterfield): I agree very strongly with the hon. Members for Aldridge-Brownhills (Mr. Shepherd) and for North Antrim (Rev. Ian Paisley) and my hon. Friend the Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody), who spoke before me—an unusual combination. We say that the Bill attacks civil liberties, but the attack on civil liberties has already begun because Members of Parliament are being denied the time to examine the Bill, to consult their constituents and experts, and to refer to the initial Acts of Parliament that are being amended. How can Members suddenly pick up the fact that the Bill amends the prevention of terrorism Act or the law on criminal conspiracy?

We are being used to rubber-stamp what a Government have decided to do, but they do not know what they want to do. They have had two weeks to draft the Bill. They could have published it in draft. The Liberal Democrats' leader said that he knows that changes were made. He is luckier than I am because he must have seen an earlier draft. If he had seen an earlier draft, he could have tabled an amendment before the Bill came before the House. What a way to treat Parliament! We are being treated as though we were the Supreme Soviet, simply summoned to carry through the instructions of the Central Committee.

Whatever the merits of the Bill—we are not discussing them now—it is an absolute affront to the House and to those whom we represent to say that we have to pass the motion by 10 pm. I made inquiries at the Whips Office. The Chief Whip will know that I rang No. 12 time and again before lunch. I was told that there was not even going to be a guillotine motion, so that has appeared at the last minute.

It is time that hon. Members stood up for our right to represent the people who send us here. On those grounds, I strongly support the speeches of the hon. Members who spoke before me. I think it is a view shared by my hon. Friend the Member for Foyle (Mr. Hume), who said that he would be unable to support the Bill because of the shortage of time, although on reflection he might decide that he wished to support or amend it. I urge the House to move for more time.

As you know, Madam Speaker, I wrote to you in the middle of August asking for the recall of Parliament to debate the bombing of Sudan and Afghanistan. I welcome the recall, but not just to be forced to do what I am told in respect of a Bill that I have not seen and cannot consider and about which, in any case, many people want a longer debate.

4.7 pm

Sir Peter Emery (East Devon): No one wants to undermine the unity that exists across the House against terrorism. None of the speeches that we have heard has sought to do that, but, procedurally, what we are asked to do is contrary to all aspects of "Erskine May" and our Standing Orders. It is wrong.

We can march in time with the Dail. Let us have Second Reading today, but let us come back in a week—the period that is usually allowed—during which time amendments could be tabled and the matter could be properly considered. We are again setting a precedent that is wrong.

It is not as if we are going to war. In some instances, the House is recalled specifically for that reason, but whether this Bill were passed tomorrow or next week would make not one jot of difference, except that a week's delay would mean that it could be considered fully and properly, as the structures of the House have always demanded. Why are we being so rushed? No reason has been given. It seems that we are thrusting to one side all the House's normal procedures for no reason.

4.8 pm

Audrey Wise (Preston): During Prayers, I obtained a copy of the Bill from the Vote Office. The document that I was handed stated that it was a draft. Like many other hon. Members, I have just come back from my holidays. I telephoned home to find out what was happening in general, was told that Parliament was to be recalled because of Omagh and was satisfied that that was proper. I want action to be taken against terrorism and terrorists, as do we all. However, clauses 5, 6 and 7 of the Bill do not deal with or arise from Omagh.

I received a letter from the Chief Whip, or party officials, telling me that the proposals—on conspiracy to commit terrorism overseas—were supported by the Government when they were in opposition. In February 1997, those proposals were put to the House in a private Member's Bill, which had the support of the then Tory Government, but the House failed twice to provide a quorum to pass the Bill. The Tories, who wanted it, could not provide the quorum and no Labour Member went into the Lobby to provide one on either occasion. If that was Labour supporting the measure in opposition, I would not like to see us opposing anything. In fact, it was one of the most effective examples of opposition during that Tory Government's period in office.

I feel deeply affronted that Omagh, on which I want the House to speak with a united voice, is being mixed up with other items. If action were taken or planned in this country, for instance against the Taliban in Afghanistan, that would be subject to the Bill—

Madam Speaker: Order. I am sorry to interrupt the hon. Lady, but she is making a Second Reading speech and we are dealing with the business motion.

Audrey Wise: I appeal to you, Madam Speaker, to those on the Government Front Bench and to anyone with influence, to disentangle those issues when we discuss the matter and, as has been said from so many quarters, to give us more time to discuss these important issues.

4.11 pm

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): I approached the Prime Minister on behalf of my party to ask for a recall of the House because we were tired of listening to Government through the press and tired of the concept

[Rev. Martin Smyth]

that we were to tackle terrorism in Northern Ireland through secondary legislation, which might not stand up. Regrettably, now that we have been recalled, we have discovered that, for whatever reason or judgment, an opportunity to bring us into line with the Republic has been set aside. It is important that we have time to debate the matter and learn the mind of the House properly.

4.12 pm

Mr. Bernie Grant (Tottenham): I am also concerned about the way in which a matter of this importance has been handled. I should have expected some notice, but, given the situation, I can appreciate why we did not have it. I do not appreciate the fact that there has not even been an opportunity for members of the parliamentary Labour party to discuss the matter. I wanted to do some research to find out whether the United States Congress has any legislation similar to the Bill that the Government are trying to push through. That is important and it is germane. The Prime Minister says that he is walking hand in hand with the Irish Government. I want to know why, or whether, he is walking hand in hand with the American Government.

Madam Speaker: Order. Hon. Members are straying into a Second Reading debate. The Bill is available and we are ready for the Second Reading. We cannot marshal the amendments until this motion is agreed, so I hope that the House understands the position in which it is placing itself.

4.13 pm

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): You indeed have a difficult task, Madam Speaker, in producing before the end of Second Reading a list of marshalled amendments that the House can use. However, the Government have put themselves into that difficulty, with their decision to add to the Bill provisions on conspiracy that are not confined to terrorism.

The conspiracy provisions are extremely wide, and in my view it would take more than their portion of the three hours referred to in the motion to consider them properly, bearing in mind the fact that the second half of the time allocated is for clause 5 and the remainder of the Bill, together with Report stage, if we have one, and any other proceedings. Within those three hours, all that has to be dealt with.

Many hon. Members did not expect to find those provisions in the Bill, and therefore have not had the opportunity to consult widely on them. My hon. Friend the Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler), our Chief Whip, attempted to negotiate a satisfactory outcome through the usual channels, but the view widespread among my hon. Friends is that it will not be possible to do justice to the important Northern Ireland provisions of the Bill and still leave enough opportunity to consider the rest of it.

We all have to recognise that some of our cherished procedures sometimes have to be cut short so that we can deal with emergencies. That argument runs for the first part of the Bill, but it does not run effectively for the second half of it, which could have been introduced at a later date. Precisely for that reason, I find myself unable to recommend that my hon. Friends support the motion.

4.15 pm

Mr. Robert Marshall-Andrews (Medway): In support of what has already been said to you, Madam Speaker, may I draw your attention to one matter of importance that has not been mentioned? The Bill affects the liberty of the subject, yet, because of the speed with which it has been drafted, the drafting is a lamentation. I have read a good many statutes in my time, and I have no hesitation in saying that this is one of the worst that I have ever seen.

By way of a soupçon, may I—it is a very short quotation, Madam Speaker—offer this delicacy from subsection (6) of the proposed new section 1A that clause 5 would insert into the Criminal Law Act 1977:

"In the application of this Part of this Act to an agreement in the case of which each of the above conditions is satisfied"—

Madam Speaker: Order. I am quite capable of reading the Bill, which is now available in its final form. The hon. and learned Gentleman is raising minute Committee points. He has every right to do so, but at the right time.

Mr. Marshall-Andrews *rose—*

Madam Speaker: Order. Will the hon. and learned Gentleman take his seat until I have given him a little guidance? We are discussing the business motion at this stage, not the Bill. No part of the Bill can be considered until I have the business motion.

Mr. Marshall-Andrews: May I clarify the point that I am trying to make, Madam Speaker? I am not talking about the merits of the clause from which I quoted; I cannot do so, because I cannot decipher it. Having spent a great deal of time trying to read it, bringing to it what legal experience I have, I find it completely incomprehensible. One of the reasons why it is incomprehensible is the unseemly speed with which the Bill has been drafted.

That utterly incomprehensible clause—I invite hon. Members to read it at their leisure as, following your order, Madam Speaker, I may not read it myself—would have the most profound effect on the liberty of the subject in this country in respect of what are purported to be agreements to commit offences overseas.

The Bill is not in a fit condition to be debated by the House—

Madam Speaker: Order. We are not discussing the Bill at present; we are discussing the business motion. I hope that hon. Members will keep that in mind.

4.18 pm

Mr. Alan Clark (Kensington and Chelsea): I support the points made by my hon. Friend the Member for Aldridge-Brownhills (Mr. Shepherd) and the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody), and I ask the House to oppose the business motion and not to give it any consideration. I am fortified in my contention by the fact that the deputy leader of the Liberal party has decided that his own party should oppose it—despite the fact that the motion carries the signature of his Chief Whip.

I would not seek to match the eloquence of my hon. Friend the Member for Aldridge-Brownhills, but I would say that this is an example of the contempt in which the

Prime Minister holds the Chamber, and which he has demonstrated almost from the first day we assembled after the general election. We are being used simply as a rubber stamp. The news is released by leak, by briefing, so that ordinary Members of the House read about it for the first time in the newspapers as they are on the way to the House. It has already been released to Lobby journalists; it has already been the subject of briefings. The meat of what is proposed has already been determined.

We are simply not being consulted, and we do not have time properly to discuss and debate the Bill. The whole House should reject the business motion because, in the fulness of time, this experience will be repeated on many occasions.

4.20 pm

Dr. Nick Palmer (Broxtowe): I hesitate to question the judgment of hon. Members who have spoken, who, on my calculation, have between them more than 200 years' experience in the House. However, I must say, as a relatively new Member, that the broader population would be incredulous if we accepted the argument advanced by the hon. Member for Aldridge-Brownhills (Mr. Shepherd), in which he questioned whether we should have been recalled, and even more incredulous if we said that we were such slow readers that it would take us another week to consider the proposals.

I agree with some of the reservations that have been expressed, to which I should like to return during discussion on the Bill, but I believe that people expect us to march in step with the Dail on this and consider the issue today and tomorrow, because it is seen as an urgent issue and it requires an urgent response from Parliament.

4.21 pm

Mr. William Cash (Stone): Some days ago I argued, in the light of what I believed was coming up in the Bill, that it was an outrageous contempt of the House for us to be treated in the way that we have been in the past few days. That feeling has been made even worse by today's occurrences.

The Government have determined on a course of action in the light of their extremely large majority. I say to the Prime Minister that I fear that, by attempting to railroad the Bill through, he may achieve the exact opposite of the objective that he seeks. I support the principle of the legislation, but I do not support the manner in which it is being enacted.

It is part and parcel of the procedures of the House that we have an opportunity to make amendments. I raised a point with you, Madam Speaker, concerning the long title. It is not enough for the Chairman of Ways and Means to exercise an attitude in the selection of amendments. The key question is whether it is within the order of the House for amendments that are inconsistent with the long title to be moved.

I believe that there is a serious problem, which goes to the heart of the Bill, and which the Prime Minister may not have fully appreciated. The Northern Ireland (Sentences) Act 1998, which we passed on 28 July, provides for the imposition of a series of conditions and tests when deciding whether prisoners should be released early. The Act clearly states that among those tests is whether the person in question is a member of a proscribed organisation. The Criminal Justice (Terrorism and Conspiracy) Bill changes the burden of the test, in the early parts of the procedure, to the opinion of a police officer plus other evidence.

If the long title needs to be changed to allow us to guarantee that persons who, in the opinion of a police officer and on the basis of the related evidence, are members of proscribed organisations are not released early, the failure to change the long title may create a flaw that defeats the Bill's main objective—to ensure that members of proscribed organisations are not released early. Therefore, there are substantive reasons why we need to know what the Government have in mind regarding the long title.

The argument that my hon. Friend the Member for Aldridge-Brownhills (Mr. Shepherd) made about the manner in which the Bill is being dealt with was absolutely justified. The Prime Minister and the Home Secretary owe the House an explanation of how we can meaningfully propose or make amendments to the Bill.

4.24 pm

Mr. Andrew Robathan (Blaby): There has been a remarkable cross-party consensus on the Back Benches. I have seen nothing quite like it since I have been in the House, which is not all that long. Nevertheless, lawyers on both sides of the House have advanced sensible arguments about why such rushed legislation is not a good idea. From my short experience in the House, I know that rushed legislation is not good legislation; yet, until 5.50 pm yesterday, it was impossible to obtain a draft copy of the Bill, and I understand that at 2.30 pm today, when the House met, it was still not possible to obtain the final version—certainly it was not possible this morning, when I tried.

What is the urgency? Are we to believe that on Friday, after a rushed Royal Assent, terrorists will start to be charged and locked up by the courts? I doubt it. I would say that the urgency has already been expressed by the Prime Minister, when he said that we must march in step with the Dail. It seems to me that this has much more to do with President Clinton's arrival tomorrow: we must all look as though we are expressing the same opinions, because President Clinton is coming tomorrow.

Most Members of Parliament would support the general thrust of the legislation. I certainly do—although I question why we got rid of internment in April this year, if we now want to introduce such so-called draconian measures. I think it important, however, for the House always to consider legislation sensibly and with time to spare, so that—as my hon. Friend the Member for Aldridge-Brownhills (Mr. Shepherd) pointed out—it can discuss amendments.

This is rushed legislation, and I suspect that it will be bad legislation. I certainly do not believe that the House, the country or the fight against terrorism will benefit from our having passed it in such a rush.

4.26 pm

Mr. Peter Brooke (Cities of London and Westminster): This is not the first time that I have marched shoulder to shoulder with my hon. Friend the Member for Aldridge-Brownhills (Mr. Shepherd), whose original address to the House was extremely eloquent.

[Mr. Peter Brooke]

I shall not risk your ire, Madam Speaker, by repeating what he said; I shall simply say "Ditto", which was said in the 18th century after an eloquent speech by Mr. Burke.

Like my hon. Friend and the hon. and learned Member for Medway (Mr. Marshall-Andrews), I waited in the long queue for copies of the Bill yesterday, when we had the impression that it was being changed by the hour. I think that, if the House was to be recalled, the Government might have paid it the compliment of having the legislation ready beforehand.

I want to dwell simply on clauses 5 to 7. In a long passage in his study of the Congress of Vienna, Henry Kissinger remarked on how difficult it was for the 18th century to come to terms with a revolutionary spirit like Napoleon. This age is faced with exactly the same problem in confronting terrorism. The Prime Minister said that clauses 5 to 7 had been lying around until a convenient moment arrived for them to be introduced. In terms of the time that we have to debate clauses 1 to 4, this strikes me as a singularly inconvenient moment. I must ask you, Madam Speaker, whether you would accept a manuscript amendment allowing us to delete those clauses, in order to solve our problems.

4.27 pm

Mr. John McAllion (Dundee, East): In this short debate, reference has been made to a guillotine motion. Can you confirm, Madam Speaker, that the only curtailment of today's debate will apply to debate on the business motion and the Committee stage, and that the Second Reading debate can continue until any hour, until all Members have had an opportunity to speak on this important Bill?

Mr. John Swinney (North Tayside): It is clear that many members of all political parties in the House are sympathetic to the direction taken by the Bill, but the unease that is emerging throughout the House about the pace at which we are moving should give the Government pause for thought.

This afternoon, I received 14 draft amendments proposed by the Law Society of Scotland. Those important amendments, whose value I have not had time to consider this afternoon, relate to issues such as the opportunity for individuals to consult solicitors, and the importance of a standard of proof in relation to forfeiture orders. I think that the House would benefit from an opportunity to consider those important matters, and I hope that the Home Secretary will have something to say about how that will be done.

4.28 pm

Mr. Peter Bottomley (Worthing, West): I hope that the Prime Minister—who, understandably, has been unable to stay for the whole debate on the motion—will pay attention to the remarks of my right hon. Friend the Member for Cities of London and Westminster (Mr. Brooke). The House would be assisted—and, I am sure, the official Opposition would not object—if the Government, through the usual channels, came forward with a proposal to find a way forward.

The essential point is that the Government thought it right yesterday to use a number of hours to make adaptations and, no doubt, improvements to the Bill. The House would want to have the same opportunity. The Government's White Paper on local government refers to decisions made "outside the ordinary structure". In this case, decisions are being made outside the ordinary structure. For the purposes of law, the places where decisions are made are this Chamber and the Committees of the House.

4.29 pm

Mr. Donald Anderson (Swansea, East): The points that have been made thus far by parliamentary colleagues show the importance of debate because, as the discussion moves on, so colleagues see the importance of consideration. Many colleagues are coming to the opinion that perhaps clauses 5 and beyond should be excised from the Bill as their provisions lack the urgency that, arguably, should relate to those provisions that refer specifically to Northern Ireland.

In his very eloquent opening, the hon. Member for Aldridge-Brownhills (Mr. Shepherd)—a considerable parliamentarian in so many respects—perhaps voiced the concerns of many of us that, in a Bagehot sense, the House is moving from the efficient to the dignified part of the constitution. We are all part of a theatre. We are all meant to play our symbolic roles. I accept the symbolism of the Dail and our Parliament marching together in respect of terrorism. I am less happy to accept the symbolism behind the belief that we have to rush our proceedings through because of the visit of the President of the United States to Ireland.

We are here because of what is deemed to be an urgency. I believe that, following Omagh, there is certainly an urgency in respect of Northern Ireland—that, in my judgment, would be the consensus of the House—and that there are relatively short, clear and targeted amendments in respect of Northern Ireland. I am not so convinced in respect of those matters that, frankly, concern me the most in respect of terrorism.

I was one of those who helped to end the previous Government's attempt to have provisions relating to conspiracy put on the statute book. In that case, they did so through the back door by a private Member's device. They also did not, until the later stages, have the fallback position of the Attorney-General's fiat. Together with those on the then Opposition Front Bench, I agreed that that should be done.

Until very recently, we were told by the Government that the matters referred to in clause 5 and beyond would be the subject of a consultation paper to be brought forward some time in the autumn—essentially because of the constitutional importance of the matters to be discussed in terms of individual citizens' liberties and so on. What has happened in respect of terrorism offences that makes the need to override that consultation paper envisaged by the Government so urgent now? In my judgment, the case has not been made in respect of the latter part of the Bill; it almost certainly has been in respect of the first. I hope that the Government will consider carefully the differences between the two elements.

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark, North and Bermondsey): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. If the Government were to show that they were willing to substitute this business motion with one that allowed time to be allocated for a contemplation of the Bill without clause 5 and beyond, would that be a business motion that you could accept—either by amendment or substitution—so that we could proceed according to the spirit of the House?

Madam Speaker: That is too hypothetical for me to contemplate at this stage. There will be a response from the Government in due course on these matters.

4.34 pm

Mr. Ian Taylor (Esher and Walton): An interesting debate is emerging on this business motion, which has been signed by representatives on both Front Benches and by the Liberal Democrat Chief Whip. Therefore, any self-respecting Back Bencher finds himself in a state of confusion about the way in which proceedings are taking place.

There is a separate strand in the debate. The powerful points that were made by my hon. Friend the Member for Aldridge-Brownhills (Mr. Shepherd) were about any legislation that would be contemplated on a recall of the House such as today's, because of the due processes, as he rightly said. Latterly, certain points have been raised about some clauses in the Bill. I should like to ask the Home Secretary—if he would take a moment just to listen to me—to help some of us in the House. Why is the urgency of the clauses about international terrorism as great as those about Irish terrorism?

Madam Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman is now straying into a Second Reading debate. This is a business of the House motion. The responsibility for this lies with the President of the Council, who will respond in due course.

Mr. Taylor: I entirely understand that view, but I must have misexpressed myself. My problem is that, to make a decision on the business of the House motion, I need to get some guidance from the Government on whether there was equal urgency in introducing clauses relating to international terrorism. I do not wish to debate those clauses.

There have been some disturbing events in the world during August relating to such international terrorism. It is also clear that, to achieve peace and stability in Northern Ireland, it is vital to keep the American Government on side. We have not been told, even by the Prime Minister this afternoon, whether there have been discussions between him and the American President about both aspects of the Bill, and whether the American President will make announcements when he arrives here that affect the consequences of terrorism. I ask the Home Secretary to come to the Dispatch Box to help on those important matters; otherwise, it will appear to hon. Members, and certainly to me, that we are legislating on two separate matters—one a matter of urgency and one a matter of convenience.

4.36 pm

Mr. Kevin McNamara (Hull, North): The Bill is divided into two parts. It would be easy if the President of the Council were to say that the Government were not going to move clauses 5 to 7. That would then end part of the controversy that surrounds the Bill.

Another part of the Bill is important. As I understand the Bill, the part concerning conspiracy will not be part of the consultative paper to be published in the autumn. It will have gone and will not be part of that general discussion. If that is true, we will not be able to return to it; we have been told that one of the major concessions under the Bill is that we will be able to look at it every year.

I urge my hon. Friends to think very carefully on this matter. It would be very easy not to move— *[Interruption.]* My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary says from a sedentary position that it would still come under Lord Young's committee. Even if that is true, it still does not defeat my earlier argument. It is far easier for the Government to say that they will not move clauses 5 to 7. It gets over that particular difficulty.

In terms of what has been said, can my right hon. Friend the President of the Council say, following discussions with the American Government, to what extent that Government support the limitation of the fifth amendment of the United States constitution and whether the American President is considering introducing similar legislation in the United States to achieve that purpose?

4.38 pm

Mr. Jonathan Sayeed (Mid-Bedfordshire): This Government are used to using their very large majority to bully through inadequate legislation. They are in danger of doing the same thing again. It is interesting to see the way in which the tone of the House has changed over the past two hours. It is clear to me at least that the House is angered that two different types of terrorism are getting mixed up in one Bill.

Will the Government consider removing all those parts of the legislation to do with international terrorism, so that they can be given clear and thoughtful consideration at some later date? It seems to me that that part of the Bill owes more to President Clinton's visit than to considerations of good-quality legislation.

4.39 pm

The President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mrs. Margaret Beckett): I should like to deal as briefly as possible with the important issues that have been raised. The hon. Member for Aldridge–Brownhills (Mr. Shepherd) asked why I did not speak when the motion was moved. I assure him that I meant no discourtesy to the House. I simply did not wish to take the time of the House in debating a matter that would reduce the time available for consideration of the substance of the issues that we are here to discuss. The House would be—

Mr. Shepherd *rose—*

Mrs. Beckett: I ask the hon. Gentleman to bear with me a moment. The proceedings that we are discussing are not unprecedented, although I agree that they are unusual. The House does not normally meet in this way or curtail business as we are doing.

Mr. Shepherd *rose—*

Mrs. Beckett: If the hon. Gentleman will give me a moment, I shall readily give way to him.

Mr. Shepherd: I wanted to refer to a specific point that the right hon. Lady made.

Mrs. Beckett: I shall give way to the hon. Gentleman in a moment. He has asked me why I did not speak at the outset of the debate. I did not do so because I had hoped that the House would wish to proceed speedily—as I believe that the country wishes us to do—to discuss the substance of the Bill. I did not want to take up the time of the House. If I have misrepresented the hon. Gentleman, I apologise and I shall give way to him.

Mr. Shepherd: The right hon. Lady should have read her motion on the Order Paper. This motion can be debated until 10 o'clock. Putting forward the arguments for the guillotine would not take away the House's opportunity to debate the Bill. The right hon. Lady's argument is nonsense.

Mrs. Beckett: With respect to the hon. Gentleman, I gave not an argument, but a reason. He asked me to give a reason, and I have done so. If he finds it unsatisfactory, I am sorry. Of course the motion can be debated, but he will know that we do not debate all the motions that we are able to debate. It seemed right to preserve as much time as possible for the House to debate the substance of the Bill.

Previous Governments have felt that emergency issues had to be dealt with as a matter of urgency. There have been precedents for matters being dealt with in this way. I say that with great respect to the many hon. Members who have made important points in the debate. In April 1996, an emergency was thought to have arisen. The then Government made a statement one day and the House discussed the legislation the next day. With great respect to the right hon. Members for East Devon (Sir P. Emery) and for Cities of London and Westminster (Mr. Brooke) and the hon. Members for Stone (Mr. Cash) and for Blaby (Mr. Robathan), I should like to say that they voted for the guillotine motion of their Government to deal with that Bill in one day. The previous Government allowed less time to discuss that measure than we are allowing today. I have great respect for the right and proper feeling of hon. Members that we should consider and take proper decisions, but our course of action is not unprecedented or unknown. No doubt that is one reason why those on the Conservative and Liberal Democrat Front Benches supported this way of proceeding.

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): A situation in which not all the signatories to a motion still fully support it might be considered unusual. Having listened to the debate for the past hour, is the right hon. Lady confident that all the signatories to the motion still fully support all its details? If not, should the Government not make some response?

Mrs. Beckett: I have heard nothing that leads me to conclude that those who signed the motion do not continue to support it.

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall): I am sure that the Leader of the House will agree that it is one of the absurdities of this place that it is thought to be an unforgivable sin not to listen to the arguments of one's colleagues and one's opponents. I know the difficulties that the Government had yesterday. I know that it was difficult to communicate. It was very difficult, when the Bill was not even published, to specify the format of the motion. However, I ask her to listen, as I have done, to the views expressed in the House, particularly on clauses 5 to 7. My right hon. Friend the Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown) expressed real concerns, about measures that did not naturally fall within the Bill being tacked on. I am sincerely sorry if I have in any way led the right hon. Lady to expect my full support for the whole motion. Having listened to the views of other hon. Members—as I hope that the Government will—I shall withdraw my name from the motion.

Mrs. Beckett: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for making that clear. It was not so clear previously. If he and his party have changed their minds, that is a matter for them. As I am sure he is aware, members of his party, including some of those who have spoken in the debate, were kept informed. As far as I am aware, they were informed at least a week ago that we intended to include the provisions in the Bill. It would not be fair to imply that that came as a source of astonishment to the Liberal Democrats when they arrived at the House today. They are free to change their minds and I am sure that the House notes that they have done so.

Sadly—it is always sad when such matters have to be dealt with in this way—it is not unprecedented for the House to act as the Government propose. We have sought—

Mr. Benn: Much emphasis has been put on clauses 5 to 7. Points that are new to me have been made. Will my right hon. Friend give me a categorical assurance that President Clinton was not told that, by the time that he arrived in Ireland, the provision would be embodied in statute? If that is the reason, let us know it and determine whether it is valid.

Mrs. Beckett: I do not speak for the American Government, but I assure my right hon. Friend that the issue that he raised has formed no part of the Government's consideration and the matter has not been discussed in that way.

I said at the outset that I did not speak at the start of the debate because I did not wish to take up the time of the House—and nor do I wish to do so now. The debate has veered between those who have complained that there has been insufficient time to consider the matters that will be before us in the Bill and those who have complained that they had heard all about the issue in the press before the House had met. Those points of view are valid, but they are not consistent with each other. I have been surprised to hear both expressed by the same person at times. The Bill follows what the Prime Minister said at Omagh. The way in which the Government intended to proceed was extensively discussed and trailed. My hon. Friend the Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody) and others are rightly concerned about how the provisions will operate should the House decide to pass the Bill. We have made it plain that the matter will be kept under review. It will be examined and will

form part of the consultation process to which my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary has referred, as will all the provisions of the Bill.

Mr. Cash *rose—*

Mrs. Beckett: If the hon. Gentleman will forgive me, I want to get on.

It has been said during the debate that the matters in the second part of the Bill will not form part of the review. That is not correct.

Mr. Cash: On a point of order, Madam Speaker.

Mrs. Beckett: Any issue on which hon. Members have concerns can be raised—

Madam Speaker: Order. I have a point of order. I think that it is more a point of frustration.

Mr. Cash: I have already raised with the Prime Minister and with you, Madam Speaker, the question whether the long title could be amended. I have had further discussions with the Clerks, and it is clear that there are significant difficulties, unless the Leader of the House is prepared in principle to concede that that could be done—

Madam Speaker: Order. That is not a point of order for me. It is an intervention on the Leader of the House, who may now continue.

Mrs. Beckett: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I can only say to the hon. Gentleman—

Mrs. Dunwoody: Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mrs. Beckett: Of course.

Mrs. Dunwoody: My right hon. Friend was kind enough to refer to me. May I ask her, very seriously, whether the Government will simply accept that the Bill is a complex one which has enormous implications? Even those of us who want to see on the statute book those aspects of the Bill that are most urgently needed in Northern Ireland have real reservations about it. During the next part of the debate, will she seriously consider whether there is a way in which the guillotine can be removed?

Mrs. Beckett: The motion is not, strictly speaking, a guillotine motion. It is a business motion, which was carefully considered so as to try to give a fair amount of time for the debate. It does give more time than has been given for debate on such matters in the past. I believe that the House has the capacity thoroughly and properly to debate the proposals that the Government are making, should the House wish to use and exercise that capacity. I am anxious, as I know my hon. Friend will be, to proceed towards allowing the House to take that step.

Mr. Dafydd Wigley (Caernarfon): Does the Leader of the House accept that some of the implications of clauses 5 to 7 are technical and that Members might be well advised to consult people outside the House before coming to a conclusion on them? Given that the logic of proceeding at speed stems from the Irish situation and a desire to walk side by side with events in Dublin, and that that same logic does not apply to clauses 5 to 7, cannot the Government amend their position on that part of the Bill?

Mrs. Beckett: There have been recent terrorist events in places other than Omagh and therefore that is not the sole reason why the Government feel it necessary to put before the House the prospect of acting with some speed. The right hon. Gentleman says that the matters in the latter part of the Bill raise certain issues, but those issues have themselves been extensively discussed by the House over the past couple of years in a variety of different contexts. Therefore it has been possible for people to become conscious of some of the implications of the issues that he raises. However, it is undoubtedly the case—

Mr. Cash: Will the right hon. Lady give way?

Mr. Ian Taylor: Will the right hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. Beckett: With great respect to both hon. Gentlemen, I do not think that our constituents who send us here expect us to spend our time discussing the minutiae of how we debate the Bill. I say that with great respect to the hon. Gentlemen, who are both long-serving Members of Parliament, and bearing in mind the fact that the hon. Member for Stone has voted for a guillotine on a previous occasion.

Mr. Cash: Will the right hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. Beckett: I shall not give way. I am simply saying to the hon. Gentleman and to the House that I have been a Member of Parliament for as long as many and it has never been my practice to debate sittings motions and take up time, unless it was absolutely necessary. Hon. Members have raised important issues relating to whether matters should be handled in this way, but that question has been dealt with and I do not propose to deal with it at greater length.

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mrs. Beckett: I shall give way to my hon. Friend, but I say to him and to the House that I do not intend to give way again.

Mr. Corbyn: The leader of Plaid Cymru, the right hon. Member for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley), made an important point relating to clauses 5, 6 and 7 and their extra-territorial implications. Does my right hon. Friend accept that there is a need for serious discussion and consultation with a large number of people before the House takes such a major legislative step, which, in effect, will give power in British law to other countries when we do not have any such control over other countries' laws?

Mrs. Beckett: I am sure that my hon. Friend has read the Bill and seen that the Government have taken steps to write safeguards into it. He will also be aware that the matter has been extensively discussed over a very long period before being put forward in legislation. I say both

[Mrs. Beckett]

to my hon. Friend and to the leader of Plaid Cymru that one of the reasons for the precise nature of the Government's motion was to ensure that the House had the opportunity specifically to consider those clauses of the Bill and not to allow that time to be swallowed up by the debate on the earlier part of the Bill. The Government have tried to recognise the sensitivities that hon. Members have expressed and to deal with them.

The hon. Member for Aldridge-Brownhills, who feels passionately and strongly about the liberties secured in the House, spoke about the liberties secured for him here. The principal reason why the Government are introducing the Bill is that securing our liberties and securing peace within the United Kingdom are of great importance to us all. That is why those on the Opposition Front Bench supported the manner in which the Government are proceeding. The matters before us are ones that, from time to time, have to be considered with a little more dispatch than is our wont. The hon. Gentleman also said that he hoped that we would march step in step with the Irish Parliament and Government; we are seeking to do so today.

Question put:—

The House divided: Ayes 317, Noes 87.

Division No. 357] **[4.54 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Alexander, Douglas
Allen, Graham
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Banks, Tony
Barron, Kevin
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, Rt Hon Mrs Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne
Bell, Stuart *(Middlesbrough)*
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blair, Rt Hon Tony
Blizzard, Bob
Blunkett, Rt Hon David
Boateng, Paul
Borrow, David
Bottomley, Rt Hon Mrs Virginia
Bradley, Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brazier, Julian
Brown, Rt Hon Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, Rt Hon Nick *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burns, Simon
Butler, Mrs Christine
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell–Savours, Dale
Cann, Jamie
Caplin, Ivor
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chaytor, David
Chisholm, Malcolm
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clark, Rt Hon Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clifton–Brown, Geoffrey
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Iain
Collins, Tim
Colman, Tony
Connarty, Michael
Cooper, Yvette
Corbett, Robin
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cran, James
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr John *(Copeland)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Curry, Rt Hon David
Darvill, Keith
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham)*
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, John
Dobbin, Jim
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Dowd, Jim
Duncan, Alan
Edwards, Huw
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Etherington, Bill
Evans, Nigel
Fallon, Michael
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foster, Michael J *(Worcester)*
Foulkes, George
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam
Fraser, Christopher
Fyfe, Maria
Gale, Roger
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry
George, Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gibb, Nick
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Gilroy, Mrs Linda
Godman, Dr Norman A
Goggins, Paul
Golding, Mrs Llin
Goodlad, Rt Hon Sir Alastair
Gordon, Mrs Eileen
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Green, Damian
Greenway, John
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Grogan, John
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hanson, David
Hawkins, Nick
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Heald, Oliver
Healey, John
Heathcoat–Amory, Rt Hon David
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Heppell, John
Hewitt, Ms Patricia
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Horam, John
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jackson, Ms Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson Smith, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Mrs Fiona *(Newark)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jowell, Ms Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Kelly, Ms Ruth
Kemp, Fraser
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Key, Robert
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lansley, Andrew
Laxton, Bob
Leslie, Christopher
Letwin, Oliver
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Love, Andrew
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Steve
McCafferty, Ms Chris
McDonagh, Siobhain
McIsaac, Shona
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
Mackinlay, Andrew
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Mandelson, Peter
Maples, John
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Martlew, Eric
Maude, Rt Hon Francis
Maxton, John
May, Mrs Theresa
Meale, Alan
Merron, Gillian
Michael, Alun
Miller, Andrew
Moffatt, Laura
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moran, Ms Margaret
Morris, Ms Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon John *(Aberavon)*
Moss, Malcolm
Mountford, Kali
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
Nicholls, Patrick
Norris, Dan
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Eddie
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Organ, Mrs Diana
Osborne, Ms Sandra
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Palmer, Dr Nick

Pearson, Ian
Pendry, Tom
Pickles, Eric
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prior, David
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Quinn, Lawrie
Raynsford, Nick
Reed, Andrew *(Loughborough)*
Reid, Dr John *(Hamilton N)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Ms Joan
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Salter, Martin
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Simpson, Keith *(Mid–Norfolk)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Rt Hon Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Snape, Peter
Soames, Nicholas
Soley, Clive
Spellar, John
Spring, Richard
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steen, Anthony
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Straw, Rt Hon Jack
Streeter, Gary
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Rt Hon Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Temple–Morris, Peter
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Tipping, Paddy
Touhig, Don
Trend, Michael
Trickett, Jon
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Vis, Dr Rudi
Wareing, Robert N
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Willetts, David
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*
Wills, Michael
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, Dr Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. David Clelland and
Mr. Greg Pope.

NOES

Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Baker, Norman
Baldry, Tony
Beggs, Roy
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bell, Martin *(Tatton)*
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Blunt, Crispin
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Brady, Graham
Breed, Colin
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Burnett, John
Burstow, Paul
Cable, Dr Vincent
Canavan, Dennis
Cash, William
Clark, Rt Hon Alan *(Kensington)*
Clwyd, Ann
Corbyn, Jeremy
Dalyell, Tam
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice)*
Donaldson, Jeffrey
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
Gorrie, Donald
Grant, Bernie
Gray, James
Grieve, Dominic
Hayes, John
Heath, Rt Hon Sir Edward
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jones, Dr Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Keetch, Paul
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross Skye)*
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loughton, Tim
McAllion, John
McCartney, Robert *(N Down)*
McDonnell, John
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
McIntosh, Miss Anne
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McNamara, Kevin
Maginnis, Ken
Malins, Humfrey
Marshall–Andrews, Robert
Mates, Michael
Mullin, Chris
Öpik, Lembit
Paisley, Rev Ian
Paterson, Owen
Randall, John
Rendel, David
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Ross, William *(E Lond'y)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Faversham)*
Ruffley, David
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
St Aubyn, Nick
Salmond, Alex
Sayeed, Jonathan
Skinner, Dennis
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Swayne, Desmond
Swinney, John
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher & Walton)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Tredinnick, David
Trimble, Rt Hon David
Walter, Robert
Webb, Steve
Whitney, Sir Raymond
Wigley, Rt Hon Dafydd
Willis, Phil
Wise, Audrey

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Peter Brooke and
Mr. Richard Shepherd.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Resolved,

That—

1.(1) Proceedings on the Criminal Justice (Terrorism and Conspiracy) Bill shall be taken and concluded at today's sitting; and for this purpose—

(a) as soon as the proceedings on this Motion are concluded, the order for Second Reading of the Bill shall be read;

(b) notices of amendments, new Clauses and new Schedules to be moved in Committee may be accepted by the Clerks at the Table before the Bill has been read a second time;

(c) when the Bill is read a second time it shall stand committed to a Committee of the whole House, and the House will immediately resolve itself into a Committee on the Bill;

(d) proceedings in Committee on clauses 1 to 4 shall be brought to a conclusion, if not previously concluded, three hours after the conclusion of proceedings on Second Reading;

(e) remaining proceedings on the Bill shall be brought to a conclusion, if not previously concluded, six hours after the conclusion of proceedings on Second Reading;

(f) at the conclusion of proceedings on the Bill at today's sitting the Speaker shall adjourn the House without putting any Question.

(2) For the purpose of concluding proceedings in accordance with sub-paragraphs 1(d) and (e), the Chair shall forthwith put the following Questions (but no others)—

(a) any Question already proposed from the Chair;

(b) any Question necessary to bring to a decision a Question so proposed;

(c) the Question on any amendment moved or Motion made by a Minister of the Crown;

(d) any Question necessary for the disposal of the business to be concluded.

(3) On a Motion made for a new Clause or a new Schedule, the Chair shall put only the Question that the Clause or Schedule be added to the Bill.

(4) If two or more Questions would fall to be put under sub-paragraph (2)(d) on successive provisions of the Bill, the Chair shall instead put a single Question in relation to those provisions.

(5) Standing Order No. 82 (Business Committee) shall not apply to proceedings on the Bill.

2. At the sitting tomorrow—

(a) any message received from the Lords relating to the Criminal Justice (Terrorism and Conspiracy) Bill shall be considered forthwith;

(b) proceedings on any message shall be brought to a conclusion, if not previously concluded, one hour after commencement;

(c) the Speaker shall not adjourn the House until she has notified the Royal Assent to any Act agreed upon by both Houses; and

(d) the Speaker shall then adjourn the House without putting any Question.

3. Standing Order No. 15(1) (Exempted business) shall apply to proceedings on the Bill at the sittings today and tomorrow.

Criminal Justice (Terrorism and Conspiracy) Bill

Order for Second Reading read.

5.8 pm

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Jack Straw): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

Madam Speaker: I have selected the amendment in the name of the hon. Member for Hull, North (Mr. McNamara). Copies of the amendment have been available in the Vote Office for some time and are still there for hon. Members who have not yet seen the amendment.

Mr. Straw: My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister made it clear in his statement that we face a new situation in Northern Ireland. The peace process is moving forward with the overwhelming support of both communities in the north and of the people of the Republic, but small splinter groups have shown themselves ready to resort to appalling and indiscriminate destruction, as they did in Omagh, in a desperate effort to throw that process off course. We cannot and we must not let such groups succeed.

The devastating bombings of the United States embassies in Kenya and Tanzania and, more recently, of the restaurant in Cape Town are further reminders, if any were needed, of the wider threat. We have to send the clearest message to international terrorist groups that we in the United Kingdom will not allow this country to be used as a base for plotting and supporting terrorist operations abroad. Britain already has wide-ranging powers to combat terrorism, but it is essential that they are kept under constant review and that we remain ready to move quickly to remedy practical deficiencies that come to light.

In opposition, we actively supported the previous Government in their rapid steps in April 1996 to extend police powers to stop and search in response to the Provisional IRA's resumed bombing campaign. As my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House spelled out a few moments ago, at that time the then Home Secretary, the right hon. and learned Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Mr. Howard), made a statement of his intention on 1 April and presented a draft Bill. With our co-operation, a guillotine motion was introduced and the debate, which finished at 1.21 am, dealt with all stages of that Bill.

Although I entirely accept that in a perfect world it is unsatisfactory to have to deal with legislation quickly and that we should never go down that road unless we have to, it is a matter of record that a Labour Government did exactly that, when in November 1974, they presented the original prevention of terrorism legislation. The Conservatives supported them at that time and, with Labour support, the previous Government introduced a more modest measure in April 1996.

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): I understand the Home Secretary's argument about terrorism. Does he recognise that the conspiracy part of the Bill is not confined to terrorism? For example, it could apply to an

environmental pressure group that was organising a peaceful protest in Germany against the dispatch of some toxic material to Britain. Therefore, the urgency that he seeks to apply, even if it were applied to terrorism outside Northern Ireland, cannot be applied to the non-terrorist implications of the Bill.

Mr. Straw: I shall come to that. The right hon. Gentleman has had much more notice of this matter than usual because of co-operation, which may turn out to be one way. The Liberal Democrats can tear up with gay abandon the agreements to which they sign up. We live and learn. The right hon. Gentleman is wholly wrong. It is impossible to conceive of a circumstance in which what he describes as a plan to disrupt a peaceful protest in Germany would be an offence here. The right hon. Gentleman spoke on the 1996 legislation and is well enough versed in these matters to know that the Bill contains the fundamental principle of dual criminality. We never lay a charge of conspiracy to commit an offence abroad if that offence is also an offence here.

If it were an offence here to do what the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) describes, people could be charged with it because we have signed Council of Europe conventions that allow prosecutions for a wide range of offences where there is evidence of conspiracy here to commit those offences in other countries. That applies not just to EU countries, but to other Council of Europe countries, which, as the right hon. Gentleman knows include some in eastern Europe. I shall explain in more detail when I come to the relevant part of the Bill why the change is important. We have lost 28 lives in the north of Ireland—but I do not seek to make this a competition, because any person's death from terrorism diminishes us. However, 10 times more lives were lost in outrages in Dar es Salaam and Kenya, and we would have been blind and deaf if we had not recognised the need to act in respect of those as well as in respect of terrorism in the north of Ireland.

Mr. Nigel Waterson (Eastbourne): Does the Home Secretary accept that clauses 5 and 7 are substantially lifted from my private Member's Bill of some 18 months ago which his party failed to support in the Division Lobby? What is the difference between the situation 18 months ago and that of today? Sadly, many people were killed in terrorist outrages more than 18 months ago and many have been killed in such outrages since.

Mr. Dale Campbell-Savours (Workington): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. Would you advise the Home Secretary to take such interventions when he comes to clause 5? If that does not happen, the House will be distracted and delayed in dealing with the Bill.

Madam Speaker: That is a sensible suggestion, but it is hardly a point of order. However, I am sure that the Home Secretary and the House have noted it.

Mr. Straw: Up to a point, I accept my hon. Friend's intervention, but he will know from his years in the House that I seek to accept interventions because that is vital to the process of debate, especially when the House is asked at short notice to deal with such a Bill.

We ensured that the Bill that was presented by the hon. Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Waterson) received an unopposed Second Reading. Although we moved amendments in Committee, as I recall we did not vote against the Bill at any stage. We had reservations about its width in the context of incitement, which is not included in clauses 5, 6 and 7 of the Bill that we are debating. As a safeguard to deal with the legitimate anxieties about how such a power might be misused, any prosecution will be subject to the explicit and prior approval of the Attorney-General. Clauses 5, 6 and 7 take account of that.

The private Member's Bill that was presented by the hon. Member for Eastbourne did not succeed because "I spy strangers" was called and the Conservative Whips were so incompetent that they could not get 40 Conservative Members to secure a quorum. I had not intended to mention that embarrassment in terms of the previous Administration's mismanagement. I hope that there is all-party support for the present measure. If the hon. Gentleman's Bill had been important, the previous Government would have made it a Government measure.

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for his preparedness to take interventions. I refer him to the principle of clauses 5, 6 and 7. Does he accept that there is a serious danger of incorporating in British law what pertains in countries over which we have no influence or control whatever? People in such countries might decide that some of their political opponents in exile are dangerous and should be committed to prison. The title of clause 5 does not specify the offences. It merely states:

"Conspiracy to commit offences outside the United Kingdom".

Does my right hon. Friend agree that that part of the Bill is extremely dangerous and has far-reaching implications for the principles of political asylum anywhere for people who legitimately oppose brutal and barbarous regimes in other parts of the world?

Mr. Straw: I understand my hon. Friend's anxiety. Others have expressed it, and I hope that not only on Second Reading but in Committee my right hon. and hon. Friends and I will be able to allay those fears. They can be allayed by reference not only to what is in the Bill but by the important fact that the Attorney-General will have the duty personally to examine every potential prosecution and, if required, he will be able to take the public interest into account. That includes some of the considerations that my hon. Friend raises.

We need not look in the crystal ball; we can look at the book. As I explained, any offences committed in countries that are members of the Council of Europe can be the subject here of a charge of conspiracy to commit those offences abroad. In addition, the offences of conspiracy to commit murder and conspiracy to commit sexual offences anywhere in the world can already be put on an indictment.

Mr. Beith: So what is the urgency?

Mr. Straw: The urgency is to ensure that, in appropriate circumstances, we can also charge people with terrorist and other serious offences. There is one other explanation. At the moment, we can charge in respect of terrorist offences not only in countries that are members of the Council of Europe but in the United States and India. Therefore, if the outrages committed by middle

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east terrorists had taken place not against the American embassies in Dar es Salaam and Nairobi but against the American embassy in Delhi, and there was evidence here of a conspiracy to commit that outrage, we could have brought that charge. In all the 19 years that I have been in the House I have never once heard a representation against that power being used.

My right hon. and learned Friend the Attorney-General would exercise the greatest care in judging whether an indictment should lie, and judge and jury would also deal carefully with the matter. We are dealing here with important anomalies which mean that our weaponry against those who conspire to commit terrorist offences abroad is defective. I have long believed that we should remedy those defects and, in the light of the nearly 300 people who lost their lives in those outrages in east Africa, now is the time to take action.

We shall return to the question of asylum, but the law and the practice here are categorical. Even where, from time to time, people in Britain are convicted of terrorist offences that relate to international, not Irish, terrorism, it is common practice where the offence is serious for a deportation order to be issued against such individuals if they are not British citizens. But those people are not automatically deported. Despite their previous convictions, they have rights under the United Nations convention on refugees and rights under article 3 of the European convention on human rights, which we are strengthening by its incorporation. They cannot be sent back to the country from which they came if they will then be subject again to degrading punishment.

Mr. Gordon Prentice (Pendle): No prosecution can be taken forward under clause 5 without the agreement of the Attorney-General. My right hon. Friend mentioned the public interest consideration that the Attorney-General of the day would apply. Would I be right in surmising that the Attorney-General may consider it important not to alienate a major trading partner and that, because of that, no action should be taken, despite there being, on the face of it, good reason for that?

Mr. Straw: My right hon. and learned Friend the Attorney-General furrows his brow with some measure of disbelief at the supposition behind the question. Such a consideration would be entirely outwith the quasi-judicial way in which, in my time in the House, the present Attorney-General and—I say with great respect—his predecessors have operated.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Straw: I shall give way to three hon. Friends; then I must proceed with the debate. Of course, I shall also give way later.

Mr. Tony Benn (Chesterfield): To be specific, Osama bin Laden was funded by the Central Intelligence Agency to fight the Russians in Afghanistan. If anyone had supported him then, would he have been caught by what the Bill proposes? Many of us, including my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary and I, supported Mandela when he was imprisoned for terrorism to which he confessed at the Rivonia trial. If people are now engaged in trying to topple Saddam Hussein, Gaddafi, or North Korea, would they be caught by the Bill? Would the Bill apply to Sandline and to other mercenaries who provide the mechanism for this? Would it apply to the security services? My right hon. Friend must be absolutely specific. If we pass this legislation, prosecutions will arbitrarily be left to the Attorney-General. Attorneys-General can be flexible in their interpretation of the law if it is inconvenient to the Government in which they serve. That is why they remain Attorneys-General. We must not pretend that this is simply a matter of the law, the law, the law. It is a matter of governmental discretion. It would be helpful if my right hon. Friend would answer those questions.

Mr. Straw: I shall do my best but, if I fail in my right hon. Friend's eyes, as I suppose I might, I hope that he will return to the matter in Committee.

The Attorney-General's decision is simply to proceed to prosecute. He is not judge and jury. Aside from the wider issues of the public interest, the Attorney-General must, above all, take into account whether he believes that there is a case to go before the courts and then before a jury. If the case is weak, it is highly likely that the judge will throw it out before it gets to the jury or, if he allows the case to go to the jury, that the jury will throw it out. I have great confidence in the ability of British jurors to determine guilt or innocence in serious cases of this kind. I am clear in my belief that they would do so.

We are dealing here not with a clean sheet but with a highly anomalous situation where already conspiracy to commit murder anywhere in the world is an offence here, as is conspiracy to commit various sexual offences and, as it happens, some computer crimes. A conspiracy to commit terrorist offences in the United States and India is already an offence here and a conspiracy to commit any offence of any kind in any country that is a member of the Council of Europe is already an offence.

Mrs. Maria Fyfe (Glasgow, Maryhill): My right hon. Friend refers to the Attorney-General being a safeguard, but he is not immortal and we must worry about any future incumbent's attitudes. It is appalling to think that a person's liberty could depend on the fairness, justice and probity of one individual. Surely the Bill needs to give people the clear safeguard that, if they do something against despotic regimes abroad that is not illegal here and which we as democrats would support, they need not fear prosecution here.

Mr. Straw: Although Attorneys-General are not immortal, as it happens—this is an ad hominem point—my right hon. and learned Friend is almost immortal. Next year, he celebrates 40 years in this place. I was in his constituency yesterday in part to celebrate that great and looming day which will take place in October.

My hon. Friend's other point was also raised by my right hon. Friend the Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn). I do not believe for a second that, under the Bill as drafted, any idea of a charge against people who supported the African National Congress, as I did, throughout the period of apartheid, would have remotely got on its feet. We are not talking about that; we are talking about conspiracy to commit serious crime. Much of what the ANC was doing here was a crime in the vile Republic of South Africa, as it then was, but it was not a

crime here. No charge can be made unless it is a crime not only in the country concerned but here. That is the essence of the dual criminality rule.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Straw: I shall take an intervention from my hon. Friend the Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick) and then from the hon. Member for Mid-Bedfordshire (Mr. Sayeed).

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): Like most people in the country, I suppose, I do not believe that Britain should be some kind of haven for those committing terrorist offences abroad. It is inconceivable that we should give asylum to those who do that. However, why do we not insert the word "terrorist" in the appropriate place in the phrase "conspiracy to commit offences"? I understand that other serious offences that my right hon. Friend mentioned, such as sexual offences, would be covered by other laws, but in order to tighten the legislation and to safeguard civil liberties, will he consider adding the word "terrorist" at the appropriate place?

Mr. Straw: We shall return to the point in Committee. The Bill tabled as a private Member's Bill under the previous Administration covered all potential offences. We supported it at that time and did not argue about the fact that it covered a wide range of offences. I know that the anxieties of my hon. Friends and Opposition Members relate principally to terrorist offences. I do not believe, therefore, that, if we excluded other offences, those anxieties would be allayed.

Mr. Jonathan Sayeed (Mid-Bedfordshire) *rose—*

Mr. Straw: I shall make some progress before I take another batch of interventions. The hon. Member for Mid-Bedfordshire will be the first.

I should make it clear that, in moving swiftly to close specific loopholes, as we propose to do today, we are complementing the longer-term work already in hand comprehensively to review the prevention of terrorism legislation as a whole. My predecessor, the right hon. and learned Member for Folkestone and Hythe, began that process in 1995 when he appointed the distinguished Law Lord, Lord Lloyd of Berwick, to conduct a thorough review of anti-terrorist measures. Lord Lloyd published his report in October 1996. I made an interim report about the future of anti-terrorist legislation to the House on 30 October last year.

I can now tell the House that work on preparation of the promised consultation paper is well advanced. The hon. Member for Aldridge-Brownhills (Mr. Shepherd) asked why we had not met the original timetable for the publication of the paper. The answer is that we kept hoping to do so, but circumstances, particularly in the island of Ireland, kept changing. Although I understand the frustration that that has caused, which has also been caused to me and to officials in the Northern Ireland Office and the Home Office because we had to keep changing the draft, it has turned out to be sensible that we did not publish that document earlier. We will publish it in the autumn.

Consideration of that document and of the legislation that should follow will provide the opportunity to deal with some of the more wide-ranging proposals for change that have been made in the past few days, including those mentioned earlier by the right hon. Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble), which will no doubt be raised by hon. Members today. It will also be an opportunity to reflect on the practical impact of the changes to which I hope the House will agree today.

The purpose of the Bill is therefore limited. It is tightly focused and it is undoubtedly tough, but it is proportionate. I shall deal first with the provisions that concern Northern Ireland and terrorism related to it.

Mr. Sayeed: I am grateful to the Home Secretary for giving way. We can all agree that it is important to introduce good-quality legislation to deal with international terrorism, particularly as international terrorism is changing from state-sponsored terrorism to a rather apolitical form of terrorism. Although it is important, why is it so urgent to table legislation that will not receive proper consideration? Everyone may agree on the principles, but the words of the Bill were not seen until 6.10 yesterday evening. It is incumbent on the Home Secretary to explain why a measure dealing with international terrorism is so urgent that Parliament must be recalled. Why could it not wait six or seven weeks?

Mr. Straw: Such a Bill would not wait six or seven weeks. If it were taken in normal time, it would have to wait until the next Session. These are always matters of fine judgment. Had the bombings of the American embassies in Dar es Salaam and Nairobi not taken place, and had there not been the loss of almost 300 lives and the injury of many hundreds more, we would not have introduced the measure at this time, just as if there had not been the loss of 28 lives in Omagh, the House would not have been recalled to consider the legislation. It is a matter of proportion.

I spent 18 years on the Opposition side of the House where the hon. Member for Mid-Bedfordshire now sits, trying to scrutinise Government legislation as best I could. Of course it is far better to have time to scrutinise legislation and to do so carefully. Sometimes that is not possible. I have done my best, as my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has done, to explain the circumstances where that judgment must be made. It was made in 1974 by the previous Labour Government and again, among other times, in April 1996.

In the space of the same month, we have witnessed the single worst terrorist outrage in the north of Ireland throughout the entire 30 years of troubles there, and one of the most serious terrorist outrages on the international scene that the world has ever witnessed. Taking those facts together, it was not unreasonable for Parliament to be recalled or for the Bill to come before the House. I accept that there is a greater possibility that some of the wording is not entirely accurate. We will listen carefully to what is said today.

The parts of the Bill that have not been before the House ever before—clauses 1 to 4—will be subject to annual review, as well as to the comprehensive review that I outlined. The first review will take place in just six months, in March. With respect to clauses 5, 6 and 7, the House need have less anxiety. The words in those clauses have been in the public domain for well over two years

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and have been the subject of a great deal of public discussion, so clauses 5, 6 and 7 are not formulations suddenly being brought before the House.

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Inverclyde): I do not want to confuse my right hon. Friend, but may I bring him back to clause 1? Proposed section 2A(3) states that the evidence of a police superintendent shall be admissible as evidence, but prohibits committal for trial in England and Wales or conviction on that basis alone. Does the same hold for Scotland, or does the Scots legal system of corroboration provide such protection? Is my right hon. Friend satisfied that the police forces of England and Wales and Scotland are working closely with the RUC and the Garda Siochana in their attempts to bring terrorists to justice?

Mr. Straw: Yes, that is provided for. It is provided for separately on page 2 in proposed section 2A(10). We can return to the matter in Committee.

Mr. Bernie Grant (Tottenham) *rose—*

Mr. Straw: If I may, I must make some progress.

Mr. William Cash (Stone) *rose—*

Mr. Straw: I am anxious to give way, but it is important that I continue my speech.

The Good Friday agreement, to which my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister referred, was comprehensive. It covered constitutional issues, as well as a wide range of confidence-building measures affecting all parts of the community. Yesterday's events, including the important and significant statement from Sinn Fein, are a further indication of how the momentum for political progress has been maintained. That has been shown by the positive reaction from everyone engaged in the process.

Mr. Andrew Robathan (Blaby): Will the Home Secretary give way?

Mr. Straw: If the hon. Gentleman will allow me, I shall make some progress and then do my best to give way.

Political co-operation is the only future for Northern Ireland. In a referendum on 22 May, the people of Northern Ireland and the people of the Republic overwhelmingly supported the agreement that the Real IRA and other splinter groups are now trying to undermine. The Government have a duty—an imperative—to ensure that those bent on such destruction do not succeed. The measures brought forward today in the Bill are targeted against groups that are not observing a full and unequivocal ceasefire.

Dr. Lynne Jones (Birmingham, Selly Oak): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Straw: If my hon. Friend will allow me, I shall make a little more progress. I shall give way to three hon. Members, of whom she will be one.

As the House knows, the Dail is also meeting today to address anti-terrorism legislation. The recall today of the two Parliaments illustrates graphically that cross-border co-operation, to which the right hon. Member for Bridgwater (Mr. King) referred, has never been better. That is equally true operationally. I saw and heard that only last Friday when I visited Belfast and spoke to the Chief Constable of the RUC, Ronnie Flanagan, and the Commissioner of the Garda, Pat Byrne, who were there for a routine meeting. I am in constant contact with my opposite number in the Republic of Ireland, John O'Donoghue, the Minister of Justice there. I last spoke to him yesterday evening about the changes that the Irish Government were tabling today in the Dail.

The clear, unequivocal message is that co-operation at all levels between north and south is vital in the fight against terrorism. This Bill, together with the legislation that is being introduced in the Republic will help that process.

We believe that it is essential to act without delay. We could have acted, in part, by secondary legislation, but we took the view that such matters ought to be dealt with openly and confidently by Parliament.

The Bill targets members of specified proscribed organisations, as defined by the Northern Ireland (Sentences) Act 1998 or designated in an order made by a Secretary of State. At present there are four such organisations—the Real IRA, the Continuity IRA, the Irish National Liberation Army and the Loyalist Volunteer Force. Membership of proscribed organisations generally has been illegal for many years, and the police have used the power with some success. Since 1990, there have been 195 convictions in Northern Ireland for membership. However, it has proved difficult in the past to prosecute for membership alone. The Bill addresses that problem in three ways.

First, the Bill allows statements by a senior police officer of the rank of superintendent or above concerning membership of a specified proscribed organisation to be admissible as evidence in court. That will not on its own be sufficient to secure conviction, although it will obviously be an important element in any prosecution.

Secondly, the Bill allows a court to draw inferences from the failure by a suspect to answer relevant questions in respect of that membership offence. Thirdly, it amends—

Mr. Chris Mullin (Sunderland, South): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Straw: I have promised to give way to three of my other colleagues, but as my hon. Friend is standing, I will give way to him.

Mr. Mullin: Would we not be able to take those inferences more seriously if the interviews were audio-recorded? What possible objection can there be to making audio recording a condition of the way in which the Bill is to be implemented? We have been promising for months now—in fact, for years—to start recording interviews with terrorist suspects in Northern Ireland. Is not today the right day to start?

Mr. Straw: What my hon. Friend describes already happens within Great Britain. There is no objection in

principle—far from it. The House has actively supported the principle for Northern Ireland, and passed such provisions into law. The only issue that remains is when it is practical to bring such provisions into operation. I cannot promise my hon. Friend that they will come into operation as soon as the Bill does, but I can promise—the RUC accepts this—that, given the decision that the House has already made and passed into law, those changes must come into force as quickly as possible. We can come back to that in Committee.

Dr. Lynne Jones: I am sure that my right hon. Friend agrees that people want to see those responsible for the atrocity at Omagh convicted of that appalling offence. I have not had time to examine the Bill thoroughly, so will he explain in what way the provisions in the legislation that we are debating today will assist in the process of convicting those responsible for the bombing, as opposed to convicting people for the lesser offence of membership of a proscribed organisation?

Mr. Straw: The third point that I was coming on to mention is that the Bill also amends the powers of arrest in the prevention of terrorism Act so that the powers in Northern Ireland are brought into line with those that already apply in Great Britain. It was anomalous—

Mr. Cash: Will the Home Secretary give way?

Mr. Straw: I should be grateful if the House would let me answer one intervention before I proceed to another. I have made it clear that, within the confines of getting through my speech, I will take as many interventions as possible.

It is anomalous that, in Great Britain, membership of a proscribed organisation is already an arrestable offence, but in Northern Ireland it is not. The amendment will mean that those suspected of the offence of membership of a proscribed organisation in Northern Ireland can be arrested on the same basis as in Great Britain.

As to the wider implications of my hon. Friend's question, the Bill gives the police and the prosecution additional powers by which they can bring a prosecution before the courts and, where the evidence is regarded as sound, secure a conviction. That is its purpose.

Mr. Robathan: The Home Secretary is giving way a great deal, and I am grateful.

Gerry Adams said yesterday, in anticipation of President Clinton's visit, that violence was finished. Does the Home Secretary recall the message sent by Martin McGuinness representing the IRA leadership in February 1993, in which he said, "The conflict is over," as quoted by the then Secretary of State in *Hansard* on 29 November 1993? My point is, what credence does the Home Secretary give to statements from Gerry Adams or Martin McGuinness on this matter?

Mr. Straw: It will come as no surprise to the hon. Gentleman that I take a similar view to my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister on this. I welcome the statement made by Sinn Fein as a significant step forward. To paraphrase my right hon. Friend, we have to take account of history, but we cannot get trapped in it. The process begun by the right hon. Member for Huntingdon (Mr. Major), then Prime Minister, and continued by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has started a momentum to get people away from terrorism, including the majority of those who have been involved in terrorism, towards a peaceful process to secure the future in Northern Ireland.

Of course we are not dewy-eyed about that process; of course it is possible that things may go wrong; but the parties to the agreement have signed up to it. So far, they have shown rather greater determination to stick to their signature than one party in this House. The agreement was signed in April, and the parties are still sticking to it. One party in the House managed to change its mind in 24 hours, but we will not go into too much private grief on that. If, God forbid, the agreement runs into difficulties, there are various provisions within it for dealing with that.

I will give way one last time and then I must continue.

Mr. Cash: The right hon. Gentleman may have noticed that I have tried to make a point with respect to the long title of the Bill on a number of occasions with the Prime Minister, the Leader of the House and the Speaker. I now have an opportunity to put it to the Home Secretary and I hope that he will be good enough to listen just for one second.

Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that it is extremely important to ensure that members of the Real IRA or Continuity IRA who are currently in prison, about whose membership of proscribed organisations people were not sure, should not be released? Does he agree that, if notice were given of the fact that they were members of such an organisation based on the opinion of a police officer under the provisions of this Bill, it would still not be possible for the commissioners under the Northern Ireland (Sentences) Act 1998, which we passed on 28 July, to prevent that early release?

If there is a problem here—I put it in all fairness to the Home Secretary that I think there is—I am told by the Clerks of the House that it will be necessary to change the long title of the Bill. If that is the case, will the Home Secretary be good enough to give us an assurance that he will look into it and adjust the long title, so that the Government's objectives in the Bill can be achieved properly? Otherwise, dangerous people will be let loose whom the Government would not want to be let loose under any other circumstances.

Mr. Straw: The hon. Gentleman raises a serious point. I will think about it, take advice and come back to it in Committee.

Mr. Mullin: I am sorry to be a nuisance—

Mr. Straw: I realised as the words were coming out of my mouth their implication in respect of my other hon. Friends. It goes without saying that every other intervention that has been made has been serious; it is just that sometimes the interventions made by the hon. Member for Stone (Mr. Cash) are not serious.

Mr. Mullin: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for being very generous in giving way. Can we clear up the

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point about the audio recording not being practical? The report of the Independent Commissioner for the Holding Centres dated March 1998 says:

"The Centre at Strand Road, Londonderry . . . already has audio-recording facilities for interviews with non-terrorist prisoners . . . We understand that the installations at the Centres have the means of being readily adaptable to accommodate audio-recording, as and when that is authorised."

So why does not my right hon. Friend just authorise it?

Mr. Straw: My hon. Friend will no doubt wish to pursue the point in Committee, but there is no argument about the need for audio recordings in terrorist cases. It has been the subject of great concern on this side of the House, and, indeed, on the other, for many years. The House has agreed it, and it has passed into law; it is simply a question of implementing it as quickly as possible. At this moment, I am unable to give my hon. Friend the precise undertaking he seeks about implementing it exactly when the Bill passes into law, but I give him the undertaking that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, the Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office—my hon. Friend the Member for East Kilbride (Mr. Ingram)—and I are determined that it should come into force as quickly as possible.

Mr. Robert McCartney (North Down) *rose—*

Mr. Straw: I shall give way later, but I must now get on with my speech.

The Bill also gives the courts new powers to order the forfeiture of property following conviction of membership of or support for a proscribed organisation. The court will be able to order the forfeiture of any form of property if it is satisfied that it has been used in connection with the activities of a group such as the Real IRA, or believes that it may be so used. The penalties already available to the courts in these cases are severe—up to 10 years' imprisonment and an unlimited fine—but I believe that the new provision offers a valuable reinforcement. It emphasises the gravity of the offence, and pulls away the practical props that such groups need to support their work. There will be safeguards, and the forfeiture will be entirely at the discretion of the courts.

It may be of interest to the House to know that, partly because the Irish Parliament already has much more extensive powers in respect of confiscation, and partly as an indication of the seriousness with which it takes this matter, clause 17 of the Bill before the Dail today contains a provision that amends the existing law governing the confiscation of property. If property—including real property such as a farm—is used in the course of a terrorist act, that property must be confiscated. The only discretion available to the court is that it can decide not to confiscate a property if it is of the opinion that a serious injustice might arise. The burden of proof is turned. Once it has been proved that the property has been used in a crime, only in a very few cases will the whole farm not be confiscated. We are not proposing that. We are proposing that the discretion should remain with the courts.

Mr. Lembit Öpik (Montgomeryshire) *rose—*

Mr. Straw: I shall give way to the hon. Gentleman in a moment, but I must make progress.

The courts will hear anyone else who has an interest in the property before making the necessary order, but they will have a firm basis for decisive action when that is in the interests of justice.

The new provisions on evidence, inferences and forfeiture extend to the whole of the United Kingdom. It happens that prosecution for membership offences has been much less common in Great Britain, but it is important that we should act consistently.

The judicial process remains paramount throughout the changes. No prosecution in Northern Ireland or in England and Wales will be conducted without the personal involvement and approval of the relevant Director of Public Prosecutions. It will continue to be a matter solely for the courts to decide whether a defendant is guilty or not on the weight and quality of the evidence presented. The present criminal burden and standard of proof for conviction will remain.

I have already referred to the requirement for the police officer's opinion to be supported by other evidence in order to found a conviction. That also applies to inferences from any failure to mention material facts. Our commitment to the rule of law is one of the crucial differences between the principles of democracy and the evil dogma of the terrorists.

Mr. Gerald Bermingham (St. Helens, South) *rose—*

Mr. Straw: I will give way in a few moments. It is just possible that I might be about to answer the point that my hon. Friend wants to make.

Earlier this Session, both Houses gave overwhelming support to the Human Rights Bill. It is not yet law, but, as the House would expect, we have gone to considerable lengths to ensure that this Bill is consistent with our commitment to human rights and to the particular requirements of the convention. The additional inference from failure to mention material facts in answer to questions, which builds on the existing power to infer from silence, takes full account of the judgment of the European Court of Human Rights in the case of Murray. In that case, the court found that inferences should not be drawn from silence prior to access to a solicitor. We have specifically covered that point in the Bill.

A further important safeguard in relation to the whole of the first part of the Bill is that all the new provisions will, as I said, be subject to annual renewal. As it happens, the first occasion that the House will have to debate renewal will be in the debate on the prevention of terrorism Act next March, just six months away.

Before I move on to the second part of the Bill, let me refer specifically to three issues that have been discussed—

Mr. Tom King (Bridgwater) *rose—*

Mr. Straw: If I may just make this point, I shall give way to the right hon. Gentleman, my hon. Friend the Member for St. Helens, South (Mr. Bermingham) and the hon. Member for Montgomeryshire (Mr. Öpik)—*[Interruption.]*—oh, and perhaps to someone behind me as well. I will not quote what Iain Macleod once said about speaking from the Front Bench.

Before I move on to the second part of the Bill, I shall refer specifically to some issues that have been discussed in the aftermath of Omagh but we have not taken forward at this stage. The first relates to evidence obtained from interception, or telephone tapping.

At present, under section 9 of the Interception of Communications Act 1985, there is an absolute ban on the use of intercept evidence in any court for any purpose. Some of the intelligence available, which leads the police to a strongly held belief that someone is a member of a designated organisation, may have come, or may come, from the product of interception. It has therefore been suggested that the intercept product might be admitted specifically to support charges of membership of a proscribed organisation, or in terrorist cases more generally.

Of course I understand the view that any material that points to involvement in terrorism should be put before the courts, but there are strong contrary arguments, which include the risk of damage to operational effectiveness from wider knowledge of interception capabilities. There are also difficulties in limiting any change to specific offences.

I hope that the House will accept that it is neither desirable nor, I suggest, practical to depart from the general rule laid down by Parliament in 1985 for the narrow purposes of this Bill. However, I acknowledge the case for looking again at the regime for interception.

Aside from any other considerations, profound changes in the technology of electronic communication have taken place in the past decade, and they, together with the decisions of the European Court in Strasbourg, have made new consideration of the regime imperative. In his report, Lord Lloyd made recommendations for a limited change in this respect, and those recommendations must be considered. I can therefore announce to the House today that, earlier in the summer, I had already put in hand a comprehensive review of the interception regime, and a consultation document will be published in due course.

The second suggestion was for much wider powers to confiscate the assets of terrorists who are convicted of offences of membership of a proscribed organisation. I announced last October that I was determined to ensure far more effective arrangements, so that criminals generally could not profit from their crimes, or use wealth that had been obtained unlawfully. Work is in hand on that, and I will be making announcements later in the year. As I have already said, the Republic of Ireland is already very much further ahead of us in this respect with its Criminal Assets Bureau, and we shall we studying its arrangements with interest.

I shall now give way to the right hon. Member for Bridgwater and some others.

Mr. Tom King: The Home Secretary drew attention to the significance of clause 4 and the power of forfeiture. He mentioned farms specifically. He will know the role that many have played as storage areas for weaponry and munitions over the years and of their use for the preparation of home-made bombs and the provision of fertiliser. Does he consider that it is sufficiently known that there is a power for the whole farm to be forfeited from someone who is found be assisting in such activities? Has consideration been given perhaps to announcing a short amnesty for any farmers who declare the existence of any stores of munitions and armaments or the location of equipment for the preparation of home-made explosives? It could be made clear that, if the farmers failed to take advantage of such an amnesty, their whole farm could be forfeited.

Mr. Straw: The right hon. Gentleman is absolutely right about the extent of the powers relating to some other offences. As to his second point, so far as I am aware no consideration has been given to the amnesty suggestion, but I and the Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office, my hon. Friend the Member for East Kilbride, believe that it is an interesting and original suggestion. I shall ensure that it receives proper consideration as part of the overall environment for decommissioning.

Mr. Bermingham: Proposed section 2A(4) contains a provision whereby, in order to comply with the judgment in the case of Murray, the prisoner has to be advised legally. Is it not a fact that, in Northern Ireland, the solicitor then withdraws? Would it not be sensible to allow the solicitor to remain, as he does in England? We should then have not only the benefit of the tape recording of the interview and of the presence of the solicitor, which would prevent any conflict, but, ultimately, an enormous saving of court time, as we have found in England, Wales and Scotland, where interviews are conducted in the presence of a solicitor, tape-recorded and presented without argument.

Mr. Straw: I have dealt with tape recordings, but I accept the gravamen of what my hon. Friend says. It is certainly true that the present position is slightly anomalous, because, in Great Britain, the solicitor, having been permitted access to his client, or vice versa, remains for the interview, which does not necessarily happen in Northern Ireland. There are reasons why the separate practice has grown up. I believe that the RUC will accept in the particular circumstances of this measure that the probative value of inferences to be drawn from a failure properly to answer a question may be enhanced if a solicitor is present. We shall pursue that point with the RUC and the prosecution authorities in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Öpik: I am also encouraged by the Home Secretary's comments on human rights issues. The civil liberties of a group of people could still suffer—those people who are coerced into assisting with terrorist acts. It is difficult to prove coercion and so forth, but is the right hon. Gentleman willing seriously to consider amendments that might help to find a way forward so that the civil liberties of individuals who have been coerced to help will not be curtailed in a way that might contravene natural justice?

Mr. Straw: Of course we will consider amendments when they are tabled, and treat them on their merits. Obviously, coercion is a defence. The hon. Gentleman may say that he is concerned about that defence being given in open court. The RUC has had long experience of dealing with people who have suffered from being coerced, and of treating their defences in the strictest confidence.

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): I am pleased to see the Home Secretary giving way so often. Earlier,

[Rev. Martin Smyth]

he spoke about confidence, and I wonder how confident he is that this legislation will result in convictions. He may be surprised to learn that, when his noble Friend Lord Mason was Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, similar legislation was suggested, and it was proposed that an RUC officer could give such evidence.

I advised Lord Mason that the Government should not go down that road, first, because the RUC gets enough flak at times—internationally—when it does an excellent job, and, secondly, because, in the Dail the legislation was then being changed because Daithe O'Connell changed the whole pattern at the time. Thereafter, IRA members denied that they were members of the organisation.

How confident is the Secretary of State that this legislation will lead to safe convictions, particularly bearing in mind the fact that, when a man called Dougan was murdered just outside Belfast, people were brought to court, there were witnesses, but one withdrew at the last minute, so the DPP said that it could not proceed with the trial? There is a political dimension, and it might be worth while bearing that in mind.

Mr. Straw: The hon. Gentleman's reference to what happened in the late 1970s underlines the point that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister was making. Circumstances really have changed, and we now have effective cross-border co-operation. The Governments of both countries are now determined to drive against that terrorist splinter group, and we now have a much better consensus than we had in the past.

We could argue whether correct judgments were made in the past—sometimes they were, sometimes they were not. The hon. Gentleman asked about the likely success of the legislation. To answer that, the best I can do—it is an important best—is quote the opinion given by the Chief Constable of the RUC, Ronnie Flanagan, on Ulster Television last Thursday. He said that the new legislation would be "very important", but went on to say:

"there are no quick fixes, there are no magic solutions",

and the

"key to our success has to be full public co-operation",

which is absolutely true.

This measure is important. We think that it will assist the police—indeed, it is a power that they have wanted. However, I make no guesses about the number of people who will be prosecuted under it, or about the number who will be deterred by it. I hope that many more will be deterred by the threats of prosecution and forfeiture.

Mr. Michael Connarty (Falkirk, East): Obviously, I would have preferred to have time to discuss these matters in parliamentary Labour party committees and to get to the detail. I want some clarification. *[Interruption.]* Opposition Members are not invited to those meetings. First, under the Bill, if a senior officer is of the opinion that a person is a member of an organisation, or the person is identified as such, and the person then fails to answer questions about membership, or denies it, can he or she be convicted because of those two simple matters, or must the person be charged with some other offence?

Secondly, my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary mentioned in passing subsection (10) of the new section 2A contained in clause 1, which refers to Scotland, and said that that could be dealt with in Committee. I understand that we must table amendments before the end of the debate on Second Reading if we wish them to be discussed in Committee, so I want him to clarify how that subsection will work. It clearly refers to any proceedings in which

"the accused is charged with belonging to a specified organisation where the court draws an inference as mentioned in subsection (6) above"—

because the accused did not deny that he or she was a member—

"any evidence that he belongs to the organisation shall be sufficient evidence of that matter."

Am I correct in interpreting that to mean that, if the person has been accused of belonging to an organisation or that is the opinion of an officer, any other evidence that is not corroborated—as it normally would be under Scots law—by a second officer would be sufficient to convict that person? Are we making such an immense change to Scots law on the Floor of the House today?

Mr. Straw: No, we are not. However, I must first correct my hon. Friend's intervention, as I think that, when he said that he would rather discuss this in a Labour party committee than in Parliament, he meant to say that he would rather have discussed it in such a committee as well as in Parliament.

Mr. Connarty: Before.

Mr. Straw: Yes. We will try to get that changed in the record as well. Perhaps I can give my hon. Friend a tip. If he wants to amend the Bill, all he has to do is table an amendment to delete subsection (10) of new section 2A in clause 1, and then we can discuss it. I have never owned up to any expertise in Scots law, but my hon. Friend the Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office, the Member for East Kilbride, who is also a Scot—

The Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office (Mr. Adam Ingram): But not an expert.

Mr. Straw: My hon. Friend has some expertise in the matter, or has access to experts. The proposal is entirely consistent with what we are introducing for England and Wales and for Northern Ireland, but my hon. Friend will deal with it at greater length in Committee.

Mr. Connarty *rose—*

Mr. Straw: I hope that my hon. Friend will accept that answer as satisfactory. We will return to the matter, I promise.

Mr. Sayeed: The Home Secretary announced a review of the use of telephone tapping to produce evidence. Will he widen the scope of that review to allow the use of intelligence information in a way that will not compromise the asset that provides it? That could be important, particularly as regards international terrorism.

Mr. Straw: To some extent it is anomalous, but intelligence obtained by electronic surveillance other than telephone tapping or interception is already admissible in court—indeed, it is sometimes admitted in court. In 1996,

we discussed that at great length in our debates on police legislation. Of course, it is a matter of fine judgment on the part of the police whether they introduce such evidence, because, by using the contents, they are admitting the fact of the surveillance and intelligence, and there is a fine line.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Straw: I have been speaking for an hour, and have been anxious to take interventions, but it is reasonable now for me to press on to a conclusion so that other hon. Members can speak.

On the conspiracy proposals, I dealt with the case for those—

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Will my right hon. Friend give way on that matter?

Mr. Straw: Perhaps my hon. Friend could let me finish my remarks. I dealt with the case for such proposals in some detail, and we will go into them in more detail in Committee.

This is not the Bill that I think some of my hon. Friends fear. It is similar to, although more narrowly defined than, the Bill brought forward two years ago, which we supported from the Opposition Front Bench. There were anxieties about whether, at that stage, the incitement provisions could have led to the problems that have been mentioned in connection with the African National Congress.

However, incitement is a much wider offence than conspiracy, and in this Bill there is no provision covering incitement. Such provision would, I accept, require detailed consideration in slow time before we could decide whether to include it.

I have already referred to the other two important safeguards—the Attorney-General's consent and the principle of dual criminality, whereby only conspiracy to commit offences abroad that are also offences here is covered.

Mr. Grant: My problem is a practical one—something that is happening today. In my constituency is an organisation called the Kurdistan information centre, which looks after about 800 Kurdish refugees on a daily basis. The police have been raiding that organisation because they believe that it has been involved in terrorism, although the organisers tell me that that is not the case. None the less, there are people there, the organisers say, who support the PKK, a terrorist organisation in Turkey, and collect money for it. Under the Bill, will that be an offence? I want a straightforward yes or no.

Mr. Straw: It is not possible to give a straightforward yes or no to a question about a particular case. With respect, I am not willing, for very good reasons, to go into details about particular organisations. However, I can tell my hon. Friend that those people—there are plenty of them in this country—who support campaigning organisations that are not planning terrorist acts abroad have nothing whatever to worry about in the Bill.

I have also, I hope, made it clear to my hon. Friends that the current situation is anomalous. It is not true that it is impossible to prosecute now for any offence of conspiracy here to commit a crime abroad. We can already prosecute for some offences in respect of some countries. Above all, we can prosecute for conspiracy to commit murder abroad, and obviously that includes terrorist murder. No one has ever demurred from that.

What we seek to do, therefore, is to bring the law into a consistent state, so that, subject to all the safeguards I have mentioned, it is possible to secure prosecutions in appropriate cases.

Mr. Campbell-Savours *rose—*

Mr. Kevin McNamara (Hull, North) *rose—*

Mr. Straw: I shall give way to my hon. Friend the Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours), and then, as I promised, to my hon. Friend the Member for Hull, North (Mr. McNamara).

Mr. Campbell-Savours: In the context of the intervention by my hon. Friend the Member for Tottenham (Mr. Grant), what would happen if the Turkish Government pleaded that there should be prosecutions within the United Kingdom? What would happen if the Turkish ambassador in London said that he believed that there should be a prosecution?

May I ask another related question, too? As I understand it, decisions on prosecution are taken in the context of what is perceived to be the public interest. We all know of cases in which prosecutions have not been brought because, we have been told, it would not be in "the public interest" to bring such a prosecution.

Would issues such as the allocation of defence contracts, troop deployments overseas and commercial factors form part of a public interest consideration that the Attorney-General and the prosecuting authorities may have to bear in mind when deciding whether a prosecution should be brought? That is what worries me in the Bill, and I hope that my right hon. Friend can give me a satisfactory answer.

Mr. Straw: I shall deal with those points in turn. My hon. Friend asks what would happen if the Turkish Government made representations about someone conspiring to commit offences in Turkey. Such representations would be treated in exactly the same way as any other representations—on their merits. In no sense would they determine whether a prosecution should take place. That would be decided on the evidence.

As for the public interest, my right hon. and learned Friend the Attorney-General—like anybody who fills that office—has a difficult set of judgments to make, but he makes them in a quasi-judicial way. My hon. Friend is right to say that, every so often, the Attorney-General may decide to prosecute a case, in the public interest, and be told that he has got it wrong; he may also decide not to prosecute and be told that that, too, was the wrong decision. That is in the nature of the job.

However, the fundamental ultimate safeguard, apart from all the procedural safeguards, is that prosecution will be a matter for the court—a matter for a judge and jury

[Mr. Straw]

to decide. No court and no jury in this country would accept the kind of tendentious case that some of my right hon. and hon. Friends fear.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Straw: I promised to give way to my hon. Friend the Member for Hull, North.

Mr. McNamara: I am most grateful to my right hon. Friend; I much admire the patience that he has shown to right hon. and hon. Members on both sides of the House. However, the conditions to be fulfilled for a prosecution to be brought contain a lot of gobbledegook, as my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Medway (Mr. Marshall-Andrews) tried to point out earlier. I cannot understand part of what is in the Bill, so will my right hon. Friend tell the House one thing: can a person be convicted under the Bill for something that is an offence in a foreign country but is not an offence in the United Kingdom?

Mr. Straw: No; I give that undertaking categorically.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Straw: I shall give way, for the last time, to my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Medway.

Mr. Robert Marshall-Andrews (Medway): I am grateful to my right hon. Friend. May I, in conjunction with the question just asked and in a spirit of seeking enlightenment, ask him to tell me and the rest of the House what subsection (6) of the proposed new section 1A of the Criminal Law Act 1977 means? It is to be found in clause 5, and I attempted to read it out earlier, but was stopped. Now I hope that I may legitimately do so. It deals with offences that are now being brought within the Bill.

For the benefit of hon. Members who do not have a copy of the Bill, subsection (6) says:

"In the application of this Part of this Act to an agreement in the case of which each of the above conditions is satisfied, a reference to an offence is to be read as a reference to what would be the offence in question but for the fact that it is not an offence triable in England and Wales."

This is not an attempt to embarrass the draftsmen, but I have genuinely struggled with that provision for a long time. I wish to be helpful, and I should be perfectly happy to help my right hon. Friend redraft the provision if he told me what was required. Indeed, I would do so free.

Mr. Straw: I was about to accept my hon. and learned Friend's offer—until he said that he would do the work for nothing. People get what they pay for when it comes to legal advice; and I say that as someone who used to earn an honest copper at the Bar.

What that absolutely transparent sentence means—*[Laughter.]* It is the dual criminality rule. That is what it is; I promise. Indeed, in that belief we have the benefit, until he changes his mind, of the opinion of the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed.

Mr. Waterson *rose—*

Mr. Donald Anderson (Swansea, East) *rose—*

Mr. Straw: I said that I would not—

Mr. Waterson: It would save time.

Mr. Straw: I shall take two more interventions—to save time. Then I must get on.

Mr. Waterson: I am most grateful to the Home Secretary, who has been most generous in taking interventions. My question genuinely might save time in a later debate. My earlier Bill, which the right hon. Gentleman has been good enough to mention, covered both conspiracy and incitement to commit offences abroad. As I read his Bill—or at least, the version of it that I have—he seems to have excised the bit about incitement. Will he explain briefly to the House why he did that?

Mr. Straw: I thought that I already had. It was because we were concerned about the implications when we were in opposition, and we are still concerned about them. In criminal justice law, we should never say "never", but, if incitement were to be included, it would require many more safeguards than those in the hon. Gentleman's Bill, or in ours, in respect of conspiracy. I do not believe that it would have been justified to bring forward emergency legislation on incitement. That is why we left that part out; we shall consider it over the longer term.

Mr. Donald Anderson *rose—*

Mr. Straw: This had better be the last intervention.

Mr. Anderson: It might save or curtail a speech later. Does my right hon. Friend—who has been very generous—agree with the following statement? Some cases are absolutely clear-cut, and any democratic society must have a means of combating them. For example—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Lord): Order. It has been brought to my attention that negotiations are continuing with the Box. That is not the normal practice of the House.

Mr. Anderson: Does my right hon. Friend agree that some cases are absolutely clear-cut, and that it would be absurd if any democratic society did not have the means to deal with them? For example, if a group—like the Baader-Meinhof group in the past—were destroying buildings and killing people in a friendly country, and if those attacks were planned in London or in the United Kingdom, it would be absurd if we were not willing and ready to deal with them.

In other, marginal, cases, public interest will arise—such as the case of the Kurds, mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Tottenham (Mr. Grant)—but the Attorney- General is used to dealing with such public interest considerations. Every day, the Attorney-General takes decisions on the public interest. Obviously, therefore, the starting point must be that we must do something about international terrorism. There must be safeguards. If we did nothing, we would be very much open to criticism.

Mr. Straw: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, and I accept what he says. I return to my point about the current anomalous position. If there were a Baader-Meinhof gang today, conspiring in Britain to commit offences in Germany, that could be the subject of an indictment for conspiracy under the Council of Europe provisions to which we have already signed up, but if such a group were conspiring to commit those offences in, for example, Australia, we could not. That is anomalous.

I now conclude my remarks. Although I fully understand the concerns that Members—including those on the Government and, I believe, Opposition Front Bench—have about the fact that we have had to be brought here during the recess, and about the fact that we are asked to accept and approve this legislation at some speed, I believe that there is, and will be, widespread support from both sides of the House for the proposals. The Bill really does represent a measured and targeted response to the appalling events that we have witnessed in Northern Ireland and around the world. It remedies specific difficulties that have been identified in taking action against the terrorists who are behind them.

It may well be that more will have to be done in future. I do not rule that out. I have described today the need for fuller consideration on a wide range of issues in the framework of wider work which we already have in hand. However, those longer-term considerations in no way diminish the desirability of acting now to take clear and self-contained steps that can have an immediate operational impact and a crucial deterrent effect. I commend the Bill to the House.

6.22 pm

Sir Norman Fowler (Sutton Coldfield): I shall seek to be brief. The context of the Bill is Omagh. The atrocity there caused immeasurable human suffering, and I believe that the violence of the assault on innocent men, women and children truly shocked the nation. I associate myself with everything that the Home Secretary has said about that. It was the latest and most terrible event in the violent history of the past 30 years.

We all remember that tragic history in different ways. At the end of the 1960s, I was a reporter, covering the initial descent into violence in Northern Ireland. In the 1970s, I was a parliamentary private secretary in the Northern Ireland Office when Lord Whitelaw was Secretary of State. In the 1980s, I was evacuated, like my Cabinet colleagues, from the Grand hotel in Brighton after the IRA bomb there and, more to the point, next day, as Health Secretary, visited the hospital that was caring for the injured.

Against that background, in the 1990s I have given full support, first to my right hon. Friend the Member for Huntingdon (Mr. Major) in his very important initiative, and then to the Prime Minister and his colleagues in their efforts to achieve peace.

We should be in no doubt about the intention of the people who planted the explosives at Omagh—it was to destroy the prospect of peace, which the overwhelming majority of people, both in Ulster and in the Irish Republic, showed conclusively that they wanted. It seems to me that it is very much up to the House, as far as we can influence the outcome, to ensure that the bombers of Omagh do not succeed. One way in which that can be done is by demonstrating as united a front as possible against terrorism.

Among the hopeful developments of the past years has been the ever-increasing co-operation between our Government and the Irish Government. That makes the response to terrorism immeasurably stronger. However, I suggest to the Home Secretary that none of that is to say that there cannot be debate and different views on the exact way forward. There is no monopoly of wisdom. Judgments may well be different, but let it be clear—especially to terrorists—that the aim of any such debate is to strengthen, not weaken, our defences against terrorism. I believe that the House is united on that essential aim.

We should be frank about this debate. This is not the ideal way of making law—I doubt whether anyone would try to pretend that it was. The Bill was published for the first time yesterday evening. It is expected to have its Second Reading and complete its consideration in Committee tonight—and, I suspect, tomorrow morning—and, if all is well, it will go to the Lords and become law tomorrow.

By any measure, that gives Parliament precious little time to subject the important measures in the Bill to scrutiny. I am concerned about parliamentary scrutiny—with respect to the hon. Member for Tottenham (Mr. Grant), who said that there should have been a meeting of the parliamentary Labour party, as its opinion was a crucial determinant. *[Interruption.]* He was corrected by the Home Secretary—although even then he did not seem to get the hint. [HON. MEMBERS: "He has gone."] The hon. Gentleman has indeed gone—doubtless to convene such a meeting.

The House would not normally contemplate the procedure that we are adopting with regard to the Bill. With respect, any of the measures before us could have been introduced in the past 18 months. Specifically, the provisions concerning conspiracy to commit an offence overseas have been a draft Bill ready for introduction throughout the Government's time in office. Therefore, although I understand and respect the Home Secretary's argument about urgency, this is not, by any standards, an ideal process.

Against that background, however, I welcome the fact that the provisions relating to Northern Ireland will need to be reviewed year by year. That is some defence. There was initial doubt about that, at least in the press. Had the 12-month review path not been chosen, it would have been our first amendment to the Bill in Committee. If we cannot have proper pre-legislative scrutiny, we can at least have the opportunity to review the workings of that legislation after 12 months. We should make that review real; I shall return to that subject later.

On the same theme, I welcome what the Home Secretary said on the admissibility of evidence derived from telephone tapping. It is entirely right that we should give thorough, detailed consideration to that proposal. We need to look at the entire position, and there would

[Sir Norman Fowler]

certainly have been no case for adding such a measure to the Bill. We look forward to the consultation document on counter-terrorism—with the hope that it may be published as speedily as possible, as it has been promised for some time.

I turn first to the part of the Bill that deals with the provisions concerning conspiracy to commit terrorist acts abroad. That was the subject of a Bill introduced by my hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Waterson) in the 1996–97 Session, with the support of the previous Conservative Government—the Jurisdiction (Conspiracy and Incitement) Bill. I hear what the Home Secretary says about the consistent support given to the measure by the previous Labour Opposition. Actually, in the previous Parliament, Labour Members kept out of the Lobbies to prevent that Bill from being passed, but let us not make too much of that point.

The measures now proposed follow that Bill very closely. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne on his initiative, which is now near success. I also congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Croydon, South (Mr. Ottaway), who, years earlier, drew attention to the defects in the current law. Those defects, I feel, are clear. As the law stands, in some circumstances, people living in this country can conspire to commit offences overseas, knowing that they are immune from prosecution for their conspiracy in the United Kingdom. In other words, they can escape prosecution simply because their actions took place in the United Kingdom.

The point was made by my hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne when he introduced his Bill. Referring to a case at the Old Bailey, he said that one of the arguments advanced by defence counsel was that, although the defendants had indeed planned to cause explosions, they had planned to cause them not in Britain but overseas. Most people today would not regard that as a valid distinction, any more than they would if the position were reversed and Britain were the target of an overseas conspiracy.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): Does the right hon. Gentleman recollect that—as I think the hon. Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Waterson) would accept—one of the troubles with both Bills was the definition of a terrorist? One man's freedom fighter might be another man's terrorist. That cliché sums up, and encapsulates, a real problem; how would the right hon. Gentleman overcome it?

Sir Norman Fowler: It does sum up a problem, but I think that the dual criminality test inserted by the Government meets the point.

Dr. Phyllis Starkey (Milton Keynes, South-West): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Sir Norman Fowler: May I first finish my response to the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell)? I do not intend to take interventions in threes, as the Home Secretary did.

This is not just my view as a layman; it is the view of Lord Lloyd, a Lord of Appeal, expressed in his report on counter-terrorism legislation. He said that the most significant additional measure that the Government could take would be to amend the law on conspiracy to facilitate the prosecution of those who conspire here to commit terrorist offences abroad. He added:

> "It may take a prosecution or two before the measure takes full effect but it should then serve as a demonstration, both to those involved and to the international community, of the Government's determination to make the UK as difficult and uncomfortable a place as possible for supporters of terrorism overseas."

That strikes me as an entirely legitimate objective. It is the objective set out by my hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne, and I strongly support it.

Dr. Starkey *rose—*

Mr. Waterson *rose—*

Sir Norman Fowler: Although I will not give way in threes, I will give way in twos.

Dr. Starkey: Does the right hon. Gentleman accept that his answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) was slightly offbeat? The dual criminality test applies to the nature of the offence, but the point that my hon. Friend was trying to make did not relate to that; his point was that the difference between a freedom fighter and a terrorist depends on whom the offence is committed against. If it is committed against a democratic Government, the person concerned is obviously a terrorist; but if it is committed against a despotic Government, that person may well be a freedom fighter.

Sir Norman Fowler: There will be the test of the Attorney-General, who must give advice and, indeed, permission in such a context. Moreover, the offence must be an offence in both the countries involved. If we are to seek to legislate against international terrorism, laws of this kind will be necessary, and it seems to me that the checks proposed by the Government are adequate for the purpose.

Mr. Waterson: Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Sir Norman Fowler: I give way to my hon. Friend and mentor.

Mr. Waterson: I am grateful.

I can confirm that the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) was correct in saying that the proposition that one man's terrorist is another man's freedom fighter was a constant theme among those who were then Opposition Members. The point that I consistently made in defending my Bill—a point that I am sure the Home Secretary would also make in defending his—was that such distinctions were not necessary. As long as the dual criminality rule applies—as long as something is a criminal offence here as well as in the other country involved—it can be prosecuted. It may then become a matter for the Attorney-General, but he will be acting, not in a political, but in a quasi-judicial capacity—deciding, for example, whether Mr. Mandela should be prosecuted for blowing up pylons in South Africa.

Sir Norman Fowler: I agree entirely with what my hon. Friend has said.

Above all, I feel that there is a general principle at stake. The challenge of terrorism is now international, as the events of the last month have shown. Appalling terrorist bombings in Nairobi and Dar es Salaam provide a context for today's debate, although all the evidence suggests that much of the planning of those bombings took place outside the countries where people were killed and maimed. I do not think that the Government are open to criticism in that respect: they have sought to respond.

In the face of such a challenge, we cannot afford to have gaps in the law that can be exploited. The United States now has a counter-terrorism law that criminalises conspiracies to kill, murder or maim persons outside the US, so long as at least one of the conspirators commits an act in furtherance of that conspiracy in the US. In this country, the Sexual Offences Act 1993 dealt with conspiracy and incitement in this country to commit sexual offences against children abroad. It was an important step in the fight against child sex tourism, and an example of the same principle.

Audrey Wise (Preston): The Bill does not talk about killing or maiming; it talks about offences. The Home Secretary has told us that we can already deal with conspiracies to murder. How is it acceptable simply to say that, if something is an offence here and an offence there, everything is all right? The difference between here and there is that we have political processes. We have votes, and we therefore do not expect people to sabotage the electoral system—but those who have no votes might have no option but to take direct action, and then to be called terrorists.

Sir Norman Fowler: I am clearly in an almost unique position in the House, in that I agree with what the Home Secretary has said about the clauses that we are discussing. The evidence is in Lord Lloyd's report of the inquiry into legislation against terrorism, which I am sure the hon. Lady has read. I do not think that the Home Secretary was saying that, in all circumstances, all terrorist offences were already covered by existing legislation. What he said was that some could be covered; otherwise, we would not be debating this legislation today.

Mr. Beith: As the right hon. Gentleman has quoted from Lord Lloyd's report, he must recognise that what Lord Lloyd recommended was that the law should be amended

"to facilitate the prosecution of those who conspire here to commit terrorist acts abroad."

That does not include the wide range of offences referred to in the Bill.

Sir Norman Fowler: Those were the terms of reference that Lord Lloyd was given. I am confining my remarks to terrorist offences; if the right hon. Gentleman is saying that the provisions should not be extended to, for instance, drug offences, I am not sure that I go along with him.

Mr. Öpik *rose—*

Sir Norman Fowler: With respect, I think that these points can be developed later.

I want to go at least some way towards meeting the point made by the hon. Member for Preston (Audrey Wise). Clearly, there must be safeguards to preserve legitimate opposition—political opposition to foreign regimes—but the requirement for dual criminality will surely mean that, for the legislation to apply, the offence must also be an offence here in the United Kingdom. I support that part of the Bill.

Let me, however, say something in parentheses about international terrorism and the issues that we have been discussing. We have tended to debate so far on the basis that only legislation and the making of law will be effective. Obviously, we must underline the point that one of the most important measures we can take is to have as strong and effective a police service as we possibly can. It would be less than frank of me not to say that we do not like to see the signs that—in some forces, at any rate—strengths are going down. We would want to look at that closely as far as the Metropolitan police is concerned.

Our aim should be to have a general law covering counter-terrorism and the treatment of terrorists which applies to every part of the United Kingdom. The Omagh massacre proves that—for the present, at least—there is a need for emergency power legislation. According to the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland—this was repeated by the Home Secretary—the aim of the measures relating to Northern Ireland is to increase the isolation of the small number of individuals and groups on either side of the border who are still engaged in violence.

The Home Secretary is saying that membership of the Real IRA is already a criminal offence in Northern Ireland, but that experience has shown that it is virtually impossible to secure a conviction for that alone. Thus, we have the proposal to make admissible in court the evidence of a senior police officer that such a person is a member of an illegal organisation, and the proposal to take into account the response of the accused.

Clearly, there are important questions concerning the fairness of the measure. There is always a balance to be struck between the protection of the public generally and the chance of injustice to an individual. We cannot just shrug those issues off. We must always remember that one of the aims of counter-terrorist policy must be to keep the support of public opinion. It does no good if legislation introduced for the best possible motives results in public support diminishing.

We are talking about the balance between the general protection of the public and the rights of the individual. There are important arguments of principle on some of the measures in the Bill, and I respect the motives of those who have made them. Whatever safeguards are put in, we are still dealing, essentially, with—for example—hearsay evidence given to a court by a senior policeman. Some will find that conclusive in their objection to the Bill.

An alternative line of questioning is to ask how effective the measure will be in practice. After all the dust of debate has settled, how many convictions of members of illegal organisations will take place? I do not want to deny the strength of some of those questions, and a reasoned amendment is before the House. However, the House has a straight choice in terms of giving the Bill a Second Reading—do the possible benefits to the public generally from the Bill outweigh those objections? In my view, the possible benefits do outweigh the objections.

[Sir Norman Fowler]

It is fair for the Government to say that they have modified the Bill to answer at least some of the questions. They have made it clear, for example, that the evidence of a senior policeman alone will not be sufficient for a conviction. In the same way, evidence on the initial response of an arrested person alone will not be sufficient to convict. On a more positive note, it is reasonable in principle for people convicted to risk forfeiture of money or property which might be in their possession at the time of conviction, and I support very much the important proposals made in the debate by my right hon. Friend the Member for Bridgwater (Mr. King).

I see a strong case for seeking to achieve as much uniformity as possible in the measures against terrorists on either side of the border. Given the cross-border nature of many terrorist offences, that seems to be an entirely desirable aim. However, if that is to be the guiding principle of policy—I very much see the case for that—as my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition said today, it makes the Government's actions in removing from the statute book even the power to have internment more and more open to question.

I am not sure that the Prime Minister answered that point. The Government have abandoned the matter. The Irish Government retain the power and, frankly, I would have thought it sensible for the Government to do the same. One of the lessons is that one cannot predict the future or terrorism. One cannot predict exactly the circumstances in which a counter-terrorist law will be required. I would have thought that a prudent Government would not lightly discard measures that are in their armoury. That was the point made by the Leader of the Opposition.

Mr. Bermingham: Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that internment led to great resentment? The difference between internment and this proposal is that, under the proposal, the accused will at least know the sentence he will serve when it is imposed. Internment was indeterminate and led to resentment among Irish nationals, whether they were Catholic or Protestant.

Sir Norman Fowler: I think that what the hon. Gentleman is arguing is that the Government's measures are an alternative form of internment, which is not exactly what I thought the Government were proposing. Although no one but a fool would say that there were not difficulties with internment, there were some successes. However, it is foolish to give away the power at this stage and not to have it even as a reserved power.

Mr. Mullin: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Sir Norman Fowler: I will not, if the hon. Gentleman does not mind.

The Bill is being introduced in the shadow of Omagh. If there is a chance that deaths and injuries can be avoided in the future by such a Bill, it deserves support. I do not intend to double-guess the police and security advice going to the Government on this issue. I suggest that one way forward is to take advantage of the 12-month review provision and to ask the Government to provide the fullest possible report in time for the debate in 12 or six months' time on the workings of the Bill in practice. We have an amendment that makes that point, to which we shall return in Committee.

Mr. Sayeed: Before we persuade ourselves that a Bill such as this will deal with the Continuity IRA, Real IRA, the INLA or whoever, can we remember that it is in the power of Gerry Adams, Martin McGuinness and the others in the army council of the IRA to tell those perpetrating this form of terrorism to stop or take the consequences?

Sir Norman Fowler: Telling them to stop is entirely what those people should be doing.

That brings me to my next point. There is an issue in the debate which is even more fundamental—decommissioning. In her article in *The Observer*, the Secretary of State said:

"In the aftermath of the Omagh bombing the confidence of people in Northern Ireland has been devastated. They need to be reassured, to feel more secure and to feel more hopeful again."

She went on to say that that was why President Clinton's visit was so important. President Clinton's visit is important, but, by itself, will not be conclusive.

I agree with the Secretary of State that our aim should be to provide reassurance and to help the people of Northern Ireland to feel more secure. However, I would have thought that those objectives would be more likely to be achieved if we could make clear and identifiable progress on the surrender of explosives and arms. In other words, we should dismantle the apparatus of terror.

It is no reply to say that, at Omagh, it appears that stockpiled explosive was not used. I agree with the comments of the leader of the Ulster Unionists in the Second Reading debate of the Northern Ireland (Sentences) Bill:

"The decommissioning of terrorist weapons has been and continues to be an important litmus test of sincerity . . . No one in his right mind would want those weapons to be left lying around to fall into who knows whose hands and be available for use by who knows who in the future."—[*Official Report*, 10 June 1998; Vol. 313, c. 1097-98.]

What is clear is that the presence of explosives and firearms poses an immense threat. What would bring the greatest reassurance to the people of Northern Ireland is prisoner releases going hand in hand with the decommissioning process.

Dr. Nick Palmer (Broxtowe): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Sir Norman Fowler: No.

Self-evidently, that is not happening. This is not a case of making new conditions. It is keeping to the principles that were clearly set out by the Prime Minister in his speech in Belfast in May—namely, that there should be

"full co-operation with the independent commission on decommissioning to implement the provisions of the agreement".

Therefore, I welcome the news that Sinn Fein will be working with the Independent Commission on Decommissioning, but the reassurance that is wanted is that progress is being made with the surrender of explosives and arms. Nothing would do more to provide the sense of security that the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland wishes to achieve than that.

Mr. Cash: I agree with the sentiment that my right hon. Friend expresses, but does he agree that a substantive

point needs to be examined in these proceedings? We must ensure that there is compatibility between the arrangements for early release under section 3 of the Northern Ireland (Sentences) Act 1998 and this Bill, so that we get a proper, parallel and mutual arrangement. In that way, no person would be given early release and then go on to use weapons that have not been decommissioned, ensuring that there is a proper security arrangement in the interests of the Republic of Ireland and this country.

Sir Norman Fowler: That is what we all want. There are tremendous difficulties with the prisoner release process, but I will leave it as I have set it out. Basically, what the Conservative party wants will come as no surprise to the Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office, the hon. Member for East Kilbride (Mr. Ingram), who will reply, because we have made this point before. We want the two processes to go hand in hand. Public support depends on that.

We want the peace process to succeed and we will do our utmost to assist that. We want to bring as much reassurance as possible to the people of Northern Ireland and we believe that the proposals that we have made over past months will assist that process. We want the surrender of explosives and arms. We want, above all, in considering the Bill, to make it less likely that there will ever again be a recurrence of the terrible events in Omagh a few weeks ago. It is on that basis that we support the Second Reading of the Bill.

6.52 pm

Mr. Chris Mullin (Sunderland, South): I welcome the modifications that have been made to the Bill since we first heard about it a week ago. It was said then that people could be sent down for up to 10 years on the word of a single police officer. Had that still been the case, I and, I am sure, one or two other Members could not have voted for it. I am glad that incitement has also been removed from the Bill.

Some of the other changes in the past week have been helpful, but I still have grave misgivings about the Bill. As others have already remarked, it bears all the signs of having been conceived in haste and I fear that we may repent at leisure, as we did with internment and the prevention of terrorism Act, both of which did little or nothing to combat terrorism but instead helped to alienate a generation of Irish people and created fertile soil for the recruitment of a new generation of terrorists.

One thing puzzled me in the speech of the right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield (Sir N. Fowler), and I would have made this point if he had allowed me to intervene. I am genuinely mystified by his party's attachment to or nostalgia for internment. It was catastrophic. It had a disastrous impact.

Many of the people who were put away were not terrorists in any shape or form. Enormous abuses occurred. The quality of the intelligence used was very poor, to put it mildly, and it led to the recruitment as terrorists of a lot of people who previously did not feature on the records. Happily, we are not going back down that road, but the right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield would be wise to study the tea leaves a little more carefully.

Mr. Robert McCartney: I agree with the hon. Gentleman's view on what happened in 1972, but does he agree that the quality of current intelligence and the nature of the situation are now completely different? Such conditions no longer prevail.

Mr. Mullin: I accept what the hon. and learned Gentleman says—

Mr. Brian White (Milton Keynes, North-East): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Mullin: May I just get the second sentence out of my mouth? I agree with the hon. and learned Member for North Down (Mr. McCartney), but the quality of intelligence has not necessarily improved as much as everyone here believes. The security forces rounded up Iraqis during the Gulf war, but they all had to be released without charge—the security forces got it utterly wrong again. The hon. and learned Gentleman laughs, but that is a much more recent example.

I agree: we are dealing with a very small number of people and it should be possible to identify them. The quality of intelligence available should be very good now, given the number of defections that have occurred, but the only point that I was making was in response to the ones that were made by the right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield, who harked back to the golden age of 1972, which, as the hon. and learned Member for North Down and I agree, was not quite such a golden age.

Mr. White: In 1972, it was said that intelligence was much better in the 1970s than it had been in the 1950s during a previous IRA threat. Every generation, it is said, has learnt the lessons of the past and its intelligence is much better, so what have we learnt that is going to be an improvement this time?

Mr. Mullin: As it happens, I do think that the quality of intelligence is much better. It darn well should be—goodness knows we have had long enough to learn a few lessons.

I have three concerns about the Bill. First, I am not convinced that it will be effective; indeed, it could have the opposite effect to what is intended. During my search for the real Birmingham bombers, I interviewed a number of young men who joined the IRA in the mid-1970s. When I asked why they had signed up, they invariably gave one of two reasons—Bloody Sunday or internment.

Those who advocate more repressive solutions should bear in mind the lessons of history. I agree with what the Prime Minister has said. We should not be imprisoned in the past, but we should take a bit of notice because this is a road down which we have travelled.

If people are interested in catching terrorists—as I am; indeed, in one or two instances I have had better luck than the security services, even though they were armed with the vast panoply of powers that they tell us they need—there is no substitute for patient detective work, leading to convictions based on credible evidence. We have had some successes recently in relation to bombings on the mainland; that is the way to proceed.

My suspicions are always aroused when anonymous members of the security services are quoted, as they were a few days ago in *The Daily Telegraph*, as saying that they "know" who the terrorists are and would have no trouble putting them away, if only the namby-pamby

[Mr. Mullin]

politicians could be persuaded to dispense with the safeguards that we used quaintly to associate with civilisation. That is what the security services said before internment and it was a disaster. Much of their information was mistaken. I fear that that could happen again.

My second misgiving relates to the climate in which the new powers will be exercised; this is perhaps the most important point that I have to make. They will be exercised in a jurisdiction where interviews with terrorist suspects are not yet audio-recorded. That is incredible because they are audio-recorded over here.

I am not satisfied with what I have heard from my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary on that point. He is being given the runaround, the source of which, I suspect, comes from Northern Ireland. I am sure that he knows where to look for the source. I do not accept that there are so many difficulties—indeed, I know that there are not. The difficulty is political and it is easily resolvable. The Government could easily concede the point this evening. I do not understand the obstacle.

Dr. Lynne Jones: The House authorities have been able to organise the removal of the scaffolding and the preparation of the Chamber so that we can reconvene. Perhaps they could advise on how to organise audio equipment in Irish police stations.

Mr. Mullin: There is no need. The equipment is already in Irish police stations. The police can use it if they want to, but they do not want to.

After my earlier exchange with the Home Secretary, I made a few inquiries. Apparently, 1 January is the target date. That will be too late—or I assume that it will be. Presumably those who are going to be lifted under the Bill will have been lifted by 1 January. Anyone who has not been lifted is not likely to be available to be lifted. With all due respect, 1 January is not good enough. The problem is not in the Home Office, but over the water. I hope that whoever needs to be pressed will be pressed so that we can come up with a concession.

The issue is vital to the credibility of the legislation. If the Bill is not credible and the first cases that come to court collapse, we shall all look pretty silly. If the RUC is interested in producing credible evidence in court, it should be aware that what I am suggesting is the way to go about it. I am sure that the Home Secretary recognises that this is a helpful point. It is designed to make the legislation work without alienating a swathe of opinion that is well on the way to being alienated. He may have seen the statement put out last week or earlier this week by 30 lawyers in Ireland, which was signed by a number of lawyers over here. It talks of the "grave disquiet" arising from the legislative changes. It says:

"Existing emergency legislation and its application has consistently led to violations of human rights and . . . its continued use has contributed greatly to a public lack of confidence in the rule of law."

We must bear that in mind. We want to build up the rule of law in Northern Ireland. We want the forces of law and order to be respected, as they should be in every part of the United Kingdom. The statement says:

"It is astonishing therefore that it is proposed that a belief expressed by a member of that force that an accused is a member of a proscribed organisation will be sufficient".

That will no longer be sufficient, but the necessary corroborating evidence, such as it is, could easily come from another policeman. The one who has to go to court and assert with complete confidence that so and so is a member of a terrorist organisation will be a superintendent. The guy who tells him that, during interview in the interrogation centre, a chap sat silently or did not respond to questioning is likely to be a constable or even a sergeant. The corroboration will not be very serious if it consists of no more than a superintendent and a sergeant corroborating each other.

We shall also run into difficulties with the European Court of Human Rights. I am not certain that the current wording of the legislation will get through the court.

Mr. Robin Corbett (Birmingham, Erdington): My hon. Friend is talking about the audio recording of interrogations. Is that not even more important in Northern Ireland, where such matters go before courts without juries—the Diplock courts?

Mr. Mullin: That is an important point. We have to bear in mind the climate in which the powers will be exercised. Interviews with terrorist suspects are not yet audio-recorded, solicitors are routinely excluded from interviews, the courts operate without juries and the judiciary is peculiarly close to the security forces. Moreover, the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984, which is designed to safeguard the rights of suspects, does not apply in terrorist cases. It is still possible in Northern Ireland to send someone down for life on the word of a single informer or an unrecorded or uncorroborated statement obtained after hours of relentless interrogation in Castlereagh. That is the background against which the Bill will be implemented.

There is a serious possibility that mistakes will be made and that the provisions will be seen by some as an opportunity to settle old scores. I would not be surprised to find a few people on the list who were not members of terrorist organisations, but were just called in for a conversation to remember times past. A solicitor in Northern Ireland to whom I spoke yesterday said that names were already being whispered to newspapers of people who were liable to be picked up without their being members of any of the proscribed organisations.

I do not understand how it will be possible to defend oneself against an allegation. The superintendent will say in court that he is certain that the suspect is a member of a terrorist organisation. He will then be asked the basis of his assertion. He will have to say that unfortunately all his material is covered by public immunity, and then sit down. That will not look very good. A lot of people will be watching. The superintendent may not even know the suspect whom he is fingering. He may be relying on material supplied from south of the border, or on the word of junior officers, who themselves may be relying on the word of a third party whose identity they are not at liberty to disclose. The scope for error or abuse is enormous.

I am also uneasy about the powers to confiscate assets. I hope that they will be used sparingly. The families of terrorists may know little or nothing about the activities of the convicted partner. Rendering families destitute will not win us any friends.

A lot of doors will be knocked down as a result of the Bill. Most of those at whom it is targeted—I hear estimates from people who ought to know of between

30 and 200—will not simply sit at home waiting to be lifted; most of them will disappear. A lot of the doors that get knocked down will be the wrong doors. In addition, mistakes will be made. Some of the intelligence will be out of date and there will be cases of mistaken identity. Before we know where we are, we shall be back to alienating a much wider section of the community than those against whom the Bill is targeted. The image of the RUC already leaves a certain amount to be desired. Policing by consent, which we all want, will be more difficult to achieve.

My fear is that, in the name of fighting terrorism, we shall end up fanning the flames. Just when republican terrorism appears to be imploding, we shall provide it with a lifeline. I pray that that will not be the case, but it is a possibility which we should not exclude. Ministers ought to be aware, whatever is said in the debate, that there is widespread unease in the House—and not just on this side; several Opposition Members have expressed to me their unease with this hasty legislation. It could all go badly wrong if we are not careful. That is why I have tabled amendments that I hope are helpful. One relates to audio recording, another to the presence of a solicitor. That should not be controversial—it is not controversial in the rest of the country. The Government could concede those points tonight if they set their mind to it. I am pleading with them. It would do them a lot of good, because it would make the legislation more credible in the eyes of the wider world. There is no reason why audio recording and the presence of solicitors cannot be organised overnight. The problem is political, not practical. The changes will happen only if they are made a condition of the Bill, as my amendments propose. We would then find that the practical objections melted away like snow on the edge of a volcano.

Mr. Corbyn *rose—*

Mr. Mullin: If my hon. Friend will forgive me, I am going to sit down. I hope that the Government will take my points seriously into account by the time we come to Third Reading.

7.8 pm

Mr. John Major (Huntingdon): The objective of the Bill is one that we can all share—no Member of this House condones terrorism. The Prime Minister, the Home Secretary and the Government are engaged in defeating terrorism. In that endeavour, they deserve our support—they certainly have mine; I have solidly supported the Government in recent months and, provided they do the right thing, I shall continue to do so in future. But, however worthy the Government's motives, we have a duty, as the Bill goes through the House, to ensure workable, practical and credible legislation.

The Bill has been brought forward in some haste. It has been produced for perfectly understandable reasons—some of them are very good reasons indeed—in response to the public mood for action following the atrocity at Omagh, so I am not too critical of the speed with which the Government have acted. When I was younger and knew much more than I do now, I might have made exactly the same decision and introduced this legislation with great speed, so I sympathise with what the Government have done.

However, the Bill shows everywhere the signs of haste. The Government are asking the House to agree to it today and I am sure that we shall—I shall give the Government the benefit of any doubts that I might have. However, unless we are extremely fortunate, the price of the House giving its agreement today might be that, whatever the merits of the motives of the Government in introducing the Bill, it will not have been properly and fairly considered and will be shown, in action, to be defective in some of its aspects.

We are asked to endorse a policy that the Government have speedily assembled to deal with the security situation and events in Northern Ireland. It is almost bound to contain loopholes—indeed, it would be a miracle if it did not. The time available to us and the speed with which we have to act today may mean that we shall have to return to this issue and this legislation at some point, to ensure that it meets the objectives that we all share and which are the reasons for our supporting it today.

Not every aspect of the Bill is urgent. The clauses relating to conspiracy to commit an offence are not new to the House; my hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Waterson) introduced a private Member's Bill with similar content. The target of those clauses—militant groups planning offences overseas—are, in the main, repellent groups and it is right that we should seek to take action. However, it is difficult and complex to define such groups and the precise point at which they move beyond legitimate overseas opposition to engaging in actions that require the Government to say, "That is intolerable and we shall take action in this country to stop them." The objective of the provisions is laudable and I thoroughly support it—let there be no doubt about that—but the definition of such groups is extremely tricky. We have already seen some examples, the most obvious being that of groups in this country supporting the Kurds against Saddam Hussein, but that is by no means the only example that will be mentioned today.

My point is simple: we should legislate with great care and it would have been better had we done so with more time for consultation and consideration. In so doing, we might produce more effective legislation and avoid injustices that we might perpetrate today, and we might not have to return to this matter, as I fear we shall. The Government deserve support for their intentions, but their approach runs the risk—I put it no more strongly than that—of producing bad legislation that has side-effects that we shall not have considered, such is the speed with which we are to deal with the Bill.

The guts of the Bill, which I suspect contain the imperative that encouraged the Government to introduce the legislation so speedily, are the clauses relating to evidence regarding membership of proscribed organisations. Of course, it has long been an offence to belong to such an organisation, but no prosecutions—certainly none of which I am aware—have been brought, because it is extremely difficult to obtain a conviction without disclosing intelligence information that, if disclosed, might imperil not only lives but the flow of such information in future.

The Bill moves the law forward a little: it provides that the prosecution can take account of the word of a senior police officer that, in his view, the accused is a member of a proscribed organisation. That is a weakening of the original briefing—it may have been misreported—that led me to believe that it would be proposed to the

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House that prosecutions could be brought on the word alone of a police officer. If that was the original intention, I believe that the House would not and should not have supported it, so the change to the provision in the Bill as published is welcome; however, it leaves several questions that we have a duty to consider.

Never mind the theory, or our determination to get at the evil people whom all of us want to see safely behind bars—how, in practice, in a Diplock court, with no jury, will the provision work? A senior police officer says, "That man is a member of a proscribed organisation," but the man says, "No, I'm not." What is the judge to do? Without the weakening of the Bill, the judge would have been in no position to ensure that there was corroborative evidence, but now there must be corroborative evidence. The Home Secretary was absolutely right to make the change and reword the clause because, if he had not, the result would have been executive detention.

Having said that, what is the corroborative evidence to be? Is it to be intelligence information? Is the evidence to be provided to the court—to the judge, with prosecuting and defending counsel present? Is that what is to happen in future? If so, I hope that we shall be told, because such an assurance would ease some, not all, of the concerns in the mind of some hon. Members. If that is not what is to happen, we should be told what the corroborative evidence is to be. If it is now agreed that there is need for corroboration, for the prosecution to prove the case beyond doubt and for "innocent until proven guilty" to be the presumption, how much, in practice, does the newly reworded clause add to existing law, which was the purpose of bringing the House back during the recess?

It is clear that the clause adds a little to existing law, but not as much as many people think. The senior police officer reiterates his assertion that the accused is a member of a proscribed organisation, but self-evidently he believes that, or he would not have brought the case in the first place, and he will have to produce corroborative evidence. Therefore, that provision, of itself, adds very little. The inference drawn from the silence of the accused—a novel proposition which I hope has only limited scope—adds something as well. However, the combined effect of those two provisions is far less than most of us believed it would be when we first heard that draconian legislation was to be introduced in the House.

Had the legislation been introduced in its original form, undiluted, allowing conviction without supporting evidence, it would indeed have been draconian—and actually rather objectionable. Requiring supporting evidence, as the Bill now does, presents a change that will, I suspect, make obtaining convictions a little easier, but that is not a great sweeping change and it will not make a significant material difference to the likelihood of there being convictions. Somewhere, that old Athenian statesman Draco will be holding his hands to his sides and chortling at the thought that that is supposed to be a draconian change.

Mr. Corbett: Is it the right hon. Gentleman's understanding that, when an accusation is levelled against a defendant who chooses to remain silent, the court will be able to regard that silence as corroboration of the charge?

Mr. Major: I think that what I said a few moments ago implies that that is exactly my understanding, which is why I said that I hope that the provision has only a limited perspective and will be applied only to specific matters. It is a novel proposition, and it would perhaps not commend itself to many of us other than in the special circumstances of the horrors that we have witnessed in Northern Ireland.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Sutton Coldfield (Sir N. Fowler) made the point that we must strike a balance between the absolute liberty of the individual who is charged and the general well-being. That is a difficult balance, and I do not criticise the Government on their efforts in that direction.

There are two halves to the Bill. Clauses 5 to 7 are potentially welcome, if and when they are well drafted, but their provisions would, frankly, have been better introduced in due course, after consultation, consideration and reflection, once we knew how to make them effective, rather than being rushed through so speedily. Clauses 1 to 4 appear—again, if the original reports were right—to have been changed and, effectively, watered down. That watering down is welcome, because of the objectionable nature of the original proposition, but the legislation that we have been called back to consider is unlikely to be as effective as many people may believe.

More effective may be the further enhanced security co-operation with the Republic of Ireland that the Prime Minister spoke of so rightly and so warmly this afternoon. It has improved greatly, and I hope that it will remain at its present high level. I do not wish to press the Home Secretary on the details, but I hope that when the Prime Minister and the Taoiseach met they considered carefully how we could continue to enhance that co-operation. It would perhaps be unwise of me to suggest to the Home Secretary precisely where it could be improved, but both he and I know the areas in which improvements can be made and consolidated—made permanent, not temporary—to ensure that there is no hiding place for those who are prepared to murder both in the north of Ireland and in the south, if it is convenient for them to do so.

The Prime Minister has often articulated the views of the overwhelming majority of the population on the problem that has been faced by Northern Ireland for so long. He said at Hillsborough that this is not a time for soundbites. He certainly articulated my view in that, and it is perhaps unfortunate that the hand of history fell on his shoulder that very afternoon. He is right, however, and the fact that he is pursuing discussions both with the political parties and with the Irish Republic is a reflection of that. Let no one be in any doubt: the problem cannot and will not be solved without the two Governments working together.

The Prime Minister was right to express his determination to track down the murderers of Omagh, and I hope that we will soon hear of progress in that respect.

As we enact a Bill to toughen measures against terrorism, it is worth taking just a moment—literally, Mr. Deputy Speaker—to say something about prisoner releases and decommissioning. In the Good Friday

agreement, the Prime Minister conceded the release of prisoners without immediate decommissioning, but on an individual prisoner basis and with the promise of parallel decommissioning over two years.

The Prime Minister was right to make clear the crucial point that every prisoner release was to be considered on its own individual merits and that there would be no blanket release. I have supported that approach before, both in public and in private, but it is inconceivable that every prisoner convicted and currently in prison for past terrorist offences is a born-again democrat, now safe for release. Some will not be safe for release, and that is why the Prime Minister conceded only individual consideration, leading to individual release.

I understand that the releases will soon accelerate. I hope that, as they do, the Government will state publicly—the people of Northern Ireland, in particular, would welcome the reassurance—the number of prisoners considered for release, how many are to be released and how many have been found unsafe for release. That would provide a reassurance that there is indeed individual consideration and, emphatically, not blanket release. I hope and believe, also, that the Government will continue the pressure for the decommissioning foreseen in parallel with the releases in the Good Friday agreement.

Yesterday, Sinn Fein said that the war was over, repeating the IRA message that I received in the early 1990s. That could be a cynical manoeuvre by Sinn Fein to distance itself from any further violence, or a genuine and worthwhile development and a preparation for the decommissioning that is still necessary in the process. I believe that it must come and, increasingly, as the weight of opinion in Ireland and elsewhere develops—against the weight of history, it may be said—I believe that it will begin to happen in practice.

Despite the horror of Omagh, there is still reason for hope in the process, albeit scarred by the death and misery that were inflicted. Inch by inch, we move forward and the impossible dream of a few years ago moves closer to becoming a practical reality. I am uncertain how much the Bill will contribute, but I think that it will contribute something. It is an advance—although less of one than is claimed—and, in its amended form, it is worthy of the support of the House.

I offer the Bill my support as part of the continuing process, so that the House can show—let there be no doubt or division—that it still believes that it is possible to defeat terrorism and that the democratic determination of politicians north and south of the border and here on the mainland, and the courage of the people of Northern Ireland, can and will have their own reward in a future for Northern Ireland that so many of us take for granted for our own part of the United Kingdom.

7.27 pm

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): I well understand the concern that has been expressed about the Bill. I appreciate the fears that it could be counter-productive and do more harm than good. No one disputes—I certainly do not—that many mistakes were made in putting into effect previous legislation on Northern Ireland. The Government are clearly no less aware of those mistakes than the rest of the House. I recognise the concerns, and certainly do not dismiss them, but I take the view that, following the tragedy of Omagh and the measures that the Irish Government intend to take, it is right to support the Bill.

Much has been said about civil liberties. It will be a poor day for the House if the time ever comes when we are not concerned about civil liberties, the safeguarding of which is one of the most essential reasons for having a House of Commons. However, we must also be concerned about preserving life. Twenty-eight people were slaughtered in Omagh and one wonders how such an act could be committed by fellow human beings. One of those killed was a baby of 18 months; when I heard the news, I thought it likely that, in other circumstances, that child could have lived for another 85 years. Her life and the lives of her mother and grandmother were taken away by terrorism on that terrible day of 15 August. Civil liberties are crucial, but such liberties and democratic rights are not much use in the graveyard or the crematorium. If we are united on nothing else, we are united in our condemnation of that slaughter.

We are debating whether we should act along the lines of the Bill and whether such legislation would reduce the possibility of other terrorist outrages. I was interested to read the comments of Mr. Colin Parry, whose son Tim was killed in the bomb explosion at Warrington five years ago. Mr. Parry is reported to have said that he welcomes the Bill and that it is long overdue. He speaks with much sad and tragic experience of terrorism.

I have four reasons for being in favour of the Bill, although I have some reservations, particularly on clauses 5 to 7. I shall relate my remarks to Northern Ireland. First, after the Omagh atrocity, it would be difficult for most people in Northern Ireland to understand why, if the Irish Government and Parliament could bring in such measures, the British Government could not do so. The two Governments worked hard to bring about the Good Friday agreement. Why should they not co-operate closely on further action to deal with terrorism? Imagine the feelings in Omagh and in other parts of Northern Ireland if the British Government seemed to be dragging their feet while the Irish Government took the action that they said they would take almost immediately after the crime.

I presume that one of the proposed north-south bodies that will arise from the Belfast agreement will deal with terrorism and that there will be close co-operation between the Republic and Northern Ireland. The Bill illustrates the continued close co-operation between security and intelligence sources and police in the United Kingdom and the Republic.

Secondly, it is obvious that the Irish will go ahead with their legislation. I do not know whether there will be opposition to it today in the Dail, but it seems that the Irish Government's proposals will be passed almost unanimously. If those proposals become law in the Republic, people who could be apprehended there would be able, if we do not pass the Bill, to go to Northern Ireland. If that happened, how credible would be our stand against terrorism?

Thirdly, it is said that the most effective weapon against breakaway IRA and terrorist groups on the other side is the sheer revulsion among Northern Ireland people about what happened on 15 August. The same argument, of course, that further terrorist outrages are unlikely because of revulsion over the Omagh atrocity, could be used in the Republic. However, we know from experience that, irrespective of revulsion over terrorist outrages, there have been further crimes against humanity. We may recall the outrage over what happened in Enniskillen in November 1987 when 11 people were killed at a

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Remembrance day parade. That did not prevent eight soldiers from being put to death in Northern Ireland in August 1988. In September 1989, 11 people were killed in an attack on Royal Marines in Deal in Kent. In January 1992, eight Protestants were killed in Cookstown and, a month later, five Catholics were murdered in a betting shop. There is genuine revulsion now, but it does not mean that, in time, terrorists will not consider it appropriate to commit further outrages. We must bear that in mind.

Fourthly, without the proposed Government action the Good Friday agreement could be endangered. Some Northern Ireland politicians who are in no way involved in terrorism want to use every excuse—they have every right to do so—to destroy that agreement. If the Government do not take the action that the Irish Government are taking, it will become difficult, and perhaps very difficult within the main Unionist party, to continue to be a party to the agreement. For those reasons, and even with my reservations, I think that the Government's action is right and justified.

As the Prime Minister said, the terrorists struck in Omagh for a political reason. They were not senseless terrorists and no one would say that they were killing for the sake of killing and had no political motive. To say that would be to underestimate them. Their clear political purpose was to create such fear, insecurity and despair in Northern Ireland that the Good Friday agreement would be in jeopardy because people would conclude that it was no use and would not bring the peace, security and progress for which both Governments had hoped. The more the terrorists want to destroy an agreement that will allow Northern Ireland to be governed in the fairest possible way, the more the House should be determined that what the electorate voted for with such a large majority in Northern Ireland and the Republic should not be destroyed by terror or by other undemocratic means.

The question is one of judgment and balance. I respect the strong views of my colleagues who say that, despite Omagh and our total condemnation of what happened there, the Bill—bearing in mind what happened in the early 1970s—would be counter-productive and would provide political ammunition for the terrorists. They have reached a conclusion, but, for the reasons that I advanced, I have reached a different one. In my judgment, it is important to approve the measure, but that is the judgment of just one Back Bencher, although perhaps I have some experience of Northern Ireland matters.

Audrey Wise: My hon. Friend refers to the conclusions that have been reached by his colleagues. The main conclusion, which was expressed by my hon. Friend the Member for Sunderland, South (Mr. Mullin), is that the measure could and should be improved. Is my hon. Friend distancing himself from that conclusion, or does he support the proposed improvements, such as those in respect of audio-recording and the presence of a solicitor?

Mr. Winnick: As a politician, I may have defects, but I hope that I have a reasonably open mind. I shall certainly study the amendments. If I believe that they are useful in furthering the Bill's aims, I will give them serious consideration, and I see no reason why I should not.

I refer briefly to clauses 5 to 7. Britain should not be a safe haven for those who wish to commit terrorist offences. One can constantly use the argument about the anti-apartheid struggle. I was involved almost from the beginning in the anti-apartheid movement. I was not aware of any moves to commit murder of any kind abroad; nor was it ever suggested by British sources, including Tory Governments, that the anti-apartheid movement was involved in any way in conspiracies to murder abroad. That argument can be overstretched.

All Labour Members and a number of Opposition Members believed that the liberation of South Africa from apartheid was justified, and some of us are proud of what we did on that issue before and during the time that we were in the House. That does not mean that groups of people in Britain who have been given asylum—fundamentalists, much along the same lines as those who caused the atrocity in Omagh and those responsible for the terrible atrocities that have caused even more casualties in east Africa—should consider it their holy writ, with the democratic freedoms that we have, and long may they remain here, to carry out conspiracies to murder overseas. I see no reason why that should be so and I do not believe for one moment that the British people would wish it so.

I recognise the difficulties. I recognise that, as the Bill stands—this is why I have some reservations about clauses 5 to 7—there is a possibility that people who have genuinely sought asylum and been given it, who are in no way involved in the plotting of conspiracies abroad of murder or any other kind, could be caught up in its provisions. That is why I share the view of the right hon. Member for Huntingdon (Mr. Major) and others that particular care should be given to those clauses. In view of what my hon. Friend the Member for Preston (Audrey Wise) asked of me, I shall give even more consideration to amendments to clauses 5 to 7.

Nevertheless, despite all the reservations, I believe that we have a duty and responsibility, following the terrible atrocity at Omagh, and given the possibility that there will be other terrorist groups, breakaways from the IRA who claim that they have a holy writ, and perhaps loyalists involved in a backlash who will also argue that they have a holy writ to preserve Northern Ireland from the Belfast agreement, to give whatever support we can to measures that can prevent further outbreaks of terrorism from occurring.

There is no iron guarantee. None of us can be certain—neither those who support the measure, nor those who oppose it. But I am convinced that, on balance, we are taking the right steps. My right hon. and hon. Friends will have every justification in supporting the Bill in the Division Lobby later tonight.

7.42 pm

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): The hon. Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick) used a phrase, which I would not have chosen, about civil rights not being important in the graveyard. Right-wing and authoritarian movements to which he and I are opposed would use that phrase rather too readily. I would put the point differently: the right to the protection of the law against arbitrary violence is an important civil right, alongside a number of other civil rights, all of which are important, such as the right not to be convicted of a crime that one did not commit. To have due process of law is an important civil right. We must address all of them.

I start by making it clear that, despite concerns which I shall outline, Liberal Democrats believe that key elements in the Bill should be brought into law urgently. We recognise that there is a certain responsibility on us as an Opposition party, when we have an historic opportunity to achieve in Northern Ireland a peace that has been denied to the people of Northern Ireland for so many years, to give the Government some room for manoeuvre, some benefit of the doubt, on some of our concerns. But we cannot set them all aside, and I want to express some by means of amendments in the hope that the Government will improve the Bill.

The Government in the Irish Republic have already said that they are prepared to accept a number of amendments to the Bill that they are considering in the Dail today. The Government have themselves moved on a number of issues and I want that process to continue during our debates tonight. I welcome some of the safeguards that have been included in the Bill. If hon. Members were not aware of them, it was because the Home Office was so late in producing the Bill. I am grateful for the Government's co-operation with us as a party in trying to give us as much notice as they could. However, the fact remains that the production of the Bill, the clear intentions of which were set out by the Prime Minister in his speech at Omagh, was unconscionably long in coming out. That was partly because of their decision to tack on the conspiracy measures to which I shall refer again later.

We welcome safeguards such as the fact that the evidence of a police officer cannot by itself be sufficient. We welcome the annual renewal provision, which we want preceded by a review. We welcome the insistence that consultation with a solicitor must be available, and it should be clear that the solicitor can remain present, as is normal practice in Great Britain during the questioning process.

We are addressing other concerns by means of amendments, with which I shall not deal now, because we can do that in Committee; I shall simply give a couple of illustrations to explain the sort of problems that we have. Take the forfeiture provisions, which not many people have mentioned. They are useful provisions, but they can give rise to problems. The forfeiture of someone's home because weapons were stored in the roof space may be inappropriate or counter-productive when other members of the family did not know that that had been done or were subject to great coercion.

I find myself in a difficult position, because we must consider the case of people who co-operated with the Provisional IRA in ways that we might deplore and who are now committed to a ceasefire, but who are in a locality where they are subject to duress by ex-Provisionals who have gone over to the so-called Real IRA, the small splinter group that is continuing the horrific violence. There is a lot of coercion in that respect and we would not help in communities if we finished up turning people out of their homes. The courts are required to hear representations from people in such situations, but people may be frightened to bring forward such representations, so I counsel caution on the part of the authorities in using those forfeiture provisions. We have tabled an amendment to tighten that up.

Another example is the inference drawn from silence. People who have been involved in the Provisional IRA may be frightened of incriminating themselves in respect of what they did when the Provisionals were involved in violence, even though they have no truck and no involvement with those who are continuing the violence now. There are some practical problems where the Bill could be tightened up a little and we have sought to do that by way of amendments.

As will be apparent from what I said earlier, my biggest concern is the inclusion of such extensive conspiracy provisions which do not arise from the Northern Ireland situation, are not part of a joint effort with the Government of the Republic and do not have the same urgency about them. The Home Office is pulling a fast one. The Prime Minister said earlier that the Government "took the opportunity" of the recall of the House to bring in these provisions which the House has had before it previously. That phrase gives the game away. The Home Office has been successful in getting Bills into the legislative programme, but it has more in the cupboard and this is one of them. I am not unsympathetic to some of the things that the provisions are intended to do, but this is not a good vehicle with which to deal with them.

Lord Lloyd recommended in his report that the Government should introduce provisions relating to terrorist offences planned in Britain but committed overseas—conspiracy to carry out terrorist acts overseas—but he did not envisage wide powers that extended far beyond terrorism. For example, those powers could involve a group that planned an act of civil disobedience in another country that had no terrorist character to it whatever. An environmental group that decided to blockade the departure of a ship from a German or Polish port by bringing a lot of little boats into the way of that ship would be committing a criminal offence in that country and might be committing a criminal offence in this country, but that would not be an act of terrorism and it is not what was envisaged by Lord Lloyd; nor do I think it is what is envisaged by the Government. If there is a case for wider conspiracy powers, this is not the place to deal with that.

The provisions are in the Bill and we can vote against those clauses when we come to them, but there are some things that the Government could do. They could ensure that the conspiracy aspects of the Bill were limited to terrorism. We have tabled amendments which the Government could easily accept that would do precisely that. We have tabled other amendments to provide some further restriction to protect the legitimate opposition to repressive regimes. There may be some element of justified violence in opposition to other regimes—not terrorism. Even for Governments with which I disagree, I do not want groups in Britain planning bombs that would kill and maim hundreds of civilians even in Iraq, let alone anywhere else. I do not want terrorism planned in this country. However, the position is difficult with regard to countries where there is a civil war or organised military opposition to a repressive regime, and we must be much more careful about that. We have tabled amendments designed to address what the Attorney-General might consider in those circumstances.

Although the reasoned amendment includes some of our concerns, we do not support it because, by its nature, it is designed to defeat the entire Bill. For that reason, we cannot support it. We believe that parts of the Bill should go ahead, as I shall explain by way of conclusion.

First, the terrible event at Omagh and all the suffering that came from it brought about an even more overwhelming desire among people in all parts of Ireland

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to proceed towards peace than had already been apparent in the votes that they cast in the referendum. There was already a clear democratic determination to seek to bring about peace. The revulsion from Omagh spread that desire deep into all communities in the north and the south. That calls for a response from Parliament. That is why it is right for Parliament to be recalled and for us to consider urgent measures.

Secondly, members of the republican splinter groups that continue to operate are very determined people indeed. They are highly trained and taught not to answer questions during interrogation. By their very decision to continue the violence, we know that they are extremely dedicated to their cause. The police and authorities need some limited extra armoury to deal with them. However, as the former Prime Minister, the right hon. Member for Huntingdon (Mr. Major), said, we should not exaggerate what the limited provisions will achieve.

The Prime Minister did not help his case by claiming that the measures were draconian. They are not. In some respects, they are unusual in our system and they need particular safeguards, but I believe that their impact will be more limited than was suggested. They could help to secure prosecutions if a court can be satisfied on more than one ground that the accused are involved in that dreadful continuing violence.

The final reason why we think it is important to support the inclusion of at least some of the provisions is that we have argued for years that we should be working jointly with the Parliament of the Irish Republic, the Dail, on legislation that runs as far as possible in parallel, so that no community can say that the British state is imposing its will on Northern Ireland or that the legislation is sectarian.

The Governments of the two countries, who must take action in the circumstances, are trying to provide a legal framework within which the declared wishes of the Irish people for peace can be given effect. Those wishes could not have been more clearly expressed. They came from north and south, Protestant and Catholic. Across the communities of Northern Ireland, people have had enough of violence.

The view that I am presenting, which is shared by my right hon. and hon. Friends, is that elements of the Bill may help to give effect to that desire for peace. They are part of the wider process and the taking of a historic opportunity. For that reason, we are prepared to support them, despite our reservations. We hope that, before the night is over, we will have improved the Bill in a number of respects.

7.52 pm

Mr. Kevin McNamara (Hull, North): On behalf of my right hon. and hon. Friends, I beg to move,

That this House, whilst expressing heartfelt sympathy to the families and friends of those killed and injured in the terrorist bombings in Omagh, Nairobi, Dar es Salaam and Cape Town, and wishing to see the perpetrators of these evil deeds speedily brought to justice, declines to give a Second Reading to a Bill of which hon Members have had sight, in draft for less than 24 hours, which is a contravention of the European Convention on Human Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the procedures for the newly established and welcome International Criminal Court; which gives power to senior police officers which past miscarriages of justice in England alone would not justify, and fails to discriminate between nations abroad which are democratic and respect human and civil rights and those which are undemocratic, tyrannous, fail to respect democracy, human and civil rights, repress their populations and pay scant *regard to the rights* of women.

I shall read from a judgment, which states:

"Just consider the course of events if this action is allowed to proceed to trial. If the six men fail it will mean much time and money will have been expended to no good purpose. If the six men win, it will mean that the police are guilty of perjury, that they are guilty of violence and threats, that the confessions were invented and improperly admitted in evidence and the convictions were erroneous."

The judgment continues:

"This is such an appalling vista that every sensible person in the land would say that it cannot be right that these actions should go any further."

That was the judgment of Lord Justice Denning, then Master of the Rolls, before the Court of Appeal in November 1979 on the Birmingham Six. I quote that judgment because in that case the defence had the opportunity to examine the evidence, to examine the policemen and to go through all the statements that were made. Of course the defence did not know that the police were lying through their teeth, that the forensic evidence was doubtful and may also have been tampered with, and that the defendants had had the living daylights knocked out of them in order to obtain the confession.

Lord Denning said that that was an appalling vista. The entire establishment would collapse—the police, the justices, the prison service—yet in that case the police evidence was open to examination. What will happen under the Bill?

A policeman will go into the dock and say, "Mr. X is, in my belief, a member of one of the proscribed organisations." The defence will say, "My client denies that. Where is your evidence?" The policeman will say, "I cannot show you my evidence, because it is covered by a public interest immunity certificate. You cannot look at it. But that is my belief, and I know all about it. I have spent 50 years sniffing out terrorists. I have known them man and boy. I can tell a terrorist by the way that he will not look you straight in the eye. And he has an Irish accent"—or an Iraqi, Malaysian or Kurdish accent, or some other accent—"and I know them." The judge will look at the distinguished policeman, who has served years in the counter-terrorism squad, and say, "We must pay attention to what he says."

The accused will say, "I am saying nothing." On the basis of that, and on the basis of the policeman's evidence, which cannot be examined, that person can be convicted. He cannot be convicted on one of those grounds alone, but he can be convicted on both in conjunction. If that is the case, the word of a single police officer is to be taken. When the matter of the word of a policeman and the accused remaining silent was raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn), it was not contradicted.

Let us consider the safeguards. In fairness to my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary, I must say that, since it was announced that the word of a policeman alone would be the criterion, and that was greeted by an outcry, some progress has been made. The Bill now requires corroboration, weak though that may be. I concede that, but the weakness of that corroboration depends on the accused. The second rule that has been made so that the

Bill does not fall foul—on the face of it—of the European convention on human rights and the Murray case is that the suspect must have access to legal advice at some time before he is subject to a caution, a suggestion or a charge.

What happens if the solicitor says, "Say nothing—that is my advice to you"? The suspect says nothing and, coupled with the other matters that we have mentioned, is found guilty. What happens if the solicitor asks to see the evidence and the police say, "Sorry, it is subject to a public interest immunity certificate"—*[Interruption.]* My hon. Friend the Member for St. Helens, South (Mr. Bermingham) thinks that I am getting it wrong, so I will give way.

Mr. Bermingham: My hon. Friend is getting it wrong. I suggest that the solicitor would ask at the police station and then at the hearing what was the basis of the police officer's evidence. If the police officer says, "I am not prepared to tell you," how can the man answer questions? So the corroboration goes. If the case gets to the Crown court, the solicitor asks again what is the basis of the public interest immunity certificate. The judge in the case will have seen the evidence on which it relies. The judge will monitor the trial thereafter. If points come out that tend to show that what is said to be in that hidden evidence is not so, the question of immunity begins to move. Historically, immunity has moved in a number of cases, and prosecutions have cessated.

Mr. McNamara: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, but that is not necessarily the case. It will depend precisely on what action the judge happens to take. It will not depend on the benefits of what my hon. Friend thinks will happen. With the greatest respect to my hon. Friend—I understand the point that he makes—I do not think that what he says happens in real life. I base my opinion on Lord Justice Denning's saying what an appalling vista that would be.

The other point is access to a solicitor. We shall have—as we already have—two tiers of law. People in this country will have the benefit of a solicitor sitting beside them all the time and an audio transcription of the proceedings. As was said earlier, audio recording saves a lot of time and bother. There can be no contradiction. The recording is there. The suspect has said it.

However, in Northern Ireland that does not apply. A person may be informed of his right to access to a solicitor for advice, but the solicitor does not sit in on the interview. We do not have audio recording in Northern Ireland, although as my hon. Friend the Member for Sunderland, South (Mr. Mullin) has pointed out, we could have it within a week if the RUC pulled its finger out, because the equipment has been available for a long time. If necessary, the RUC could take everyone down to Strand road police station for interview, where we know the information is—[HON. MEMBERS: "Equipment."] Sometimes it was where the information was as well.

My point is that an accused could be done for refusing to incriminate himself, and on the word of a policeman, subject to whatever caveats my hon. Friend the Member for St. Helens, South may make, without the protection of proper legal advice during the interrogation. I put it to my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary that that will create real difficulties if one person is found to be wrongly accused or it is felt that a person has been treated unfairly. My hon. Friend the Member for Sunderland, South suggested that as many as 300 people could be affected by the Bill. That is a lot of people among whom to start dissent. That is more likely to undermine the Good Friday agreement than the evil of the Omagh bombing. We know why the Omagh bombing was done. It singularly failed.

In providing access to a solicitor, my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary was trying to meet the problems raised by the European convention on human rights with regard to access to advice. People will recall that the judgment in the Murray case was that the length of the period of detention coupled with the absence of legal advice amounted to a denial of that person's human rights, and therefore a breach of the convention.

However, the court also drew attention to the increasing possibilities of compulsion as a result of the denial of the right to silence and the inferences that could be drawn from it. I do not believe that my right hon. Friend has met that point. Nor has he met the need to balance the rights of the accused and the rights of the prosecution. There is no equality between the two in such cases, so I believe that the Bill runs foul of the European convention. Certainly the United Nations Human Rights Committee drew attention to that matter.

When my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary came to the House to speak about the international criminal court and the great step forward that had been made, the right to remain silent and to have no inferences drawn from that was specifically written into the convention. So we are in breach of all three conventions.

Mr. Dalyell: I am a signatory to my hon. Friend's amendment. One of the reasons is that, on the right of silence, such a lawyer's lawyer as Lord Ackner has expressed grave doubts about what we are doing here.

Mr. McNamara: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for drawing the attention of the House to that point.

I suggest that questions regarding the seizure of property will also cause problems under the European convention on human rights. By merely allowing a person to make his case before the judge when a decision is being made about a seizure of property and not giving him a fair and balanced opportunity of a trial in which to defend his position, the Government will fall foul of the European convention on human rights on the right to private property. Where people have different interests in a piece of property—land, a house or a car—one cannot just seize it under the European convention if that will punish another person. It would be wrong for that to happen without providing an opportunity for the third party to defend his position.

So we are in breach of the convention, because there is no right of cross-examination or right to examine the evidence. There is a lack of balance in the court and in the way in which seizure of property takes place. I suggest to my colleagues that, despite the statements that my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary made in moving the Second Reading, the provisions in the European convention are not met in the respects that I have outlined, and probably in many more.

However, I suggest that there is a way around that. If the Government are so confident, they can accept my amendments which would ensure that the European

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convention on human rights was specifically taken into consideration whenever a decision was taken under this legislation. If they can accept that, we can move on.

Mr. Bermingham: I am sorry to interrupt a second time, this time not by request. In any court or jurisdiction of the United Kingdom, one point that any competent lawyer would put to the judge, on sequestration—as in drug trafficking cases—or in respect of the case generally, would be whether the European convention on human rights had been contravened, because we have just incorporated that convention into our law.

Mr. McNamara: We have not. People whom we are led to believe will be dealt with speedily will have the protection that was available in 1971, when they were given notice that they were going to be lifted and then disappeared from the jurisdiction or hid. If the Government are so certain, they can include their provision in the legislation. That is all I am arguing. It seems a reasonably sensible course to take.

Some people regard the provisions as internment by another name. One argument, which is not especially strong but which should at least be mentioned, is that membership is a continuing act. People can be sentenced for a specific offence—for having been involved in an incident—but once they are released, can they then be picked up for membership? Can the sentence that they have served be used as evidence of their continuing membership if they refuse to deny it? That argument leads some people to talk about the reintroduction of internment.

I shall deal briefly with the question of conspiracy. There seems to be great unhappiness in the House about how this has been dragged in—an unhappiness that I share. The question of conspiracy goes far beyond Omagh and anything connected with it. It has pre-empted Lord Lloyd's discussion documents and the document to be introduced by my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary.

I am glad that my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary has said that conspiracy will be a matter for review, but I am not sure whether he said it was going to be under the terms of the prevention of terrorism legislation or under the general consultative paper on conspiracy. However, I am certain that we should not be dealing with the matter in this way and at this time. That is why I have tabled an early-day motion to which reference has already been made.

No distinction is being made between the types of regime to which the Bill is going to apply. My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary said that we already have an agreement with the United States, India and all the countries of the Council of Europe. That is absolutely right, and there is a specific reason for our having an agreement with those countries. Those countries observe the rule of law; they have standard procedures, an independent judiciary and presumptions of innocence. But what about the Emirates, Iraq and many other countries, where none of the proper standards apply? Despite that fact, we are saying that we are going to introduce legislation that would make it an offence for people to seek to use violence—not necessarily to kill—to overthrow a regime.

People talk about the African National Congress. Money was put in the defence and aid fund to help people accused of terrorism, and those people knew that the money was there to help them. It is a very fine line that we are drawing. What would happen if, for example, an organisation in this country planned a campaign of violence, but did not intend to kill anyone, with the aim of creating democratic structures in Saudi Arabia? That would be caught by the Bill, but the aim of those people would be democracy, elections, the rule of law and an accountable Government.

What if people wanted to campaign, quite properly, and perhaps went in for some violence against the Taliban regime and the objectionable way in which it treats women? Perhaps the only way to achieve change is to seek to subvert the Government, which would be an offence in this country and would cause those involved to be prosecution and prosecuted here. People do not have to be foreigners to be caught by this provision; British subjects could be caught. Not only could people be caught by the legislation, but if they planned to do something and then did not do it, they could be done for not doing it, according to the strange clause that mentions omitting to commit an offence.

Mr. Winnick: Is there not a sharp distinction to be made? People in Britain have every right to campaign against the Saudi Arabian regime for very good democratic reasons. Fortunately, what they do not have the right to do—I hope that they never will—is to conspire to commit terrorist acts. What about Kenya? My hon. Friend says that a distinction should be made between democracies and dictatorships. Even recognising all the blemishes in Kenya's legal system, would it have been right for people in Britain to plot to commit the outrages that caused the death of hundreds of people in Kenya recently?

Mr. McNamara: My hon. Friend's final comment makes my case. There is no distinction between regimes in this sort of legislation. How do we distinguish between a good terrorist and a bad terrorist?

Mr. Michael Mates (East Hampshire): There is no such thing as a good terrorist.

Mr. McNamara: Let me put it this way: how do we distinguish between a good freedom fighter and a bad freedom fighter? My hon. Friend the Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick) will say that the answer lies in the strength, feeling and objectivity of my right hon. Friend the Attorney-General. That is splendid, but let us now go back to the Saudi example.

Let us presume that the Saudis, like the Indians and others, are getting fed up with certain people in London; and if we want our big contracts renewed, and if we want to sell a few more Hawks, we have to deal with those people. That is not an idle threat—we should remember what the Malaysians did over the Pergau dam and other matters. This problem also goes to the root of many other issues.

What happens where there is a de facto Government but not a de jure Government?

Mr. Corbyn: Does my hon. Friend recall the campaign mounted by Conservative Members three years ago to

have Dr. al-Masari, a member of the Saudi Opposition, deported from this country because he was said to be jeopardising British commercial interests? There was an attempt to override the provisions of human rights legislation on the grounds of the commercial interests of organisations in this country. Is my hon. Friend aware that almost every country complains that people living in exile or those who form part of an opposition have either treasonable or terrorist intentions?

Mr. Winnick: What were his views on the racial minority?

Mr. McNamara: I hope that my hon. Friend is not referring to my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, North.

Mr. Winnick: He is the last person I would have been referring to.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael J. Martin): Order. I remind hon. Members that sedentary interventions do no good and that the interventions are too long. Also, the hon. Member for Hull, North (Mr. McNamara) should remember that the convention is to address the Chair. Although he does not mean to do so, he is facing in the wrong direction, but it is only a small matter.

Mr. McNamara: I have worshipped at many shrines, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and I am happy to worship at yours.

Mr. Winnick: I was referring not to my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn) or any other hon. Member, but to Dr. al-Masari, whom my hon. Friend mentioned and whose views of a certain racial minority were almost Nazi-like—perhaps the word "almost" is unnecessary.

Mr. McNamara: I accept what my hon. Friend says, but that does not detract from what my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, North said, or from my argument that, if one has good defence contracts, one is likely to be safe—that was my only point—no matter how tyrannous one's regime. Indeed, there is a real suspicion that those parts of the Bill have been introduced merely to give way to international pressures to defend Britain's commercial interests as a merchant of death.

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): Does my hon. Friend accept that there is a real problem in that those who come here and use the powers of free speech to advocate, in some cases, violent action against people who may or may not be of their political persuasion are frequently given much freedom, which they sometimes abuse? I am worried about the Bill and many of its aspects that we have been examining, but I hope that my hon. Friend understands the real problem posed by people who choose to live here but abuse the very traditions that they seek to espouse.

Mr. McNamara: Laws exist to deal with those possibilities, and should be used. I frequently send to the police offensive notices that are shoved through the doors of my constituents, suggesting that they should take some action—I expect that my hon. Friend does so, as well. For example, Nazi literature about Anne Frank has been circulating recently to say that she never existed, and other such things that are all lies. I sought to have people prosecuted on the ground that they were inciting anti-Semitism. The legislation exists—whether it is implemented enough is another matter.

To sum up, everyone wants the people who were involved in Omagh to be brought to justice. The Bill will not result in anyone being charged with the terrible offence that took place there. It might bring the perpetrators to prison by virtue of their being members of a particular organisation, but it will not result in anyone being charged with that offence, and I want people to be charged with it and imprisoned.

The fact that the Bill certainly runs counter to the European convention, the United Nations convention and the International Criminal Court should not be thrown away lightly. Those defences exist for exactly this sort of situation. If everything were perfect, we would not need any of the conventions to protect people. We are disregarding what we have done.

The essential points on conspiracy are too widely drawn. If pressures were brought to bear, they could cover people who were properly agitating on different matters. The Bill could also lead to police harassment, which is why I suggest that the Attorney-General should have the power to initiate not only prosecutions but investigations, so that the police do not harass various exiled groups here as has been described, in the hope of picking up information, perhaps, but also in the hope of keeping them quiet for people who have commercial interests within their countries.

The Bill is dangerous, and we have been rushed into it without any proper thought. The Government have put together two conflicting ideas. During the passage of the Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Bill in 1974, there were enormous pressures on the House. I know of them for two reasons. The first was my name and my descent. I was subject to many threats of violence—it has been a thousand times more difficult for hon. Members representing Northern Ireland, I admit.

Secondly, we were told that if we enacted that legislation, it would protect Irish people in this country who were subject to an enormous amount of abuse. Some hon. Members might not remember that, but I do. They were thrown out of factories, their windows were broken, they were threatened in the streets and thrown out of clubs. We were told that if we enacted the legislation, it would protect them. We were also told in the corridors outside the Chamber, "If you don't do this, the next step is capital punishment." Happily, that can never happen now.

Those were the pressures that we were put under when the House made those decisions in a short time. We were told that the legislation would only be necessary for six months, to get us over an unhappy patch, and that it would then disappear—it is now permanent and it has been in existence for 25 years. Annual reviews or no annual reviews, one thing we know is that we cannot amend a statutory instrument.

We are taking upon ourselves a power upon a power upon a power. People say that this Bill is proportionate. Internment was proportionate, and so was the prevention of terrorism and the emergency powers legislation. We were told that those measures were necessary to stop terrorism. Now, we are told that this measure is carefully targeted and surgical and will cover only the people who

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are involved, exactly as we were told that the smart bombs dropped on Iraq were surgical and would take out only their targets, that they would get rid of the problem and that it would all be over in two or three days, instead of going on and on, as it has.

My fear is illustrated by that headline in *The Observer*, which said that tougher laws would get rid of the problem. I think that tougher laws will increase the opportunities for more horror and more tough laws. It is that more than anything that may undermine the Belfast agreement.

8.27 pm

Mr. David Trimble (Upper Bann): First, I welcome the fact that Parliament has been recalled to consider this legislation. Obviously, because of the recall and the time scale involved, drafting and consultation difficulties have arisen and hon. Members have made a number of comments about that in this and the previous debate. Those are points of substance. Obviously, that situation is undesirable. However, those criticisms should not be allowed to obscure the basic fact that the Government were right to recall Parliament. They had no choice in the matter once the Irish Government had decided to recall the Dail. From the point of view of containing public confidence, both in Northern Ireland and more generally, our Government could not be seen to be less active in responding to the situation than the Government of the Irish Republic.

The principal proposal in the Bill parallels that being considered in the Irish Parliament this evening. Again, our Government could not appear to be less concerned than the Government of the Irish Republic about the consequences of an appalling act of terrorism inside the United Kingdom. I underline that point because some hon. Members have focused too much on the difficulties arising from the short time scale, the drafting and all the rest and have left out of their thinking the important factor that the Government had a clear responsibility to respond to the atrocity and to demonstrate to the people of Northern Ireland and people elsewhere that their lives, interests and safety weighed in the mind of our Government as much as in that of the Government of the Irish Republic.

The Bill is in two parts, one of which has attracted quite a bit of criticism, and deals with conspiracy directed abroad. I shall make only a couple of comments about that part. Whatever arguments there may be about the technicalities and details, the basic principle to which those clauses are directed is right, because the conspiracy must be one to commit criminal acts elsewhere.

There may be difficulties about definitions, as has been mentioned, but let us take as an example the recent atrocity in east Africa—a car bomb with no warning in a busy city centre at a time of peace, with hundreds of civilians killed. I want to challenge hon. Members who criticise legislation in that sphere.

Is there any circumstance to justify such an act, whatever the regime may be?

Audrey Wise: No.

Mr. Trimble: Why, then, is there argument about passing legislation to make the planning of such acts from here in the United Kingdom an offence, and to try to prevent such things from occurring? *[Interruption.]* The legislation does not seem to me to touch in any way on any legitimate political activity, because the provisions are directed against criminal acts.

Mr. Öpik: I agree about the right hon. Gentleman's examples involving terrorism, but surely the issue is that the legislation goes further, and may prevent other examples of what might be called civil disobedience, in circumstances in which we may naturally feel that it is justified to stand up against a dictatorship or other despotic regime. To me, that is the bigger concern—that the measures would not stop at terrorism.

Mr. Trimble: The answer to that is that we are dealing with offences that are also offences in United Kingdom law.

I have two other points to make about the clauses on conspiracy, although they do not have the same weight as my first point. First, I could not help but notice clause 6, which enables the Bill to amend the law of Northern Ireland as well. To those right hon. and hon. Members on both the Government and the Opposition Front Benches who over the years have told us that we had to operate by Order in Council, and that it was not possible to make provision in Bills of this Parliament to change the law of Northern Ireland at the same time, I say, "Please look at clause 6." Clause 6 does in this Bill what we have argued for years should be done as a matter of course, and it is being done without any difficulty on this occasion. So let it be done on every future occasion, and let us have no more primary legislation by means of unamendable instruments.

My final remark about the conspiracy aspect is that one good consequence has flowed from the inclusion of those clauses in the Bill: it has given us the pleasure of the Home Secretary's presence in the House introducing the legislation today. I may wish to make some critical comments about the hon. Member for Hull, North (Mr. McNamara) later, but I echo his thanks to the Home Secretary for the way in which he presented the Bill, and for what he said in his speech.

Obviously, I mean to focus on the legislation as it relates primarily to Irish republican terrorism, and I shall examine the substance of it as it relates to proscribed organisations. It may be worth while to remind ourselves of the background to the Bill. Although the provision is being introduced into United Kingdom law for the first time, it is not a new provision. In its original form it was introduced into the law of the Irish Republic in the Offences Against the State Act 1972.

The provision was then introduced in the simple form of making admissible before hearings of the special criminal court in the Irish Republic the opinion of a senior police officer, and providing that that opinion alone would be sufficient to ground a conviction. There was no question of any corroboration. As originally introduced in the Irish Republic, the provision was that a senior police officer could go to the special criminal court and say, "In my opinion, Bloggs is a member of a proscribed organisation," and it would be open to the court to convict on that basis.

Hundreds of people were so convicted, purely on that basis, without any corroboration. The hon. Member for Hull, North is familiar with such matters because he has

close connections and contacts with the Irish Republic; he knows what happened. I would attach much more weight to his criticisms of the Bill tonight had I ever heard him criticise those provisions as they operated in the Irish Republic from 1972.

Any criticism that the hon. Gentleman has of the Bill before us applied in spades to the Offences Against the State Act 1972 and proceedings under it. That calls into question the approach that he has adopted to the present Bill.

Mr. McNamara: First, may I point out to the right hon. Gentleman that I am legislating not for the Republic of Ireland but for the United Kingdom, and that I have a status here that I do not have there? Secondly, may I draw to his attention the fact that I have, of course, always supported the Irish Council for Civil Liberties in its objection to those provisions in the Offences Against the State Act?

Mr. Trimble: None the less, as I said, I would have given much more weight to the hon. Gentleman's criticisms of the Bill had I heard him express criticism of the Irish legislation in anything approaching the terms that he has used this evening.

I want to carry the story onwards with regard to the experience in the Republic of Ireland, where the legislation was effective from 1972 until about 1975 or 1976. During that period, several hundred people were imprisoned on membership charges. Then the republican movement adopted a different approach.

During the earlier period, the republican movement followed its traditional approach of refusing to recognise the court, so the special criminal court had only the opinion of the police officer. Nothing else was said—or at least, the only other thing that was said was the prisoner refusing to recognise the court. The court could then proceed to convict on that basis.

The republican movement then switched from a policy of refusing to recognise the court to one of contesting the actions. People would go into the witness box and say on oath, "No, I am not a member of that proscribed organisation." Nothing further was said.

Here we come to a crucial point that hon. Members on both sides of the House have missed in the context of the Bill before us. The Bill, like its counterpart in the Irish Republic, says that the opinion of a senior police officer is admissible as evidence. It says nothing about the weight of that evidence; it merely makes it admissible. It does nothing to change the basic rules that apply in criminal trials with regard to the presumption of innocence and the requirement to prove beyond reasonable doubt.

Those rules still obtain both in the Irish Republic and here. So a bit of evidence is being introduced—the opinion of a senior police officer. Under the Bill, a little bit of corroboration may be introduced as well. Again, however, admissibility says nothing about weight. The police evidence will be matched by an assertion under oath by the accused, and other information may be introduced by the accused, too.

The court has to consider whether in those circumstances there is proof beyond reasonable doubt, or whether the presumption of innocence should be upheld. The actions of the Irish special criminal court in the 1970s were clear; once the statement of the senior police officer was matched by the denial of membership by the accused, it could not be said that the accused was guilty of the offence beyond reasonable doubt, so the number of convictions rapidly dropped off.

That has remained the position in the Irish Republic until now. The Irish Government now recognise that their 1972 legislation has become ineffective, and, in the aftermath of Omagh, they made a decision. Indeed, they anticipated the problem and did some homework on it beforehand. They decided to see whether they could revive the legislation by introducing an element of corroboration.

I have grave doubts about whether that will be effective, because the problem that vitiated the original 1972 Act provisions will still be there. An element of corroboration will be introduced, but will that have sufficient force to outweigh the denial of membership by the accused? I have very grave doubts about that.

I have spoken to the Irish Government about the matter. They believe that the legislation will be effective. They have taken soundings. Although I do not know the nature of those soundings, they believe that it will be effective and that they will be able to secure convictions. I do not know the Irish judiciary and I have not spoken to anyone who practises in the Irish courts, so I am not in a position to gainsay the Irish Government's belief that they will be able to secure convictions on the basis of the legislation.

I very much doubt whether we shall secure any convictions in Northern Ireland on the basis of the Bill. I say that on the basis of what little knowledge I have of the judiciary in Northern Ireland and of the practising legal profession in Northern Ireland. I believe that it will be very difficult to obtain convictions. The mere fact that one is introducing these things or saying that they are admissible as evidence does not mean that there will be convictions.

Mr. Robert McCartney: I think that I may claim to have considerable experience of the judicial process and the behaviour of the judiciary in Northern Ireland, and that experience would confirm entirely the conclusions that the right hon. Gentleman has drawn.

Mr. Trimble: I thank the hon. and learned Gentleman for that element of corroboration, which in this case may have a little more weight than the elements of corroboration that I was referring to in terms of the Bill. I have grave doubts, reinforced by the comment—

Rev. Martin Smyth: My right hon. Friend may not have been in the Chamber this afternoon when I raised this matter on a point of information. Is it not a fact that the pattern that was adopted by the IRA when Daithe O'Connell denied that he was chief of staff has consistently been followed through by leaders of the IRA in Northern Ireland during this last period? At the level of corroboration, if people who murdered Robert Dougan at Dunmurry were followed to the place where they were unloading their clothes, where the police caught them red-handed, and yet, because one witness withdrew, the prosecution did not proceed, is there any likelihood of corroboration being brought on the word of an officer in the circumstances that my right hon. Friend is referring to?

Mr. Trimble: My hon. Friend has graphically illustrated, using the example of the Dougan case,

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the difficulties that exist with these matters. I am not sure that my recollection is correct on this, but I think I should correct him as to who was responsible for the change of policy by the republican movement in the mid-70s. I do not think it was David O'Connell; I think it was Martin McGuinness who made the change. He was the first person to recognise the court, in the 1970s, and that reflected the weight that he had in the republican movement even then.

Earlier, I said that I had my doubts about whether there would be many convictions—

Dr. Lynne Jones: It is not unimportant for us to express our horror at events at Omagh, but is the right hon. Gentleman saying that we have convened today merely to pass a Bill that will be ineffective in securing convictions for membership of proscribed organisations and, perhaps more important, will have absolutely no effect on the security forces' ability—we wish them well in their efforts—to secure convictions for the atrocity at Omagh?

Mr. Trimble: I said at the outset that I believed that it was right that the House be recalled and that it was right that it consider legislation parallel to that in the Irish Republic. I also mentioned the Irish Government's belief that the legislation would be effective within their jurisdiction—and, of course, most of the people responsible for the atrocity reside within their jurisdiction, so that suggests a possibility of effectiveness.

I expressed doubts about what I consider to be the likelihood of effectiveness in Northern Ireland, but of course I cannot predict the future any better than can anyone else in the Chamber. I am merely expressing a view as to that likelihood.

I have said that, in my view, judges in Northern Ireland, in Diplock courts, with their legal background, knowing the presumption of innocence and the need to prove guilt beyond reasonable doubt, may not convict often in the circumstances that will pertain. One's concern about the circumstances where there might be convictions relates not to Northern Ireland, but to England.

All the criticisms that are made regarding the consequences of hasty legislation—I listened to the examples taken by critics of the Bill—relate to England. If there is a danger, English juries constitute the danger, because English juries have produced not all, but most, of the miscarriages of justice that have occurred. The example of the past 30 years shows that a person is in more danger of a miscarriage of justice from an English jury than from a Northern Ireland judge sitting alone in a Diplock court.

Mr. Corbett: With great respect, the right hon. Gentleman must bear in mind the fact that the seeds and roots of the great legion of miscarriages of justice that have arisen under the prevention of terrorism Act are the fact that police officers lied in the witness box.

Mr. Trimble: In Northern Ireland we have also had cases of police officers who have not acted with absolute probity, and we have had what I believe to be miscarriages of justice, from similar roots, but I must say to the hon. Gentleman that I believe that the Diplock courts in Northern Ireland have a much better record of detecting that than juries, which tend, especially in circumstances like this, to react emotionally to the circumstances. That is the problem here. It is paradoxical, but if we are dealing with a terrorist situation there is a very strong argument for limiting the involvement of juries in those cases. That is a more general point, which I mention but shall not develop.

I have some reservations about the Bill's effectiveness, but I have expressed, and I emphasise, my belief that it was necessary to introduce it. I have no doubts about the present Irish Government's determination to respond to the current situation; I believe that they intend to respond effectively to it. They believe that the legislation that they are introducing in their jurisdiction will be effective. I hope that they are right, but because I believe that they are genuine in their intention, and because they believe that it will be effective, I think it becomes necessary for us to act in concert with them. If we failed to introduce similar legislation in this place, we would undermine their efforts, and it would be a terrible situation for us to be in, especially after all the criticisms that we have made of Irish Governments over the years, when I and my hon. Friends have felt that previous Irish Governments have not been as effective as they could be. It would be terrible, having made those criticisms, if our own Government were not to act effectively enough.

That brings me to the point that was raised by several people regarding internment. I believe that the Government are making a serious mistake in not restoring it to the statute book. The power of internment is still on the Irish statute book. It is not being exercised at the moment, but the power is there, so that, should the need arise, it can be used immediately, rapidly, as a surprise, in the circumstances that it should be. As was pointed out earlier to the Prime Minister, internment will not work unless it is imposed as a matter of surprise, but one cannot do that unless it is on the statute book.

Internment is on the statute book in the Irish Republic, and the Irish Government have said that they have not ruled it out. They are threatening republican splinter groups that internment might be used. That threat, however, is undermined by the fact that the legislation is not on the statute book in the United Kingdom, and so cannot be used immediately. I heard the Prime Minister assert that it could. I hope that he is right. I have grave doubts about whether it is possible to introduce it as a matter of surprise, in advance of the legislation—to arrest people and then call the House to pass the legislation to give a legal basis for the arrests that have occurred.

That is a very dubious way of proceeding, but that is what the Prime Minister implied. I hope that he is right. I hope that, somewhere in Whitehall, the homework has been done and contingency plans exist. If that is the case, it would be a good idea for the Government to make that clear because, until it is made clear, the threat that is implicit in the Irish Government's position is being undermined by the failure to act in the United Kingdom.

I would very much prefer to see Government restoring the power to the statute book. Restoring the power does not mean that one exercises it, but it means that it is available.

During the Prime Minister's statement, I referred to the measures that the Chief Constable of the RUC has put before the Government. One of those is the restoration to

the statute book of the power to intern. The chief Constable has told the Government that the RUC would like to see the power to intern restored to the statute book. The Home Secretary said that the Home Office is considering the matters that the Chief Constable of the RUC has put before it; that is one of them. It should be acted on as soon as possible. I believe that the Chief Constable's other proposals should also be implemented.

Reference has been made to the interception of telephone conversations. There is no good reason for not putting that on the statute book. In view of the hour, I will not elaborate on the matter; but the arguments against interception are based on the belief in some quarters of Customs and Excise that English punters are so stupid that they do not realise that telephones are tapped. I do not think that belief is founded in fact. People forget that everyone must communicate. Even if people communicate in code, or in a roundabout way, they still have to communicate, and such communications could be used for the purpose of convictions. In other countries, intercept evidence is repeatedly seen to be used as the foundation for proceedings against organised criminals.

The Chief Constable mentioned other matters: changing the rules on disclosure of evidence, changing the law with regard to the admissibility of accomplice evidence—that is important in practice—and widening the scope of authorised investigators, under the emergency provisions Act, to deal with terrorist acts as well as terrorist financing. Those are all important measures, for which the RUC has been asking since at least 1993, and I think it is time that the Government responded more seriously.

I want to make some points about the groups against which the Bill is directed. Earlier, the hon. and learned Member for North Down (Mr. McCartney) referred to what he described as a two-tier system of proscribed organisations. Whatever weight that may carry generally, I think it right for the legislation to be targeted—and the real target in this instance is the group that calls itself "the Real IRA", or "the IRA", which we know to be closely associated with the Continuity IRA.

As currently drafted, the Bill also covers two other groups, the Irish National Liberation Army and the Loyalist Volunteer Force. Both those organisations, however, have recently declared a ceasefire—and there is more reason to believe that declaration than there was to believe the hurried statement made by the Real IRA when it discovered the extent of popular outrage in the Dundalk region.

Following the INLA's declaration of a ceasefire just over a week ago, it has—judging, at least, by what has appeared in the press—received assurances from the Government that, after a matter of months, it will be included in the prisoner release scheme. It would appear, then, that the Government are treating the ceasefire as substantial, and are moving towards recognition of it.

I hope that at least the same consideration will be given to the ceasefire declared by the Loyalist Volunteer Force. The declaration may have been made cynically, in the hope of securing releases, but the fact that a ceasefire has been declared, and the fact that—interestingly—the LVF has offered to decommission weapons should be explored urgently by Government. If one group—any group—started to decommission weapons, the impact on other groups would be substantial.

The Minister of State knows—I have made the point to him, and to the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland—that the caution displayed by the Northern Ireland Office is giving rise, in some quarters, to a suspicion that the Northern Ireland Office does not want the LVF to start decommissioning, because that might embarrass other groups. I have said that I hope that is not the case, and that I hope the Northern Ireland Office will act more vigorously in responding to the offers that have been made. The question of decommissioning obviously arises in this context. As was said earlier, I think that this is the important litmus test establishing whether the ceasefire is genuine. The genuineness of the ceasefire is made a condition in this legislation, as it was in the sentences Bill.

I welcome what Sinn Fein has said today in appointing a spokesman who will act as interlocutor, or go-between—call it what you will—with the decommissioning commission. I hope—as the commission hopes—that that person will embark on the task with the intention of bringing about actual decommissioning within a short period. Certainly, my friends in the Northern Ireland Assembly and I will not consider Sinn Fein's commitment to peaceful means to be genuine in the absence of some actual decommissioning.

Mr. Cash: What confidence has the right hon. Gentleman in the fact that Sinn Fein actually speaks for the IRA in this context? Does he share my concern about the lack of compatibility that the Bill appears to have with the proposals for early release, when it comes down to the question of proscribed organisations and whether the opinion of an officer has a bearing on that?

Mr. Trimble: The hon. Gentleman is assiduous in his interventions in trailing the amendment that he has tabled. As he knows, I am fairly sympathetic to it, and I hope that hon. Members will consider it earnestly.

As for Sinn Fein and the IRA, as the Government have said repeatedly, they are inextricably linked. Some commentators have said of the gentleman nominated by Sinn Fein as its interlocutor with the decommissioning commission that no one could be better equipped to ensure that the IRA does decommission, although I leave it to others to decide what can be read into that.

My colleagues and I support the Bill in principle. We have expressed our doubts about its effectiveness, but we consider it necessary for the Government to act in the present circumstances. Because of our doubts about its effectiveness, however, we think that the Government should do more. We think that it should, as soon as possible, implement the Chief Constable's proposals—and, in the present circumstances, it is most important to restore the power of internment.

A mythology has grown up about that in recent years, which is quite inaccurate. It describes the failure of what is seen as a tool. Every time it has been used in the Republic, it has succeeded. Its most recent exercise in Northern Ireland was a failure, but there were specific reasons for that. Hon. Members should study those reasons in detail, and recognise that, in dealing with what is currently a comparatively small group, the tool has a much better chance of working effectively than it had in 1971. I consider it wrong to take the rigid and doctrinaire stance that some hon. Members have adopted. Certainly, I think it wrong for Ministers to say that they oppose

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internment in the present circumstances. Whatever their private feelings may be, they should not oppose its use publicly, because in doing so they clearly undermine a threat that is posed by the Irish Government.

As I said at the outset, we in the United Kingdom cannot be seen to be less anxious and less ready to act than the Irish Government.

8.57 pm

Mr. Clive Soley (Ealing, Acton and Shepherd's Bush): I am pleased to follow the right hon. Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble). When he became leader of the largest Unionist party in Northern Ireland, I expressed severe doubts about whether he could offer the quality of leadership that the Unionist people were crying out for. In recent months—indeed, for longer—he has proved me wrong by his actions and words, and I am delighted to say so publicly. The Unionists are getting the leadership that they need, and I am delighted by that.

My first point concerns the problems of emergency legislation. When we recall the House of Commons to deal with such legislation—as the previous Prime Minister, the right hon. Member for Huntingdon (Mr. Major) made clear—we have to be particularly cautious. We have the lesson of the Birmingham pub bombing, and any atrocity such as Birmingham or Omagh should put us on our guard. The Government are right to try to get their business through in the next two days—not least because I think that if we had asked the House to sit for a further two days, we would not have secured agreement anyway. However, the House does not have in place the checks and balances necessary to examine legislation such as this.

Although this is not the appropriate time to outline the details, the Modernisation Committee—of which I am a member—is looking at the matter. I hope that we will recommend that a Committee that examines a Bill can continue in existence after a Bill becomes law to see how it is working, and I hope that such a recommendation will be accepted by the House in the near future. That proposal was dreamt up partly as a result of the disaster of the Child Support Agency. However, we need to take a step further. Every time the House meets for an emergency debate and passes legislation, we should establish a Committee to look at the way in which the legislation works over time.

Select Committees can do that to some degree, but when an Act of Parliament crosses departmental boundaries—as this Bill does—it would be better to set up an operation to see how it works over time. I would be happy to make that proposal to the Modernisation Committee. I hope that some of my Committee colleagues, such as the hon. Member for Aldridge-Brownhills (Mr. Shepherd), would support that. His concerns about the way in which we deal with such legislation are right. As one or two of my hon. Friends have said, when we have emergency legislation, it is all too easy to get it wrong.

A number of people said to me when they saw the Bill that it was the prevention of terrorism Act, old-style, back in drag. It is not. I was a strong and persistent opponent of the prevention of terrorism Act for many years, and it was only in recent years that I ceased to vote against it. There were two primary reasons for that. The first was that the offences against civil liberties and the reputation of this country as a democracy operating under the rule of law were devastatingly serious in one particular respect—exclusion orders. However they were dressed up, those orders were a form of internal exile—the first time that had been used in the United Kingdom since the days of Henry VIII. That was one of the reasons why the Act was so atrocious, and why I was so pleased when my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary ceased to use its powers.

The other big failure of the prevention of terrorism Act was that it was not used as a prevention of terrorism Act in the specific sense. It should really have been called the collection of information Act. The measure was used to round up hundreds of people—several thousand people in some years—question them, often for several days, and release them without charge. On very few occasions throughout the years were more than 5 per cent. of those arrested and detained under the Act charged with any offence. Of that 5 per cent., a smaller percentage were charged with offences relating to terrorism. As my hon. Friend the Member for Sunderland, South (Mr. Mullin) said, the Act was a recruiting sergeant major for the Provisional IRA and, to a lesser extent, for other paramilitary groups operating out of Northern Ireland. For that reason, I was pleased to see the Act go.

Nor is the new Bill a form of internment. Unlike the right hon. Member for Upper Bann and one or two others, I do not believe that internment should be put back on the statute book. It is one thing for the Irish Government to consider internment in Ireland, but it is altogether another thing—for historical reasons, of which we are all aware—for the British Government to become involved in a policy of internment. That is not just because we got it so badly wrong, or because one of the biggest mistakes we ever made was to allow the British Army to be under the direction of what was then a biased and skewed Northern Ireland Executive. It is because the Act was inevitably going to involve British troops in exercising internment, and the history and image of that in Ireland were unacceptable.

Mr. Dominic Grieve (Beaconsfield): I fully understand the hon. Gentleman's comments and the problems of the British Government unilaterally introducing internment, but is there not a problem with the Bill? What it purports to do is to put criminal sanctions on a test that is not very dissimilar to the test for interning people. To get away from calling a spade a spade—that, in fact, the criminal justice system cannot deal with certain kinds of terrorism—are we not making another and extremely dangerous error in bending the rules of the criminal justice system to convict people who do not fit it?

Mr. Soley: There is clearly a danger of that, but let me try to deal with that as I continue my remarks. I hope to deal with it to some extent.

My hon. Friend the Member for Sunderland, South has a point when he says that anyone who is picked up under the Bill should be taken to one of the police stations that operate the recording procedure; one of them certainly does. He is a bit more optimistic than I am about these things. He thinks that a lot of the criticism of audio recording will melt like snow on a volcano.

I suspect that some of us might be more resistant to the flames of a volcano than others. Nevertheless, there is no doubt that, if that were done, it would be a significant step in the right direction. I hope that the Government will examine that while we debate this Bill.

Mr. Robert McCartney: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Soley: I will, but I want to be brief because I am conscious of the time.

Mr. McCartney: The suggestion by the hon. Member for Sunderland, South (Mr. Mullin) that audio equipment would be the answer to everyone's difficulty ignores the fact that the real opinion that is given by the superintendent will not necessarily be based—in fact, it frequently will not be based—on any information given in interview.

Mr. Soley: That may be so, but I do not think that we are looking for perfection. In a perfect world, we would not have this Bill in the first place. My hon. Friend the Member for Sunderland, South was identifying an additional safeguard, and it is one that the RUC will have to bring in anyway. The suggestion is that we simply ensure that it applies to all these cases.

The other fundamental difference between the Bill and the PTA is that the Bill is sharply focused. By anyone's standards, the number of people involved is probably not much more than 20 or 30 in the north of Ireland—it may be less than that—so the Bill will not operate like the PTA, which swept people up in its net, questioned them and let them go.

There is no reason why the Bill should not provide for audio recording and I hope that it will do so. No doubt we will be told whether it is possible, but I hope that it is.

The other big difference from the past is the force of the vote in the referendums in the north and south of the island of Ireland. It has radically and completely changed the nature of the debate because, as the Real IRA discovered, it removed any legitimacy from what terrorists were doing. It took away a lot of water in which the fish of terrorism, if I may revert to that old saying, were able to swim.

That vote changed the mood in Ireland, north and south. We must respond to that. We must ensure that the Bill is focused. Although I do not like it and would not, in an ideal world, have it, in the context of Omagh it is necessary to do something of this nature.

Ms Diane Abbott (Hackney, North and Stoke Newington): I think that the entire House accepts that the vote on the Good Friday agreement transformed the debate on Northern Ireland, but that vote still does not make it right that people can be interned on the word of a senior police officer. The change in the political debate does not make the civil liberty infringements in the Bill right.

Mr. Soley: With respect, if my hon. Friend had been here for most of the debate, she would not have made that intervention. That point has been addressed a number of times. It is not as she thinks it is. Perhaps she needs to read the debate and she will understand why.

There is another important issue. Since 1981, the core of the Labour party's policy to achieve change in Northern Ireland has been that the British and Irish Governments should act together. To be fair, such action was first taken by Lord Prior. He was the first to begin to achieve a coherent policy between Britain and Ireland. We knew that to ask the Unionists or the republicans to come out of their trenches was almost impossible unless the two Governments held the ring, as it were, and led the way forward. Since Lord Prior developed that policy, which was continued by the previous Prime Minister and has been magnificently carried forward by my right hon. Friend the present Secretary of State, the situation has been transformed. It is the core of what we are trying to do. If the Irish Government judge that action is needed to deal with the threat of a repeat of what happened at Omagh—it is important to remember that two other large bombs planted in city centres by the Real IRA could easily have gone off and killed as many people as were killed at Omagh—we have to take that seriously. We have to listen and act in concert with the Irish Government when possible, not just to rubber-stamp what they do, but to recognise that they have for many years borne the brunt of the problem, even though we have not always given them credit for having done so. The desire for common consent between Britain and Ireland should drive us together.

My final point relates to the second part of the Bill. As I have said a couple of times, its provisions cause more anxiety than those relating to Northern Ireland. The main reason for that is the Nelson Mandela question. I was satisfied some time ago by my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary's assurance that we could not have acted against Nelson Mandela if such a provision had been in force, because my right hon. Friend has removed any reference to incitement. People can campaign or argue—they can even praise the bombing in Kenya and Tanzania, as a couple of representatives of a particular Islamic group did on television recently. No action would follow from that. Given some of the other things that those people said, one could argue that action should be taken against them under the Race Relations Act 1976, but that is another matter. The point is that they could not be prosecuted in this country for what they said about the bombing. Campaigning, speaking, raising money or distributing leaflets would not be an offence. That is important.

The Home Secretary is aware of my anxieties. The person who says, "Murder Saddam Hussein," would probably by signed up by MI6 and offered the facilities to carry it out. I joke, but only slightly. In the case of some dictators, such as Adolf Hitler, we know—

Mr. Corbyn *rose—*

Mr. Soley: I am reluctant to give way again, but I shall do so once more.

Mr. Corbyn: Like the rest of us, my hon. Friend has read the Bill. Is he aware of the references in clauses 5, 6 and 7 to decisions under law made in other countries—countries outside the Council of Europe over which we have no control? Such countries may brand people as

[Mr. Corbyn]

terrorists on the basis of no evidence. Such people could subsequently face prosecution in this country for legitimately pursuing democratic ends in their country.

Mr. Soley: My hon. Friend is wrong. Two things are needed: there needs to be an offence in the country concerned; and that act needs to be an offence here. If it is not an offence here, there can be no prosecution. [HON. MEMBERS: "Conspiring."] The Minister who sums up the debate will no doubt make the point, but let me answer. Conspiring to kill someone here is an offence. It would also inevitably be an offence in another country. The difficulty comes when we are dealing not with an obviously dictatorial regime, such as those of Saddam Hussein or Adolf Hitler, but with a more shadowy, in-between case, such as Saudi Arabia, where we are unhappy about civil liberties. Nobody will be returned to such a country.

The issue is whether a person should be prosecuted in a country with a poor human rights record. The Home Secretary's answer is that the Attorney- General would have to make the political decision on whether to do so. I should like an additional safeguard requiring the Attorney-General to take account of the human rights situation in that country. That would also give a power of judicial review in the event of an Attorney-General feeling that he or she must act against an individual in cases where many would argue that, although the act involved was a criminal offence both here and in the other country, it was one that, in the circumstances of that country, could be understood. That is the difficult area that we are trying to root out.

We are not simply concerned about not sending people back, because that would not be done under the Bill in any case. The legislation would not apply in cases where an action was an offence in a dictatorial country, but not here; the action has to be an offence here as well.

Mrs. Fyfe: I should like my hon. Friend to consider a case with which everyone here must be familiar, even though it goes back to the second world war. We live in a democracy, so it is, of course, an offence to blow up bridges in this country for political ends. However, during the second world war, when brave citizens of France blew up bridges in the effort to defeat the Germans, we not only supported them, but funded them. Would not such action fall foul of the Bill?

Mr. Soley: With respect, I have already answered that question. Let me give a more up-to-date and perhaps better example than the one that my hon. Friend raises to demonstrate why that would not work. The example is one of someone being prosecuted in this country for taking action in the areas of Palestine occupied by Israel. The reason why it would not be possible to do that is that, in the United Nations' view, the area is occupied; in other words, it is the second world war situation that my hon. Friend describes brought up to date.

My final point, and it is a crucial one, which it will not be possible to address today, is that we are developing a global approach to deal with terrorism. It is profoundly difficult to get that approach right, because terrorism challenges both democracies and autocracies. The name of the game is to try to find a way of dealing with terrorism that is directed at countries that are capable of change in a democratically legitimate way. A matter that we must consider in the longer term, and one of the things for which I commend the Government, is their signing up to the International Criminal Court, which probably offers the long-term solution to dealing with terrorism.

If we can deal with the problem on an international basis and, in the not-too-distant future, arrive at an international approach to terrorism—perhaps a convention, containing the safeguards of free trials, a proper legal system and democratic procedure—we shall have achieved something positive. The danger is that, because we have all been brought up in a world that is polarised and stuck in the past, we are trying to legislate on the basis of those past experiences. The world has changed dramatically and will continue to do so. We should look for an international structure if we are to tackle the problem in the right way in future.

9.17 pm

Mr. Michael Mates (East Hampshire): I have experienced a unique sense of deja vu as I have sat listening to the debate, because it was from this very seat 24 years ago that I made my maiden speech during proceedings on the Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Bill, which was introduced in 1974 by the noble Lord Jenkins as a result of the Birmingham and Guildford bombs. It was difficult to take the legislation through very quickly—although not as difficult as today, because the House was actually sitting at that time—but it was right then and it is right now. I fully agree with those hon. Members who have said that it is necessary that we take the measures contained in the Bill.

I am sorry to say that I do not go along with the civil liberty arguments that have been made, because the greatest civil liberty of all is the liberty to live one's life in peace, unaffected by terrorism and terrorist bombs. I do not propose to go into the many contributions from Labour Members, save to answer one question posed by the hon. Member for Hull, North (Mr. McNamara). He asked: what is the difference between a good terrorist and a bad terrorist? There is a perfectly simple answer: there is no such thing as a good terrorist. All terrorism is to be deplored, and all conceivable measures must be taken in a democracy to prevent it from occurring.

Mr. Benn: The Central Intelligence Agency funded Osama bin Laden to engage in terrorist activity in Afghanistan against the Russian army. I was totally opposed to the Russian intervention. Was that terrorism to be denounced; if so, why did the Americans finance it and build the headquarters for it that they bombed a few days ago?

Mr. Mates: I hope that I made it clear that all terrorism should be denounced. There is no excuse for any terrorism whatever, and we should do all that we can to prevent it.

I may have a perspective on internment that is unusual in the House, in that I am totally opposed to it. I was in Northern Ireland in the early 1970s when internment was introduced, and I saw its consequences. As someone said, it was the best recruiting sergeant that the IRA ever had. I agree completely, however, with what the right hon. Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble) said: although it

was wrong then, it is nevertheless part of the armoury to combat terrorism. I cannot foresee any circumstances in which I would want to introduce it—indeed, the issue came up from time to time while I was in Northern Ireland, during especially bad phases of violence, and I was always against it because I thought that it would do more harm than good—but that does not mean that we should remove the option altogether.

I sincerely hope that the Government will reconsider, with a view not to introducing internment, because there is clearly no case for it at present, but to having it available. The one development over the past four or five years that has been good and constructive is that the British and Irish Governments are becoming ever more at one in the measures that they have taken in the fight against terrorism. In the face of that growing convergence, the Government threw out the ability to introduce internment four or five short months ago. The Irish did not do the same, and that is significant.

There is no use having internment on only one side of the border: that is an absolutely empty gesture. One argument that was made in the 1970s and 1980s was that it would have been pointless for us to consider introducing internment in Northern Ireland because it was perfectly clear that, in the prevailing political climate, the Republic would never do so, so we would simply have been repeating the mistakes of the early 1970s.

To be effective, internment has to be total on both sides. It has to be done as a precise, surgical, surprise operation; otherwise, the people whom we seek to inter are not there and we are bolting the door after the horses have left. The Prime Minister was wrong today—or wrongly advised—when he said that it was a matter of judgment. The judgment concerns whether we have the ability to introduce internment in circumstances that we cannot foresee, but the fact is that, if we do not have that ability in our law, we cannot do it—unless the Government are suggesting that they can round up everybody and then come to the House to seek retrospective legislation for an action that would otherwise not be legal.

I cannot understand why the Government are deliberately choosing not to have that weapon in their armoury. I do not believe that we would use it now—I would not have considered using it after Omagh, but what if we have four, five or six more Omaghs and it becomes clear that a small nucleus of people is determined to continue the violence and that, as now, there is no public support for those people? However, that weapon would be available if circumstances arose under which it should be considered.

One reason for the failure of internment was the sympathy of the whole nationalist community for those who were interned. Many were interned wrongly and there was great public sympathy for their cause. As of today, there is no sympathy whatever for the cause of the Real IRA, or other such splinter groups, whatever they call themselves. There is simply disgust at and abhorrence for what they are doing.

If it became a question of judgment on whether to introduce internment, the decision would not be taken in the same scene. We would be dealing with a small number of people and it might be the right action to take, except that we cannot now take it. That is a silly policy and, in the light of what I have said, I hope that the Government will look at the matter again.

Mr. White: Does the hon. Gentleman accept that the introduction of legislation for internment would alter the balance about which he speaks? There is no support for the terrorist in any of the communities in Northern Ireland, but the mere fact of introducing such legislation would alter the equation.

Mr. Mates: That is again a matter of judgment. I do not agree with the hon. Gentleman because, if the Government had not repealed the legislation earlier in the year, its reintroduction would not be an issue. That does not mean that a Government cannot admit that they have done something wrong and decide to put it right. I am not advocating the introduction of internment; I am saying that it is one of the weapons that we should have. The Government's true position came out in the Prime Minister's final answer, and that may have been innocently echoed by the hon. Gentleman who said that internment legislation would send the wrong message to the terrorists. I am afraid that that begs another question: what is the right message?

Mr. White: My point was that the wrong message would be sent to the republican community and not necessarily to the terrorists.

Mr. Mates: Since Good Friday, we have been in the business of sending messages; the Government need to be careful, because the problem is that all the messages are going one way. There have been firm assurances about decommissioning. Has anything been handed in—one gun or other weapon, one piece of explosive? The quid pro quo for decommissioning is the release of prisoners. Some of the worst prisoners have been rushed out of Irish gaols, although such people have not yet been released from ours. Lord Mountbatten's murderer is free. Was there any quid pro quo for that? How about 10 tonnes of Semtex in exchange for the murderer of Lord Mountbatten? No, because it is said that that would send the wrong message.

I offer a word of caution on this matter. Do the Government intend to continue in that way without bringing people up to the mark to deliver what they have promised? If they do, we shall increasingly alienate the decent majority in Northern Ireland and some people in this country who wonder why all the traffic at the moment is one way. I hope that the Government have it in mind to issue some timetables and put Sinn Fein-IRA feet to the fire over the matter. I hope that, before there are mass releases of prisoners from Northern Ireland gaols, there will be some concrete signs and not just good intentions.

The right hon. Member for Upper Bann welcomed the appointment of Mr. Martin McGuinness to the body that will look into decommissioning. Mr. McGuinness will have to change his tune because, only six short months ago, he said that not one bullet would the IRA ever give in. That was his position, but now he is part of the organisation that is looking into decommissioning. If that is a road to Damascus conversion, I welcome it.

Dr. Lynne Jones: The hon. Gentleman spoke about sending messages. Does he agree that the Good Friday agreement was a breakthrough and that it gives real hope

[Dr. Lynne Jones]

for peace in Northern Ireland? Does he further agree that, if the Government had not abolished internment, that agreement would not have been reached?

Mr. Mates: The hon. Lady must ask the Government about that. I do not know whether that was another of the messages that were sent at the time. If it was, it was the wrong message. Of course I do not question the fact that the Good Friday agreement was good, but at the moment the only people who are keeping to the agreement are on this side. Sinn Fein-IRA have not done any of the things that they have undertaken to do. Has there been any decommissioning or any move towards it? Has anything been handed in? Has there been any reduction in punishment beatings or knee cappings? Those things are, and must be, part and parcel of bringing peace. But Sinn Fein-IRA do not call that violence; they call it community policing.

Dr. Lynne Jones: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Mates: I have already given way to the hon. Lady and I want to be brief.

I commend the Government on introducing the Bill, which I shall support, but I hope that they are listening. There is a limit to what they can expect to be given while we get nothing back in return. So far, if I may put it this way, the good guys have had precious little back for what we have given. I hope that, before the prisoners are released from Northern Ireland gaols, we shall demand and see concrete signs of the good intentions that Sinn Fein-IRA say that they have being put into practice so that the sort of weapons that set off the Omagh bomb—not the fertiliser, but the detonator, the primer and possibly a small amount of Semtex—are no longer available to those people to cause destruction. If we go on accepting their good faith, we may wreck rather than cement the Good Friday agreement.

9.30 pm

Mr. Gerald Bermingham (St. Helens, South): I propose to be brief, as I have already made many of my points by way of intervention.

When I first heard about the proposal to recall the House and to discuss these two matters, my hackles went up, the hairs rose on the back of my neck and all the defensive mechanisms in me as a libertarian came to the fore. As time went by, I resisted the temptation of invitations from television and messages in the press and, for once, I sat down, waited, watched and listened. In doing so, I learned something and many of my prejudices evaporated.

Yet more prejudices have gone with the passage of time. The right hon. Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble) debated whether the proposed clause would work with frankness and honesty, and I pay him the great compliment of saying that he got it just about right.

Internment has been replaced by a method of prosecution for membership of a list of proscribed organisations. Those proscribed organisations will disappear with time, just as many of their forebears have gone. With them disappears the necessity for this part of the Bill. I seek an assurance on that from the Home Secretary. *[Interruption.]* The right hon. Gentleman nods. Once there are no proscribed organisations, there will be no need for this part of the Bill and it will go into the past.

When I intervened in the speech of the hon. Member for Hull, North (Mr. McNamara) at his invitation, I sought to show what happens when public interest immunity matters are raised. Let us consider what happens in real life in a police station. I speak with some 30 years' practice in the law. I declare my interest as a practising barrister who has been involved and is involved in such cases day by day.

A solicitor goes into the police station. Under the Public Interest Disclosure Act 1996, which the Labour party supported in opposition, the first thing that the officer has to do is give the evidence. The solicitor asks on what evidence a charge is based. The officer no doubt says that it is intelligence which he is not prepared to disclose. Then the advice is given to the client that he should, of course, answer the question. It was suggested that the solicitor would say that he should not answer the question. That would be the most stupid advice in history. It would be stupid, dishonest and dishonourable to the defendant. If the defendant is saying that he is not a member, he should say it loudly and clearly.

If the police decide to make a charge, the case then goes to court. Assuming that the Home Secretary once again gives in to my simple suggestion that solicitors be allowed to attend the interview and, so that there is no argument about it, the interview is tape-recorded—I see no reason why it should not be—there will be no argument. The court—it will be a court with a jury—will hear what was said. The jury will then decide whether that interview amounts to corroboration. If it does not, we know from the Bill that there will be no case to answer at the close of the prosecution case because the word of a single officer is not enough to secure conviction.

If, however, the officer says that the information is confidential and subject to public interest immunity, the judge will have heard the basis for that. That is how the system works. If matters arise during the trial that show that that is not so and that there is no basis for what was said, the judge will intervene. That is his continuing duty in a criminal trial in this land. There is a slight difficulty in the Diplock courts, where the judge is both judge and jury.

The judge knows what sensitive information is. If it is merely informant tittle-tattle, as is often the case, the judge will give it the weight that it deserves. If it derives from observation, interception or tapping, the matter will be left to the jury, who will not know the basis of the assertion by the police officer. It will be a matter for the jury to decide, on the evidence that they have heard, whether they are sure beyond reasonable doubt that that man or that lady is guilty.

That is a pretty good alternative to internment. The person knows that he has had a fair trial. The issue has been aired in public and a jury has decided—not a police officer, but a jury.

Mr. Corbyn: There is great concern, especially among Labour Members, at the suggestion, especially by Ulster Unionists and some Conservative Members, that internment should be reintroduced. Does my hon. Friend think that the Bill would give power to the RUC to take people into custody and hold them for a very long time

on remand, which would in effect be a form of internment, knowing full well that the chances of getting a prosecution were extremely limited?

Mr. Bermingham: No. Under the prevention of terrorism Act, the maximum holding time is seven days.

Mr. Corbyn: Until charge.

Mr. Bermingham: Until charge. People cannot be held week after week; they must be charged. If my hon. Friend does not take my word for it, he should ask the Attorney-General, who has been in the game longer than I.

Dr. Godman: The game?

Mr. Bermingham: I thought that the time had come for a little levity in the proceedings.

There comes a time when a suspect must be charged or released. If he is charged, the case must go before a court and it is then subject to investigation by the court. There is the opportunity to apply for bail, which will be granted on the basis of the strength of the evidence and other matters. My hon. Friend asks whether the Bill proposes interment by another name, but that is not so: it is an alternative to internment. A specific allegation must be made against the defendant. He cannot simply be locked up, given no rights and let go at the end of an indefinite period. That is what brought the hatred and horror in Ireland. That is the point that I tried to make earlier, but I did not get much approval from the Ulster Unionists.

If a person is to be incarcerated, he has the right to know why. That is why the Murray case was decided as it was. If the Home Secretary wants to keep clear of the European convention on human rights and all the other jurisdictions, all that he needs to do is to put in the Bill the right to a solicitor, and allow the solicitor to remain present and the proceedings to be tape-recorded. The prisoner's rights will then be protected and there will be no further trouble in that respect.

Dr. Godman: Will my hon. Friend confirm that, when he speaks of a suspect in a police station being accompanied by a lawyer, he is referring to an English police station? A suspect in a Scottish police station does not have the right to be accompanied by a lawyer during the investigation.

Mr. Bermingham: That is tragic. The law in Scotland should be amended. The English law is correct in that respect. I am asking the Home Secretary to extend it to Northern Ireland, so that the law is equal in every part of the country for all crimes, terrorist or non-terrorist. I do not like the word "terrorist". A crime is a crime. If I blow someone up, it does not matter whether it is for his political beliefs or because I want to blow up his property. I am still a criminal and he has still been blown up. People should remember that. Crime is crime, and it ought to be dealt with.

My attempts to understand clause 5 began as a nightmare. Well, I took the advice. I did what most good lawyers do. I went and talked to my friends. One takes one's piece of paper with one and says, "Hey, Jim," or "Hey, Jane, what does this mean?" I spent the whole of last night—not literally—walking around various places in the Temple. I will not report where, or what the beverages were, but I gathered from many senior colleagues their interpretation of clause 5. They were not very polite until we began to understand the language. Then it became obvious what clause 5 was all about. It is, as my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary said earlier today, a means of bringing into effect an anomaly that already exists.

When previous attempts were made in various private Members' Bills to prosecute people abroad, I was worried about the incitement provisions. The Bill does not include incitement. It avoids that pitfall. It says in simple language that, if something is a crime in England and a crime in, for example, Patagonia, the legislation applies. But if it is not a crime in England or not a crime in Patagonia, the legislation does not apply. That already happens, for example, in drugs cases. Again, I declare my interest. I have been involved in such cases. In one case, drilling pipes in Spain were found to be full of cannabis, but the conspiracy originated in the United Kingdom. My client happened to be somewhere near. He was acquitted, I do not know how, by an English jury. In another case, a lot of bootlegging was going on. If someone is bootlegging in Spain, France or Belgium, he can be tried in the United Kingdom on the conspiracy count because he conspires to commit a crime in the European area.

Incidentally, the crime has to be one that carries a sentence of more than two years in prison. Petty matters are not covered. I hope that when we consider the matter—perhaps it should be considered again in some detail—we will bear it in mind that, in the European context, there is a limitation to crimes subject to a two-year prison sentence. The crime has to carry a sentence of more than two years, so we do not get bogged down with petty crimes.

As I understand it, the Bill deals with crimes that are crimes in this country and in other countries. I was thinking earlier today what a farce it was that we could prosecute someone in England for conspiring to import from Spain £100 million-worth of cannabis, as in the case to which I referred, but we are stuck if we want to try someone for conspiring to import £200 million-worth of cocaine from Colombia. That is lunacy. This attempt by the Government to recover their position is a worthwhile attempt which needs support.

I concede immediately that the drafting of clause 5 leaves much to be desired. For example, one proposed subsection refers to a judge of the Crown court. The cases with which we are dealing are, in my respectful submission, so serious that, under proposed subsection (10), which says:

> "In the Crown court the question whether the second condition is satisfied shall be decided by the judge alone",

the judge has to decide not only what is or is not a crime in this or that country but in certain cases whether the Government of a country is de jure or de facto. Take Burma as a classic example. Is the junta the Government of that country or are the democratic persons elected some years ago the Government? Those are the questions which will have to be considered. Therefore, I suggest that clause 5 needs further amendment and consideration. I hope that, even though we may pass the Bill into law in the next few days, it will be brought back to the House very soon. I seek again from the Home Secretary an

[Mr. Bermingham]

assurance that it will be brought back soon so that it can be considered in the light of further discussions and advice, and amended accordingly.

Clause 5 is horrendous. It is designed to deal with criminal conspiracies when the country in which the crime is intended to be committed and that in which it is thought up are different. I have tried to be as brief as possible. I have some reservations. I promised the Attorney-General that I would put formally on the record my view that, while he is the Attorney-General, I am not too worried about bad cases getting into court. However, I will be worried in the future. [HON. MEMBERS: "Distant future."] The distant future, I hope. I hope that the matter can be reconsidered later and that the technicalities and other matters can be tidied up in a way that makes plain what we seek to do.

For once, I wish a Bill on civil liberties a fair passage.

9.44 pm

Rev. Ian Paisley (North Antrim): There seems to be among some hon. Members a strong conviction that, after Good Friday, everything changed in Northern Ireland. They should look at what we have been through since Good Friday. The people of Northern Ireland have a right to question the strong and fierce language used against them when they say anything that does not side with, condone or support the Good Friday agreement.

Since Good Friday, 37 people have been murdered by the terrorists. Since Good Friday, every paramilitary group supposed to be on ceasefire has breached the ceasefire and the terms of the Mitchell principles of non-violence, so much so that two groups had to be expelled from the talks because of their misbehaviour.

Six hundred and ninety-one people have been injured as a result of paramilitary-inspired violence. There have been 75 separate bombing incidents that include the atrocity at Omagh, Banbridge and Moira, as well as a growing list of largely unreported fire bombs and incendiary devices, many of which have destroyed businesses. There have been six car bombs; there have been 89 separate punishment shootings carried out by all the paramilitary groups; there have been 55 serious assaults carried out by paramilitary groups; and more persons are detained in custody this year than during the mid-1970s when the troubles were at their height. We might say, "Some peace process!"

The Government claim to be doing everything possible to counter those violent acts, but there is little evidence to prove the Government's claims. The Government are not tough on terrorism or the causes of terrorism. The quarterly report on the working of the prevention of terrorism Act indicates a severe dropping off in activity by the security forces to prevent terror. From Good Friday to July, the Government's own figures show that the police and courts failed to charge or convict one person for one single act of terror, for withholding information or for assisting the flow of terrorist funds. In the same period, only one person was charged under section 9 of the Act. That is a record not of success, but of failure; and there is little prospect of the record being improved, given the Government's lack of will to tackle the terrorists.

The concession process has seriously compromised the Prime Minister's ability to deal with terrorists. The people of Ulster are asking how long the concessions to the terrorists will go on. We heard the hon. Member for East Hampshire (Mr. Mates) say that there was no such thing as a good terrorist. I agree with that, but there is a difference in the Acts that we are producing. One set of terrorists is put on one side and one set is put on the other. Someone said, "Aye, but they had declared a ceasefire." It is some ceasefire when they are still carrying out those terrible acts of terror.

That record makes the people of Ulster afraid of what will happen in the days ahead. The House must face up to decommissioning. Once again, we have heard talk today about decommissioning and statements about what was said in the agreement. To hear some hon. Members, one would think that the agreement was strong on decommissioning. What does it say? It states:

"All the participants accordingly reaffirm their commitment to the total disarmament of all paramilitary organisations. They also confirm their intention to continue to work constructively and in good faith with the Independent Commission, and to use"—

mark these words—

"any influence they may have, to achieve the decommissioning of all paramilitary arms within two years following endorsement in referendums North and South of the agreement and in the context of the implementation of the overall settlement."

Mark those words:

"to use any influence they may have",

but not to use all their influence and not to take any steps. So, nothing in the agreement says that participants must decommission within two years.

As long as arms and explosives are available, we will have repeats of Omagh. I am sad when I hear politicians saying, "Surely this is the last time. It will never be repeated." They said that about Moira, after that they said it about Banbridge and after that, about Omagh. God alone knows where the next strike will come.

The House needs a baptism of reality, and it needs to face up to what is really happening in our troubled Province at present. On the Prime Minister's most recent visit, my colleagues and I told him that he had the opportunity at that juncture to deal with the matter and to tell all the paramilitary groups, "No prisoner releases until the guns are handed in." I was amazed at the right hon. Gentleman, who replied, "Would you keep innocent people still in prison?" I said, "Innocent people! The people you are letting out of prison are not innocent. They are as guilty as the people who carried out the Omagh bombing."

The IRA prisoners who are coming on to the streets of Northern Ireland are intent on joining the Real IRA. We have only to look at the names of people in the Real IRA to realise that—people such as Michael McKevitt, who was the IRA quartermaster-general and a man with immense influence over those who are at present in prison but are about to be released. What about Liam Campbell? I have also mentioned the three people from the Omagh area who were taken in by the police.

I asked the Prime Minister a simple question: if the law that we are asked to pass had been on the statute book, could those prisoners have been held and taken to court to prove themselves guilty or not guilty? The right hon. Gentleman did not give me a yes or no answer. If the Bill is to act properly, those people have to be rounded up, but the tragedy is that they will have disappeared by the time we get through the business.

I have heard some talk here about internment. I was in the House when internment was in force, and I believe in Executive internment. I believe that it is an act of a Government; it is not a judicial act, and it is not carried out in a judicial way. The Government say that they will put a certain person away, and they put him away.

People talk about the failure of internment, but what did the Government do at that time? They sewed on to the exercise of internment a quasi-judicial commission. People said, "We never knew who made the accusations against us, but we were put away." What did the Government do then? They hung up an army blanket in a room in the prison. If someone who had been interned wanted to appeal against it, he stood, and all he could see was the brown boots of the fellow behind the blanket. The commissioner asked, "Do you know this man?" and a voice from behind the blanket said, "Yes." "Is he a member of a terrorist organisation?" "Yes." All right, down he goes.

That procedure would have riled any section of the community, and Protestants, Roman Catholics and Jews who were interned were angry with the system. It went against any iota of decency and democracy—but that is not what we are talking about with the Bill.

Someone said that we were advocating internment. No; as the hon. Member for St. Helens, South (Mr. Bermingham) rightly said, the person will be charged, but will have an opportunity to answer the charge. The right hon. Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble), the leader of the Ulster Unionist party, told us why that law is not working now in the south of Ireland, because of the change of approach. It is true that it is not working, yet we are now putting our hand to this measure to bring us into line with that law.

I hope that, when the Bill is passed, we shall see action by the Government, and such people will be taken out of circulation—but they will still be given the opportunity to go to court and stand trial. They will be able to have their day in court. No one wants an innocent person behind bars, but everybody wants the murderers of all those people behind bars.

Our trouble today is that many such people are to be released into our community. This is not a good day for our Province, or for the House. None the less, I shall vote for the Bill, because at least it is sending a signal, and saying, "You bombers of Omagh cannot do that without our taking these measures against you."

9.57 pm

Mr. Tony Benn (Chesterfield): This has been a remarkable debate, and I would like to identify some of the issues that it raises. First, I believe that most people will welcome the recall of Parliament. As you will remember, Madam Speaker, I wrote to you asking for the House to be recalled long before the Government suggested it, because the problem of terrorism relating to the bombing in Nairobi and Dar es Salaam, and the American response, seemed to me to raise important matters.

Secondly, on the legislation, a fairly substantial body of Members are not happy about the way in which the Bill has been presented to us on a take-it-or-leave-it basis. Indeed, I am not happy about that myself. As an old parliamentarian, I was pleased to hear Members on both sides of the House claim that the legislature still has some sort of role in a world dominated by Ministers, spin doctors, media commentators and so on.

The third thing on my mind as I listened to the debate was the fact that it provided me with an opportunity to say what I deeply believe—that the Belfast agreement is by far the most important and significant achievement by the present Government in the 16 months that they have been in power.

I have long thought that the war in Northern Ireland—the war in the United Kingdom—was our biggest single domestic problem, and I think that the Government's handling of it has been absolutely brilliant. In a minute I shall discuss the implications of that, but it is because it has been such a successful policy that I am totally opposed to the Bill that they have introduced. If I may be allowed briefly to explain the various elements in that argument, perhaps the House will listen to me.

I have sat in the House for nearly 48 years now. We all bring our personal experience to bear when we look at problems, but I have been thinking of the policies that have been advocated during my time in the House of Commons. It was said that Stormont would solve the problem of violence in Northern Ireland—it failed; that direct rule would put it right—it failed; that the prevention of terrorism Act would eliminate terrorism—it failed; that the Diplock courts would be the only way to deal with terrorists—they failed.

My hon. Friend the Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn) and I went to the Crumlin road court one day, and we heard two Diplock trials being conducted. I had never seen such a thing before; it was a remarkable experience: a judge; a supergrass—an informer; the families behind armour-plated glass; the courtroom full of guys with submachine-guns. In one court, a Catholic judge was trying a Protestant terrorist; in the other, a Protestant judge was trying a Catholic terrorist. Afterwards, I went to the welfare, and there were the families from both communities, denouncing British justice because it was nothing whatever to do with the justice of which we boast.

I was in the Cabinet in August 1969, when sending in the troops was the great answer. In fairness, Jim Callaghan, Roy Hattersley and so on genuinely believed that it would solve the problem. Then there was the broadcasting ban; we would not allow Gerry Adams, as he was then, to broadcast—oh, no. That applied in the Republic as well as in the north. Then, when the ceasefire agreement was announced in 1994 by my hon. Friend the Member for Foyle (Mr. Hume) and Gerry Adams and Albert Reynolds, what did the then Home Secretary do? He prevented Gerry Adams from coming to London to address a meeting in the House. All the policies failed—every one.

The tribute that I pay to Ministers is that, by engineering the discussions, by bringing about the Belfast agreement and by bringing about the victory in the referendum and the election, they have made greater progress in dealing with terrorism than has been made by any other measure that I have mentioned. Of course, after a war—and it has been a war—there will always be examples of violence, but to try now, in the face of Omagh, to revert to one of the failed measures is very foolish: a matter of bad judgment. The right hon. Member

[Mr. Tony Benn]

for Huntingdon (Mr. Major), speaking as a Back Bencher, honoured us with his experience. I thought that what he said about that was absolutely right.

The Bill is not necessary. It will not be effective. It does infringe civil liberties. It is no good saying that civil liberties do not help you if you are in a grave. Not only are civil liberties morally right, but they protect societies from violence because people are not tempted to violence by their denial. In addition, as many hon. Members have said, some of these measures, when used in the past, have recruited for violence, and there is a danger of abuse.

In my opinion, therefore, this is a thoroughly bad Bill. The fact that it is being pushed through on a single day will not help. No doubt, in five years' time, there will be many television programmes describing how Parliament got it wrong on the Bill, because the media are very, very clever at discovering the mistakes that they contributed to.

The second half of the Bill relates to conspiracy to commit offences outside the United Kingdom. My hon. Friend the Member for Hayes and Harlington (Mr. McDonnell) drew an interesting aspect of clause 5 to my attention. It reads:

"Nothing in this section . . . imposes criminal liability on any person acting on behalf of, or holding office under, the Crown."

I had asked whether the limitation on terrorism abroad would affect MI5 and the security services. I did not get an answer, but it is in the Bill.

On the issue of international terrorism, the House must surely know that, just as the right of self-defence is accepted in international law, if a nation loses its [illegible] people have the right to win that liberty—by force if necessary.

Clinton is coming to Northern Ireland tomorrow. George Washington was a terrorist against George III. In the old days, no one could get into America without swearing that they did not believe in the overthrow of the Head of State by force. I used to say, "I agree with you: George Washington was wrong." They did not like that very much. *[Interruption.]* Of course they did not like it, because George Washington was a terrorist.

I dare say that Edmund Burke, my predecessor as a Bristol Member, could have been caught under the Act for supporting the Americans at the time of the revolutionary war. But are we really going to say that anyone who supports groups who are trying to get rid of Saddam Hussein is guilty of terrorism?

I spoke in Trafalgar square in 1964, in the week of the Rivonia trial. As anyone who reads the transcript of that trial will see, Nelson Mandela admitted that he was a terrorist. The next time I met him, he had won the Nobel peace prize and was President of South Africa. The number of people whom I have met who spent time in British prisons and ended up having tea with the Queen—for what that is worth—is a reminder that all the anti-colonial movements involved an element of force.

Mr. Robert McCartney: Surely the point is that those who opposed the people cited by the right hon. Gentleman—whether we are talking about George Washington, Saddam Hussein or Nelson Mandela—had no democratic rights, and no means of exercising such rights. That is not the position in Northern Ireland, which is part of the United Kingdom.

Mr. Benn: The hon. and learned Gentleman has repeated exactly what I said—that those whose democratic rights are removed have a basic entitlement to use force. I take his point, but there are countries in which that situation exists. Is it the case that, if we in Britain support people who are trying to secure democratic rights that dictatorships have denied them, we will be liable to be charged with promoting terrorism?

What I am saying could not be clearer. Of course I am basically a believer in non-violence—a supporter of Mr. Gandhi. When he came to London and the press asked him what he thought of civilisation in Britain, he said, "I think it would be a very good idea." Gandhi was in a British prison, and Gandhi was a believer in non-violence. But we must be absolutely clear about this: if we want to deal with violence—as the hon. and learned Member for North Down (Mr. McCartney) pointed out—we must have a politically democratic system. When there is such a system, there is no justification for violence.

I hope that nothing that I have said implies that I have any sympathy for the Omagh bombers, or any of the other bombers in Northern Ireland. When we consider the second part of the Bill, we are considering a different situation.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke (Rushcliffe): Surely no one is describing terrorism as violence of any kind for political means. There are political situations in which violence can be justified by almost anyone who does not have a pacifist temperament. The point about modern terrorism is that it is indiscriminate, and is aimed at innocent people. It is not directed against Heads of Government, soldiers or policemen; it kills men and women from all backgrounds and of all nationalities who just happen to be there.

We oppose the blowing up of embassies in Kenya and Tanzania, the blowing up of aeroplanes over Scotland or the blowing up of people in Omagh not because we disagree with the political aims of those responsible—although we do—but because hundreds of people were killed who were not party to that. The obvious intention was to create terror and instability at the expense of innocent people, and that justifies fairly draconian legislation and international co-operation.

Mr. Benn: The right hon. and learned Gentleman does not really understand the point. All war is violence against innocent people—all war, not just terrorism. The smart bombs killed 200,000 people in Iraq. I have been to Hiroshima and Nagasaki, which were bombed after the Japanese had offered to surrender. Perhaps the right hon. and learned Gentleman has been there too. I saw the little children's lunch boxes that had been burned by the bombs. Do not try to tell the House that only terrorists injure innocent people.

As I heard Churchill say in this House, "The alternative to war-war is jaw-jaw." That is the tribute I pay to my Front-Bench colleagues—they started the talking in Northern Ireland. My God—what a change it is to hear the right hon. Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble) appealing to us to follow the line of the Dail. I never thought that I would hear that in this House.

Gerry Adams—who should take his seat in this place, I might add—has appointed Martin McGuinness to the decommissioning body. Do not think that that is not serious, because it is. My hon. Friend the Member for Islington, North and I were threatened with expulsion from the Labour party two years ago for meeting Gerry Adams. We cannot get to see him now—he is popping in and out of No. 10 all the time. If one argues an unpopular case, one must try to find the answers.

President Clinton is coming to Belfast tomorrow. He will say that he welcomes the end of the bombing, and he has said all along that those involved should not go in for reprisal bombings. That is exactly what he did when he bombed Sudan and Afghanistan. The world was as shocked by Dar es Salaam and Nairobi as it was by Omagh—more so, because more people were killed. President Clinton then threw it away by bombing Sudan.

We have no time to go into this, but it was funny that, a few months ago, President Clinton said that we should bomb Iraq because it would not let us inspect its factories. Now, having bombed Sudan, he will not agree to an inspection of the factories he bombed, because he knows that there is no evidence. What Clinton said about Sudan is what the police will say in cases involving terrorists—"I cannot tell you why I did it, for security reasons."

I mentioned an historical case earlier, and the Prime Minister rebuked me. He said that one must know history but live in the present. I agree with that, but, in 1858, the Palmerston Government fell because they introduced a conspiracy Bill, rather like this one, because the French Government wanted action taken against Orsini, an Italian who bought a bomb in London and tried to kill Napoleon III. The House of Commons—a rather more courageous place then than it is now—threw out the Bill, and Palmerston was out. Nothing much changes.

I referred to Omdurman in my question to the Prime Minister, because 10,000 Sudanese—who were held to be Islamic fundamentalists—were killed by Kitchener 100 years ago today. One of the cavalry officers who fought there sat in the House with me when I was elected—none other than Winston Churchill. I beg the House to take a proper historical perspective.

The only way to get peace, nationally or internationally, is by social justice and democracy—they provide the best guarantees. Nobody in Northern Ireland wants violence. Even the hideous and offensive apology by the Real IRA was an indication that they knew that they had no support, and INLA knew that they had to give up. That is the victory of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister.

I do not know whether there will be a Division on the Bill. If there is, I shall vote against it, because I think that it is a bad Bill, for the reasons that I have given. However, the important thing is that we address ourselves now—not only in Northern Ireland, but throughout the world—to the problem of how we deal with violence. It does not help to launch a cold war against Islam, or to whip people up into believing that there is only one way to deal with violence, which is more and more violence.

I put my argument respectfully to the House. The Government have done a brilliant job, but this is a bad Bill, presented to us in a bad way. It would be better if it did not go through on a vote tonight, although I know well that it will.

10.13 pm

Mr. Tony Baldry (Banbury): I wish to address briefly the provisions in the Bill that deal with conspiracy to commit offences overseas. I am glad to see the Attorney-General in his place, because most of my comments will be directed to him.

I must say to the right hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn) and to the House that *Hansard* will show that those Labour Members who have expressed concerns about clause 5 and the provisions relating to conspiracy to commit offences overseas somehow seem to have wanted to give the impression that all terrorists are, in reality, romantic freedom fighters. If hon. Members do not believe that, just read *Hansard* tomorrow.

I was a Minister in the Foreign Office for a single year between being in the Department of the Environment and going to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. During that year, one thing struck me in relation to those countries with which I had the responsibility of dealing. One of our major bilateral problems with practically every one of those countries was a founded belief on their part that there were people in the United Kingdom who were using the UK as a base to plot terrorist activities in their countries.

Within the space of one year, high commissioners from a number of Commonwealth cousin countries came to see me. The high commissioners for India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh all, in their own ways, in reference to their countries, put forward moderate, proportionate cases for why they believed individuals in this country either had committed terrorist offences in their countries or were planning terrorist offences. They were concerned not about embarrassment, incitement or anything of that type, but about offences being committed.

The Government have said that they have introduced this part of the Bill because of the terrorist offences that were committed in Dar es Salaam and Nairobi. Consider just how many people have been murdered in recent months and years by terrorists in Karachi alone—many more than were killed tragically in Nairobi and Dar es Salaam. Therefore, it must be right for the UK to take action, if possible, against international terrorism and for us to ensure that there is no suggestion of the UK being used as a base for terrorist activities being planned overseas.

Mr. Andrew Rowe (Faversham and Mid-Kent): The Home Secretary told us that, in relation to India, the power that is being taken in this Bill already existed. Is my hon. Friend saying that the Foreign Office was unable to use that power—if so, the taking of it for more countries seems to be valueless—or was it simply that the power was not in place when he was in the Foreign Office?

Mr. Baldry: My hon. Friend moves me on to the next point that I wish to make. In the past, the line of Government generally—certainly the line of the previous Government and, I suspect, that of this Government—to such requests and representations has been that it has not been general policy to seek to prosecute offences committed outside the territory. This Bill will mean that all Governments will expect the UK to take action.

If an ambassador or high commissioner comes to the Foreign Office and says to Ministers there, "We have reason to believe that an individual or group of individuals

[Mr. Baldry]

who are resident in the UK either have committed or plan to commit and conspire to commit an offence overseas. We expect action to be taken." If action is not taken, it will seriously poison bilateral relations with those countries.

Therefore, my request to the Attorney-General is that he take the earliest possible opportunity—I appreciate that he will not have the time tonight—to explain to the House, and, more important, to the rest of the world the process that will be followed in all this. Which Government Department is going to have the lead? If an ambassador or high commissioner has evidence from his Government of terrorist activities being undertaken or planned in the UK, does he go to the Foreign Office or the Home Office? Who then will undertake an investigation?

Is there to be a clear understanding that, if a Government with diplomatic representation at the Court of St. James make a claim that they consider to be valid—that someone who is resident in the UK is conspiring, or has conspired to commit an offence in their country—that will be investigated by the appropriate police force in the UK? Is there to be a clear understanding that, if the officers in charge believe that an offence has been committed, those individuals will be arrested and the matter will be referred to the Attorney-General?

The Attorney-General also has to explain other issues publicly and clearly. The Attorney-General will not be involved in a case until the papers are referred to him. If there is sufficient evidence for police officers to arrest someone on the belief that an offence has been committed under clause 5 and the Attorney-General decides not to prosecute, he will have a great responsibility, because the Government of the country concerned will feel that the United Kingdom has let them down. It will not be sufficient for the Attorney-General to say simply that he has not prosecuted because it is contrary to the public interest. That could sour our relations with the country concerned for a long time. Clear criteria will have to be set out on the circumstances in which the Attorney-General may decide not to institute a prosecution.

The Government also have to explain, not just to the House, but to the rest of the world, the provision in the Bill for Ministers to overrule the Attorney-General's decision to institute a prosecution. Which Minister or Department will take the lead? Will it be a matter for the Home Secretary or the Foreign Secretary? It will not be sufficient simply for a Secretary of State to say that he considers prosecution to be against the public interest. That could poison relations with a friendly country. The conditions and criteria under which Ministers can intervene to stop a prosecution will have to be clear.

I support the provisions in the Bill and I believe that many friendly Governments around the world will also support them. I suspect that many colleagues who go to the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association conference this year will find that many from elsewhere in the Commonwealth will welcome the provisions. We have to recognise that, when we have introduced the provisions, there will be an expectation around the world that they will be implemented.

The right hon. Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble) said that some of the provisions on Northern Ireland may not work, but they are important presentationally. It is not sufficient to say that clauses 5, 6 and 7 are there for presentational reasons and are window dressing. The rest of the international community will expect us to act on the provisions. They will want a clear understanding of how the Government will act and the processes that they will introduce to ensure that the provisions can be implemented.

I very much hope that the Attorney-General and the appropriate lead Secretary of State will make the fullest possible explanation at the earliest opportunity of the processes to be used. I suspect that many Governments around the world will want a clear understanding of what the Government intend. They will want to be sure that we are genuine in our intent to take action and that the measure is not simply window dressing by the Government.

10.23 pm

Mr. Brian White (Milton Keynes, North-East): I support the recall of Parliament today and agree with the need to take action and introduce laws in the north and the south of Ireland together. However, when I first heard about the Bill I had several concerns. My main concern was whether it would work—would it achieve the objective that was set out for it? The theme of today's debates seems to have been that we should learn from the past. I welcome some of the safeguards that my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary has added to the Bill. They are a significant improvement on some of the announcements over the weekend.

There are two ways to defeat terrorism. There is the way that Britain used in Malaya in the late 1940s and early 1950s, and the Serbs are now using in Kosovo, which is to take military action and wipe out village after village. No one would argue now that that is the right way, although I suspect some Opposition Members have inklings in that direction. The alternative method is the one that the Government have chosen, which is to tackle the political dimension.

It is important that we recognise the effect of anti-terrorist laws after they are passed. There have been many anti-terrorist laws passed in many countries; some of those have worked, but many have had the opposite effect and increased support for terrorists instead of diminishing it. I want to ensure that the legislation before us reduces support for terrorists.

The biggest single event this year, apart from the Northern Ireland agreement, was the reaction of the people of Dundalk to the Omagh bombing. They came out and said, "We do not want violence." That was a highly significant act. We have waited a long time for it, but the political conditions were not right before. We have to understand the effect of laws on communities, and recognise that by subjecting a community to injustices, we increase support for terrorism instead of decreasing it. That point has been made several times already this evening.

I shall illustrate that with an example dating from the introduction of the prevention of terrorism Act. A 17-year-old was travelling from Belfast to Heathrow in Christmas 1974, just after the Birmingham pub bombings. This cocky 17-year-old kid was stopped at Heathrow and asked for some identification. He said, "I don't need a passport to travel from one part of the United Kingdom to another. This is not the Soviet Union—we don't have

gulags here." He had just been reading Solzhenitsyn's "The Gulag Archipelago". That kid was taken into custody, questioned for hours and accused of being a member of the IRA. I believe that a press statement was drafted suggesting that an IRA suspect had been arrested at Heathrow. Only the intervention of a senior customs officer who knew the kid resolved that situation, but I know that, 10 years later, a police superintendent remained convinced that the kid was a member of the IRA, when all he was was a stupid little boy.

The important point is that injustices occur when legislation is rushed through the House. The example I have given is a minor one, which does not compare with the cases of the Guildford Four or the Birmingham Six, but it illustrates what can happen when people get caught up in events. We all want to get the terrorists who bombed Omagh, but we will not get them by quick fixes or by bad legislation, because that will trigger an adverse reaction. Let us look at how other pieces of legislation have worked: the banning of Sinn Fein members' voices has already been mentioned, but the point is that the message still came through; people could not hear the voices, but they still heard the message.

I hope that the Bill does achieve some of the objectives set out by the Government. I hope that it will be proportionate, but it would be more proportionate if some of the amendments were accepted by the Government, especially the one that would ensure that solicitors were present throughout interviews in Northern Ireland. I would also argue strongly that some of the security forces' proposals should be scrutinised carefully in respect of their practicality. We all agree on the principle, but we must concentrate on the practicalities.

Clauses 5 to 7 have been mentioned by many hon. Members, so I shall content myself by asking two questions of the Minister. What worries me is the difficulty of distinguishing between a genuine charge and a trumped-up charge. How is the question of a person's innocence or otherwise to be determined? There are clear arguments in favour of laying down in the Bill procedures relating to the sort of evidence that will be admissible.

There is also the question of state-sponsored terrorism. How would we deal with, for example, the French secret service's actions in Auckland, or with the Central Intelligence Agency's activities in Nicaragua, if British people had been involved in either?

We have been told that British Crown personnel are exempt from the Bill, but what is the position of the people whom they employ—the Sandlines of this world? Will they be caught under the legislation for carrying out British Government policy, or will they be exempt, and what will be the consequences of any such exemption?

I will support the Government tonight, because it is important that the House sends a message of unity with the Dail, but I urge them to accept the amendments that have been tabled to improve the Bill and strengthen the safeguards so that its misuse cannot lead to support for the men of evil. Those people should be given no oxygen in the political vacuum that has been created. Let us not give them any renewed hope.

I support the Government's campaign against terrorism, but far more important than what we are doing today is the message of the peace process and of what is happening in Belfast through talks between the parties. Bringing the remaining terrorist organisations into the peace process will resolve the problems far more effectively than the Bill ever could.

Not many people were arrested under the Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act 1974 who could not have been jailed under other Acts. The same will be true of the Bill when it is enacted, and I implore the Government to accept the amendments that have been tabled.

10.30 pm

Mr. Ken Maginnis (Fermanagh and South Tyrone): We have heard many good contributions this evening, two of which made an especially strong impact on me. One was that of the hon. Member for Hull, North (Mr. McNamara), which was the usual irrelevance that used to make me so angry, but which I can now pleasantly ignore. The other was that of the right hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn), for whom I have the highest regard, in that I know his genuine concern for the traditions of the House and the rights of its Members.

In the right hon. Gentleman's knockabout contribution—which was most entertaining; he has a talent that many of us wish we could emulate—we lost sight for a few moments of the serious issue. We are here because the largest single tragedy in 28 years of violence in Northern Ireland occurred a few Saturdays ago, and it is important to recognise that, whatever the right hon. Gentleman's intentions, if we follow him to the logical conclusion of his argument, we will have something in this country that is little better than anarchy. What he says is entertaining within the Chamber, but outside ordinary people have had to face the horror of terrorism for 28 years, and to drift down the road that he described would be to drift towards anarchy.

I do not want for one minute to diminish the horror of the Omagh incident, but I must remind right hon. and hon. Members that in 28 years more than 3,300 people have died at the hands of terrorists, among whom I must include the Member for Belfast, West (Mr. Adams), who was the commander of the unit of the IRA that placed a bomb in the window of the La Mon hotel and burned to death members of a canine club. He was commander of the unit in West Belfast that was responsible for bomb after bomb going off at Oxford street bus station in Belfast, killing many people who were going home. I do not regret that the efforts by the right hon. Member for Chesterfield and the hon. Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn) to bring that person to speak in the House were frustrated by the Government and by Madam Speaker.

When we view the legislation, we must consider the needs of society as a whole. I have never looked exclusively at the needs of Northern Ireland's Unionist or Protestant people. I look to the needs of society. I came into politics with the objective of helping people in Northern Ireland society to find a way to work together in partnership, sharing responsibility in a way that enabled us to have political stability and peace. I am trying to remember the age of my eldest child. He is 35 and he cannot recall a time when there was not violence in Northern Ireland.

It is against that background and not in a knockabout play on words that we must try to make a judgment. If I have anything to say to the Government it is not that I am

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concerned that the human rights of many people will be jeopardised. The human rights of people in Northern Ireland and, indeed, throughout this United Kingdom have been jeopardised only by the actions of terrorists over the past 28 years. Some mistakes have been reciprocal to the violence, but no Government set out to undermine the civil rights of people in our society.

Many of my colleagues regard me as being too liberal. *[Interruption.]* People may laugh, but there is always the difficulty and the danger that a Northern Ireland Member who tries to look at the interests of society as a whole is considered to be foolishly and naively liberal. People who have enthusiastically supported, as I have, the agreement of 10 April are considered by many to be naive and too liberal. It is because of my regard for that agreement that I do not want the Government to make the mistake that has been made by one Government after another. That mistake was not to take measures that endangered human rights but rather to take timid, inadequate measures that were too little and too late to protect lives in Northern Ireland.

The right hon. Member for Chesterfield and the hon. Member for Hull, North have said that we tried this and that and that it did not work. The right hon. Gentleman knows that, if Governments had not taken such measures, the bloodshed would have been much worse as two traditions, fearful of each other, would have been let loose, resulting in a much greater tragedy than the one that has occurred over the past 28 years.*[Interruption.]* The right hon. Member for Chesterfield may shake his head, but those of us who have seen people fleeing to their ghettos, who have seen people move because of the intimidation of men of violence, can have little time for the simplistic arguments that we have heard tonight.

My concern is that the two measures that we are debating that will affect Northern Ireland are, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble) has already said in respect of one of the measures, inadequate.

I hope that the Minister will listen for a moment because I should like a response on my next point. May I have a clarification from him in respect of inferences to be drawn by the court should a person being questioned fail to mention a fact that is material to the offence and that he could reasonably be expected to mention? I refer to subsection (4)(b) of proposed new section 2A in clause 1 as it impacts on subsection (6)(a).

It seems that a substantial change is being applied in respect of questioning procedure in so far as a person being questioned will have to be given access to a solicitor before being questioned rather than at some time up to 48 hours after his arrest, as would apply if that person were being questioned specifically about, say, the Omagh atrocity.

Does that not mean that the membership offence has to be dealt with separately from any other offence, and that, in practice, arrests for membership will have to be exclusively for that purpose? In other words, is it true that the provision could not be applied where a person is first arrested in connection with a specific terrorist offence, such as the Omagh atrocity, where, for quite justifiable reasons, which I, the Minister and most hon. Members understand, the 48-hour embargo on solicitor access is applied, and when the matter of membership arises only as a secondary consideration? As the questioning continues a little progress may be made and it suddenly may become evident that there is one thing that can be proved based on intelligence and the questioning itself, and that is that the person is a member of an illegal organisation.

Mr. Robert McCartney: The hon. Gentleman raises a fundamental issue—whether in those circumstances there would have to be a preliminary inquiry to determine whether such a person was a terrorist falling within the proscribed classes, which would enable the regulations to apply to him before he could then, in a subsequent terrorist offence, such as the bombing, be subject to the proofs that the new regulations provide.

Mr. Maginnis: Yes. The hon. and learned Gentleman will, I think, agree that in terms of complementing the existing legislation that enables us to deal with terrorists, this will be pretty useless. That is the point to which I should like a response.

I note that in proposed new section 2B in clause 1 the Secretary of State has the power to specify any organisation that she believes

"has not established or is not maintaining a complete and unequivocal ceasefire."

I am pleased that this part of the legislation refers to specified organisations. I do not want, and I do not think that we need, a great broad brush. I am content with that, but I would be interested in hearing details of the logical basis on which the Secretary of State makes that judgment.

The hon. Member for North Antrim (Rev. Ian Paisley) referred to a number of incidents. I shall refer to three, which relate to the IRA, the UDA and the UVF respectively. Those are not specified organisations, nor are they likely to be. They are supposed to be observing a ceasefire—perhaps they are the "good terrorists" of the hon. Member for Hull, North.

The IRA, as we all know, shot Mr. Kearney and left him where he was bound to bleed to death. They callously killed him and we know that the senior member of the Provisional IRA was responsible for that incident. It is common knowledge. As we say, the dogs in the street know it.

There was an incident in Londonderry in which two Catholic brothers were shot. It is now known that that was by members of the UDA—I believe they have been charged—who have carried out other acts of terrorism for that organisation. That is admitted.

Most recently, there was the heist in east or north Belfast in the past week, when up to nine members of the UVF were caught trying to hijack a load of cigarettes or whiskey—I cannot remember what it was—in order to fund that illegal organisation.

It is not the discretion of the police that worries me, but the discretion of those in charge of the Northern Ireland Office who are still dominated by the euphoria of the 10 April agreement. Whatever I might think of that agreement and however much I may support it, I am not overwhelmed by euphoria. I know that there is an uphill struggle that must be completed before the agreement can yield what we want it to yield. The politics of headlines and of soundbites are not enough at this time.

What were spoken of as voluntary contributions from various political organisations or paramilitary-linked political parties in the past are no longer to be voluntary contributions. In so far as those organisations have signed up to the Stormont agreement, those have become obligations, which must be met. The Government must stop trying to implement the agreement unilaterally. To do so is to destroy it for those of us who would be its strongest supporters. We will lose the confidence of society and with it our ability to carry the agreement forward in the way that we would wish.

I caution the Government seriously and without rancour to reassess how they legislate. Whether they will be persuaded to ameliorate the Bill tonight will be important. It needs to be stiffened up. I shall give an example of one of the nonsensical aspects of the Bill. One of the most impractical provisions in the Bill is that in clause 4(3), which refers to the forfeiture of the property of convicted terrorists. That should be able to happen, but what will the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland do with the house or the pub somewhere in south Armagh when it is forfeit? Will she be able to sell it to another resident in the area? We know that it cannot be sold to another resident in the area. So should I expect to see our Secretary of State ordering the bulldozers down? It will be a little bit like more historical times—firing the thatch. I do not think that we are going to indulge in that either, so let us be very careful about property. I am not terribly sure that it can be disposed of. The worst thing that we can do is to seize property that cannot be disposed of and allow the person from whom it is seized to repossess it without paying any penalty.

There is increasing evidence that financial resources are held by terrorists and terrorist organisations. They are not being tackled at present because those who hold illegally obtained finances are supposed to be observing a ceasefire. There must be equity before the law for everyone. I do not believe that it will weaken the agreement one iota, harm the Government or harm any of us to have that equity before the law demonstrated as it should be demonstrated.

Mr. Roy Beggs (East Antrim): Does my hon. Friend agree that, if the Government are serious about tracing illegal funding, one of the best places for them to start is with public expenditure in Northern Ireland? They should check up on all the miscellaneous expenditure by contractors, many of whom are still paying protection money.

Mr. Maginnis: That is something that, in the more than 15 years that I have been in the House, I have repeated again and again. I have heard colleagues raise this point. I am grateful to my hon. Friend for raising it again. The Government must seriously look at the massive embezzlement of public funds—for example, the giros that go to convenience addresses. I know that that is not peculiar to Northern Ireland, but it has a significance in terms of terrorism there.

There are many things that one would want to get off one's chest on an occasion such as this, but I conclude by reminding the House why we need more stringent anti-terrorist legislation and why we cannot be content to finish with what we have in front of us tonight. I hope that the Government are serious when they say that they are examining the possibility of using wire-tap evidence and investigating other matters that have been suggested by the Chief Constable. I believe that those who have been involved in the process that led to the agreement are being forced, many of them reluctantly, to move inch by inch inexorably towards a democratic process, or at least towards decision point, where they have to jump the psychological hurdle from the Armalite and ballot box strategy to exclusively peaceful and democratic means. As they move, others are drifting away to the Real IRA and perhaps to other organisations—who knows? Those people have to be stopped now before they make an impression on the young.

No one has been caught for the Omagh bomb. No one has been charged. Young people will be impressed that Mr. McKevitt and others whom I could name have managed to elude the Brits, the Irish Government and the Dail. If they are not brought to justice, that will help with recruitment. For that reason, we should be trying to co-operate as far and as actively as we can with the Government of the Irish Republic—yes, to the extent of at least getting internment back on the statute book.

I do not think it is a secret that my right hon. Friend the Member for Upper Bann and I met the Taoiseach in the wake of the Omagh bomb. Talking about the measures that he was going to introduce, he said that he had no intention of introducing internment at this stage, but that his great problem was that he may need it. He said that he intended ruthlessly to suppress the Real IRA, and if he wanted to intern, he would. He said that only one thing would hinder him—the fact that we did not have the ability to match and assist him because we no longer had internment on the statute book. I leave the Home Secretary with that thought, and I hope that he will respond.

10.55 pm

Dr. Nick Palmer (Broxtowe): The Bill comes at a critical moment in the development of the peace process. I believe that, for most of us, the presumption is favourable in the sense that we have to assume that now, after the Omagh bomb and after the successes of the peace process, it is sensible to take further action to crack down on the small groups that are defying the peace process. Realistically—one needs realism in dealing with the Ulster problem—that was not possible when there were very large organisations with broad popular support, but it now appears possible to isolate the small groups that are still defying public opinion across the whole of northern and southern Irish society. That provides a window of opportunity that the Government are seeking to seize through the Bill.

Despite comment in the media to the effect that the whole of northern Irish society is now behind the peace process and that people have revolted against the Omagh bomb, it would be a dangerous illusion to assume that there is not a small group of people still willing to use and committed to the way of the bomb and the bullet. After every atrocity, there has always been a group of such people; there are still such people today, and there will be in the foreseeable future.

Mr. Robert McCartney: I trust that the hon. Gentleman is not suggesting that the 250,000 people who voted no in the referendum—the number who now agree

[Mr. Robert McCartney]

with them is growing—are to be associated in any way with those involved in armed violence alleged to be directed towards wrecking the peace process.

Dr. Palmer: I made no such suggestion. I was saying that a small minority in various parts of the northern Irish community is still committed to armed violence. I think that the hon. and learned Gentleman will agree with that assessment. We have to consider whether the Bill will enable the Government to stamp out, or at least remove, that minority from circulation without doing irreparable harm to human rights.

Like several hon. Members, I have reservations about the weight that the Bill places on the judgment of individual senior police officers. There have been too many cases in which police officers, being human like the rest of us, have come under pressure to solve an especially heinous crime, have found a suspect whom they felt was likely to have done it and have then taken short cuts. Given the nature of human beings, we have to accept that that will happen again, and that it is a risk inherent in this type of legislation.

For this window of opportunity, when a small, isolated group is defying the whole of Northern Irish society, it is worth taking that risk in the short term to take the group out of circulation. However, we need to avoid the temptation to create a new power that will last for as long as the PTA. Both sides of the House must recognise that this is an emergency power, which is being imposed because of a critical situation and that, in due course, we hope that it will be possible to move away from it. With that in mind, I want an assurance from the Minister that, when he makes his annual report on the state of this legislation, he will include an assessment of whether all aspects of the Bill are still necessary, whether it is still being actively applied, whether the application is satisfactory or whether the time has come to step back from this emergency power.

I said that we should proceed with the Bill despite those reservations principally because public confidence is critical at this point and it would be totally insane—and it would be seen to be insane—if terrorists planning to plant bombs in Northern Ireland fled there from southern Ireland to avoid similar provisions there. We have to match what the Dail decides in this matter—the two Governments and Parliaments need to move in step.

However, I would make a distinction for internment, which several hon. Members have raised. At present, internment is not proposed in southern Ireland. The reintroduction of that power would have a massive political impact in Northern Ireland, which could not be conducive to the present peaceful process. Those who suggest internment on the mainland have not seriously considered the impact that it would have, just as those who propose that we should break the Good Friday agreement by cancelling prisoner releases pending decommissioning have not seriously assessed the impact of that proposal.

The problem with clauses 5 to 7 can be precisely identified. Some hon. Members have said that the double test is sufficient to ensure that no one is victimised. They have said that, if an offence is a crime both here and in the other country in which it arises, there is no problem. The problem arises when the offence is a crime here, because we have a democratic alternative, and a crime in the other country, because opposition is not tolerated.

To give a concrete example, we talked about the African National Congress and its campaign against electricity pylons. If that were updated to today, and a group were planning to blow up pylons in a western European country, all of us would oppose it—although, because Brussels was involved, the Conservative party would support it, I suppose. We would speak with one voice within democratic western Europe, saying that such behaviour was totally unacceptable.

If the group were in a friendly, autocratic country, such as Saudi Arabia, it would be more difficult to reach a firm view. Possibly, our view of the action would in practice depend on the people who were carrying it out. There are popular and less popular opposition groups. We would be moving into dangerous terrain if we started judging the offence by whether we liked the people who were doing it, and whether we considered that they were in the democratic opposition or the fundamentalist opposition.

We could move a step further and consider the application to Iraq. If we read that the opposition there had decided to give up violent opposition to Saddam Hussein and were concentrating on electricity pylons, would we say, "This is a very serious offence; we must seize those people immediately"? Probably not.

In contrast to the private Member's Bill two years ago, this Bill provides a backstop—the Attorney-General, who has to decide whether to approve a prosecution if the possibility arises. However, as others have said, that can backfire, because at the moment if the Saudi ambassador says to us, "What that exile group is doing on your territory is shocking. What are you going to do about it?" we can say, "We are terribly sorry, but unfortunately our law does not allow us to do anything at all. Goodbye." That will not be possible in future. We shall have to say, "Well, the Attorney-General is a funny chap; he does not seem to want to do that."

We are delivering the Attorney-General into a difficult grey area of political judgment, in which either he will have to have clear, firm guidelines, as was suggested earlier, so that everybody knows where we stand, or he will have to make decisions from case to case, which will frequently cause a degree of political friction.

I seek two assurances in that regard. First, if the United Nations has passed resolutions relevant to the case, the Attorney-General should have to take them into account. Again I am taking the South African example. I believe that, if there is a resistance campaign that is sufficiently clearly in the right to attract United Nations support, no British Government should imprison people for non-terrorist acts in support of that campaign.

Mr. Grieve: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the House is the only body capable of making the judgment that he suggests, the idea of which I appreciate? If that is the system that he wishes to see in operation, would it not work effectively only through an annual report to the House saying which countries fall within the criteria and which without, so that the House could debate and decide the matter?

Dr. Palmer: That is an interesting proposal; it would really throw the fat in the fire if we attempted to classify

the world's nations into those to which we were prepared to support opposition and those to which we were not. I suspect that most British Governments would prefer to delegate such decisions to the United Nations Security Council, where we have a veto, but where we can also achieve a broader view.

The second assurance that I seek from the Minister is that the legislation should be used sympathetically in cases in which an organisation breaks the law only because it has been denied democratic options. I believe that, if there were a democratic alternative to illegal action, most of us would have little time for any group that did not take that alternative, but I hope that, if one did not exist, and the group were operating with restraint, the Government would view its activities in a somewhat different light.

Despite those reservations, I support the Bill. I believe that, in the last resort, that is our duty to the peace process and to the leaders of the political parties behind the peace process, who have taken a not inconsiderable personal risk; above all, it is our duty to the people of Northern Ireland, who have voted so overwhelmingly for the peace process and who look to us for their protection and support, to carry through that process into a durable peace for Northern Ireland.

11.9 pm

Mr. Nigel Waterson (Eastbourne): I am delighted to have the opportunity to contribute to the debate. Because of the lateness of the hour, I shall be brief. I am sure in common with many right hon. and hon. Members, I was pleased to break my holiday to come back and debate this important issue. It is enormously significant. I believe that everyone, from whichever side of the House they speak, agrees that the House should have been recalled in this way. I do so because I fully support the main thrust of the Bill.

One of the things about being on holiday that gives one a sense of perspective about these debates is the fact that one inevitably reads newspapers that are at least a day old. As I followed the discussions about the likely contents of the Bill, I acquired a sense of perspective. I noted from what I read that the word "draconian" was being bandied about. I believe that even the Home Secretary would accept, with hindsight, that this was a silly and demeaning bit of spinning, even by the Government's standards.

Then, this morning, as I sat fuming on the runway while my plane was waiting to obtain air traffic control clearance, I reflected that my colleagues in the House would be much better informed than I about the contents of the Bill. I was relatively reassured, therefore, to return to find that, in fact, colleagues had been able to get their hands on a draft of the Bill only at a very late stage yesterday. Indeed, different versions seem to have been floated past us as the debate has developed.

There have been delays in drafting the Bill. I accept that, in some cases, those were due to genuine changes of mind about the balance that should be achieved on individual issues. I accept what my right hon. Friend the Member for Sutton Coldfield (Sir N. Fowler), the shadow Home Secretary, said about the fact that we must accept some imprecision on these occasions because we accept the basic aspirations of the Bill.

I have said that I am in favour of effective and comprehensive anti-terrorist legislation. That is one reason why I introduced my Bill, the Jurisdiction (Conspiracy and Incitement) Bill, as a private Member's Bill. It is also why I shall dwell on clauses 5 to 7 of the Bill before us—clauses which, because of that very private Member's Bill, have already received scrutiny by the House in the recent past.

Terrorism can touch us all, whether we are talking about Omagh or about the quiet Sussex lane where my predecessor, Ian Gow, was murdered by the IRA. When I introduced my Bill, it struck me that it was an extraordinary loophole in our law that apparently people could conspire and incite to carry out such terrible acts in other countries without breaking English law. That is why I am interested in effective anti-terrorist legislation, not in petty wrangling about what happened to my Bill. I pay tribute to the Society of Conservative Lawyers, and to my hon. Friend the Member for Croydon, South (Mr. Ottaway), who, some years ago, presciently foresaw the problems that would have to be addressed in the Bill.

However, undeniably, when my Bill was before the House, it was Labour Back Benchers who forced a vote on the motion "That strangers do withdraw", and, despite the honeyed words of the hon. Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth (Mr. Michael) supporting my Bill, when it came to it, the official Opposition, as they then were, failed to go into the Division Lobby to support my Bill. Indeed, I remember Labour Members being shooed out of the Lobby by the then Labour Chief Whip.

Mr. Donald Anderson *rose—*

Mr. Waterson: However, I pay tribute to the hon. Member for Swansea, East (Mr. Anderson), who has been consistent in his intelligent interest in my Bill and this Bill, and in his reservations about my Bill. In his earlier remarks he recognised his role, and that of his party, in the demise of my Bill.

Mr. Anderson: Before the hon. Gentleman rewrites history too much, he must surely concede that, had he received the full support of the Government on whose behalf he was acting as agent with his private Member's Bill—that is, if a sufficient number of Conservative Members had been asked to attend on the relevant day—there would have been no problem.

From the start, part of the difficulty was that no, or no adequate, safeguards were written into that Bill, but many Labour Members were happy for the Bill to proceed once the sifting mechanism with the Attorney-General had been added. However, the hon. Gentleman must surely accept that the Conservative Government had acted with insufficient commitment in not properly supporting his Bill by ensuring that Conservative Members were there.

Mr. Waterson: I shall deal with the hon. Gentleman's second set of points later in my speech, when they will arise naturally. As for his earlier comments, as I have said, I do not wish to become involved in a wrangle about whose fault it was; I am merely saying that it is not for the current Home Secretary to take credit for having always supported this Bill. I pay tribute to the hon. Member for Swansea, East for his consistency throughout the stages of my Bill, and, indeed, for his attitude to the current Bill, but I agree with him that we should not rewrite history. It is important for these matters to be put on the record.

The Bill has a long and distinguished provenance. I leave aside my own involvement, before which we had Lord Lloyd's report and the report of the Society of

[Mr. Waterson]

Conservative Lawyers, which I have mentioned. At the time of my Bill, I was grateful for the enthusiastic support of my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Mr. Howard), who was then Home Secretary. It was ironic at the time—this was reflected in the comments of the hon. Member for Swansea, East during the debates—that the House had only recently supported a very similar measure applying to paedophilia and other activities in foreign countries.

Against all that background, I was a trifle taken aback when I heard the Prime Minister say in his statement earlier today:

"We are therefore taking the opportunity of Parliament's recall to put into law long-held plans to make a criminal offence of conspiracy to commit offences outside the UK."

As I put it to the Home Secretary, what is the difference between then and now? There are no degrees of terrorism, whether it is hundreds in Nairobi or a single much-loved local Member of Parliament. When I introduced my Bill, a case was proceeding in the Old Bailey, which I quoted, in which those responsible—or allegedly responsible—for bombing the Israeli embassy here in London were using this very defence. It was a very current issue then, as indeed it is now.

I merely make the point—more in sorrow than in anger—that, if my Bill had received the support from all parts of the House that it deserved at the time, it would have been on the statute book for some 18 months.

Finally, let me touch on the reassurances that were in my Bill, and are in this Bill, for those on both sides of the House who have expressed concerns about civil liberties. The question of dual criminality, which has been discussed at length, is a major safeguard, ensuring that any offence that is brought before the courts must be an offence in this country as well as in the other country. If, in Iraq, for example, it is a criminal offence to publish pamphlets criticising Saddam Hussein, that will not be actionable in the courts in this country. We have, of course, the normal rules of the English legal system to protect the accused: charges must be proved beyond all reasonable doubt.

As for the safeguard of the Attorney-General, I think, with respect, that some Labour Members are misguided in regard to the sort of political decision or judgment that they think the Attorney-General may be called on to make in certain cases. I do not think that there is a major difference between this Bill and my Bill in that respect. In the earlier instance, the Director of Public Prosecutions became involved in the decision to prosecute; but, in any event—this was an error that the hon. Member for Broxtowe (Dr. Palmer) fell into—the Attorney-General has always had the power to intervene in any prosecution in this country, under the nolle prosequi rule, if he sees fit.

There has been considerable agonising, both today and during the stages of my Bill, about one man's terrorist being another man's freedom fighter. That is not a problem with which Labour Members need wrestle; it does not come into this Bill, as it did not come into my Bill. Terrorism is not defined as such, and, as we said at the time of my Bill, it would be very difficult to define it. We must merely establish that a criminal offence has been committed both in this country and in the other country, and that it has been proved beyond reasonable doubt.

I emphasise that neither my Bill nor, I believe, this Bill was ever intended to discourage peaceful political protest and dissent from a foreign regime. After all, we are the country that allowed Karl Marx to sit in the reading room of the British museum, writing "Das Kapital". Long may such activity continue.

We will continue to be a safe haven for such people—not for those who abuse our hospitality by plotting mayhem and criminal acts overseas. We will ensure that those who abuse our hospitality by planning criminal actions in foreign countries—friendly or otherwise—are subject to our laws, and that has not been the case so far. For those reasons, and a number of others, I am happy to support the Bill.

11.19 pm

Mr. Robin Corbett (Birmingham, Erdington): I wish to explain briefly why I have put my name to the reasoned amendment, and I want to confine my remarks to the aspects of the Bill that deal with Northern Ireland. I want to say to my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary and to the Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office, my hon. Friend the Member for East Kilbride (Mr. Ingram), that it would help a large number of Labour Members and others if they would concede the point about having audio recordings of interviews in every case from day one, and if they would accept the provision that solicitors remain with those facing charges while interrogations take place.

I am going to say things that I do not mean to be offensive, and I do not want to upset people—especially colleagues from Northern Ireland. However, I will say directly to the hon. Member for North Antrim (Rev. Ian Paisley) in particular that he and some of his colleagues seem much happier living in the past than facing up to the future.

Regrettably, some of my Front-Bench colleagues do not seem to have appreciated what I regard as the highly significant developments in Northern Ireland since the dreadful outrage in Omagh. Things that happened before the House was recalled in response to what happened in Omagh give grounds for considerable hope and optimism. After the outrage in Omagh—and however sickening it was—the group that claimed responsibility for it, the so-called Real IRA, for the first time ever did not simply apologise, but went on to announce that they were no longer going to commit acts of violence. INLA had said earlier that they had given up violence.

Yesterday, Sinn Fein said that violence was

"a thing of the past. Over, done with and gone."

Too many in this House, including the Government—perhaps they are too near it—have missed the real significance of those statements. What is important are some of the reasons that lie behind those statements. There is no question but that that is exactly the outcome that the Government, and all those who put their hands to the historic Good Friday agreement, wanted. They wanted the community in Northern Ireland to show that it was fed up with violence, and that it wanted to take the gun out of Irish politics.

The Secretary of State, in an article in *The Observer*, spoke about

"the small number of individuals in groups on either side of the border who are still engaged in violence. These people have no support in the community."

That was demonstrated by the referendums on both sides of the border which endorsed the Good Friday agreement. Over the whole island of Ireland, nine out of every 10 people who voted in that referendum supported the agreement and made it clear that they had had enough of violence. However, they made something else clear.

This is what I think is being missed, and why Sinn Fein, the Real IRA and INLA have made the statements they have. In that referendum and in the reaction to the outrage in Omagh, the people of both traditions in Northern Ireland—and, indeed, the people in the Republic of Ireland—were saying that they were no longer going to hide the men and weapons that make these acts of terrorism possible. They were saying that they would no longer supply them with the information that has helped those on both sides of the argument, let it be said, and has made this violence possible.

Colleagues anywhere in the House can say to me that I am being wildly optimistic about this. What I argue is that at least this is a possible and credible explanation. It goes beyond the mere euphoria of that hard-negotiated Good Friday agreement and the result in both the referendum and elections in Northern Ireland that followed. It is of profound importance.

We all know—colleagues from Northern Ireland must know better than I, but we know it from other parts of the world—that no terrorist organisation can survive for any length of time without some support in the communities on whose behalf it claims to act. These groups cannot exist in isolation. They need people to provide the alibis, the information, the so-called safe houses to hide the people who have committed acts of terrorism and to hide the weapons under the beds, in the cupboards or wherever it is.

My interpretation of what has happened in Northern Ireland is that those facilities that have been available in both communities have now been withdrawn; otherwise, why would INLA or the Real IRA have made the statements that they have? There was no need for them to do that. My strong view is that it is at least open to that interpretation—they have now recognised that, if you like, their life support system has been withdrawn by the communities on which they previously relied.

Mr. Peter Robinson (Belfast, East): Is it not possible that the more likely reason is that those groups were given 24 hours to do exactly that by the Prime Minister of the Irish Republic, or he would use against them the type of legislation that we are putting through the House tonight?

Mr. Corbett: The hon. Gentleman demonstrates the point that I made earlier about his great wish to live in the past. He knows as much as I do about the people who were responsible for the Omagh outrage—nothing. He may have his suspicions as to who they are and where they live. Indeed, some Northern Ireland Members have given names in this Chamber today. That is not proof and evidence.

I say to the hon. Gentleman again: please at least consider the possibility that the withdrawal of the life support system from these terrorist groups is really what has made them realise and accept that violence will no longer win support from those communities in Northern Ireland. That is my view. It will not be shared universally—I acknowledge that—but I ask the hon. Gentleman and others at least to consider it.

I say to my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary in particular and to his Front-Bench colleagues: what saddens me about their proposals is that implicit in them is the suggestion that nothing has changed in Northern Ireland, and that the only proper response to Omagh is to pile more anti-terrorist legislation on to what we have already.

The hon. Member for East Hampshire (Mr. Mates) reminded us that he was in the House on the night the prevention of terrorism Bill was introduced—as a temporary measure to last for six months. So was I, although we voted in different Division lobbies. I come to the issue as a representative of the city of Birmingham, so I feel that I have a special responsibility to make judgments on what the Government are proposing for Northern Ireland.

It is no good pretending that legislation such as the prevention of terrorism Act will beat terrorism. It has not done so, and it will not, as the past 24 years have demonstrated. The Act has given a bonus to those on both sides who have engaged in violence by giving them martyrs—people in prison who can be used as recruiting sergeants and to raise cash.

The PTA has also done something more damaging. On the perjured evidence of police officers under oath, it persuaded jurors to convict the Birmingham Six, the Guildford Four and others in a long line of serious miscarriages of justice. Police officers lied on oath—officers whose word, together with the silence of the accused, could send someone to prison for up to 10 years under the Bill. We should all know what we are doing if there is a Division on Second Reading.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hull, North (Mr. McNamara) gave us a quote from Lord Denning. The PTA led Lord Denning and a series of distinguished judges over many years to dismiss with contempt the appeals of those wrongly convicted of terrorist offences. The Birmingham Six fought for 15 years for the justice to which they were entitled.

Short cuts with justice lead inevitably to miscarriages of justice. Replacing the presumption of innocence to which a defendant is entitled with a presumption of guilt—as the Bill does, in my view—is wrong and risky, and encourages the police to take short cuts. The opinion of a police officer is not evidence; it is an opinion. As the Home Secretary has confirmed, if a defendant remains silent in the face of an accusation, that can be interpreted as corroboration of the opinion of a police officer. This will surely take the Home Secretary to the European Court of Human Rights, so I wonder what the justification is for running a real risk of miscarriages of justice.

Of course there should be a response to evil acts of major terrorism, but the proposals must face the tests of reasonableness, effectiveness and how they are likely to play with the public. They fail on each count, and will do nothing to encourage and support the strong majority in both parts of Ireland who have made it clear that those who turn to them for help in terror will no longer get it.

11.33 pm

Mr. Elfyn Llwyd (Meirionnydd Nant Conwy): Nobody in their right mind would ever justify what happened in Omagh a few days ago. In my objections to several parts of the Bill, I hope that hon. Members will not consider me soft on terrorism. Perhaps I could be considered tough on civil liberties and the need to avoid denials of them. That might ring a bell with the Government Front Bench.

[Mr. Elfyn Llwyd]

On such an important issue, some emergency action is needed in the national interest. Surely, such briefing as was available to Labour Back Benchers last week should have been made available to the rest of the House—*[Interruption.]* That there was some correspondence has been confirmed to me by some Labour Members; perhaps they were not telling the truth. In any case, there should have been some ground work before today, because the Bill is important and far-reaching.

The Government's attitude leaves a lot to be desired. The Bill was made available only at 5.55 pm yesterday, to be debated through all its stages today. The way in which the Bill is being dealt with has broken new ground in the House. It is the Government's fault that the unanimity of condemnation of what happened at Omagh has not been translated into unanimity of support for the Bill. Perhaps, if we had all had time to reflect, consider and reasonably discuss amendments with Ministers, we would be a little less fractious in the Chamber this evening.

The concept of introducing the opinion of a senior police officer as admissible evidence is a novel and highly dangerous one. I echo the views of the hon. Member for Birmingham, Erdington (Mr. Corbett), who made a fine speech on that point. Of course, opinions are often given as evidence in court. Such opinions will normally be the evidence of people who are experts in their field and who have been called as witnesses to assist the court. They will not be witnesses for the defence or for the prosecution, but witnesses to assist the court. That is what expert witnesses are. Their duty is not to secure a conviction—

Mr. Grieve *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Llwyd: I speak as a practising barrister. I shall gladly develop the point, if the hon. Gentleman wishes to argue it.

Mr. Grieve: I do not want to take issue with the hon. Gentleman, but I have to tell him that, in my experience, witnesses, including expert witnesses, are called for both prosecution and defence to give their opinion in criminal cases.

Mr. Llwyd: If the hon. Gentleman reflects on that, he will realise that their first duty is always to the court. He might like to check that and to apologise in due course.

The value and quality of experts' evidence vary from one case to another and the evidence is sometimes flawed. The one fundamental flaw is that such evidence is too partisan, and that is the crux of the matter. This evening, the cab driver who brought me from Paddington asked me what was going on in the House of Commons and I told him. I could not explain much, because I had not seen the Bill; I was not in a position to explain anything other than what I too had read in the press. His comment was, "How can the policeman be independent in those circumstances? He wants to secure a conviction."

That comment may or may not be right. I am not anti-police—I speak as the son of a policeman and the brother of a serving policeman—but at the core of my argument is whether we are to entrust police officers with that extra role, which I believe goes beyond the bounds. In every walk of life, every trade and every profession, there are good and bad, but to have a bad policeman in this situation is to guarantee miscarriages of justice as surely as we are debating this point today.

After carnage such as that which occurred in Omagh, one can imagine a policeman being extremely anxious, upset and—quite naturally—angry. He would want to secure a conviction—to clear the books, as it were. That is the sort of background against which miscarriages of justice have occurred from the 1970s onward, which led to the formation of the new commission. That commission is still considering cases that are outstanding.

The Bill says that such evidence alone would have to be tested, and that is a welcome safeguard, but one can easily imagine that a defendant would feel disadvantaged if he had little evidence to support his case and a senior police officer was there to give an opinion on whether he was a member of a certain organisation.

The right hon. Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble) blamed miscarriages of justice on what he called English juries. Far be it from me, as a Welshman, to defend English juries, but that is a ridiculous proposition, because if juries were persuaded by tainted evidence that was clearly not their fault.

We all know of the inequities involved in the sus laws and the way in which they worked in London, putting, in my view, unrestrained power in the hands of some police officers who misused it.

The Bill says that a senior police officer's evidence alone cannot secure a conviction, but the frightening thing is that such evidence, coupled with the exercise of what was, until very recently, an inalienable right to silence, would be enough to secure conviction. In other words, the opinion of an interested party, coupled with the suspect's silence, would be enough. That is a radical departure from the normal practice under the law obtaining in England and Wales.

I believe that the right to a fair trial is being undermined. We could all quote senior lawyers, civil liberties groups and others but, with all respect to them, we do not need their opinion because we need only look at the Bill and what it sets out to do. I am concerned, because people might exercise their right—or what was their right—to silence because they are not able to express themselves adequately or for a wealth of innocent reasons.

On clauses 5 to 7, I am not satisfied on the Mandela question. Consider, for example, the PKK, the Kurdish group fighting state terrorism and murder by Turkey. Its members might consider violence the only way of combating that terrorism—I do not know what they might be planning—in which case they would be in the firing line under the Bill. Their legitimate right to defend themselves from being gassed and bombed by the state would, it seems to me, be taken away. Other examples could include the Tamils. I am no supporter of violence for any political ends, but I live in a democracy in which we can argue our case rather than being bombed and gassed.

No one can deny that the events in Omagh were horrible, inexcusable and vile, or that measures should be taken to ensure that such an incident never happens again. With regret, I cannot in all conscience say that the Bill is the right vehicle. I believe that we should have had far more time in which to reflect and discuss. The great danger is that the very intention of the Bill, to defeat

terrorism, will be completely subverted, and that it will fan the flames and create martyrs once again. I am thinking of the internment in the 1970s, which was known as the IRA's recruiting sergeant. Legislation in haste may well lead us to repent at leisure. The trouble with the Bill is not simply that it could increase difficulties in Ireland but could also negate the basic civil rights of many people throughout the United Kingdom.

Hon. Members have spoken about the need to move in tandem with the Republic of Ireland. I agree, but surely that does not mean speeding downhill without any idea of a destination. There should be more opportunity to discuss the Bill because it is not receiving reasonable scrutiny. I raised that with the Prime Minister earlier. We are not doing our job properly and to do that more time should have been allowed.

Hurried law is often bad law, and in that context one thinks of the poll tax and the Child Support Agency. The consequences of getting the Bill wrong are far more serious than the consequences that flowed from those flawed and disreputable pieces of legislation. If we legislate in haste we shall repent at leisure. I sincerely hope that I am wrong, but I have great forebodings about the Bill.

11.45 pm

Mr. Andrew MacKay (Bracknell): The debate was called at short notice, but it has been comprehensive and has shown the House at its best. Legitimate concerns about the speed at which the legislation is proceeding have been expressed by hon. Members in all parts of the House. We share some of those concerns, but we support the measure. We are delighted that the legislation will need to be renewed each year. That is right, and it will allay many genuine fears. We suggest a further move. Before the measure is confirmed for another year, there should be a publicised review so that we can see whether there are any errors.

The Minister and I suspect that the measure will not be perfect in all respects. We all hope that it will not need to be renewed a year from now because the proscribed organisations will no longer exist. If it does need to be renewed, we need to be totally satisfied that any mistakes that have been made now can be rectified. I am sure that that would be in the interests of civil liberty and good law.

The debate has had several positive aspects. First, it has shown our Parliament united against the men of violence, appalled by what happened in Omagh, and determined to ensure that it never happens again. Secondly, all hon. Members are delighted that there is such close co-operation between our Government and security forces and those of the Republic of Ireland. Terrorism will be defeated only when there is complete co-operation north and south of the border. We are delighted to note that that seems to be taking place.

We shall vote in favour of Second Reading because, on balance, the first duty of the House, and certainly Government's first duty, is to ensure that ordinary people are properly protected. The modest measures supplement existing anti-terrorist legislation and will go some small way towards increasing the probability that innocent people will not be murdered. My right hon. Friend the Member for Bridgwater (Mr. King) raised an important idea which must be explored further when he said that there should be an amnesty for farmers. That is a positive way forward.

The hon. Member for Sunderland, South (Mr. Mullin) suggested that Conservative Members had some form of nostalgia for internment. I refute that straight away. Neither I nor any of my right hon. and hon. Friends are saying that internment should be reintroduced now. But what I said from the Dispatch Box last autumn when advising the Government that they were wrong to take internment off the statute book was that we all hope and pray that there will be a settlement and that, if there is a settlement, Irish history dictates that splinter groups from both communities will not support it, but rather use every effort to destabilise it and extreme violence. In those circumstances, it is just possible that internment should be used.

That is precisely why the Government of the Republic have not taken internment off the statute book. We believe that, when the Prime Minister said again and again on television during the past few weeks that it is hugely advantageous for British and Irish legislation to be identical in this area, it is a glaring anomaly that the Irish Government have kept internment on the statute book while, quite wrongly, this Government removed it last autumn.

It is not good enough to say that internment can be returned to the statute book in due course. The whole benefit of internment, if ever we need it, is the element of surprise, which will be lost if we have to come back to the House first, allowing those who might need to be interned to escape. I hope that the Government will think again and admit that they made an error of judgment which is now seen to be quite wrong.

I strongly agree with those hon. Members who have said that this legislation alone will not end violence. Another important element, which I was pleased to note that the Prime Minister and the Home Secretary endorsed, is the total decommissioning of all arms and explosives. A small step forward was made when Mr. Adams yesterday renounced violence. A further small step forward was taken today when it was announced that Mr. Martin McGuinness would be the negotiator or representative of Sinn Fein-IRA with the Independent Commission on Decommissioning. We welcome both those small steps.

But Sinn Fein-IRA must match those tough words with equally firm action. We must see full co-operation with the commission and that very soon must mean the handing in of arms and explosives which Sinn Fein and the loyalist paramilitary parties signed up to on Good Friday as part of the Belfast agreement.

I do not require a response now on the detailed points that I am about to make, but I would appreciate the Minister taking note of them. When I was in Omagh last week, local councillors, the chamber of commerce and members of the public were anxious on three specific points, which I am sure they have raised with him but which I promised that I would underline today.

The first point is the that Tyrone County hospital is under threat of closure and local people believe that, if it had been closed, there would have been more deaths than in fact occurred. I hope that the future of the hospital will be sensitively considered by Ministers. Secondly, the people of Omagh believe that there is an urgent need for economic regeneration and financial help for the business community. Thirdly, those shopkeepers who have lost their properties are worried about betterment and the

[Mr. Andrew MacKay]

additional costs that they will incur. I know that the Minister will do his best, along with this ministerial colleagues to allay those genuine fears from a brave community that is still in a state of shock and trauma.

On behalf of the official Opposition, I support the measure and shall be voting for it in the Division Lobby shortly.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I call Mr. Adam Ingram.

Mr. Corbyn: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I am sorry to interrupt the speech from the Front Bench, but as I understand it, the debate was to be open-ended. A number of us have been present throughout the debate but have been unable to contribute so far. Are you proposing to accept a Division at the conclusion of the speech from the Front Bench?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I do not comment on these matters. The hon. Gentleman should not question my judgment. I have few powers in the House, but I am entitled to call whomever I want. I have called Adam Ingram.

11.54 pm

The Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office (Mr. Adam Ingram): Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I appreciate that exercise of your wise discretion.

The debate is conducted in the shadow of the Omagh bomb masterminded and exploded by the enemies of democracy. It also takes place in the shadow of the terrible events in Kenya, Tanzania and Cape Town. Against that background there can be no argument about the weight that the House attaches to today's debate.

I am grateful to right hon. and hon. Members for their contributions. Many have signalled their support for the measures that the Government seek to introduce, and I am grateful for their support. However, it is clear that there are a number of outstanding questions. I shall deal with as many as possible in the time available to me. In his opening remarks, my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary spoke for an hour and a quarter. That was a result of the number of interventions that he took, and he addressed many of the doubts and concerns that hon. Members expressed.

I shall begin by dealing with the civil liberties concerns expressed by my hon. Friend the Member for Hull, North (Mr. McNamara), among others. The Government are committed to human rights throughout the United Kingdom. Measures in the Bill reflect European convention on human rights rulings and concerns about uncorroborated evidence, and provide a number of important safeguards. In our view, they do not conflict with international human rights obligations, nor do they enhance the risk of miscarriages of justice, as some hon. Members claimed during the debate.

I thank the right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield (Sir N. Fowler), who spoke on behalf of the official Opposition, for his general welcome for the Bill. I recognise the importance of his point about the procedure that is implied, and clearly it would have been better if matters had progressed in a different way. That would have happened, had it not been for the horror of Omagh and the other reasons given by my right hon. Friend in his opening statement.

The right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield raised, as did other hon. Members, the issue of internment. I make the point that I have made from the Dispatch Box in earlier debates, because it is worth making as part of the rounded judgment on the matter. If internment over the past 20 years had been deemed to be an effective tool against terrorism at a time when terrorism was at its height, it would have been used by the previous Government. It never was. A judgment had to be made about whether, by retaining internment on the statute book, anything was to be gained for the confidence-building approach that we were trying to move forward. A decision was taken to remove it, in the light of experience. It had never been used at a time of heightened terrorist activity.

We have said all along that we will reintroduce internment if there is a need to do so. Of course that does not need to be done on the basis of a specific and immediate threat. It could be brought back on to the statute book because of a perceived change of circumstances and could be used later, if need be.

The right hon. Member for Bracknell (Mr. MacKay) asked about the annual review of the legislation. He rightly pointed out that there is provision for that, and went on to ask about the mechanism and whether there would be a public review in advance of that. I can give him that assurance: that is the Government's intention. It is right that the legislation should be scrutinised and assessed not just by the House, but by the wider public.

Mrs. Fyfe: Will my hon. Friend confirm that the parts of the Bill that relate to Scottish law will be reviewed by the Scottish Parliament when it is formed and not by this House?

Mr. Ingram: The Bill for the Scottish Parliament is in place and we are entering into a debate on amendments to the Scottish legislation. That is a matter to which my hon. Friend may return if she so wishes, but clearly the first review—in March next year—will take place before the Scottish Parliament sits.

The hon. Member for Stone (Mr. Cash) raised in a number of interventions questions about the long title of the Bill, including issues relating to the release of prisoners. Nothing in the Bill affects the prisoner release programme under the Northern Ireland (Sentences) Act 1998. However, a prisoner cannot be released under that Act if he is likely to become a supporter of a specified organisation such as the Real IRA. If the RUC or any other UK force has intelligence to the effect that a prisoner will become a supporter of such an organisation, that information should be passed to the sentence review commissioners appointed under the Act and will be taken into account by them when considering whether to release a prisoner.

Mr. Cash: The Minister may note that he has just used the expression "a supporter of": that is not what clause 1 says. It refers to a person who "belongs to an organisation". The amendment in my name uses the words

that he just used—"or is a supporter of". I should be grateful for his confirmation that that amendment would be acceptable in those circumstances.

Mr. Ingram: If the hon. Gentleman's amendment is called for debate, we should discuss it during that debate rather than at this stage, given the progress on the Bill.

My hon. Friend the Member for Sunderland, South (Mr. Mullin) and others made very strong points about the confidence that would be created in the legislation if audio recording were included in clauses 1 and 2. We are actively looking at ways of implementing that suggestion. I would have liked to be able to announce this evening that we were implementing it. He is aware, and my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary intimated, that we already have the provision on the statute book. We are introducing codes of practice and there was an intention to implement it at an early stage. We are now looking at ways in which that can be done as quickly as possible. I give my hon. Friend the commitment that every effort will be made to seek compliance with that approach.

Mr. Mullin: The phrase "as quickly as possible" has been around for some months now. I want to know whether people arrested under the Bill will be subject to audio recording when they are interviewed in holding centres.

Mr. Ingram: I am trying to give my hon. Friend as strong an assurance as I can on this point. I have taken on board the strong representations that he and others have made in this debate, and in the time available—the past few hours—I have been considering ways of implementing audio recording. That effort will continue in the days ahead.

The right hon. Member for Huntingdon (Mr. Major) made a valuable contribution to the debate, and I welcome his general support for the measure, especially for the clauses relating to Northern Ireland. He is right in his assessment that the House would not accept the word of a senior police officer as being sufficient to prosecute. For that reason, the Bill has been drafted to bring other elements into play. He is also right in his assertion of the importance of co-operation between the United Kingdom Government and the Irish Government, and between the RUC and the Garda Siochana. He has played his part in bringing about much of the positive development in the co-operation between the Governments and the police forces in the two jurisdictions.

My hon. Friend the Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick) made another of his strong and informed contributions. He brings considerable knowledge to the issue, and I thank him for his very robust defence of the measure.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hull, North made several detailed points. He spoke specifically to the clause relating to forfeiture and asserted that it conflicted with the European convention on human rights. Clause 4 provides for forfeiture orders on conviction for membership of specified organisations. It is similar in its impact to section 13 of the Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act 1989. The legal advice that I have is that it does not breach the ECHR. My hon. Friend has his opinion, but our advice is different. In these cases, the trial will be concluded in the normal way. The question of forfeiture arises only in the event of conviction. It will be considered case by case in the courts, and any person claiming to have an interest in the property has a right to be heard by virtue of clause 4(4).

The right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) also raised issues relating to the forfeiture elements of the Bill and to the safeguards for dependants. We shall probably be able to discuss that when we consider the Bill's remaining stages. However, I have checked on that very point, and I am advised that inclusion of specific safeguards is not necessary because the court will already take account of such matters. Again, we may want to deal with that in due course.

I thank the right hon. Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble) for his comments. He said that there was a need to recall Parliament—indeed, many right hon. and hon. Members commented on the correctness of that approach—and that there was a need to act in concert with the Irish Government. I noted his comments about internment. I think that I have responded to the remarks made by other hon. Members on that issue.

The right hon. Member for Upper Bann made several specific points, one in relation to the recommendations that the Chief Constable of the RUC has said he would like to be implemented in law. All those issues are now being considered as part of the comprehensive review of anti-terrorism legislation, and they will be given due weight.

The right hon. Member for Upper Bann also mentioned the Irish National Liberation Army and the Loyalist Volunteer Force and their current approach towards the ceasefire. Every encouragement will be given to those groups to prove that their declaration of a ceasefire means what they say, in words and deeds. If, on the evidence, we are satisfied that their ceasefire is unequivocal, they can be treated as other groups that have implemented unequivocal ceasefires.

The right hon. Member for Upper Bann also asked about the effectiveness of the membership provisions in the Bill. My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary has already given a frank assessment of this matter, drawing on the Chief Constable's views. Convictions are a matter for the courts. An independent judiciary is essential in any democratic country. It is the Executive's role to provide the legislative framework within which that judiciary works. The proposals are important additions to the anti-terrorist laws available to the RUC.

It will be important to assess how the legislation works. After all, my hon. Friend the Member for Sunderland, South has predicted that large numbers will be subject to the new powers, while others have argued that no one will be arrested. We have different opinions on how the legislation will take effect, and only time will tell. In any event, it will be done via the due process of law, not by the determination of the House.

My hon. Friend the Member for Falkirk, East (Mr. Connarty) asked two questions. First, he asked whether a conviction was possible on the basis of a superintendent's opinion and inference from a failure to mention a material fact. The answer to that question is yes.

Secondly, my hon. Friend asked whether subsection (10) of new section 2A in clause 1 would alter the law of evidence in Scotland. Scottish law normally requires two pieces of evidence for a conviction. The provision allows

[Mr. Ingram]

for a conviction for membership to be on the basis of some evidence and an inference drawn from failure to mention a material fact, which makes the provision the same in Scotland as elsewhere in the United Kingdom. Without it, the inference could not be taken into account in deciding whether the accused were guilty as charged. We may be able to debate that matter again at length when we deal with the remaining stages of the Bill.

The hon. Member for Fermanagh and South Tyrone (Mr. Maginnis) raised a number of issues in a strong contribution to the debate. On the most important—the relevance of the inferences element of the Bill—the ability to draw such inferences will apply in any case in which the accused has been charged with the membership offence. The fact that other offences have been charged is not relevant. The inferences that can be drawn relate only to membership of a specified, proscribed organisation.

The hon. Gentleman also asked about the disposal of property and what would happen to seized property that could not be disposed of under clause 4, the forfeiture clause. That is dealt with in the detailed regime in schedule 4 to the PTA. Property can be sold. A receiver can realise land and pay the proceeds to a proper officer—that is, a court clerk. Any balance in the hands of the officer is treated as a fine going into the public coffers. Of course, that is subject to any claim that another person might have over the property.

Mr. Maginnis: I am grateful to the Minister for giving way, but I think that he missed the point that I was trying to make about the inference aspect of the Bill, in so far as I was asking whether, because of the different times at which access to a solicitor is possible, the new provision would be complementary to the existing provisions, or whether it would have to be treated separately.

Mr. Ingram: I am probably still misunderstanding the point at this late stage. The inference cannot be brought into play until the accused has the opportunity to speak to a solicitor, which is an important protection for the individual in those circumstances. The point about inference is that it relates only to membership or alleged membership of an organisation, and can be used only in such circumstances. Clearly, an officer could be investigating other terrorist-related crimes when he comes across the possibility of membership. Those issues are separated out. The inferences to be drawn from silence relate only to the second element and not to the first. I hope that that has answered the hon. Member for Fermanagh and South Tyrone.

The hon. Member for Broxtowe (Dr. Palmer) asked about the continuing need for the measures in the Bill. Since it has been designed to deal with a specific set of circumstances, it will remain in force as long as it can be put to good effect. I mentioned the need for a comprehensive review of anti-terrorism legislation, which we are undertaking, and the Home Secretary has given assurances on that and on the annual review that will take place, in line with a published report.

The hon. Gentleman also mentioned clauses 5 and 6. In deciding whether to bring a prosecution under those clauses, the authorities, including the Attorney-General, will consider the public interest, the human rights situation in the country in which the offence is to be committed—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Lord): Order. The buzz of conversation is making it extremely difficult to hear what the Minister is saying.

Mr. Ingram: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I was saying that the human rights situation in the country in which the offence is to be committed may be a relevant factor in that consideration.

My hon. Friend also asked whether United Nations resolutions would be taken into account when the Attorney-General decides whether to prosecute. That might be a relevant factor. However, if the planned offence is non-political, such as child sex abuse, it may well not be. That is a matter for the Attorney-General.

Other hon. Members made similar points, asking whether, if a crime has taken place in a non-democratic country, prosecutions should not take place here. If a crime has taken place, the usual course would be a prosecution in the relevant country. However, if there is evidence of a conspiracy here to commit that offence, a prosecution here under the new provisions would be possible, assuming that the accused was within the United Kingdom jurisdiction.

My hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Erdington (Mr. Corbett) said, among other things, that the Bill seemed to be based on the assumption that nothing had changed in Northern Ireland. I can tell him that the opposite is true. Almost everything has changed there. The whole political landscape has changed, and the whole approach to many of the groups that have been involved in violent actions has changed over recent months. Indeed, it is changing on a daily basis.

I am surprised that my hon. Friend makes that charge against my right hon. Friends and myself as we introduce the Bill. It is because there is a change and we have a new set of circumstances, because we have now specified organisations, and because specific small groups are now the only ones involved in violence, that we can take this course of what we hope will be effective action.

The Bill we seek to pass today comprises elements concerned with both criminal evidence and conspiracy. The measures on conspiracy are an important step in the fight against international terrorism and other international crime. The Bill closes off a loophole through which people engaged in planning terrorist and other criminal activities abroad can abuse this country's hospitality.

Making such conspiracies an offence will improve our ability to tackle the growing threat from international terrorists and other criminals. They will no longer be able to use this country as a base to plot their evil activities. The Bill will send a clear message to those who conspire to commit such crimes that we are committed to fighting them with all the means at our disposal. They will find no safe haven in the United Kingdom.

The provisions on criminal evidence will form a new and vital element in the Government's strategy for delivering to the people of Northern Ireland a secure and peaceful future. The new measures will support the political process and ensure that the laws applying north and south of the Irish border are in step, and that there is no hiding place for terrorism.

It is worth while looking for a moment at the pattern of bomb attacks by dissident terrorist groups since the Good Friday agreement on 10 April. In Lisburn, County Antrim, on 30 April, a 600 lb bomb was successfully defused by the Army. No group claimed responsibility. In the border town of Belleek on 9 May, two mortar tubes were discovered in the car park of an hotel near the police station. The Real IRA claimed responsibility.

On 15 May, the Continuity IRA claimed that it had abandoned a car and trailer bomb at Kinawley in County Fermanagh. Two mortars, containing between 100 lb and 150 lb of explosives, were recovered by the Army and made safe. On 16 May, the Army defused a bomb in Armagh, again close to the police station. The Real IRA claimed responsibility.

On 24 June, a 200 lb car bomb exploded in the centre of Newtownhamilton close to the police station. It caused more than £3 million-worth of damage to commercial and residential property. Let us be thankful that there were no serious injuries. The INLA claimed responsibility.

On 1 August, the Real IRA planted a bomb in Banbridge, and gave a completely inadequate 20-minute warning. The bomb, containing 500 lb of explosives, detonated, causing damage to property to the tune of nearly £4 million. Two police officers and 33 civilians were injured. Again, it was a miracle that there were no deaths.

Dissident groups have also been active in the Republic of Ireland and here in Britain. On 23 May, two cars travelling towards Jonesborough were stopped by the Garda Siochana and found to contain between 700 and 800 lb of home-made explosives and a number of mortar tubes. On 10 July, the Garda and the London Metropolitan police, in a joint operation, intercepted six primed fire bombs in the London area. That campaign culminated in the horrors of Omagh.

My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister mentioned the scale of the death and injury. In addition to the 28 lives lost and many hundreds injured, there is the impact of trauma on many of the relatives, those from the emergency services, and others caught up in one way or another in the dreadful events of 15 August. The personal loss and injury are uppermost in all our minds. The structure of Omagh also suffered a searing blow that will take time to rectify.

That is the backcloth against which the Bill is being considered. It makes a grim picture, but it shows not only the determination of some groups to cause mayhem, death and destruction and to bring down the Belfast agreement, but the determination and the success which the security forces—the Army, and the RUC and the Garda working in close co-operation—can claim. Without their professionalism, the position would be worse still.

Some hon. Members have made explicit and implicit criticisms of police officers during the debate. I ask them to reflect on the many unseen brave actions of the RUC and the security forces, who daily put their lives on the line in the fight against terrorism and in defence of our freedoms.

Obviously, we all oppose the aim of those who conspire and perpetrate evil to destroy the peace process. They care nothing for who or what they destroy in pursuit of their goal. We must not let their efforts succeed. We must stop them in their tracks. We must apprehend them, and, using the due and proper processes of law and the courts, we must see to it that we crush their operational capacity.

There must be no more atrocities like the one visited upon Omagh, now left with its heart, and the hearts of its people, ripped apart by evil thugs. This Government, the Irish Government and the heads of the respective police forces are united as never before in our determination to stamp out those who threaten, through terrorist actions, to deprive the people of Northern Ireland of the peace and prosperity that they so wish for and so much deserve.

The Bill will enable those terrorists who are aiming to wreck the Belfast agreement to be targeted. They are already isolated. Let there be no mistake about that. They have no support, north or south of the border. Their actions are against the will of the vast majority of the people in these islands. Parliament has a responsibility, and we owe it to the people to give the security forces the exceptional powers that they now need to deal with this aberration.

I commend the Bill to the House.

Mrs. Ann Taylor (Dewsbury) *rose in her place and claimed to move,* That the Question be now put.

Question, That the Question be now put, *put and agreed to.*

Question put accordingly, That the amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 17, Noes 391.

Division No. 358] **[12.22 am**

AYES

Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Best, Harold
Corbett, Robin
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Dalyell, Tam
Etherington, Bill
Grant, Bernie
Jones, Dr Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
McAllion, John
McDonnell, John
McNamara, Kevin
Marshall–Andrews, Robert
Pollard, Kerry
Sedgemore, Brian
Skinner, Dennis

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Jeremy Corbyn and
Mr. Dennis Canavan.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Alexander, Douglas
Allan, Richard
Allen, Graham
Amess, David
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Norman
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Tony
Barron, Kevin
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, Rt Hon Mrs Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne
Beggs, Roy
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bell, Martin *(Tatton)*
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blair, Rt Hon Tony
Blizzard, Bob
Blunkett, Rt Hon David
Blunt, Crispin
Boateng, Paul
Borrow, David
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Mrs Virginia
Bradley, Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brady, Graham
Brazier, Julian
Breed, Colin
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, Rt Hon Nick *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burnett, John
Burns, Simon
Butler, Mrs Christine
Butterfill, John
Cable, Dr Vincent
Cabom, Richard

Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell–Savours, Dale
Cann, Jamie
Caplin, Ivor
Cash, William
Caton, Martin
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chaytor, David
Chidgey, David
Chisholm, Malcolm
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clark, Rt Hon Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clifton–Brown, Geoffrey
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Iain
Collins, Tim
Colman, Tony
Connarty, Michael
Cooper, Yvette
Cotter, Brian
Cousins, Jim
Cran, James
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Curry, Rt Hon David
Darvill, Keith
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham)*
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice)*
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, John
Dobbin, Jim
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Donaldson, Jeffrey
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Dowd, Jim
Duncan, Alan
Edwards, Huw
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Evans, Nigel
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Field, Rt Hon Frank
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foster, Michael J *(Worcester)*
Foulkes, George
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam
Fraser, Christopher
Gale, Roger
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry
George, Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gibb, Nick
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Gilroy, Mrs Linda
Goggins, Paul
Golding, Mrs Llin
Goodlad, Rt Hon Sir Alastair
Gordon, Mrs Eileen
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorrie, Donald
Gray, James
Green, Damian
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Grogan, John
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archie
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hammond, Philip
Hanson, David
Harman, Rt Hon Ms Harriet
Harris, Dr Evan
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Heald, Oliver
Healey, John
Heath, David *(Somerton & Frome)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hewitt, Ms Patricia
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Horam, John
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Hoyle, Lindsay
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hunter, Andrew
Hurst, Alan
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jackson, Ms Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson Smith, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Mrs Fiona *(Newark)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Jowell, Ms Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keetch, Paul
Kelly, Ms Ruth
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross Skye)*
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Key, Robert
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lansley, Andrew
Laxton, Bob
Leslie, Christopher
Letwin, Oliver
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Linton, Martin
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Lock, David
Loughton, Tim
Love, Andrew
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Steve
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
McIntosh, Miss Anne
McIsaac, Shona
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
Mackinlay, Andrew
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Maginnis, Ken
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Major, Rt Hon John
Mallaber, Judy
Mandelson, Peter
Maples, John
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Martlew, Eric
Mates, Michael
Maxton, John
May, Mrs Theresa
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Merron, Gillian
Michael, Alun
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll & Bute)*
Miller, Andrew
Moffatt, Laura
Moran, Ms Margaret
Morris, Ms Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon John *(Aberavon)*
Moss, Malcolm
Mountford, Kali
Mudie, George
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Paul *(Torfaen)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
Norman, Archie
Norris, Dan
Oaten, Mark
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Eddie
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Öpik, Lembit
Organ, Mrs Diana
Osborne, Ms Sandra
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paisley, Rev Ian
Palmer, Dr Nick
Paterson, Owen
Pearson, Ian
Pendry, Tom
Pickles, Eric
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prior, David
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Raynsford, Nick
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Reed, Andrew *(Loughborough)*
Reid, Dr John *(Hamilton N)*
Rendel, David
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Ross, William *(E Lond'y)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Faversham)*
Rowlands, Ted
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Ms Joan
Ruffley, David
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
St Aubyn, Nick
Salmond, Alex
Salter, Martin
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sayeed, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Short, Rt Hon Clare
Simpson, Keith *(Mid–Norfolk)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Rt Hon Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spellar, John
Spring, Richard
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steen, Anthony

Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Straw, Rt Hon Jack
Streeter, Gary
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Stunell, Andrew
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Swayne, Desmond
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Rt Hon Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Taylor, Ian *(Esher & Walton)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thompson, William
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Touhig, Don
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trickett, Jon
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tyler, Paul
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Vis, Dr Rudi
Walter, Robert
Wareing, Robert N
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, David
Webb, Steve
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Whitney, Sir Raymond
Wicks, Malcolm
Willetts, David
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*
Willis, Phil
Wills, Michael
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Woodward, Shaun
Woolas, Phil
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, Dr Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Kevin Hughes and
Mr. Robert Ainsworth.

Question accordingly negatived.

Main Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 62 (Amendment on Second or Third Reading), and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a Second time.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 63 (Committal of Bills),

That the Bill be committed to a Committee of the whole House.—*[Jane Kennedy.]*

Question agreed to.

Bill immediately considered in Committee.

[MR. MICHAEL LORD *in the Chair*]

Clause 1

EVIDENCE AND INFERENCES: GREAT BRITAIN

The Second Deputy Chairman of Ways and Means (Mr. Michael Lord): Before we embark on the Committee stage, I wish to make it clear to the Committee that we are working on the basis of the amendment paper as at 9.30 pm today and the revised selection list that relates to the amendment paper.

12.38 am

Mr. Cash: I beg to move amendment No. 77, in page 1, line 15, after 'to' insert

'or is a supporter of'.

The Second Deputy Chairman: With this, we may discuss amendment No. 78, in page 1, line 16, leave out

'belonged at a particular time to'

and insert

'at a particular time belonged to or was a supporter of'.

Mr. Cash: I support the Bill for all the reasons that have already been given in the debate, but, when we consider the manner in which the Bill has been introduced, the extraordinary confusion that existed yesterday, when a draft Bill was made available and, subsequently, the Bill itself was properly made available only at 2.30 this afternoon, and all the other things that have already been said, the reality is that the Bill requires very careful examination. An enormous amount depends on—*[Interruption.]*

The Second Deputy Chairman: Order. There are still far too many conversations taking place in all quarters of the Committee. May we now listen to the hon. Gentleman?

Mr. Cash: In his winding-up speech, the Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office, the hon. Member for East Kilbride (Mr. Ingram), used the same words that I have used in the amendment, for a very good reason. The clause lays down the basis on which organisations will be proscribed. The provisions apply

"if a police officer of or above the rank of superintendent states in oral evidence that in his opinion the accused—

(a) belongs to an organisation which is specified, or

(b) belonged at a particular time to an organisation which was then specified."

The Northern Ireland (Sentences) Act 1998, which we passed on 28 July, relates directly to the issue, because it deals with the early release of prisoners. That Act uses the word "supporter". It is well established that the word "support" means much more than merely belonging to an organisation. It is clear to anyone who has eyes to see that it is possible for people who support an organisation to avoid becoming members of it so that they can provide support without being caught within the four walls of the Act.

I have the support of the Minister, who used the word "supporter" in this context on Second Reading. I strongly agree with him and I am trying to be helpful and constructive in creating a framework that will work. The Northern Ireland (Sentences) Act 1998 also uses the word "supporter". In the rush to draft the Bill, the issue may have been overlooked. I argue strongly that the word should be included.

Terrorist organisations are clever and cunning. They rely on the interplay of words. They are past masters at weaving their way in and out of the liability that will attach to them under this Bill, the 1998 Act or any other legislation on terrorism. Was the right hon. Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble) entirely satisfied that those who spoke for Sinn Fein could automatically be regarded as spokesmen for the IRA when they said that the conflict was over, or words to that effect?

Terrorist groups have long been adept at developing covert relationships with those who front their organisations—relationships that could involve giving funds or providing some other form of support to ensure that the organisation was able to continue—without their being members of the organisation.

Furthermore, I notice that the provisions of the Irish legislation, which I believe went through today, create a new offence called "the unlawful collection of information". If the Government are suggesting that we should, as far as possible, be on all fours with the legislation in the Irish Republic, I suggest that the offence now being created—that of collecting, recording or possessing information likely to be useful to members of unlawful organisations in the commission of serious offences—is a form of provision that relates to support for an unlawful organisation within the Offences Against the State (Amendment) Bill, but would not be directed exclusively at persons who are members of that organisation.

I do not think that I need enlarge on that point. I have made a simple point and it is open to the Government to make their case as to why, in the light of the Minister of State's remarks, the amendment should not be passed. I do not need to repeat myself. The amendment is important and I strongly suggest that my hon. Friends on the Opposition Front Bench and the Government accept the amendment for the reasons that I have given.

The Second Deputy Chairman: I call Mr. Paul Murphy—sorry, Mr. Adam Ingram.

Mr. Ingram: In many ways, I wish that it were Mr. Paul Murphy.

The hon. Member for Stone (Mr. Cash) has made several points about the need to amend the Bill to bring the concept of a "supporter" into play. His amendment would allow a police superintendent to give evidence that the accused is a supporter of a specified organisation, but the new evidence provision in clause 1 regarding members of a specified proscribed organisation has been

laid down as a means of specifically targeting the wider offence of membership of a proscribed organisation. It is felt that it would not be appropriate in the context of that targeting to widen the basis of the offence to encompass support for an organisation, which is not, in itself, an offence.

In accepting the hon. Gentleman's amendment, we would be creating a new offence, but, in this legislation, we are trying to be extremely specific and targeted and to ensure that those who are members of specified organisations are brought to justice and receive their just deserts in a court of law. Therefore, I resist the amendment primarily on the basis that we do not believe that there is a need to widen the scope of the legislation.

Mr. Öpik: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Ingram: The hon. Gentleman may speak after I sit down, and so extend the debate if necessary.

On Second Reading, we heard criticism from right hon. and hon. Members of the measures in the Bill.

Mr. Cash: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Ingram: I am trying to explain that the Government are extremely specific and targeted in what we are trying to achieve.

Extending the legislation to cover supporters of proscribed groups might not achieve our objective, which is to take out those who are actively involved and engaged in illegal activities. Indeed, extending the Bill to supporters might encourage others to begin to support the organisation, because it would extend the area of grievance, which is something of which we have to be conscious. We must not encourage the creation of a new republican family who are prepared to take actions such as those seen at Omagh and elsewhere.

Mr. Cash: Does the Minister not accept that the Northern Ireland (Sentences) Act 1998 is absolutely specific? I have never heard a Minister reject an amendment that is perfectly clear, that uses words that he himself used on Second Reading and that is reflected in an Act of Parliament that received Royal Assent only a few weeks ago, on 28 July. That Act used exactly the same expression in relation to eligibility for release. It said:

"A prisoner may apply to Commissioners for a declaration that he is eligible for release"—

The Second Deputy Chairman: Order. I appreciate that we are in Committee, but this is a very long intervention. The hon. Gentleman must bring it to a quick conclusion.

Mr. Cash *rose—*

The Second Deputy Chairman: Order. Has the Minister finished his speech?

Mr. Ingram: Yes.

Mr. Cash: In which case, I am replying to the Minister.

The Minister said absolutely nothing about any of my points. He simply said that the Government wanted a targeted provision. For the reasons that I have given, membership of an organisation is not sufficient in itself to determine whether a person is engaged in terrorist activities.

It is perfectly clear from the Northern Ireland (Sentences) Act 1998 that, if the word "supporter" is used in that context, it is precisely because the Government know perfectly well that being a supporter of such an organisation is a strong reason for being caught within the framework of that Act, and there is no reason whatever, in either logic or common sense, why the same criteria should not be applied in respect of the Bill. The Minister gave no indication whatever why he draws the distinction.

The Minister of State, Home Office (Mr. Alun Michael): Yes, he did.

Mr. Cash: In so far as he made an attempt to flannel, he said that he thought that there might be an encouragement to other people to become supporters. Exactly the same point could be applied to the way in which the word is used in the Northern Ireland (Sentences) Act 1998.

I strongly suggest to the Minister that, if and when it is established in due course that supporters have participated in what would, under the amendment, be criminal acts, and that, by default, they have been allowed to get away with terrorist activities, the responsibility will lie with the Government, and not with the mover of the amendment.

Mr. Beggs: Would the driver of a getaway car, taking a bomber to a safe house, be reasonably described as a supporter, and does the hon. Gentleman agree that such a person should be subject to due process of law?

Mr. Cash: Emphatically yes, in my view. The person might be able to put up a defence—that he had been coerced, for example—but the fact remains that some people deliberately disguise the fact that they are members of an organisation. It is inconceivable that the Government should sell the pass in this part of the Bill. I do not know where their amour-propre comes from. What is the point of deliberately avoiding the opportunity to introduce words that were used in an Act passed only a few weeks ago for exactly the same kind of purpose, and allowing people who have taken part in a bombing, for example, to get off scot free? It is inconceivable. It is extraordinary, to my way of thinking, that the Minister can try to get away with that.

Mr. Öpik: Compared with our Bill, the Irish Offences Against the State (Amendment) Bill seems to have been written by the Plain English Campaign. Clause 6 of that Bill makes it an offence to be at any level in a proscribed organisation and the punishment is life imprisonment. Have that clause and others been considered in the spirit of marching in step with decisions in the Irish Parliament?

Mr. Ingram: Many amendments have to be considered and we have tried to make progress that will satisfy everyone's needs. Support for a proscribed organisation is not an offence, because it makes no sense to make support

[Mr. Ingram]

for a subset of proscribed organisations, in this case specified organisations, an offence. Much consideration was given to the Republic of Ireland legislation but, of course, we are dealing with our own specific measures. I do not know what else I can say about the matter.

The hon. Member for Stone (Mr. Cash) is well known for detailed picking of the bones of everything. I am not prepared to move on the case that he has made and I ask the Committee to reject the amendment.

Amendment negatived.

Mr. Donald Gorrie (Edinburgh, West): I beg to move amendment No. 3, in page 1, line 21, leave out 'in England and Wales'.

The Second Deputy Chairman: With this, it will be convenient to take the following amendments: No. 10, in page 2, line 21, leave out 'in England and Wales'.

No. 13, in page 2, leave out lines 44 to 49.

No. 79, in page 2, line 46 after 'belonging' insert 'having belonged'.

Government amendments Nos. 61 and 62.

Mr. Gorrie: Amendments Nos. 3, 10 and 13 go together. We seek to clarify the position in Scotland because the Bill seems to alter Scotland's laws, which have hitherto always demanded corroborative evidence. Our concerns are shared by the Law Society of Scotland, which states in its letter to us that the Bill undermines the rule of corroboration that applies in Scotland.

As the Bill stands, a person can be found guilty of membership of an organisation on the say-so of a police officer or on the basis of some other evidence, plus the inference that is to be drawn from the person's failure to say various things. It may be a pedantic point, but an inference is not a fact and is not corroboration. As I understand it, the law of Scotland demands two witnesses to testify to facts that are relevant to the point to prove a person's guilt. The Bill changes that, to make one statement by a police officer plus an inference from a person's silence on certain matters sufficient. That is a material change in Scottish law, and it is a serious issue.

If there had been more time and the Bill had been presented in the normal way, we would have produced an amendment with better wording. As there was not enough time, we propose to delete clause 1(10) and to make two consequential amendments elsewhere to remove the drastic change in Scotland's law. One of my hon. Friends will propose an amendment to widen the issue so as to obtain evidence in addition to the police statement and the inference that will be drawn from a failure to speak. At the moment, we are trying to establish the proposals for Scottish law, because this material change should not be made lightly. We look forward to the Minister's reassurance on the issue.

I am

Dr. Godman: Amendment No. 13 seeks to remove subsection (10) of new section 2A in clause 1. I have some sympathy with what the hon. Member for Edinburgh, West (Mr. Gorrie) said about the principle of corroboration, which is the cornerstone of the Scottish criminal investigation system.

Does my hon. Friend the Minister accept that, to some extent, the principle of corroboration, which is such an important element in Scots law, is diminished by subsection (10)? I have no doubt that, given the opportunity, professors of Scots law in Scottish universities would argue for years over the wording of subsection (10). As I understand it, the hon. Gentleman is not a lawyer, and in that regard we have something in common. But we are concerned, as, I am sure, are my hon. Friends the Members for Falkirk, East (Mr. Connarty) and for Falkirk, West (Mr. Canavan), because it is important not to diminish that significant element in Scots law.

Will my hon. Friend the Minister confirm that a suspect in a Scottish police station is advised of his right to remain silent when he is charged? I do not need to remind the Minister, but others perhaps should be reminded, that, in a Scottish police station, the suspect does not have the right to have a lawyer present during an investigation. My hon. Friend the Member for St. Helens, South (Mr. Bermingham), when I reminded him of that, said that perhaps in this instance Scots law should come into line with that which pertains in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. Perhaps that should be taken on board by the Government.

Will the Minister also confirm that, as a result of this legislation, the caution delivered by Scots police officers will have to be differently worded, in contrast to the caution that is part of established police procedures? If so, we need a word or two about that.

I also remind the Minister—if he needs it—that interviews of suspects in Scottish police stations are always subject to audio recordings. If we are to bring our laws in the two different legal systems in the British Isles into line in terms of the best interests of civil liberties, perhaps audio recordings should be introduced in Northern Ireland.

There are concerns here. Is there a diminution in the principle of corroboration in subsection (10)? Is there to be a change in the caution given by police officers to suspects? Can the Minister offer us the possibility that Scots law will be changed to bring it into line with this legislation where a suspect has the right to legal representation when being investigated?

I seek that clarification from the Minister, because, as I told him and others earlier, I have serious reservations about the legislation and the likelihood that it might harm people's civil liberties.

Mr. Dennis Canavan (Falkirk, West): The Committee is entitled to an explanation of the difference between the law in Scotland and that in England and Wales. Subsection (6) refers to the situation in England and Wales. I must admit that I find it easier to understand the situation there as described in the Bill, compared with the part of the Bill relating to Scotland.

Subsection (6) states:

"the accused shall not be committed for trial in England and Wales, or be found to have a case to answer or be convicted, solely on the base of inferences"

relating to the question

"whether the accused belongs or belonged at a particular time to a specified organisation".

There is no corresponding clear statement about the situation in Scotland. Indeed, subsection (10) states, rather surprisingly in my opinion:

"where the court draws an inference as mentioned in subsection (6) above any evidence that he belongs to the organisation shall be sufficient evidence of that matter."

How on earth can "any evidence" be "sufficient evidence"? Will the flimsiest of circumstantial evidence be classified as sufficient evidence to convict someone? I find that difficult to understand.

A situation could arise in a court in Scotland in which a superintendent said, "In my opinion this man or this woman is a member of a particular organisation," and some inference was drawn from the silence of the accused person. That would be deemed sufficient evidence to convict. Surely there ought to be stronger evidence before a conviction is obtained.

I could see a case, although I would not agree with it, for the Government saying that any evidence that a person belongs to a particular organisation shall be admissible evidence of that matter, but to say that any evidence is sufficient evidence is a contradiction of one of the basic premises of natural justice—that there ought to be sufficient evidence before a person is convicted.

It is a pity that neither the Lord Advocate nor the Solicitor-General for Scotland is a Member of this House, and it is a disgrace that there is no one from the Scottish Office on the Front Bench to give us an explanation of what legal advice, if any, the Scottish Office has had from the Scottish Law Officers. I realise that the Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office, my hon. Friend the Member for East Kilbride (Mr. Ingram), represents a Scottish constituency, but he, like me, is not learned in Scots law. We are entitled to a detailed explanation of the legal advice that was given to the Government in the drafting of the subsection.

I notice that my name has been appended to the Liberal Democrat amendment. By coincidence, I happened to table an amendment identical to the Liberal Democrats' amendment, and the Clerks of the House simply added my name to the Liberal Democrats' amendment. I have no objection, but I say that by way of explanation. Subsection (10) should be deleted, unless we are given a satisfactory account of the reason for its inclusion.

Mrs. Fyfe: I shall address my remarks to amendment No. 13. It is an important matter, but all of us discussing the amendment must beg the indulgence of the Committee at this hour of the night. I appreciate that the present wording is an improvement on the original. However, there is still the huge matter of corroboration contained in this part of the Bill. As has been said, there could be endless debates among professors of Scots law about whether the provision amounts to a diminution of the right of corroboration, which is a centuries-old aspect of Scottish law. It is certainly arguable that inference from someone's silence plus any old piece of evidence, no matter how worthless, is hardly the strength that we have at present in Scots law, in which corroboration is required.

This loss is important in itself. It might be the case that the matter can be debated among legal experts, but in that case we should not be rushing tonight to legislate to remove the requirement for corroboration when we have not had the benefit of that expertise.

I should also point out that the law of corroboration is centuries old. It has seen us through wars, civil riots, commotions and disturbances, and there was no diminution of the corroboration rule during those times. I do not diminish the dreadful events of Omagh for one moment, but we have been through dreadful times these past centuries, and we have not taken this step.

There has not been time for any substantial debate. We have not had the benefit of advice from the Front Bench, from people who know Scots law inside out, or from those whose expertise lies in that area. For those reasons, I urge my hon. Friend the Minister of State to withdraw this part of the Bill so that we can have a proper look at it.

Earlier tonight, I asked my hon. Friend the Minister to confirm that the Bill would be reviewed by the Scottish Parliament. I did not mean to spring something on him unexpectedly, but the matter needs to be clarified. The Scotland Bill provides that measures to deal with terrorism remain with the United Kingdom Parliament, but it also says that Scots law and the police are matters for the Scottish Parliament.

We need clarity on that aspect of the Bill. In what way will any further look at the Bill in six months or on a yearly basis be undertaken? Will it be done in this Parliament, or will it be the job of the Scottish Parliament? I hope that the matter does not arise in the first place, and that the Government will withdraw this part of the Bill so that we can have a more careful look at it, and we do not simply throw out something that has existed for centuries because we are worried about the current circumstances, when we have gone through so much before.

Mr. Connarty: I adhered to the request of the Whips not to make a Second Reading speech, but I still have to put my points on the amendments in context. I make the point that we try to counter terrorism with the rule of law so the law must be effective, naturally, but also as transparent as possible so that it continues to gather the support of the people who trust us to make it the best opposition to terrorism and violence. We are looking not for infallibility but, as my hon. Friend the Member for Sunderland, South (Mr. Mullin) said, credibility. In the part of the Bill that relates to Scotland, we have a problem of credibility.

I remind the Committee that I asked a couple of questions in an intervention. One was the simple question whether the opinion of a police superintendent that a person was in one of the named organisations plus the person's silence would lead to a conviction. We had a clear statement from the Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office my hon. Friend the Member for East Kidbride (Mr. Ingram) that that was the case. I then asked a question about clause 1(10) on Scots law. I wished to establish that the same simple equation—the opinion of a police officer and silence—could lead to a conviction in Scotland. That is why I and other hon. Members tabled an amendment. We wished to raise the matter specifically and name the word "corroboration", which the hon. Member for Edinburgh, West (Mr. Gorrie) said was normally evidence from two different sources, two pieces of fact, or separate pieces of evidence for the same fact. Unfortunately, subsection (10) does not do that. It is such a massive change in Scots law that the simple amendment deserved some consideration by the Government. The

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amendment stated that in Scotland we would require corroboration before the second part of subsection (10) would apply. The second part states:

"where the court draws an inference as mentioned in subsection (6) above any evidence that he belongs to the organisation shall be sufficient evidence of that matter."

The amendment would change that part to take account of what for centuries has been the spirit and fact of Scots law, namely that evidence must be corroborated from two different sources.

1.15 am

I welcome some of the amendments, but feel that some are insufficient while others perhaps go too far. I welcome Government amendment No. 61, but Government amendment No. 62 needs to be explained because it seems to include conviction for past membership of an organisation.

I can think of three recent occasions when people have come to see me. They were active members of the Ulster Volunteer Force when the UVF had not pledged itself to a non-violent course. They fled Ireland when the last ceasefire finished. The UVF demanded that they be reactivated, but in the meantime, those people had put lives together and fled to Scotland.

If someone in, for example, the Real IRA had decided before Omagh to get out and to flee to Scotland, under Government amendment No. 62 he could be charged with having been a member of that organisation. Although he might not have taken part in or supported any terrorist activity, he might still be gaoled.

Amendment No. 10 deals with the inference from silence. It would remove the words "in England and Wales" and therefore would extend to Scotland, but I do not see the opinion of the officer dealt with in any other amendment.

Dr. Godman: In attempting to be fair minded in our criticisms of the legislation, we ought to refer to subsection (4)(b). At least now in Scotland such a suspect, before being questioned, would be permitted to consult a solicitor. Presumably, even a solicitor who was only half alive would urge a client to deny being a member of a proscribed organisation rather than to exercise his right to remain silent.

Mr. Connarty: That may well be the case, but the point is that one has to lie if one is a member of a proscribed organisation rather than remain silent and, as happens in the United States of America, not have one's guilt inferred from that silence.

In respect of Scotland, there is nothing to address the opinion of the police officer. Amendment No. 13 would delete all of subsection (10). That is inadequate because, if I interpret it correctly, that would mean that the Bill did not extend to Scotland. That is not the solution that we are seeking, which is to insert corroboration into the process rather than remove Scotland from the Bill's jurisdiction. An amendment that was not selected would have allowed the question of corroboration to be dealt with by the Government, in the hope that they would respect the tradition.

Our credibility will be undermined if we proceed with the Bill as it stands. In one fell swoop, we will retract from the process of law in Scotland the need to have corroborated evidence. That will lead people to worry that, if corroboration is not needed for this legislation, other criminals—perhaps drug traffickers—could be dealt with without corroboration. That would erode the very basis of Scottish law. I am disappointed that corroboration is not being dealt with. Perhaps the Government will think seriously during the Committee stage about how they might take that point on board.

Mr. John McAllion (Dundee, East): The amendments deal with the admissibility of evidence that is not at present allowed in Scottish courts, which is that the opinion of a senior police officer should constitute evidence of an accused's membership of an illegal organisation and that an inference can be drawn that any silence on the part of the accused about belonging to such an organisation constitutes guilt.

The problem centres on the inference to be drawn from the silence of the accused. The position in Scotland is different from that in England. In Scots law, there is no general right for the courts to draw inferences from the silence of the accused. Only in specific circumstances can such inferences been drawn in Scottish courts. The Lord Advocate told me that those include a judicial examination before a sheriff on petition because, in such circumstances, the accused has the right to be represented by a solicitor. Indeed, that is the only occasion on which inferences can be drawn from such a silence in Scots law. It is different in England and Wales, where there is a much wider right to draw inferences from the accused's silence.

Owing to that difference, under the original draft of the clause the accused could be found guilty in Scottish courts solely on the evidence of a senior police officer, who asserted that he or she was a member of an illegal organisation. To deal with that problem, the Government introduced subsection (10) of new section 2A, in clause 1, which brings the position in Scotland into line with that elsewhere in England and Wales, so that, before a guilty verdict can be found, the evidence of the police officer has to be corroborated by the inference to be drawn from the silence of the accused. With the inclusion of subsection (10), the position in Scotland would be better than it might have been, but it would also be much worse than it is at present. That seems to be the problem.

It would be wrong to support amendment No. 13, which would make matters worse by withdrawing subsection (10), leaving the position in Scotland much worse than that in England in Wales. One could then be found guilty in Scotland simply on the basis of the evidence of a senior police officer and no one in the Committee wants that. Equally, it would be pointless to support amendments Nos. 3 and 10, which are entirely irrelevant to the position in the courts in Scotland. Therefore, I cannot support the Opposition amendments.

I must take this opportunity to protest about the weakening of the Scots law of corroboration. Undoubtedly, the clause represents such a weakening of that law, which has been around for a long time, as my hon. Friend the Member for Falkirk, East (Mr. Connarty) said. That is particularly important in respect of Northern Ireland because, as many hon. Members will know,

Scotland is in many ways closer to Northern Ireland than any other part of the United Kingdom. In Scotland, we find both the Unionist and the nationalist traditions, particularly in the west. There is much contact between Scotland and Northern Ireland and, on occasion, it is illegal and of a terrorist nature.

I recognise the Government's need to remain vigilant, through the police and the courts, to ensure that they can control any terrorist activity between Scotland and Northern Ireland. However, the real question that we should be asking ourselves is whether the measures weaken or strengthen the fight against terrorism in Scotland. I have to tell my hon. Friend the Minister that the banned organisations included in the Bill have virtually no support anywhere in Scotland. He will know that Celtic park in Glasgow is a place where one is likely to find much affinity with the nationalist cause in Ireland. Recently, at a match at Celtic park, there was a minute's silence in respect for those who had lost their lives at Omagh. Almost 50,000 people were present and only four idiots tried to disrupt the silence by shouting out. All four were thrown out of the ground and roundly booed by the rest of the supporters of both Celtic and Dundee United.

There is evidence to show that those people have no support anywhere in the United Kingdom. We have to ask ourselves whether, if we create injustices, we will begin to change that balance. If we begin to arrest and imprison innocent people and to deny to accused people the civil and legal rights that currently exist, will we change the balance and begin to build support for terrorist organisations of that sort—support that does not at present exist? It seems to me that accepting police opinion as evidence in a court of law—something that is not acceptable in Scots law at present—represents a serious weakening of that law and the rights of the accused under it.

Similarly, denying the right of silence is much more difficult to do in Scots law, but it will now be made much easier as a result of the changes in the Bill. Finally, withdrawing the presumption of innocence, which is not done in Scots law now but will be done in future if the clause is upheld, represents a further weakening.

Weakening the legal and civil rights of the individual citizens of this country is not the way to tackle terrorism. In fact, it will be counter-productive. That is why I hope that when my hon. Friend the Minister winds up the debate he will tell us whether the Scottish Parliament, which will begin to take over control of Scots law next year, will have the right to review the legislation.

I know that prevention of terrorism is a matter for this House, but the clause deals with the very narrow ground of the admissibility of evidence before a Scottish court, and whether the accused in Scottish law has the right to silence and to the presumption of innocence. So far as I am concerned, after next year that should be a matter for the Scottish Parliament and for nobody else.

Mr. Ingram: We have had a good and detailed debate. I can tell all my hon. Friends from Scotland who have contributed to the debate that the part of the Bill with which we are dealing has been subject to the robust scrutiny of Scottish lawyers. Obviously there will be Scottish lawyers who disagree with the import of what we are trying to achieve—but it seems to me that it is ever thus with lawyers; the minute we hear one opinion we shall also hear another. That applies outside Scotland, too.

In drafting the legislation, we have tried to bring all parts of the United Kingdom into a clear framework. Scotland had to be included, because the threat applies throughout the United Kingdom, and has to be dealt with accordingly.

My hon. Friends the Members for Glasgow, Maryhill (Mrs. Fyfe) and for Dundee, East (Mr. McAllion) asked about the role of the Scottish Parliament. Like all anti-terrorist legislation, the Bill concerns a reserved matter. It falls into the reserved area and is therefore to be dealt with by the Parliament of the United Kingdom.

I suggest to my hon. Friends that they could have had that debate when the appropriate legislation to establish the Scottish Parliament was going through. If they had been able to persuade others that the envisaged arrangements were not appropriate, suitable amendments would have been made. However, as terrorism knows no borders and no boundaries, we need United Kingdom legislation, and we must ensure that its application under the various jurisdictions within the United Kingdom is mutually compatible.

Terrorism is an evil and a menace. It may have particular effect at a particular time in one particular part of the United Kingdom, but at any time it could be visited upon other areas, as has happened with England in the past. For a variety of reasons, we have been able to avoid it in Scotland, but that does not mean that people of evil intent will not bring their terrorism to my homeland, and in drafting legislation we must always be conscious of that.

I shall now deal with the amendments. Amendments Nos. 3 and 10 are defective because they would extend reference to committal to Scotland, which would be inappropriate because of the criminal law that applies there. The drafting makes them defective, so on that basis I cannot ask the Committee to accept them. Clearly, they would not comply with a major element of Scottish law.

Amendment No. 13 would deny a court in Scotland the ability to convict on the basis of inferences drawn under the Bill and any other evidence supporting those inferences. The provisions of clause 1 are designed to provide a Great Britain-wide scheme whereby the courts in the various GB jurisdictions can act on inferences drawn from silence in another part of Great Britain. We believe subsection (10) to be sensible and necessary for the proper working of the clause in Scotland, so that a court may take inferences fully into account without being authorised to convict purely on the basis of inferences.

My hon. Friend the Member for Dundee, East made a strong point in support of part of that argument: he argued that acceptance of amendment No. 13 would seriously diminish the status of Scottish law, and should therefore be resisted. He made other points, which I shall try to deal with. However, on the basis of the arguments that I have made, I ask the Committee to resist amendment No. 13.

1.30 am

Mr. Canavan: Will the Minister explain the words in subsection (10):

"any evidence . . . shall be sufficient evidence"?

Mr. Ingram: Any evidence judged by the court would be sufficient evidence. Like my hon. Friend, I am not a lawyer, but it seems to me, as a layman, that it is for the

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court to decide what it deems to be suitable and appropriate evidence to be taken into account. Legislation should not say what would constitute such evidence. Therefore, the term "any evidence" is something that is brought forward for consideration by the court of law, and it is judged by those sitting in judgment—and, in Scotland, the trial is likely to be a jury trial. Therefore, "any evidence" is that which is deemed appropriate by the court to be considered.

Mr. Connarty: Would that evidence be sufficient evidence if it was only the opinion of a superintendent of police—in a Scots court?

Mr. Ingram: Of itself, no.

Mr. Connarty: Corroboration?

Mr. Ingram: Perhaps what I say when I come to the issue relating to corroboration or supporting evidence will deal with that. However, before I move on to that, may I deal with—

Mr. Canavan: Am I correct in understanding that subsection (10) means that any evidence that a person belongs to a proscribed organisation shall be sufficient evidence that he or she belongs to that proscribed organisation, so that even the flimsiest of circumstantial evidence shall be deemed to be sufficient evidence for a conviction?

Mr. Ingram: Well, it really is for the court to judge the strength or weakness of evidence that has been advanced to it. It is not for us in this place to decide the value or otherwise of evidence, because the judgment must be made in the court of law. In the Bill we are merely building a framework that allows those matters to be proceeded with so as to allow people to be brought to justice for their involvement as part of a specified organisation. Any evidence is sufficient, but only where it corroborates inferences, so that, where an inference is being drawn, any other evidence could be deemed by the court to be sufficient. It can be, but it will not always be, sufficient, and that is for the court to decide.

Mr. Canavan: That is not what it says. It says "shall be".

The First Deputy Chairman of Ways and Means (Mr. Michael J. Martin): Order.

Mr. William Ross (East Londonderry) *rose—*

Mr. Michael Jabez Foster (Hastings and Rye) *rose—*

Mr. Ingram: I give way to the hon. Member for East Londonderry (Mr. Ross).

Mr. Ross: If the word was "may" rather than "shall", the Minister's argument would have more force. His hon. Friends have raised a serious problem.

Mr. Ingram: I am considering that serious point, and I am trying to explain, as I go along, dealing with interventions as they arise. I am trying to explain that part of the Bill, why it exists and why we feel that it is important to ensure that Scotland is brought into compliance with the rest of GB and with the other jurisdictions affected by the legislation.

Mr. Foster: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Ingram: I hope that my hon. Friend is a Scottish lawyer, because that may help us.

Mr. Foster: I am not a Scottish lawyer, but is it not the position that, in any event, the provision applies only when there is no statement by the accused? Surely any evidence that he or she is a member of an organisation would be better evidence than no evidence that he or she was not; so it applies only in circumstances in which there is no denial. Would that not be sufficient evidence in any event?

Mr. Ingram: My hon. Friend has made a strong point, and I accept that it refers to the matter at stake, in terms of the way in which I have amended the original legislation. However, we must deal with other groups of amendments, including Government amendments. I shall deal with issues that were raised earlier in the debate that may answer points that have been raised, rather than responding to interventions.

Government amendments Nos. 61 and 62 propose minor changes that are necessary to ensure that the provisions have similar application in Scotland to their application in England and Wales. They reflect the potential for a jury to draw inferences from failure to mention a material fact when questioned, and the importance of ensuring that those who did belong to a specified organisation are caught in Scotland as well. They are not a result of rushed drafting per se, and do not reflect the potential for any number of other terrors; they are simply minor amendments to ensure that the law has a similar impact throughout Great Britain.

My hon. Friend the Member for Dundee, East said that subsection (10) had been inserted as a result of the need to reflect fully certain aspects of Scottish law, and that, when it was inserted, it did not reflect those aspects fully in relation to other features of the Bill. That is why we had to table amendments Nos. 61 and 62, which I ask the Committee to support.

A point was raised about a change in the caution provisions. Let me explain. The suspect will be warned, in appropriate language, of the effect of failure to answer questions: that is the way in which the caution will apply. As for the point about the diminution of corroboration requirements, there will be no such diminution. Simply treating inferences as one piece of evidence means that that is not the case. There is only one piece of evidence for which inference would be used.

As for the right to legal representation, the accused must be given an opportunity to consult a solicitor before inferences can be drawn; otherwise, there is no change. I stress that inferences alone are not sufficient evidence, but, if corroborated, they can be taken into account. That is an important protection for those who are charged.

The Bill does not say that any evidence is sufficient evidence; it says that evidence on the issue at trial, together with inference, can be sufficient evidence.

I have tried to deal with the detailed parts of the Bill. Hon. Members may want to continue the debate, but I think that we have examined the issues fully, especially in view of that other matters that remain to be considered.

Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (Cotswold): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Ingram: No. I ask the Committee to accept the recommendations before it. *[Interruption.]*

The First Deputy Chairman: Order. The Minister does not need to give a reason; he is not giving way. It is as simple as that.

Mr. Gorrie: I am pleased that our amendment, if somewhat defective, has effectively acted as a tap which has allowed five excellent speeches from Labour Members to gush forth and spread light—to mix my metaphors—on this subject. Subsection (10) is remarkably badly worded. It may have been written by some robust Scots lawyers, but I do not think that they understand the English tongue.

I entirely agree with the interpretation of the hon. Member for Falkirk, West (Mr. Canavan)—perhaps because we both come from a teaching background. Contrary to what the Minister said, the Bill states that

"any evidence that he belongs to the organisation shall be sufficient".

The Minister was contending that that was not what was meant, but clearly it is.

The clause is extremely badly written, but, because of the time constraints and because our amendment is imperfect, we will not push it to a vote. Whether some wiser lawyers in the House of Lords may consider the matter worth pursuing, I do not know. Unfortunately the two Scottish Liberal Democrat QCs were revolving in aeroplanes over Orkney, and we could not get their advice. This is an important issue and I hope that the Government will address it more carefully than they have done hitherto. However, in light of all that has been said, I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Mr. Mullin: I beg to move amendment No.5, in page 2, line 1, after 'constable' insert 'in the presence of his solicitor'.

The First Deputy Chairman: With this, it will be convenient to discuss the following amendments: No. 6, in page 2, line 5, at end insert 'of his choice'.

No. 7, in page 2, line 8, leave out from 'offence' to 'the' in line 9.

No. 8, in page 2, line 14, at end insert 'of his choice.'.

No. 15, in page 3, line 7, at end insert—

'( ) All questioning under this section shall take place in the presence of a solicitor if the suspect so requests.'.

No. 16, in page 3, line 7, at end insert—

'( ) Every suspect to be questioned under the provisions of this section shall be informed of his rights under subjection (13) above.'.

No. 23, in clause 2, page 4, line 10, after 'constable' insert

'in the presence of his solicitor'.

No. 24, in page 4, line 14, at end insert 'of his choice.'.

No. 25, in page 4, line 16, leave out from 'offence' to 'the' in line 17.

No. 26, in page 4, line 22, at end insert 'of his choice.'.

No. 31, in page 5, line 7, at end insert—

'( ) Every suspect to be questioned under the provisions of this section shall be informed of his rights under subsection (12) above.'.

No. 32, in page 5, line 7, at end insert—

'( ) Every suspect to be questioned under the provisions of this section shall be informed of his rights under subsection (12) above.'.

Mr. Mullin: This is the first of several helpful amendments that I have tabled designed to enhance the credibility of the Bill. There is no malice in my heart. I am in favour of rounding up terrorists—I just want to be sure that we do round up terrorists and not somebody else. I do not want us to get into a lot of trouble with the European Court of Human Rights, or with the courts in Ireland.

It is in that spirit that I move this simple little amendment, which will be readily comprehensible to everyone present, to require that a solicitor be present when interviews take place. The interviews are very important—they will be the corroboration that will be required when a police officer stands up in court. It is important that the interviews should be as credible as possible.

Under the Bill as it stands, the suspect is allowed to consult a solicitor, but the solicitor is kicked out when the interview takes place. That is not good enough. It would not wash anywhere else in the UK, and I do not see why it should wash in Northern Ireland. I make no criticism of Ministers, and I recognise the serious problems that they are up against. I do not think that the problems come from Ministers. It will seem incredible to many that the Government are resisting an amendment of such obvious common sense, but the problem has arisen because, unfortunately, there are mighty vested interests in Northern Ireland.

The culture in Northern Ireland is such that even the most moderate change is likely to encounter the most strenuous resistance. That is why Ministers find themselves in this difficult position. It is not my intention to make their lives difficult. I want the Bill to be improved so that it is credible to the outside world. That is the purpose of the amendment.

The presence of a solicitor during an interview with someone charged with a serious offence is standard practice elsewhere in the UK—Scotland may be an exception, but I do not want to get into another debate about Scotland—but that does not apply to terrorist cases. The Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984, which lays down all sorts of safeguards for the rights of suspects, does not apply to terrorist cases.

The police in the UK realised long ago that it was in their interests to do things by the book and to have witnesses who were able to confirm that if necessary. They voluntarily record interviews, even in cases where they do not have to, and they allow solicitors to be present.

Of course, I look forward to the day, and I think that it may not be too far off, when the Police and Criminal Evidence Act extends to all criminal offences. It is not sensible—this was done a while ago—to exempt the most

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serious terrorist offences from the Act. It is the one area where people might think, in the light of history, that we need a few safeguards. This is not obligatory at the moment, but I am confident that that day is coming and I know that the Government are working on that.

All sensible policemen in Northern Ireland, and elsewhere in the UK, will regard the presence of a solicitor as a protection, not a threat. The policeman's evidence has to stand up in court, and these cases will be widely watched by the outside world when they come to court. The presence of a solicitor can only help.

1.45 am

I shall listen with great care to the Home Secretary because I am puzzled about why the amendment must be opposed, when it is obviously so reasonable to all people of common sense. I shall push it to a vote unless I hear something that suggests that considerable progress is about to be made.

This is the moment for the RUC. If we make the Bill conditional on the presence of solicitors and on audio recording, all their complex objections will melt away overnight like snow on the edge of a volcano. Everything that was impossible yesterday will become possible tomorrow when they realise that they will not get what they want from the Bill unless those elementary safeguards are included.

I look forward to a speech from the Secretary of State that matches the spirit in which I offer this simple little amendment because my purpose is to enhance the Bill and to make it more credible, so that we can hold up our heads in the outside world and go away from this place tonight feeling that we have done something useful.

Mr. Öpik: I add a word of support to what the hon. Member for Sunderland, South (Mr. Mullin) has said. It seems a matter of common sense to us and, more to the point, it is of great importance that justice is seen to be done. There are so many ways in which the Bill can fall down if it appears unjust in the eyes of the public. I will not reiterate the points that he has made, but I stress that we support his sentiment.

Amendments Nos. 6 and 8 propose that a suspect should be allowed to have the solicitor "of his choice." I hope that the assumption is that the choice will be within reason; I foresee enormous difficulty if the choice is limitless.

I am not convinced about amendment No. 7, which seems to remove the requirement for the suspect to make a statement where he or she has been informed by the police that he or she may be charged. I think that, on that, the Bill makes good sense.

By and large, we support the sentiments expressed by the hon. Member for Sunderland, South. It is important that we are seen to be bending over backwards to ensure that no accusation can be levelled that civil liberties are being undermined by the Bill. We think that it would be helpful for the Home Secretary to give an assurance that the Government will reconsider. Perhaps they will introduce a Government amendment in another place if they do not feel able to accept the amendment tonight.

Mr. McNamara: I do not intend to delay the Committee for long.

I take up the point that was made by my hon. Friend the Member for Sunderland, South (Mr. Mullin). There is a contradiction in what the Government said earlier if they hope very quickly to have oral recordings of interviews. If that is the case, there can be no possible reason for not having a solicitor present. A solicitor will, in any event, hear what has been recorded. If we are to have a delay before the recording of interviews is introduced, as has been suggested, it makes sense for a solicitor to be present. There is no longer a disagreement in principle about keeping a record of the interview.

I believe that the reluctance to have a solicitor present shows a feeling that solicitors are somehow not to be trusted because if they were present during an interrogation they would pick up something, rush out and start telling other people. We encountered that nudge, nudge, wink, wink attitude when we were in opposition and were urging proper representation by solicitors at interrogations. That point is invalid if we are to have recordings. There is no reason why solicitors should not be allowed to be present.

It is possible, under the current drafting of the Bill, for a solicitor to be present on three occasions, but not to be present throughout an interrogation: he can be present before a caution is made; he can be present before the suspect is informed that he might be cautioned or charged; and he can be present before the charge is made. However, the solicitor cannot be present continuously. While the RUC is getting over the technical difficulties of not having the necessary equipment, despite provision being made six or nine months ago to have it in police stations, we should remember that most solicitors have legs or bicycles or motor cars and can attend Castlereagh, Gough barracks or the Strand police station, where special interrogations take place. They can be present and listen and we can wait for the glorious day when we have audio recordings.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: It has oft been said during our debates on the Bill that justice must be seen to be done. Unless justice is seen to be done, the population of Northern Ireland may think that the Bill does not represent their interests. It is fundamental to the rule of law and to common justice that people should have the full right to be heard and to professional representation throughout their hearing. It is not good enough to say that they can be represented by a solicitor before a caution and before a charge is made. They should have a right to be represented by a solicitor throughout the hearing.

We are in danger of passing legislation that will result in innocent people being charged with offences that they have not committed. The House of Commons should jealously guard the interests of minorities and of people who have not committed crimes. I am concerned that ordinary, inarticulate people in Northern Ireland may be convicted of crimes that they have not committed. It is common sense that suspects should have proper legal representation. If the Government resist the amendments, they will appear to have something to hide. I know that it is inconvenient for prosecuting authorities to have articulate solicitors and barristers arguing the case, but that is not the point. Justice must be seen to be done.

I ask the Home Secretary, instead of smirking and talking to his colleagues as he is, to listen seriously to the representations being made and to consider sensibly whether the amendments are of sufficient merit to be

included in the Bill. We should take into account the sensible proposals advanced by the hon. Member for Sunderland, South (Mr. Mullin), which would create a situation in Northern Ireland that is the norm even in respect of extremely minor offences in the rest of the United Kingdom—ordinary audio tape recording and representation by a solicitor.

All the police and criminal evidence legislation has included provisions allowing individuals to be represented by a proper solicitor. Why should some of the UK's citizens, in the face of some of the most serious offences imaginable, not to be allowed legal representation? The Home Secretary should seriously consider the amendments. If he fails to do so, the legislation may be seen to be oppressive and in breach of the European convention on human rights, and thus subject to challenge in the European Court.

Mr. White: The amendments enhance the Bill. It is hard for an individual to admit to having made a mistake, but it is almost impossible for a system to do so.

The police are under immense pressure to get a result in respect of terrorist offences. I related earlier my experiences of about 20 years ago. If a suspect is indeed a member of a proscribed organisation, is it not important that we ensure that he cannot cry, "perfidious Albion" and say that the accusation is a set-up? There must be evidence to convict such individuals. If the suspect is innocent, should there not be a solicitor present to project individuals, who might be as naive as I was about 20 years ago?

If the problem is that the RUC will not accept that, it is contempt of what the House suggested six or nine months ago. Joe Kennedy said that, in politics, perception is everything, but, if we do not enhance the Bill, the perception will be that we have something to hide. I urge my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary and the Government to take on board a sensible amendment that will give the Bill greater credibility.

Mr. Martin Salter (Reading, West): I am sure that all hon. Members are aware that Parliament has been recalled to introduce tough—some would say draconian—measures to deal with an exceptional situation in Northern Ireland. I fully support the Bill and its underlying aim of taking out the 20, 30, 40 or 50 individuals who are pledged to undermine the Good Friday agreement, to bomb, maim and destroy innocent people and to undermine all that we have worked for. However, I could support the Bill even more strongly with the inclusion of the amendment.

Tough laws need tough safeguards. Yes, the Omagh bombing was an attack on the Belfast agreement. Yes, it was an attack on the peace process. However, as great an attack on the peace process and the Good Friday agreement would be the first miscarriage of justice that occurred as a result of the inadequacies in the Bill. I hope that we can avoid miscarriages of justice, because it is in our interests to do so. There is no coherent argument to be made against the full involvement of proper and due legal representation, so I urge all hon. Members to support the amendment tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Sunderland, South (Mr. Mullin).

Mr. Straw: I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Sunderland, South (Mr. Mullin) for the manner in which he moved the amendment. I also thank all other hon. Members for their contributions on this important issue.

Let me start by saying to my hon. Friend that, for reasons that I have explained, I cannot accept the amendment, but I do accept and acknowledge the overall case that he made in respect of the importance of proper safeguards for the accused. Those are important, first and foremost, in the interests of justice—they are a mark of the rule of law—but they are also important in the interests of ensuring that guilty men are convicted and that our police system works efficiently.

I make no reference at all to terrorism or the north of Ireland, but I remember from my short time at the Bar more than 25 years ago that in those days only the judges' rules were available, and they were not properly enforced. Police officers used to refer to the "Ways and Means Act", which had never been before any Parliament but gave them the ways and means of obtaining confessions. Even decent police officers jealously guarded the old procedures, because they genuinely believed that those less formal methods, which were less subject to proper outside scrutiny, were in the interests of justice because they helped them to secure convictions efficiently.

We and the police have reaped the whirlwind of those methods. There have been serious revelations of corruption and an increasing scepticism on the Bench about the way in which confessions have sometimes been extracted, as well as some celebrated miscarriages of justice whereby innocent people spent many years in prison. Courts and juries have become increasingly sceptical about police evidence. It would have been far better if safeguards had been put in place much earlier, giving rise to much less questioning of the veracity of police evidence. The rare but important cases that besmirched British justice, when shortcuts were taken or corruption or violence was used, might not then have arisen.

2 am

I entirely agree that we need the greatest possible safeguards for the accused, but the Bill includes some important safeguards and others are already in place. We have already had a lengthy debate about the evidential safeguards and the fact that people cannot be convicted solely on the opinion evidence of a senior police officer or because of a refusal to answer material questions. The Bill also contains the very important safeguard that no inferences can be drawn before the defendant has been permitted to consult a solicitor.

The hon. Member for Cotswold (Mr. Clifton-Brown) referred to the European convention on human rights.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: If, according to the criteria in police and criminal evidence legislation, people in the rest of the United Kingdom are entitled to proper legal representation on comparatively minor charges, surely those accused of the most serious crimes—terrorist offences—who might be innocent and might be inarticulate should be allowed proper representation both pre-caution and post-caution and at the evidence-taking stage. I cannot understand how the Home Secretary can possibly resist the amendment.

Mr. Straw: The hon. Gentleman's assumption about standard practice elsewhere in the United Kingdom is incorrect.

[Mr. Straw]

We are satisfied that the Bill meets the requirements of the European convention. I am delighted that, as a result of the Human Rights Bill, many Conservative Members, who were sceptical even about our signing the declaration, are becoming more and more convinced of the need for incorporation and of the benefits that it will bring. One of the benefits that it has already brought is that there is a much greater daily focus on the crucial issue of human rights and the rubric of human rights. The burden of the judgment in the Murray case was that before inferences from silence could be drawn, the person should have a right to consult a solicitor. The European Court of Human Rights did not say that a solicitor should be present throughout the rest of questioning. We have reflected Murray exactly in the measure.

There are other safeguards. Since January, there has been a mandatory regime for silent video-recording of all interrogations in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Clifton–Brown: Why silent?

Mr. Straw: When the hon. Gentleman represented Cirencester and Tewkesbury he usually supported the previous Government, who for a long time resisted the introduction of any safeguards for the questioning of suspects in Northern Ireland. I shall not detain the Committee with an explanation of why it is silent. It is a significant advance and an important safeguard for suspects and for police officers against allegations of assault on suspects—the overwhelming majority of police officers do not go in for such practices—and it also records the general conduct of interviews.

When we deal with the next set of amendments, I shall speak about the statutory provision to ensure that interviews can be audio-recorded in circumstances such as those that are anticipated in the Bill. The only issue there, which is an important one and with which I shall deal on the next group of amendments, is the time that it is taking to introduce those arrangements.

Mr. Öpik: Is the Home Secretary completely satisfied that the Bill will not fall foul of the ruling in the Murray case?

Mr. Straw: Yes, I am. As I introduced the Human Rights Bill, it would be odd for me to introduce measures that were knowingly outwith the convention and then deny that that was the case. I hope that my hon. Friends would agree that that would be completely out of character. All Ministers make an effort to ensure that Bills are consistent with conventions.

Perhaps the most important point is whether, as a general rule, solicitors ought to be present at interrogations. They are present in England and Wales, and that is desirable. I suggest that one of the reasons for the European Court not saying that solicitors should be present in all interrogations of suspects in serious crimes is that that is not necessarily the general rule in the jurisdictions of the countries that are signatories to the Council of Europe convention.

Mr. Clifton–Brown: It is in England and Wales.

Mr. Straw: Yes, but it is not the general rule in Scotland.

Dr. Godman: That is right.

Mr. Straw: Yes, it is. In Scotland, a person who may be charged has the right to see a solicitor privately, but there is no requirement whatever for the solicitor to be present at interviews under the general criminal law as well as under prevention of terrorism legislation. That is a feature of the Scottish system and I do not presume to say whether it is better or worse than the system that obtains in England and Wales. However, I am not aware of serious complaints being raised in the House about the quality of interrogations and their reliability being undermined by the absence of a solicitor. In England and Wales, solicitors are present during interrogations, both under the Police and Criminal Evidence Act and in practice under the prevention of terrorism legislation.

Dr. Godman: Many of us in Scotland disapprove strongly of the present system, but the absence of solicitors in such circumstances was supported for many years by Conservative Members when they were in government.

Mr. Straw: I accept what my hon. Friend says.

Mr. Clifton–Brown: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Straw: No, I have already given way to the hon. Gentleman.

One of the advantages of devolution to Scotland is that such a matter can be considered at greater length, and if the people of Scotland wish to change it, that will be a matter for them.

Mr. Roger Berry (Kingswood): I take on board all the points that my right hon. Friend has made so far, but does he agree that he has yet to advance a single argument against this specific amendment?

Mr. Straw: No, I do not agree. I have advanced a number of arguments about why we cannot accept the amendment at this time.

I acknowledge that it is desirable for solicitors to be present, but systems and practices vary from one jurisdiction to another and changing those can, and often inevitably does, take considerable time. That is in the nature of this kind of exercise.

We propose to consider the matter carefully in the context of the wider consultation exercise on counter-terrorism legislation and I shall publish a consultation document later this autumn.

Mr. Clifton–Brown: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Straw: I have already given way to the hon. Gentleman.

I understand the anxieties that my hon. Friend the Member for Sunderland, South expressed. I do not dispute the principle that he raises about the importance of safeguards for the accused, but I regret that, for the reasons that I have outlined, I cannot accept the amendment.

Mr. Mullin: I have listened carefully to my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary. I know that he is in a difficult position and I do not want to make his job any more difficult.

In the Northern Ireland jurisdiction abuse has been widespread over a long period and has attracted international, never mind national, recognition. A recent United Nations special rapporteur report on the independence of judges and lawyers was highly critical of current and past RUC practices. That is what led to the present Independent Commission on Policing. Therefore, there is serious concern in Northern Ireland about this. Last week, 30 solicitors put their names to a statement expressing extreme concern.

I hope that my right hon. Friend will not be offended, but, if I can, I shall divide the House.

Amendment negatived.

2.15 am

Mr. Mullin: I beg to move amendment No. 9 in page 2, line 14, at end insert—

'(5A) But subsection (6) shall not apply unless evidence given under subsection (4) or (5) above is supported by a sound recording of the questioning or other exchanges to which the evidence relates.'.

The Second Deputy Chairman of Ways and Means (Mr. Michael Lord): With this, it will be convenient to discuss amendment No. 27, in clause 2, page 4, line 22 at end insert—

'(5A) But subsection (6) shall not apply unless evidence given under subsection (4) or (5) above is supported by a sound recording of the questioning or other exchanges to which the evidence relates.'.

Mr. Mullin: This is the second of the helpful amendments that I am moving this evening. It concerns audio-recording. *[Interruption.]*

Dr. Godman: Will my hon. Friend give way?

The Second Deputy Chairman: Order. Before the hon. Gentleman pursues his intervention, the Committee must come to order and settle down.

Dr. Godman: As I said earlier, when a suspect is questioned in a Scottish police station, the interview must be audio-recorded. In an earlier debate, I argued for such recordings in Northern Ireland police stations. Is the equipment in place there? Does it simply need to be activated?

Mr. Mullin: Yes, the equipment is in place. There are no practical obstacles to audio-recording. This was an issue on which I hoped that we could make progress tonight, as I know that Ministers are sympathetic. The purpose of the amendment is to make the Bill conditional on audio-recording. There has been a great deal of foot-dragging on the matter.

I listened carefully to the Minister's winding-up speech on Second Reading and I acknowledged that we were making progress, but I was disappointed when I heard those fateful words "as soon as possible". We have heard them numerous times over recent months. There are no practical obstacles to audio-recording. What is lacking is the political will. Indeed, I am not even certain that that is lacking. I think that Ministers are doing their best.

The previous Government tried to persuade the RUC, without success, to accept audio recordings. On 30 October last year, the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland told the Labour party conference that there would be audio recordings. They were provided for in the Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Act 1998, which received Royal Assent on 8 April. It is already provided for in legislation. That is what makes the amendment even more reasonable than the previous one.

Lord Dubs was asked on 10 June how we were getting on with the procedure for sorting out audio recordings. He replied:

"Preparation of a draft code of practice governing audio-recording of police interviews with terrorist suspects in Northern Ireland is currently under way; the draft code will be presented for the approval of both Houses of Parliament as soon as possible."—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 10 June 1998; Vol. 590, c. 90-91.]

That phrase again—"as soon as possible".

I am concerned that progress is a little slow. We have here an opportunity to move a bit faster. If the House of Commons decides to make audio-recording—this is pretty basic stuff—a condition of the Bill, all the objections to it will disappear overnight. The Government will not hear any more about them. At 9.30 tomorrow morning, recording could be organised.

When I intervened in the speech of my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary this afternoon, he said that there were practical problems. The practical problems cannot be all that great, because some of the holding centres in Northern Ireland have the facilities installed. In his report, the Commissioner for the Holding Centres said:

"We understand that the installations at the Centres have the means of being readily adaptable to accommodate audio-recording, as and when that is authorised".

Well, let us get on with it. I do not understand the reason for the delay—or rather, I think that I do understand the reason. It has nothing to do with Ministers. The reason is the foot-dragging by the usual people. My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary mentioned silent video-recording. My goodness, that was a struggle to bring in. It took a long time. With the first lot of equipment that the police put in, the images on the video were so obscure that the whole lot had to be chucked out and they had to start again. One could not see what was happening, and the whole purpose of a video is to see what is happening.

Mr. McNamara: When there was a video but not an audio record, it was not unknown for interrogators to put their coat over the camera.

Mr. Mullin: Yes, and it has not been unknown for the equipment to break down at key points, or for the attention of the officer supposed to be monitoring it to wander at key points. There are all those problems.

[Mr. Mullin]

I return to my point about the presence of solicitors. We want the legislation to be credible. The purpose of the amendment and the previous amendment is not to undermine the legislation; it is to make it credible. At the moment, it is not credible. It will get us into a lot of trouble if we are not careful. It will make quite a big difference if, when the police say in court that the suspect refused to co-operate, the suspect did this or the suspect did that, a tape recording can be produced.

The police in the rest of the United Kingdom got used to all this some time ago. They opposed it initially and then they found that it was in their interests. Of course it is in their interests, because they no longer have to spend hours in court and do not have to spend enormous amounts of money on lawyers arguing who said what to whom, when. It is greatly in the interests of the police and everyone involved that a credible record should exist of what is said in interviews. As a recording is the corroborative evidence—in addition to the opinion of the police officer—it will be pretty important to have credible corroboration. At the moment, we do not have credible corroboration.

This is my contribution to the Bill. I want us to have credible evidence that can be presented in court. That can be done only with audio recordings. It is not very controversial or difficult. The facilities already exist. All that is lacking is the will, and not, I think, the will of Ministers. Frankly, we are just talking about the time scale.

The Bill is an ideal opportunity to improve the time scale a little. I do not want to hear that audio-recording is being introduced as soon as possible. There was some clarification, and it was stated that the proposals would come into force on 1 January, but I think that everything that is supposed to happen under the Bill will be over by then. I want to hear that people arrested under the Bill will be interviewed in circumstances that are not controversial and in which there can be no dispute about who is saying what. That is the assurance that I seek from Ministers. In the absence of that assurance, I am sorry that I shall have to press the amendment to a vote—and this time there will be Tellers in the appropriate place.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: I find myself agreeing with the hon. Member for Sunderland, South (Mr. Mullin), the Chairman of the Select Committee on Home Affairs. Until this evening, I had not agreed with him on virtually anything, but the amendment carries enormous credibility.

When a case of a miscarriage of justice arises, we shall examine this legislation. Following the judgment in Pepper *v.* Hart, we shall read what was said by Members of Parliament as recorded in *Hansard*. I am sorry that the hon. Member for Sunderland, South did not manage to put Tellers in place for the Division on the previous amendment relating to the presence of a solicitor. I hope that my Front-Bench colleagues will be prepared to push an amendment to that effect on Third Reading.

It seems that the elementary rules of the Police and Criminal Act 1984 demand that we have an audio record, so amendments Nos. 9 and 27 are eminently sensible. I should prefer a video record, but, if we cannot have that, let us have an audio record. We have discovered this evening that the equipment is already in the courts and the cells, so why can the Home Secretary not accept the amendments? He sits there looking sullen. He accepted the moral arguments that I made when we debated previous amendments about solicitors, so why on earth can he not accept amendments dealing with the audio-recording of evidence given by terrorist suspects? We are talking about the most serious offences of which anyone is likely to be convicted, so why can the proper safeguards not be put in place?

If the Home Secretary wishes to carry the good will of the people of Northern Ireland and to ensure that justice is seen to be done, he should accept the amendments. If he does not, the people of Northern Ireland will ask why.

Mr. Richard Allan (Sheffield, Hallam): I offer strong support from the Liberal Democrats for the amendment moved by the hon. Member for Sunderland, South (Mr. Mullin). We share the concern that has been expressed across the Chamber about the cost of miscarriages of justice—the cost to the criminal justice system itself in having to put them right, but also the cost to the credibility of the entire legal system in the communities that are supposed to be served by that system.

Technology is a two-way street. It is now used effectively to catch criminals. Indeed, we spend most of our days walking past closed circuit television cameras which accurately record everything that we do. In the same way, technology should be used to protect the rights of defendants until such time as they have been convicted of a crime.

We strongly support the use of audio technology. As we have heard, the facilities already exist. There are no excuses for not proceeding with audio-recording. When in opposition, the Labour party called for audio interviews and recordings to be extended. There are specific requirements in the Bill which mean that audio-recording should be included. It is not sufficient to say that audio-recording in general is being introduced.

The Bill would introduce the key element of using inferences drawn from an interview and the responses of the accused in the interview as corroborative evidence in court. In those circumstances, it is entirely appropriate to link the gathering of the evidence with the audio recording. That should be done in the Bill through such an amendment, rather than being left simply to a general audio-recording provision, which may or may not be introduced later.

There may be security requirements whereby the Government would want certain parts of an interview, for example those in which the names of informants were revealed, to be kept secret. However, it is not beyond the wit of the courts to excise certain parts of an interview if that has to be done for security reasons. Certainly, there should be ways around that, but it is appropriate that the general tone and gist of the interview from which one is drawing inferences should be made available through the audio-recording system.

Certainly, we are aware that many of the key elements in the famous miscarriage of justice cases about which we all know relate back to the interview, as the research of the hon. Member for Sunderland, South has shown. The interview is critical—the tone and manner of the police officers and the responses of the defendant are critical to those cases. The simple, straightforward way to get rid of such problems is to make the recordings available. That is in the interests of the police force as well as of the defendant, as the hon. Member for Sunderland, South said.

We hope that the Government will accept that the amendment should be in the Bill and should not merely be put off until such a date as they choose to implement it. We shall certainly support the hon. Member for Sunderland, South if he can give us the tools whereby we can register our vote in the Division Lobby.

2.30 am

Ms Abbott: I am grateful to have the opportunity to speak in favour of this modest amendment. We are discussing the rule of law in the British isles, which requires three things: first, that the public support the forces of law and order; secondly, that those forces carry out their job properly; and, thirdly, that we as legislators set in place the correct legislative framework for the first two to happen. I am not persuaded that the Bill sets out that framework.

Some of my colleagues believe that, in the aftermath of Omagh and because of the public concern, we must push through this legislation and that it is not the details but the spirit behind it that matters. However, the detail of this legislation is crucial. If it is wrong and if implementation goes wrong, we run the risk of creating a new generation of republican martyrs.

I listened carefully to the Home Secretary's arguments against an earlier amendment concerning the presence of solicitors, but I did not hear him put forward a single argument against their presence. All he had to say was that practice varies in different European Union countries. He did not show why practice should vary in Northern Ireland. I should be grateful if he would give some concrete arguments against tape recording in respect of the amendment.

The way in which the legislation is being pushed through is wrong. Tagging on clauses 5, 6 and 7 is also wrong, and I shall come to that at the appropriate time. I hope that this simple amendment, which would greatly improve this unfortunate legislation, will at least persuade the Home Secretary to offer some concrete arguments in favour of his position.

Audrey Wise: My hon. Friend the Member for Sunderland, South (Mr. Mullin) said earlier that he would plead with the Home Secretary to accept the amendments. I echo his wording. I rarely comment on Northern Ireland issues and I do so now with great humility because those issues are complicated. I am not one who thinks that there are easy answers to such issues; nor do I think that it is enough to say, "Civil liberties, civil liberties," and that those are an argument against the sort of legislation that is before us.

I am aware that all liberties are restrained and have limits. There are balances and compromises to be made. I am aware of that and accept it. I also accept that the Government are in a difficult position after Omagh. The Government's handling of Northern Ireland has been brilliant, to echo the words of my right hon. Friend the Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn). That is why some of us are so agitated—we do not want that spoilt now.

I am also nervous about commenting on technical issues, but I remember my mother telling me that sound came to the movies in 1930. Yet now I am told that we are in the era of silent videos. The technology is not even expensive. Even I feel competent to make a comment on it. I was thinking of saying that, if we cannot afford it, we should have a whip-round. Anyway, my hon. Friend the Member for Sunderland, South says that it is already there. Capital equipment is lying idle. That does not make economic sense.

There is nothing that my right hon. Friend can say against the amendment. Please, please just accept it. We want to be in the same Lobby, so just accept the amendment.

Mr. Straw: I wish that I could, but, for reasons that I shall explain, I cannot. There is no disagreement in principle, certainly among Labour Members, about the desirability of audio interviews during the interrogation of suspects under prevention of terrorism legislation in Northern Ireland. After a lengthy campaign, in which I was not involved—it has to be said that my hon. Friends were not assisted by many Opposition Members in that campaign, either—this House and the other place finally agreed earlier this year, by means of the passage of section 5 of the Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Act, that there should be audio recordings of police interviews.

That will happen. The only issue—I accept that, as my hon. Friend the Member for Sunderland, South (Mr. Mullin) says, it is an important one—is when it should take place. My hon. Friend wants to ensure that the core part of the operation of the first part of the Bill cannot come into force until facilities for the audio-recording of the interrogation of suspects are properly in place. That would be the direct effect of his amendment.

Dr. Godman: May I ask my right hon. Friend a couple of practical questions about the use of audio-recorded interviews? Has the RUC published a training manual for its officers concerned with such interviews? Has a code of practice concerning such interviews been published? What kind of training programmes have been implemented for officers who will be engaged in them?

Mr. Straw: I am sorry; I missed my hon. Friend's third question.

Dr. Godman: It was about training.

Mr. Straw: The answer to my hon. Friend's questions shows why we could not accept the amendment unless we were also ready to accept that the implementation of the Bill could be delayed for some weeks—and we do not believe that it could. By the way, I do not subscribe to the view of my hon. Friend the Member for Sunderland, South that the whole purpose of the Bill will have been and gone before audio-recording is in place. The Bill's purpose will be there so long as there remains a threat—*[Interruption.]*—a serious threat, from splinter terrorist groups of the kind designated by the Bill. I hope that that time is as short as possible, but none of us with experience of terrorism in Northern Ireland can say how long that will be.

Ms Abbott *rose—*

Mr. Straw: Of course I shall give way, but I should like to answer my hon. Friend the Member for Greenock and Inverclyde (Dr. Godman) first.

Under legislation passed only five months ago by this House and the other place, it was agreed in principle that audio recordings should be in place for the interrogation

[Mr. Straw]

of suspects under prevention of terrorism legislation—but it was also agreed that a number of steps needed to be taken before that could happen.

One of those steps was that a code of practice should not only be published but come before the House and receive affirmative approval, as well as the approval of the other place. That is often a standard practice when the House wants to ensure that the provisions of a code of practice are comprehensive. Inevitably, that is bound to lead to some delay. It is not possible to achieve that until the House next sits.

My hon. Friend the Member for Greenock and Inverclyde asked about the training manual. Obviously, that will follow the code of practice. There was a third point, which I missed, but I am happy to give way again.

Dr. Godman: I asked about a manual, about a code of practice and about training. However, now that the Secretary of State has courteously given way again, may I ask a fourth question? Presumably, there are codes of practice for Scottish police forces, where audio-recorded interviews are commonplace. There must be a code of practice for police forces south of the border, here in England. Presumably, training can be given by those Scottish and English police officers who are expert in this field.

Mr. Straw: The RUC is not starting from scratch on that. If that is the point that my hon. Friend is making, he is absolutely right: the RUC has considerable experience.

The hon. Member for Cotswold (Mr. Clifton-Brown) says that, unless we pass amendment No. 27, we shall offend the good will of the people of Northern Ireland. However, one reason why this legislation was not previously approved by the House was the considerable opposition by a substantial section of the community in Northern Ireland. If the hon. Gentleman reads the *Hansard* on the emergency provisions debates from November 1997 and earlier this year, he will see that opposition reflected there. People—including the right hon. Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble)—who have played an important role in the peace process had genuine and serious anxieties about the potential abuse of audio recordings if they were introduced into Northern Ireland. That opposition existed for a very long time.

As the Minister of State, Northern Ireland office, my hon. Friend the Member for East Kilbride (Mr. Ingram), told Standing Committee A, new Chief Constable Ronnie Flanagan actually supports the change. It is not an issue of dispute among Parliament, Government and the RUC. My hon. Friend said:

"The Chief Constable recently said that he no longer considered that audio recording would deter his officers in the pursuit of terrorist crime, and that is his judgment. He did not say that because he wanted to be politically correct, but because he, too, has taken on board the assessments that have been made and the benefits which will flow from the introduction of audio recording."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee A*, 25 November 1997; c. 110-11.]

The only issue, therefore, is timing. My hon. Friend has made it clear that—

Mr. Allan: Does the Secretary of State accept that there is also an issue of principle? An inference will be drawn from the responses given in the interview, and it will be crucial to know whether a suspect grunted, or gave an inarticulate response, or was completely silent. An audio recording is fundamental. A typewritten script of an interview will not reveal its entirety.

Mr. Straw: I know that it is not an alternative, but there is already the silent video-recording, which provides important evidence about the conduct of the interview. What the hon. Gentleman says explains why the whole of the House of Commons has accepted that audio recordings are better, but the question before the Committee now—

Mr. White *rose—*

Mr. Straw: I shall give way to my hon. Friend and then I shall return to the question.

Mr. White: If the amendment is not accepted, some people may be arrested and charged under the Act, and they may lose their defence. Either they will be terrorists who are using arguments to challenge the prosecution's case, or they will be innocent people who have been misunderstood. The amendment would resolve that conflict. It seems to me that we are unnecessarily creating problems for ourselves. That will undermine the principle of this important Bill.

Mr. Straw: As I have said, it is not in dispute that it is better if audio recordings are available, and that is the Chief Constable's view—reported by my hon. Friend the Minister.

However, the issue before the Committee is whether we can delay the Bill's implementation until audio recordings are available. The Prime Minister sought, with the Speaker's consent, to have Parliament recalled because we believed that there was an urgent situation, which required urgent changes in the law. We do believe—we would not have sought the recall of Parliament otherwise—that this legislation needs to come into force in the next two or three days, to give the police and the courts the powers that we judge to be necessary.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Straw: I want to finish this point, if I may.

There is no question in our mind, as I believe was reflected in the overwhelming vote in favour of Second Reading. Given that, it is not possible for us to pass the Bill with the amendment proposed by my hon. Friend.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way, on this point?

2.45 am

Mr. Straw: No, I wish to proceed.

I do not believe that injustice will arise without my hon. Friend's amendment, for reasons that I have already explained in responding to his earlier amendments—although, of course, it is preferable for audio-recording to be there. As my hon. Friend the Minister of State has explained, the original intention—before the need for the

Bill arose—was for audio-recording to come into force from 1 January this year. My hon. Friend has explained, and I will repeat the point—

Mr. Clifton–Brown: On a point of order, Mr. Lord. Is it in order for the Home Secretary to misrepresent the current situation? He has already told the Committee that audio facilities exist in places where evidence is likely to be taken—

The Second Deputy Chairman: Order. That is not a point of order for the Chair.

Mr. Straw: I am not misrepresenting any situation; I am merely trying to explain why, with great sadness, I cannot accept my hon. Friend's amendment, and also to explain that we are taking steps to ensure that audio-recording is introduced as soon as possible and before the date previously marked down for it—1 January.

We are working hard to introduce the draft code of practice, on which there will have to be consultation. The draft code will then have to be approved by both Houses of Parliament as soon as possible within the time frame that has been laid down. We are also seeking to ascertain—my hon. Friend will understand that this has arisen only in the last two or three days—whether the administrative procedures that we can put in place will mimic the code before it becomes law, but once the draft code is available. I shall give hon. Members, including my hon. Friend the Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office, further information on that—not today, but as soon as such information becomes available.

I hope that the Committee will accept my explanation of why we cannot accept the amendment, and that we feel sadness and regret; but I hope that the Committee will also accept the determination of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, my hon. Friend the Minister of State and me to ensure that these arrangements are introduced as soon as humanly possible.

Mr. Mullin: I do not question the seriousness with which Ministers are pursuing this matter. I know that my right hon. Friend and my hon. Friend the Minister of State have made a little progress even today—and we would not have made that progress if the amendment had not been tabled. I am confident that we can make a little further progress, because I think that the problem lies with the RUC. I accept that the present Chief Constable—the new Chief Constable—is signed up, but I do not think that many of his colleagues necessarily are. There has been great foot-dragging on that matter. The facilities already exist. Audio interviews already take place in Northern Ireland—they just do not happen to take place in terrorist cases. All we are talking about is using the same facilities, and perhaps the same people who do the interviews, in terrorist cases.

Even if those involved are not compelled to do that, there is nothing to prevent them from doing it voluntarily. The police on the mainland have done voluntarily many things that they were not obliged to do by police and criminal evidence legislation. I acknowledge the progress that has been made today, which I welcome. I thank my right hon. and hon. Friends for that progress. However, to move things on and to concentrate minds, I wish to put the amendment to the vote.

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The Committee divided: Ayes 43, Noes 199.

Division No. 359] **[2.49 am**

AYES

Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Allan, Richard
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Blunt, Crispin
Borrow, David
Breed, Colin
Burnett, John
Butler, Mrs Christine
Canavan, Dennis
Caton, Martin
Clifton–Brown, Geoffrey
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cotter, Brian
Cousins, Jim
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Dalyell, Tam
Davidson, Ian
Etherington, Bill
Fyfe, Maria
Gibson, Dr Ian
Harris, Dr Evan
Heath, David *(Somerton & Frome)*
Hopkins, Kelvin
Iddon, Dr Brian
Jones, Dr Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
McAllion, John
McDonnell, John
McNamara, Kevin
McWalter, Tony
Mullin, Chris
Öpik, Lembit
Pollard, Kerry
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Rendel, David
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Skinner, Dennis
Stunell, Andrew
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Webb, Steve
Wise, Audrey

Tellers for the Ayes:
Ann Clwyd and
Mr. Donald Gorrie.

NOES

Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Alexander, Douglas
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Barron, Kevin
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, Rt Hon Mrs Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne
Beggs, Roy
Betts, Clive
Blizzard, Bob
Boateng, Paul
Bradley, Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brown, Rt Hon Nick *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Caborn, Richard
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Cann, Jamie
Caplin, Ivor
Chisholm, Malcolm
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Iain
Colman, Tony
Cooper, Yvette
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Darvill, Keith
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, John
Dobbin, Jim
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Edwards, Huw
Ennis, Jeff
Fisher, Mark
Fitzsimons, Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foster, Michael J *(Worcester)*
Foulkes, George
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry
George, Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gilroy, Mrs Linda
Goggins, Paul
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mrs Eileen
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Grogan, John
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hanson, David
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Healey, John
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Heppell, John
Hewitt, Ms Patricia
Home Robertson, John
Hoon, Geoffrey
Hope, Phil
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam

Jackson, Ms Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Jowell, Ms Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Laxton, Bob
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Lock, David
Love, Andrew
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Steve
McDonagh, Siobhain
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNulty, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mandelson, Peter
Martlew, Eric
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Merron, Gillian
Michael, Alun
Miller, Andrew
Moffatt, Laura
Moran, Ms Margaret
Morris, Ms Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon John *(Aberavon)*
Mudie, George
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Paul *(Torfaen)*
Norris, Dan
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Eddie
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Organ, Mrs Diana
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Pendry, Tom
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Raynsford, Nick
Reid, Dr John *(Hamilton N)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Ross, William *(E Lond'y)*
Rowlands, Ted
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Ms Joan
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sheerman, Barry
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Rt Hon Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Soley, Clive
Spellar, John
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Straw, Rt Hon Jack
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Taylor, Rt Hon Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Vis, Dr Rudi
Wareing, Robert N
Watts, David
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*
Wills, Michael
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Woolas, Phil
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, Dr Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Mike Hall and
Mr. Graham Allen.

Question accordingly negatived.

3 am

Mr. Öpik: I beg to move amendment No. 12, in page 2, line 24, at end insert—

'(6A) If both subsections (3) and (6) apply, the accused shall not be committed for trial in England and Wales, or found to have a case to answer or be convicted, solely on the basis of inferences drawn and statements admitted as evidence under those subsections.'.

The Second Deputy Chairman: With this, it will be convenient to consider the following amendments: No. 17, in page 3, line 7 at end insert—

'( ) No person shall be convicted of an offence under section (2)(1)(a) above on the basis solely of the cumulative effect of the opinion of a police officer under section 2A(2) acting together with any inference or inferences drawn under section 2A(6)(a).'.

No. 33, in clause 2, page 5, line 7, at end insert—

'( ) No person shall be convicted of an offence under section 30(1)(a) above on the basis solely of the cumulative effect of the opinion of a police officer under section 30A(2) acting together with any inference or inferences drawn under section 30A(6)(a).'.

Mr. Öpik: The purpose of the amendment is to probe a potential anomaly in the Bill. We want to understand whether a combination of subsections will produce a different outcome.

The new section 2A(3) to be inserted by the Bill says:

"If this subsection applies—

(a) the statement shall be admissible as evidence of the matter stated, but

(b) the accused shall not be committed for trial in England and Wales, or be found to have a case to answer or be convicted, solely on the basis of the statement."

Subsection (6) makes a similar provision, that the accused shall not be found guilty solely on the basis of inferences drawn from a failure to make a statement on the issue.

However, the Bill does not say what should happen if the criteria in both subsections (3) and (6) apply. Is it the Government's intention that an accused should not be found guilty on that double criterion alone? Our assumption is that an individual should not be found guilty solely on the basis of subsections (3) and (6) both applying.

In an interesting and pertinent point, the right hon. Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble) said earlier that the Bill was not a breakthrough, but an additional opportunity for us to legislate to make it more difficult for terrorists to operate, and a little easier for us to bring them to book. However, if the collective effect of fulfilling the criteria in subsections (3) and (6) entitled the court to find the accused guilty, that would be more than just a reduction in the level of evidence required; it would almost be a change in principle of the barrier between guilt and innocence. Therefore, it seems unlikely that the Government intend such a dramatic change to apply.

We do not intend to push the amendment to a vote, but we should be grateful for clarification from the Minister of what the Government intend should be the collective effect of subsections (3) and (6). If the Minister feels that the amendment would be useful, we should be pleased to hear him express an intention to accept it as it stands, or to take it away and substitute a Government amendment in another place.

Mr. McNamara: The amendment standing in my name and that of my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn) is somewhat similar to that moved by the hon. Member for Montgomeryshire (Mr. Öpik), so I do not intend to delay the Committee too long. I merely wish to make the point that it appears, that, on the basis of the information we have and what appears on the face of the Bill, although the fact that a person has exercised the right to silence will not of itself convict, and although the single opinion of a police officer will not of itself convict, both put together will convict. That seems wrong.

I urge my right hon. and hon. Friends in the Government to reconsider their position. I shall not rehearse the Second Reading debate, but the points made then by hon. Members on both sides—some of whom supported my amendment, some of whom did not—expressed grave concern that that combination of factors, without any additional corroboration or evidence, would not only be sufficient to send a person to prison for a considerable time, but might result in him and his family losing their house, their possessions and other assets. It cannot be right that, on the flimsy basis of a policeman's opinion and a person's decision not to make a statement, not only should that person suffer a heavy prison sentence, but so much else should be put at risk.

Mr. Ingram: The amendments would prevent an accused person being committed for trial or convicted solely on the basis of the admissible evidence of a police superintendent or more senior officer and an inference drawn, when considering whether the accused is a member of specified organisation, from failure to mention a material fact. Therefore, the amendments would undermine the fundamental thrust of the legislation, which is designed to make it easier to secure conviction for membership of a specified organisation.

The Government have already taken full account of the civil liberty concerns, by ensuring that neither of those two new evidential changes is sufficient on its own. Having done so, they see no reason to make further changes that would reduce the impact of what is proposed.

Hon. Members need to be reminded that nothing in the Bill alters the criminal burden and standard of proof required to obtain convictions. It remains the case that a court would need to be satisfied on the evidence, beyond reasonable doubt, that the accused was guilty of the membership offence. We have introduced specific and targeted measures to try to bring to justice those who belong to specified organisations. The amendments would weaken that, and prevent that objective from being achieved. That goes against the fundamental principles of the legislation, so I urge the Committee to reject the amendments.

Mr. Öpik: I am horrified that the Minister is under the impression that we are trying to weaken the legislation. The hon. Member for Hull, North (Mr. McNamara) and I are simply trying to clarify the position. I apologise to the Minister if I have frightened him with my comments.

Is it the Minister's understanding of clause 1 that, if both subsection (3) and subsection (6) were fulfilled, that would mean that the individual was necessarily to be found guilty of the offence; or would the court be entitled to take both those pieces of information and add them to the general deliberations to decide whether or not an individual was to be found guilty and convicted?

Mr. Ingram: The hon. Gentleman did not frighten me. I was trying to explain the effect of the amendments, and I saw him nodding as I did so. The two evidential changes could result in a conviction only if the courts so decided. It is not for me or for the Committee to decide. The evidence would be subject to scrutiny either by a Diplock court or by jury courts in the rest of the United Kingdom.

If the RUC pressed a case, and the Director of Public Prosecutions in England and Wales or Northern Ireland accepted its arguments, there would have to be a reasonable certainty that a conviction could be obtained, as those involved would realise that otherwise the very principle of what we are trying to achieve could be undermined. The RUC would be sure of its ground before pressing a case.

The right hon. Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble) rightly referred to the robustness of the legal system in Northern Ireland, and we have full protection in the jurisdictions in Scotland and in England and Wales. It is for the courts, not for me, to decide whether there should be a conviction, but I can say that a conviction could—not necessarily would—happen on the basis of the two elements.

Mr. Beith: I want to draw the Committee's attention to the difficulties that could arise if someone who has in the past been involved with, say, the Provisional IRA, has resisted answering questions because he does not want to incriminate himself for his former activities. The evidence of the police officer may not be soundly based, and that person may have failed to answer the questions, not because he is guilty of belonging to a proscribed organisation that has not called a ceasefire. There is a risk that, if the two elements alone are relied on, wrongful convictions will be secured. We hope that the courts will watch carefully for that.

Mr. Öpik: We are a little uncomfortable about the provisions. The Minister will have noticed that I nodded with a great deal more sincerity on the second occasion than on the first. I can delight him with the news that I think that his position is entirely clear. We may want to return to the matter, but I thank him for his clarification.

Mr. McNamara: What the Minister said is important for the record. He said that the changes could lead to a conviction, but that it is not for him but for the courts to say that they would. We all accept that. We are being told that two flimsy pieces of evidence that are insufficient individually could result in a conviction. I am unhappy that the hon. Member for Montgomeryshire (Mr. Öpik) is happy to accept that.

Mr. Öpik: To clarify the position, we are concerned about the matter, and it may be useful to consider it further, perhaps in another place. At least we have had clarification from the Minister about where he stands on the matter. I have also ascertained from his response that he recognises that someone who meets the two criteria will not necessarily be convicted. That does not go as far as we or the hon. Member for Hull, North would like, not least because the evidence could be flimsy. However, I accept that the issue may need to be further considered, and we do not intend to press the amendment to a vote. I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Amendments made: No. 61, in page 2, line 46, after 'court', insert 'having belonged'.

No.62, in page 2, line 48, after 'belongs' insert 'or, as the case may be, belonged'.—*[Mr. Ingram.]*

3.15 am

Mr. William Ross: I beg to move amendment No. 18, in page 3, leave out lines 10 to 12 and insert—

'(a) it is listed as a proscribed organisation under the provisions of section 30(2) of the Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Act 1996.

The First Deputy Chairman of Ways and Means (Mr. Michael J. Martin): With this, it will be convenient to consider amendment No. 34, in clause 2, page 5, leave out lines 10 to 12 and insert—

'(a) it is listed as a proscribed organisation under the provisions of section 30(2) of the Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Act 1996.'.

Mr. Ross: The amendment's intention is clear. It seeks to replace the provisions in the Bill relating to the legislation that was passed earlier this year with the provisions in the 1996 legislation. It addresses one of the Bill's key defects.

The Bill's scope is limited. It applies to only a small number of terrorist organisations that are presently admitting that they engage in terrorism that is directed at Northern Ireland's constitutional position. The Provisional IRA alleges that it is not so engaged. It is presently milking the agreement for all the political clout that that gives it, but we must not shut our eyes to the fact that PIRA may change its view and its attitude when the milk stops flowing.

To keep PIRA peaceful, or apparently peaceful, the Government have decided to concentrate on the small terrorist organisations that are engaged in a murder campaign. Some earlier comments implied that it was possible to deal with those small groups by security measures, but that such methods should not be used on the larger ones because they have political, intellectual support. If the Government say that it is possible to deal with one organisation by security measures, I cannot understand why Governments did not similarly deal with the major ones over the past 30 years.

The Government ignore the fact that the changes to Northern Ireland's constitutional position that were brought about by the violence of the larger terrorist organisations gained for those organisations the electoral support that they currently enjoy. I—and, I think, most people in Northern Ireland—see no difference whatever in the carefully planned murders of members of the security forces over the years, the murders of Senator Barnhill in Londonderry, of Airey Neave in the precincts of the House or of Ian Gow, who, like Neave, was murdered for the simple reason that he had thought out for Northern Ireland a system of government that would work, or any of the other PIRA murders.

The intention of those murders, and the evil spirit that drove their perpetrators, was exactly the same as the intention behind the Omagh bomb. The intent of the terrorists was to murder people who stood in their way or to terrorise people into doing that which they would not otherwise do. That is the purpose of political terrorism.

The Bill ignores the major terrorist organisation, and, most significantly, it ignores the activities of Sinn Fein-PIRA. It seems to ignore all the murder activities of PIRA that are not sanctioned by the present leadership. The Government seem to be willing to come down with a heavy hand only on the small organisations.

Dr. Palmer: We are aware that the hon. Gentleman is not one of those who support the Good Friday agreement, because he feels that agreement with Sinn Fein is undesirable. Does he agree that the amendment is an attempt to pursue his opposition to that agreement by other means?

Mr. Ross: Certainly not. It is an attempt to treat all terrorist organisations in exactly the same way. If the hon. Gentleman waits for me to finish my remarks, he will see exactly what I am trying to do.

The Bill applies the criterion of the Northern Ireland (Sentences) Act 1998 rather than that set out in the Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Act 1996. In so doing, it diminishes the number of terrorist organisations that fall within the ambit of the Bill. No truer words have been uttered than those that fell from the lips of Gerry Adams when he said PIRA had not gone away. It has not gone away. It is still there. It still has its organisation, its weaponry, its Semtex and the capacity to engage in massive violence should it so desire. It has no intention of going away until it accomplishes its goal of a united republic of Ireland.

At present, as I said, PIRA is engaged in milking agreements for every drop of influence and power that it can achieve, but some day it may well decide that this agreement has taken it as far as it is possible to go, and at that point there is a danger that it will once again consider violence—either it or a successor organisation. With its structure and weaponry intact, it could rotate from peace to war very quickly indeed. It may not happen, but, given the history of republican violence, prudence should be the order of the day when we are creating this legislation.

I and my hon. Friend the Member for Belfast, South (Rev. Martin Smyth) tabled a number of amendments to provide a safety net of measures to meet the possibility of sudden and massive violence from such a quarter. Sadly, only two have been selected, which disappoints me somewhat. The others would have placed on the police rather than the Secretary of State the responsibility of declaring, in court if need be, that an organisation and its individual members were again involved in terrorist violence.

I hope that the fact that the amendment was not selected simply means that the responsible Minister will accept the advice of the police and other security forces, and make that advice a determining factor in deciding whether an organisation is specified as engaged in terrorism should the need arise. I hope that he will be guided solely by that advice, and not by short-term political expediency. It would be atrocious if such advice given by the security forces were to be ignored for such short-term hopes of political gain.

The other amendment not selected, although I thought that it fell well inside the scope of the Bill's long title, would have restored to the statute book the power to intern, a power foolishly removed by the present Administration. That power is much needed, given the demonstration of the IRA's capacity to enforce its decree that the Real IRA should cease its violence. PIRA issued that decree because it considered that the violence was damaging to the Irish republican cause. It said so, simply and clearly, and we should not ignore what it said.

Nor should we ignore the words of Mitchel McLaughlin when interviewed shortly after the Omagh bomb. He was asked why he condemned it, and he said that he could not do anything else in the circumstances, or words to that effect. That was a telling interview. If the Minister has not seen it, I advise him to look it up, because it would be instructive, even for him.

The amendments under discussion bring all the terrorist organisations within the ambit of the Bill. In so doing, they perform a valuable service by removing the distinction that has been created in recent months between good terrorists—those terrorist organisations not currently engaged in an active murder campaign for political and constitutional ends—and the bad terrorists, who are. *[Interruption.]* The Minister may laugh, and his hon. Friends may find that amusing, but the people of Omagh did not find it amusing two weeks ago, and I did not find it amusing over the past 30 years.

If the amendments were accepted, they would allow the Secretary of State to take into account the punishment shootings and the beatings that are the method by which the larger terrorist groups keep control. It is they, not the smaller organisations, that are in charge of their various areas. The other smaller fish swam in the sea created by the Provisional IRA and the Protestant paramilitary organisations in their own ghettos.

If the Secretary of State is eager to discover the extent of the involvement of those groups in such activities, she should inquire of the RUC whether the weapons used in recent punishment shootings in Belfast, one of which ended in the death of the victim, have a history of being used by PIRA. Perhaps she is already aware of the answer. The Minister will know from my remarks that I am aware of the answer. It would be instructive for the Committee if he would tell us the extent of the Government and police knowledge in that regard.

Without the changes that my amendments would accomplish, the Bill will be a dead letter—of that I have no doubt. "Savage assault by a dead sheep" are words that spring to mind. A telling remark to that effect was once passed in the House. That is the most likely outcome of the Bill.

Large sections of the community in Northern Ireland have the impression that the intention is to create an illusion of determined action when none is intended. If the legislation is considered effective, why was it not introduced 30 years ago?

In May this year, I wrote to the Chief Constable and asked him a simple question—whether he could provide me with information about the number of murders committed by terrorists over the past 30 years for which no one had been brought to court. His answer, which arrived in a letter dated 29 July, stated that the total number of murders attributed to terrorists was 2,719. The number of cases in which charges were brought—only those cases where a person or persons were charged with the offence—was 938. The number of cases where no charge was brought—the unsolved murders—was 1,796. Charges were brought in just over 34 per cent. of cases. There may be a few more, as some cases are still in the pipeline.

If the House and the Government are prepared to forget 1,796 murdered people, I can tell those on the Front Bench that the people of Northern Ireland are not. The people who committed most of those murders are those in the Provisional IRA, who are outside the ambit of the Bill. They should be brought firmly within it.

Mr. Ingram: I do not think that I will be able to convince the hon. Member for East Londonderry (Mr. Ross) of the merits of my argument, and he has not convinced me of the merits of his. We come from entirely different understandings of where we are, where we are going and what we hope to achieve in Northern Ireland. History was mentioned in earlier debates. I do not want to be unkind to the hon. Gentleman, but I believe that he is trapped too much in history. He is not looking towards a new horizon. If we do not begin to look towards those new horizons, we shall never achieve them.

The legislation is specifically targeted. The measures deal with specific organisations. The hon. Gentleman's amendments would make the evidence and inference provisions bite on convictions for membership of all proscribed organisations under the Northern Ireland legislation. He has made that clear. He wants everyone to be included in the legislation. However, his approach ignores all the recent developments, and the substantial and significant statements made in the past 24 hours by Sinn Fein and, by implication, the IRA. That is an important development.

3.30 am

Only time will tell whether those developments have full effect, but we have to give encouragement to such developments, as we have to give encouragement to the so-called loyalist paramilitary groups who are on unequivocal ceasefires in our judgment. We have to make the best judgment—it is a fine judgment at all times, and at all times it is put under close scrutiny. That scrutiny is dependent on the very best intelligence and information made available to us by the Chief Constable of the RUC and the security forces. Those judgments are based on better information than the hon. Gentleman is able to pick up from gossip, rumour and innuendo from other people. Our judgments are based on facts and facts alone. That is what makes a better quality of judgment.

To widen the scope of what we seek to do in the Bill would not be productive in terms of what we are trying to achieve overall in the peace process in which we are engaged. The Bill is a specific, targeted measure. It deals with a particular group that we know about and other specified groups that I mentioned in earlier debates which may be moving into a different frame of activity. If that is the case, it is to be welcomed.

That is why I catalogued in my winding-up speech on Second Reading all the events that had taken place. Most of the events were attributed to the Real IRA. There is a new grouping out there. It is a smaller grouping. It does not have the full support of the wider Republican community. That is clearly the case. Statements have been made to that effect. Gerry Adams certainly supports that view, if we can take those expressions of opinion at face value, and I think that it is right that we do so.

So we have a different landscape to deal with now. We are dealing with a specific group of organisations. If any other group breaks its ceasefire, it moves from its current status to become one of the specified organisations. We will constantly keep that under review.

[Mr. Ingram]

I come back to the earlier point about how long this legislation will prevail. If we go back to the position in which we have been for the past 30 years, it may apply to other groups, and it may be around for some time. We hope not. If we are right, and it is not around for a long time, we shall have succeeded in our objectives with the specified groups referred to in the legislation.

I cannot ask the Committee to accept the amendments. I would prefer it if they were withdrawn, but if not, we shall oppose them.

Mr. William Ross: I cannot say that I am disappointed in what the Minister has said. It is perfectly in keeping with the policy that the Government have been following these many months past—in fact, since they came to office—of buying off the Provisional IRA regardless of the unsolved murders.

Rev. Martin Smyth: I thank my hon. Friend for giving way. I rise because the Minister nodded in disagreement with my hon. Friend's comment. The tragedy is that clear cases of breaches of ceasefire even in the past six months have been overlooked. Sometimes those who think that we are living in the past fail to remember that we live in the Province. The fact that the Government are acting on better intelligence than that of which we are aware is not necessarily a correct argument, given that the Government know that people from the Provos have committed heinous offences but have not been brought to justice for various reasons. When one considers the past, one must bear it in mind that it was a Labour Administration who de-proscribed PIRA and allowed it to grow and develop.

Mr. Ross: In the light of the Government's attitude, which is not going to help the long-term interests of Northern Ireland or, indeed, of the United Kingdom, and as they are clearly unwilling to accept any sensible point of view, I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment. The Government will find out eventually that my assessment is correct.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Mr. MacKay: I beg to move amendment No. 20, in page 3, leave out lines 24 and 25 and insert—

'(ß) is not complying in full with the Belfast Agreement (Cmnd 3883)'.

This is a probing amendment, but we believe that it would strengthen the Bill. I can say precisely what is behind it. We should now make sure that organisations that are not complying in full with the Belfast agreement are proscribed. We are looking specifically at those that are not co-operating with the decommissioning commission.

It is not good enough for an organisation simply to say that it renounces violence and is operating a ceasefire. We believe that an organisation can renounce violence and operate a ceasefire only when, as it says in the Belfast agreement, it is co-operating with the decommissioning commission and ensuring that the large arsenals of guns and explosives are handed in over a two-year period. Unless that happens, it seems that we have no reason to believe that the paramilitary organisations on both sides of the community divide can be taken at their word when they say that there is a cessation of violence or a ceasefire.

We commend the amendment to the Committee. It would strengthen the Bill and would also put further pressure on paramilitary organisations to decommission. As I said on Second Reading, I greatly welcome the announcement—yesterday's announcement, as it is now—that Martin McGuinness had been appointed by Sinn Fein-IRA as its negotiator or co-ordinator with the commission. That is a welcome first stage. We need to see the loyalist paramilitaries doing the same fairly quickly. I know that that is a wish that the Minister and the Prime Minister share. I commend the amendment, although I suspect that we are not going to get much further.

Mr. Ingram: We are all watching the clock, as there is very little time on this part of our proceedings. We have covered a wide range of issues in the past three hours, but it is a pity that we have not—

It being three hours after the conclusion of proceedings on Second Reading, THE CHAIRMAN, *pursuant to the Order [this day], put forthwith the Questions necessary to dispose of proceedings to be concluded at that hour.*

Amendment negatived.

Amendments made: No. 61, in page 2, line 46, after 'court' insert 'or jury'.

No. 62, in page 2, line 48, after 'belongs' insert 'or, as the case may be, belonged'.—*[Mr. Ingram.]*

Clause 1, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clauses 2 to 4 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 5

ENGLAND AND WALES

Mr. Beith: I beg to move amendment No. 42 in page 7, line 7, leave out 'an' and insert 'a terrorist'.

The First Deputy Chairman: With this, it will be convenient to discuss the following amendments: No. 43, in page 7, line 8, after 'event' insert 'involving acts of terrorism'.

No. 45, in page 7, line 28 at end insert—

'(5A) The fifth condition is that the offence contemplated by the agreement would be a serious arrestable offence as defined by section 116 of the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984.'.

No. 50, in page 8, line 12, after 'Any', insert 'terrorist'.

No. 51, in page 8, line 23, leave out first 'an' and insert 'a terrorist'.

No. 57, in clause 7, page 9, line 28, leave out 'an' and insert 'a terrorist'.

No. 58, in clause 7, page 9, line 28, leave out 'an' and insert 'a terrorist'.

No. 59, in clause 7, page 9, line 39, after 'event' insert 'involving acts of terrorism'.

Mr. Beith: We now embark on a three-hour period during which we are intended to discuss a substantial change in conspiracy law, as well as Report and Third Reading. A great deal of detail is contained in this part of the Bill and because of the need to discuss it at greater length, my right hon. Friends and I felt that the business motion had got it wrong. Experience has demonstrated that. To continue Second Reading for six hours or so, and

devote such a relatively small period of time to important detailed changes between 3.40 am and 6.40 am is not a good way to tackle such major legislation.

The clause and the amendment are part of what I would describe as the Home Office add-on to the Bill—a fact that was given away when the Prime Minister said that the Government had taken the opportunity of the recall to propose the measures, which were put before the House in a different guise two years ago, as a private Member's Bill proposed by the hon. Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Waterson). The case for the Government doing so was based on the Nairobi and Dar es Salaam bombings, with which there was no known United Kingdom connection. As far as I am aware, there has been no suggestion that any conspiracy took place within the United Kingdom to further those, so the connection is, indeed, distant.

Perhaps the most important point is that people did not expect the Bill to concern anything other than terrorism. Many people outside the House and, I suspect, some inside it have still not realised that it covers a great deal more. The object of this amendment, and those grouped with it that stand in our names, is to ensure that the conspiracy provisions relate to terrorist acts and offences, not to a wide variety of other matters.

The rather odd title of the Bill illustrates my argument. It is the Criminal Justice (Terrorism and Conspiracy) Bill, not a prevention of terrorism Bill, which is what we normally deal with on such occasions. The bit about conspiracy only partially concerns terrorism. It is a wide-ranging measure and because it is so wide ranging it does not justify the urgent proceedings that have been applied to Northern Ireland. We were advanced reasons for dealing with those matters by urgent procedure; the situation following the Omagh bombing, the fact that the Irish and United Kingdom Parliaments are acting in parallel and at the same time and the need to deal as quickly and as effectively as we can with republican splinter groups. None of those arguments applies to this section of the Bill.

Mr. Ian Taylor: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for giving way. I raised that point about whether these clauses necessitated urgency in an earlier intervention, when I tried to get the Home Secretary to clarify. If the Government are aware of circumstances that would require us to enact this legislation urgently, given the events in August and the terrible bombings, the House could well look upon it with a sense of urgency, but that case has not been fully made. The right hon. Gentleman is right to raise a few warning signals.

Mr. Beith: It could be relevant to our considerations if the Government indicated that a sense of urgency should apply to this part of the Bill. It would be a different case from that which applies to the rest of the Bill, but the House would clearly listen to it. We would listen to the Home Secretary, if he advanced such an argument.

Unless we amend the Bill as I have suggested in the amendments, it could include a wide variety of provisions, some of which people would not want it to include, and others that they might want in legislation of this sort, but that they would not want to be rushed through as the Bill has been. The conspiracy provisions of the Bill could relate, for example, to a civil obedience campaign that involved the commission of criminal offences, both in another country and here.

For example, if an environmental pressure group decided that it wanted to stop the loading of a cargo of toxic waste bound for this country from a port in Germany or Poland, and embarked upon planned action including the criminal offences of interfering with dockyard operations and marine traffic, that could be a conspiracy in the terms of the Bill, and could be the subject of a charge.

I do not think that that is desirable—and even if it were thought desirable, we should debate it in a more careful and measured context than the way in which we are considering the Bill at this time in the morning and under such a strict timetable.

Other activities, too, are included under this part of the Bill. For example, financial crimes, sex offences, drugs offences, and anything else that is a criminal offence in this country and in the country to which the conspiracy relates, are all covered. That is a canvas far wider than the focus on terrorism on which all the justification, both for the Bill itself and for the urgency with which it is being pursued, has been based.

We believe that a reference to terrorism will at least target the legislation more effectively, and exclude some of the protest groups against repressive regimes that are a subject for concern in all parts of the House. Here we enter a difficult area, with which we also seek to deal by means of a later amendment about the Attorney-General's discretion.

3.45 am

Whereas there is a widespread concern that acts of plain terrorism should not be planned and organised on British soil to take place in other countries, that concern would not be anything like so great—indeed, it might not be present at all—if we were talking about groups seeking to organise resistance to a regime that allowed no other means of change or opposition, in a country in which there were no democratic procedures.

One of the distinctions that I would draw, which at least defines some categories of terrorism, concerns the fact that if someone is planning to place a bomb in a city so that many civilians will be killed, I would regard that as an act of terrorism even if I were hostile to the regime in the country in which the bomb was being planted.

The terrorism definition, if it focused on such situations, would help us in some degree to deal with the concern in many parts of the House that the legislation should not be applied to groups seeking to assist legitimate resistance to an illegitimate regime allowing no democratic means of change.

Dr. Palmer: Does the right hon. Gentleman not feel that he is proposing to replace a wide net with an ill-defined net? Does he have a clear definition of terrorist acts?

Mr. Beith: It is for the courts to decide what they consider to be terrorism. In any case, it hardly falls to me to have to define terrorism when the Government base much of the rest of the Bill on an understanding of what

[Mr. Beith]

terrorism is, and use the term widely in all the other related legislation. Indeed, they have created an assumption that the Bill is about terrorism, and almost everything that has been said publicly about it has backed up that assumption.

It is true that the Home Secretary helpfully told me last week that he proposed to include conspiracy measures in the Bill, although I must admit that at that point I thought that he would confine them to the terrorism element. That may simply stem from a lack of deduction on my part, so I do not mention it as a criticism of the way in which the right hon. Gentleman tried to assist.

Mr. Corbyn: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Beith: In a moment.

I do not think that that message was widely understood, even after the Bill had been published yesterday. After its publication I talked to Members of the House who still thought that it was about terrorism, and did not realise that it had very wide additional implications for all sorts of other offences.

Mr. Corbyn: I can see the point that the right hon. Gentleman is trying to make about terrorism, but it is not good enough simply to insert the word "terrorist" without trying to define what that is. We have discussed before the difficulty in defining the difference between a terrorist and a freedom fighter, depending on the regime, on one's perception of it and on whether one agrees with it, among other things. It is a bit unwise to insert the word without any definition of it.

Mr. Beith: Terrorism is defined in the prevention of terrorism legislation—with which the hon. Gentleman will be familiar, having opposed quite a bit of it over the years—and primary legislation introduced by Governments that he otherwise supported. *[Interruption.]* The Home Secretary challenges my use of the word "otherwise".

That was merely the third leg of my argument—that the targeting on terrorism would be of some assistance with a problem that we also seek to address by a later amendment to this part of the Bill. The principal leg of my argument is that the Bill is supposed to be legislation to deal with the problem of terrorism. Understandably, the Home Secretary has sought to extend it to deal not only with Northern Ireland terrorism but with other kinds of terrorism of which we have had recent experience across the world—that is, terrorism organised in one country and carried out in another, although that experience has not, in the more recent cases, been especially relevant to Britain.

However, in the course of doing so, the Home Secretary has taken off the shelf measures that extend over every area of criminal jurisdiction, far beyond terrorism, and used an inappropriate procedure to do that. He is doing it by means of a Bill that is being rushed through in urgent procedure, without allowing the opportunity for wide consultation. That is not a reasonable way to proceed, and that is the principal reason why I believe that we should re-focus the Bill on terrorism.

I merely made the incidental point that such a re-focusing might be of some help in at least excluding from the scope of the conspiracy section some of the actions of protest organisations against repressive regimes, but I would not rely on the amendment alone to achieve that object. We should return the Bill to the purpose for which the Prime Minister announced when he spoke after Omagh—to deal with terrorism. Clauses 5, 6 and 7 go far beyond that scope. That is an inappropriate way to use the very rapid mechanisms—with which we are all uncomfortable—for passing the Bill.

The vast majority of us recognise a need to pass legislation quickly in respect of certain aspects relating to Northern Ireland. I do not believe that that need exists, or that the procedure is appropriate, for the rest of the Bill, so I believe that we should get back clearly to terrorism by making these amendments.

Mr. Michael: The right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) began by speaking about the limited time available. The Committee has debated, very maturely, a series of amendments on clauses 1 to 4 and has covered, in the process, an enormous range of issues. I think it was, as the right hon. Member for Bracknell (Mr. MacKay) suggested, the House of Commons at its best in debating important issues, and I hope that that will apply to the way in which we debate conspiracy. The right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed certainly approached the manner seriously and constructively.

Mr. Tony McWalter (Hemel Hempstead): I accept that we have had quite a long debate today—we are now in about the 15th hour—but we have not had a great deal of time to do a lot of the work that we should have liked to do. For example, I have not had a chance to read the Criminal Law Act 1977, yet clause 5 is entirely composed of modifications to that. I hope that my hon. Friend will accept that, although we have had a lot of time for debate, we have not had time for preparation, thought, discussion and a rational debate, which would really have allowed us to do justice to these important measures.

Mr. Michael: My hon. Friend is a new Member of the House, but for the House as a whole these are not new issues; they have been debated for considerable periods. When we dealt with the Jurisdiction (Conspiracy and Incitement) Bill, which was drawn up by the previous Government but introduced as a private Member's Bill, the issues were considered in a Friday debate. That Bill went much wider than the element of conspiracy in the clauses that we are debating; it went into the whole subject of incitement.

It might be instructive for my hon. Friend to research previous legislation and to read those debates. Most of the debate was about incitement and how we should answer the Mandela question—how do we ensure that unintentional interference with political aspirations abroad are not accidentally caught by the Bill? I took part in those debates, which were extremely interesting and constructive.

Mr. McWalter: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Michael: Not for the moment.

The right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed was right in saying that the trigger for the Bill was a series of acts of terrorism. The prime trigger was events in Omagh, referred to repeatedly by Members, which horrified us all.

The second trigger, or set of triggers, was events in Kenya and elsewhere: in those places, terrorist acts affected several hundred people, and there was clearly an international element that may or may not have related to events planned in this country.

The urgency—in respect of both the conspiracy parts of the Bill and the earlier parts—related to acts of terrorism; but, as other debates made clear, the need for legislation to deal with conspiracy in relation to a range of issues is extremely important. I shall deal with a specific example shortly, but the right hon. Gentleman was right to emphasise that this could apply to sex offences and drug trafficking. Indeed, there are other elements—for instance, other forms of violence, if they happen to relate to organised crime rather than terrorism.

Victims of violence of that sort might say that a narrow definition of terrorism would not be a great consolation, given that the events affecting them would fall outside the scope of the legislation. I invite the right hon. Gentleman to accept that the Home Secretary intended to pursue legislation relating to conspiracy, which we said for a long time was necessary, which was debated in the House on a number of occasions, but which was not brought to fruition. It would have been ludicrous for us to deal purely with the terrorism element, although that was the trigger for the opportunity, as the House was returning to debate those elements.

I do not rest on that argument alone; the amendment is technically defective in terms of application. The definition of terrorism is in the PTA and the EPA, but not in these amendments, or in the Criminal Law Act 1977 in which they are to be inserted. There would be a technical difficulty. I accept that the right hon. Gentleman is making a serious point, but that would be a conclusive reason for not accepting the amendments, because it would destroy the effectiveness of the clauses as a whole. I make the point simply in order to be accurate; in the rest of my comments, I would prefer to engage the serious points made by the right hon. Gentleman.

Audrey Wise: It is rather a put-down to say to an hon. Friend, "You are a new Member; you were not here when we discussed it all." I was here when we discussed it all, and I distinctly remember that the issues were so complex, and the amount of support on all sides so restrained, that twice we failed to secure a quorum. That does not suggest to me—

The First Deputy Chairman: Order. I have given a little leeway, but hon. Members must speak to the amendments. The history of these matters is important, but we are confined to the amendments.

Mr. Michael: Let me say briefly to my hon. Friend the Member for Preston (Audrey Wise) that I intended no put-down. I simply said that there was a degree of continuity. If my hon. Friend remembers those early debates, she will remember that the complexities were about not the conspiracy element of the Bill, but the incitement element, which involved enormous difficulties. The difficulty of the amendment is that it would restrict the conspiracy offence in the Bill to terrorist offences. The right hon. Member for Berwick–upon–Tweed made it clear that that was his intention. However, it is not practicable to single out terrorists from other criminals in the way proposed. In many instances when carrying out their initial inquiries, it will not be clear to the police or to the other investigating agencies whether the offence of arms trafficking, for instance, is terrorist or criminal. It would be undesirable to tie their hands in this way.

4 am

We might hamstring the effective investigation of arms trafficking when it may not be clear from the outset whether those involved are terrorists, rather than other serious organised criminals. In any event, we believe that it would be wrong in principle to exclude from the scope of the provision the unacceptable activities of arms traffickers or other organised criminals plotting overseas crimes in this country.

Mr. Beith: Trafficking in arms by a person resident in this country is an offence which the police can already investigate under existing law.

Mr. Michael: Yes, if the trafficking in arms takes place in this country, but not if it takes place abroad and the requirements in terms of conspiracy to undertake such events abroad as defined in the Bill do not apply. The right hon. Gentleman is right in relation to some offences but not others, so the provisions are important. The amendment would create a loophole through which organised criminals could plot in this country to carry out serious crimes abroad, and that cannot be right. I ask him to withdraw the amendment.

There are some nasty individuals whose activities are destructive to people's lives here and abroad who would not fall within a definition of terrorism. I have made the technical point about the lack of a definition, but even if a definition such as that which exists in other legislation were to be introduced to meet that point, it would exclude those people. Surely that cannot be right, and I am sure that the Committee would not wish that to be our approach.

Mr. Mullin: If my hon. Friend the Minister is unable to accept the amendment tabled by the right hon. Member for Berwick–upon–Tweed (Mr. Beith)—for the perfectly understandable reasons that he has given—will he consider amendment No. 45, which, instead of inserting the word "terrorist", would insert the words "serious offence"? That would meet the point that he is making. I am reluctant to be too helpful because I think I have probably given my share of help to the Government already.

Mr. Michael: My hon. Friend is never anything other than helpful, although his is sometimes the sort of help that forces one to use more brain cells than one wants to use. That is the strength of his contributions. There are problems with taking the approach that he suggests. We are seeking to address serious offences, and my hon. Friend will recall debates on measures on the security services, for instance, in which it was questioned whether the definition of serious crime imported into police legislation might cause such difficulties as to make the intentions completely impossible to achieve. I understand and accept the spirit of what my hon. Friend is saying, and I hope that I can encourage him.

Amendment No. 45 would restrict the conspiracy offence to serious arrestable offences and would, under the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 and the Police

[Mr. Michael]

and Criminal Evidence (Northern Ireland) Order 1989, limit it to the most serious criminal offences in common law. I need to deal with the effect of that in specific terms. The definition of serious arrestable offences excludes any serious offences that are also arrestable for the purposes of the Police and Criminal Evidence Act, and therefore punishable with at least five years' imprisonment. It does not even include grievous bodily harm with intent to kill, which is punishable with life imprisonment under the Offences Against the Person Act 1861. Nor does it include offences such as the use of violence for securing entry; taking, possessing or distributing indecent photographs of children; or going equipped for stealing. Indeed, the amendment would have the perverse effect, which I am sure my hon. Friend would not intend, of removing the existing jurisdiction for conspiracies here in respect of the commission of certain sexual offences against children abroad.

Under the Sexual Offences (Conspiracy and Incitement) Act 1996, which, again, a number of my hon. Friends who are here will remember and on which serious debates took place in which we examined jurisdiction in this country in relation to events abroad, definitions were agreed that would be undermined by my hon. Friend's amendment, so a conspiracy here to have unlawful sexual intercourse with a 13-year-old girl abroad would no longer be triable in our courts—nor would a conspiracy to carry out an indecent assault overseas on a boy aged under 16.

We should not deny ourselves the opportunity of taking firm action to deal with the many offences that, although they may be triable on a summary basis, are not minor or insignificant in the effect that they may have.

The existing law on conspiracy does not distinguish between different offences within the UK. We have deliberately sought not to limit in the Bill the offences to which the conspiracy provisions apply. The requirement in the Bill for the Attorney-General's consent to prosecution provides a crucial safeguard against the prosecution of malicious and frivolous cases.

My hon. Friend the Member for Sunderland, South (Mr. Mullin) will recall that, when we debated the Sexual Offences (Conspiracy and Incitement) Bill in opposition, we specifically proposed inclusion of the Attorney-General's judgment as a way of getting a threshold, so that only the intended target would be hit—events that are serious and for which these powers should be used. We should not put in the Bill a definition of seriousness that would have the unintended consequence—I stress again: I am sure that my hon. Friend would not intend this—of exempting from prosecution many of the cases that I am sure all hon. Members want to see pursued.

The amendment would create a loophole through which terrorists and other criminals could plot in this country to carry out serious crimes abroad. That cannot be right. That is why I hope that my explanation will satisfy my hon. Friend the Member for Sunderland, South and that he will be willing to withdraw his amendment.

Mr. Öpik: As a matter of interest to the Minister, the Offences Against the State (Amendment) Bill 1998—the Irish document that mirrors this one—does include definitions of a serious offence and may have other definitions; I have not read the whole document. Therefore, the Irish Government would take a different view from that of the Minister.

Mr. Michael: It is always difficult to draw exact comparisons between different jurisdictions; that is true in relation to Irish legislation and legislation in this country. Indeed, it is difficult sometimes, as we realised in one of the earlier debates, to ensure that in aiming to do the same for Scotland as we do for England, Wales and Northern Ireland we get it exactly right because the law is different and it is a difference that we have to respect, even though it again tests our knowledge and intellectual capacity from time to time. We have to tease out the right way of doing those things. I have explained the difficulty, certainly in relation to our law, which is all that I can speak about from experience, although not from qualification.

Mr. Corbyn: My hon. Friend is right to point out that, under his legislation, the Attorney-General would be the one to initiate prosecutions. Many of us have concerns about that, one of which is what scrutiny there would be of the Attorney-General's decision. Would it be subject to parliamentary scrutiny? Many of us are concerned that some future Attorney-General will come under pressure from a mixture of political and commercial interests in a repressive country to silence opposition that is based in London and to curry favour with those interests. Does the Minister recognise that there are serious concerns about these aspect of the legislation?

Mr. McNamara *rose—*

Mr. Michael: I think that I need to take breath in order to give way. I have taken breath and I give way.

Mr. McNamara: On the role of the Attorney-General, there is confusion about the new subsection (6) to be inserted by clause 5(2), which allows the preceding provisions for a matter to be instituted only by or with the consent of the Attorney-General to be superseded. It says:

"The Secretary of State may by order provide that subsection (5) above shall not apply, or shall not apply to any case of a description specified in the order."

Subsection (7) continues:

"An order under subsection (6) above—

(a) shall be made by statutory instrument".

The power is unnecessary if we are specifically saying that the Attorney-General should have it.

Mr. Michael: Several points have been raised that are relevant to the debate. We have to understand the issues in context.

I confess that I was puzzled when I read the first draft of the Bill. I am pleased to say that there is a satisfactory explanation. It is appropriate for the Attorney-General to make a judgment on offences involving terrorism that have some political sensitivity and might involve the exercise of the powers in a way that the House did not intend. On the other hand, there are some offences, which might arise frequently, on which the House would have no doubt. I refer specifically to the abuse of children abroad. The Committee would not regard the pursuit of those who pursue very young children abroad as politically sensitive. The power allows the Secretary of

State to come to the House and ask that certain categories of offence should not require the Attorney-General's judgment. The Government might want to specify some paedophile offences, but that would not happen on the say-so of the Secretary of State. It would have to be done through a statutory instrument. We have broken with precedent by saying that that must be done through the affirmative resolution process. The measure could not be implemented without the specific agreement of both Houses. If the conspiracy provisions were used against paedophile activities, the Attorney-General's time would not have to be taken up.

That is a current issue. In the *Evening Standard*—I was going to say that it was this evening's edition, but it is last night's—there is a report of 40 people being held in worldwide raids related to child sex on the internet. The incidents involved the trading of children and what were described as "sick and revolting" sex images of children, some as young as two. We all find that horrific and unacceptable. There were simultaneous police raids in the United States, Finland, Austria, France, Sweden, Portugal, Germany, Belgium, Italy, Norway, Australia and this country. No one in the Committee would doubt that that should be pursued. We are clearly dealing with conspiracy. We all agree that there is no political sensitivity about that being pursued with vigour. If the conspiracy requirements under the Bill enabled stronger pursuit of those who use and abuse children—sometimes their own children—for the production of images, we would be in favour.

That is an example of a case in which a category might be exempted. I hope that my hon. Friend the Member for Hull, North (Mr. McNamara), having had the same instinct as me to ask how the power would be used, will accept that that is the intention. I hope that he also accepts that we intend to use the affirmative resolution procedure rather than following precedent by using the negative resolution procedure. That shows how serious we are about the issue. The House should be able to take a decision before the provisions are implemented, rather than merely having an opportunity to react after the event.

Two of my hon. Friends referred to the powers of the Attorney-General, which is quite understandable. Hon. Members on both sides are trying to ensure that those powers, if approved by the House, can be used for the purposes that Members would want them to be used for, and cannot be used where it would be inappropriate. All hon. Members acknowledge that there are those who ought to be caught—those who are prepared to undertake horrific acts of terrorism or, because terrorism is often seen as having a political element, acts of gangsterism and violent crime.

In deciding whether to prosecute or to approve prosecution, the Attorney-General takes into account all aspects of the public interest. "The public interest" is a general term; there is no precedent for singling out any specific element as being more important than another. In the House of Commons, in 1951, Lord Shawcross gave classic expression to the doctrine relating to criminal prosecutions and I should be happy to go into detail if colleagues wish. The point is that human rights considerations, such as conditions in other countries, might be taken into account, where appropriate, by the Attorney-General in coming to his decision.

4.15 am

It impossible to predict the circumstances in which public interest considerations would arise, but experience shows that, where the evidence in a particular case is available and the facts are clear, it is usually also clear whether the public interest lies in prosecuting. Crimes such as terrorism or murder do not cease to be crimes just because of the political aims involved. The facts of the event justify the public interest—indeed, the public interest lies in continuing to secure the peace and tranquillity of the nation, which is what we seek each day, in the prayers before Parliament sits. That is the prime objective that the Attorney-General has to consider in respect of the public interest.

Dr. Palmer: I have been following my hon. Friend's argument closely and, if I understood him correctly, he said that problems of definition make it undesirable to restrict the Bill to, for example, terrorist offences, serious offences, or some other such formulation. However, what he has just said suggests that, in practice, he would expect the Attorney-General to limit the application to what we, in common parlance, would call serious offences—that is, the Attorney-General would not wish to bother with relatively minor crimes and would concentrate on cases involving murder, terrorism and violence.

Mr. Michael: In colloquial terms, there is a lot in what my hon. Friend says. The difficulty is in drawing a line without excluding many offences that people might think it ludicrous to exclude. We argued for many years that the requirement that the Attorney-General should make the judgment is an important one. He has to take public interest considerations into account; the seriousness of the offences would form part of that public interest and pursuit of trivial crimes committed abroad would not, generally speaking, be in the public interest.

Those are the sort of considerations that the Attorney-General would take into account, along with other considerations. As I have said, no definition limits what the Attorney-General can take into account when considering the public interest, so he would certainly consider many issues that my hon. Friends would want to be taken into account. In that way, we can ensure that only those cases that the House intends to be pursued and that we really want to tackle will be pursued.

Mr. Gordon Prentice: The public interest may include considerations such as not alienating a major trading partner. The Minister spoke of criminals and terrorists, but what about environmental activists who are concerned about logging in the tropical rain forest in Brazil, which is an important trading partner with Britain? They might suspect that the indigenous peoples may suffer terribly as a result of logging. What considerations would form in the Attorney-General's mind in such a case?

Mr. Michael: The simple answer is that it would depend on what was relevant to the decision that the Attorney-General was to take. The human rights situation in another country could be taken into consideration in deciding where the public interest lay. I am sure that hon. Members can think of examples of occasions on which they would want the Attorney-General to take the decision to prosecute.

[Mr. Michael]

Expressing the doctrine of the Attorney-General's power, Lord Shawcross said that the responsibility for the eventual decision rests with the Attorney General, and he is not to be put, and is not put, under pressure by his colleagues in the matter. Nor, of course, can the Attorney-General shift his responsibility for making the decision on to the shoulders of his colleagues. If political considerations affecting government in the abstract arise it is the Attorney-General, applying his judicial mind, who has to be the sole judge of those considerations.

In explaining the context, Lord Shawcross also said that there might be a variety of issues of which the Attorney-General was informed through the knowledge of his colleagues, so that he could take them into account. Those issues might include some that have been mentioned tonight. The Attorney-General's responsibility is clear: what he can take into account is not limited.

Mr. White: I am a relatively new Member, and I am slightly confused about the Attorney-General's role. Sometimes the Attorney-General has taken decisions that have caused a public outcry. How would the House or individuals go about securing redress when taking out or not taking out a prosecution caused an outcry?

Mr. Michael: That would work largely through the normal processes of accountability. The Attorney-General is a member of the Cabinet and answers to the House. We are talking about the decision to agree to proceed with a prosecution. Once the decision is taken to allow that to happen, the case has to go through the courts and the rights of appeal have to apply. There are also other constraints and pressures on the Attorney-General to act properly. His role is to act as the guardian at the gate for the appropriateness of the prosecution and to consider the public interest. Issues concerning which cases to prosecute and the degree of seriousness would come into the ambit of his discussions. I hope that that is helpful.

Mr. Corbyn: My hon. Friend may have made the situation worse, as he appears to be saying that the Attorney-General could undertake a prosecution and that, once it had been undertaken, the House could not involve itself in any way in questioning that decision, because it had become sub judice by virtue of the fact that it could go before a court. We are concerned that a combination of political and commercial pressures could encourage the Attorney-General to take action against people for actions happening in another country.

Mr. Michael: My hon. Friend conflates two entirely separate points. I said that, as the Attorney-General is a Cabinet member, there are processes of accountability; in a separate point, I said that his decision to take out a prosecution is not the end but the beginning of the process, which would lead to decisions in the courts, which would have to consider the case that had been made out.

Mrs. Fyfe: Where does that leave people who could in no sense be called terrorists but who are perhaps democrats trying to oppose as effectively as possible some despotic regime abroad? For example, they could be Afghan women who oppose the Taliban. I have gathered from the hours of debate that they would be allowed to write pamphlets but not to do much else. Is there any way in which they could have guidance about how far they could go in the commission of minor unlawful acts that would help their cause because the normal democratic process is of no use in their case?

Mr. Michael: To answer that I shall have to approach the issue from a different direction. I am trying to be as helpful as possible in responding to hon. Members. To understand the matter, one must turn to page 7 of the Bill and read the clause that sets down the conditions that create the possibility of a prosecution. They include an act, happening or event in another country. The second requirement is that the act or event

"constitutes an offence under the law in force in that country".

The third condition makes it clear that it has to be an offence in this country as well, and the fourth condition is that an act of some sort in this country is the trigger for the conspiracy and the prosecution. The four conditions have to be satisfied. For example, if my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Maryhill (Mrs. Fyfe) is afraid that a simple way to express views democratically in another country was illegal in that country, it would have to be illegal here to be caught by the provisions and would have to satisfy the other requirements. In addition, the Attorney-General would have to look at the matter and decide that the public interest would be served by a prosecution here in relation to those events.

Mrs. Fyfe: The point that I am trying to get across is that such dissidents would not know in advance what the Attorney-General would find acceptable, especially when circumstances are so fluid as to be affected by notions of public interest at a given point in time. An action that was an offence in another country could be minimal and not a case of murder or kidnapping or blowing up buildings. It might be an offence here too, but it could be trivial in the context of this country. In the kind of regime that I am talking about a woman can have her nails pulled out for wearing nail varnish. What kind of activities can those people engage in that are of any use under such regimes? Are they confined to stay on the safe side and write pamphlets?

Mr. Michael: I do not want to trivialise the issue, but as far as I am aware the pulling out of nails for wearing nail varnish has not been suggested as a possible offence in even the most draconian proposals by any party in Parliament. People would know what was an offence in this country, and an act that is an offence in another country is not sufficient in itself to fall within the provisions. The act must be an offence in this country as well and the other conditions must be satisfied. We are not debating a measure that anybody will consider using for trivial offences or for expressing an opinion or criticising a regime. Such actions are not offences in this country. I think that my hon. Friend the Member for Maryhill asked that question during a debate on the conspiracy and incitement measure that was considered about two years ago. I expressed reservations about that legislation on precisely the grounds that she raises.

Those dangers are not present in what we are presenting here. As my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary said clearly at the beginning of the debate, and which I say with equal force now—

Mr. Allan: The specific offence that I would like the Minister to consider is that of criminal damage. That is clearly an offence here and will be in another country. It is frequently a consequence of political activity against a regime, but I would not consider it sufficient reason to prosecute someone in this country if it were committed in the exercise of someone's democratic right against the sort of despotic regime that has been described.

4.30 am

Mr. Michael: That is quite a good example. As always, the hon. Gentleman is helpful. It would be unwise for me to enter into the mind of the Attorney-General, but I have great confidence, particularly in the present incumbent of that role. It would be a total shock to me not only if he regarded the painting of graffiti against a regime as justification for the use of these powers, but if an Attorney-General of any party were to consider that appropriate. I see that my right hon. and learned Friend encourages me in my—

Mr. Canavan: He will not be in the job for ever.

Mr. Michael: Earlier it was predicted that my right hon. and learned Friend would be in the job for ever, so I would not like to contradict comments made by colleagues earlier. I certainly hope that he is.

Mr. David Heath (Somerton and Frome): Does the Minister accept that by extending the scope of the provision beyond terrorism and serious offences to any offences which are offences in this country and elsewhere, he opens the Attorney-General to all sorts of additional pressures in the exercise of his discretion in that the public interest then becomes conflated with the national interest? How is the Attorney-General to respond to requests from regimes with which we may not be on friendly terms but which are asking for prosecutions? He has two alternatives. Either he says that he will not prosecute, but he has no criteria to put forward to explain his decision, or he accedes to that pressure and prosecutes in circumstances in which the House may well not wish to see a prosecution take place and yet we would have no way under the Bill of limiting that discretion which is given to the Attorney-General.

Mr. Michael: Hon. Members need to consider the exercise of the powers of the Attorney-General in law. They are not powers that can be exercised at whim. I return again to the definition of Lord Shawcross who said:

> "It is the duty of an Attorney-General, in deciding whether or not to authorise the prosecution, to acquaint himself with all the relevant facts, including, for instance, the effect that the prosecution, successful or unsuccessful as the case may be, would have upon public moral and order, and with any other consideration affecting public policy."

That includes the sort of issues that the hon. Gentleman raises.

All of us in coming to the concept of the Attorney-General having this responsibility rather than the power of taking the decision might think that all that the Attorney-General has to say is whether he would like something to happen. It is not. He has a clear duty to weigh the public interest in the balance. Precisely the sort of areas of concern that hon. Members are raising are appropriate.

Overseas Governments may be encouraged by new legislation to present evidence of what they see as crimes being committed linked to activities in this country, but they do that now on the basis of the existing law. It is for the police to investigate any such material and to see whether crimes are being committed, and that will remain the case. There is nothing new in having to tell a foreign Government that no action will be taken under our law. Our relations are mature enough to be able to cope with the disappointment that that may cause. It is happening all the time.

What we are doing in linking the responsibility of the Attorney-General to the conspiracy proposal is using a tried and tested method of setting a threshold which is far more meaningful than limiting it to terrorism or limiting it with a definition of seriousness. That is a tried and tested way of doing it.

Mr. Heath: I am grateful to the Minister for giving way again. He seems to have accepted that commercial and diplomatic pressures are matters which the Attorney-General must take into account, yet he is providing no floor that gives protection to the Attorney-General in the exercise of that discretion and allows him to say, "No, those are categories of crime that I shall not consider. I can explain to a foreign Government that those are not matters that a British Government would wish to pursue in the context of the Bill." That is a grave omission that can lead only to future problems in our foreign relations. I ask the Minister seriously to consider putting some sort of de minimis provision into the Bill.

Mr. Michael: I understand the hon. Gentleman's point, but I do not think that he understands the responsibilities of the Attorney-General, who must consider any factors and information that relate to the public interest. The Bill is not limited in that respect, so it does not exclude commercial or trade considerations and so on. The Attorney-General would have to consider the matter and take a decision in the public interest, which includes human rights, our obligations under international law and other appropriate considerations. That wide interest is part of the accepted and settled way in which the Attorney-General exercises his functions.

Mr. Öpik: Before the Minister moves on, may I assure him that this is not an esoteric debate. My parents' home country, Estonia, was very much dependent on the help of Estonians outside Estonia in its bid for independence, yet under the Bill Britain would undoubtedly have been faced with a dilemma—whether to respond to the former Soviet Union's demands to turn in Estonian activists in this country who were helping to fight for independence and violating the law, perhaps through some form of mild civil disobedience, or whether to ignore the Bill and support Estonians who were trying to get independence for Estonia.

[Mr. Öpik]

As I listen to the debate, I would counsel the Minister to take these concerns much more seriously, as they would have had a practical impact on the many peoples and activists on this side of the former Soviet Union's iron curtain who were trying to achieve independence in exactly the way that has been described by hon. Members on both sides of the House.

Mr. Michael: The hon. Gentleman is confusing two things. The measure is about conspiracy in this country. It is not about sending people back anywhere. It is not about deporting people or putting them under another jurisdiction. It is only about prosecuting them in this country under UK jurisdiction on matters that are offences in this country and satisfy the other requirements that I listed. The only thing that people have to fear is that if the Attorney-General says yes, they will be prosecuted in the UK according to the normal requirements of the Bill for the relevant part of the UK.

Mr. Dalyell *rose—*

Dr. Starkey *rose—*

Mr. Michael: I return to the question of what we want to catch. I referred earlier to the holding of individuals today in relation to child sex over the internet. That involved the national crime squad and co-operation across countries because of the complexity of the internet and the sophisticated use of it. International events may have horrendous effects on people in this country and abroad. They would be dealt with under the conspiracy provisions, which is why they should not be limited, as has been suggested. We have built in safeguards. Each element must be satisfied in order for a prosecution to take place.

I ask hon. Members to look not only at those elements on which they think that things could go wrong—one can see why they would not go wrong because the permission of the Attorney-General would not be forthcoming—but at the people involved in conspiracy to commit serious violent offences abroad who would be excluded were the Committee to accept the amendment and the limitations.

Mr. Dalyell: The Minister said that this was not about sending people out of the country. I may have misunderstood, but I thought that there was a possibility of deportation. If I am wrong, I would like to be told so.

Mr. Lord, to put it bluntly, I have been listening to the Minister both in the Committee and on the screen, and this is not a subject that the House of Commons should be debating at 4.39 am. There are very important issues here. For heaven's sake, I say to my hon. Friends, cannot this wait until October or November?

Mr. Michael: I say to my hon. Friend, as I said at the start of my remarks, that the trigger for the Bill was, first, the events in Omagh and, secondly, the events in Kenya and elsewhere. Deaths of individuals took place and it was clear that there was an element of international activity and conspiracy. Those conspiracies may well have an element in this country. They may not. But the events raised the need for us to proceed on something on which we had aspired to proceed for some time. These matters are not new. They were debated when we were in opposition.

The elements about which we had reservations when we were in opposition when we debated the Jurisdiction (Conspiracy and Incitement) Bill are not raised by this Bill because we have left out the incitement element. We have concentrated on the real mischiefs that need to be addressed in terms of international crime. I believe that the House would be wrong not to use the opportunity to ensure that the Bill is put on the statute book. The case for it is strong and the defence for the reservations is also strong. I understand why my hon. Friends want to probe these issues. That is why I have tried to respond to the many interventions that they have made. They are genuine and reasonable concerns, but I believe that the case is overwhelming for saying that we should go ahead.

Ms Abbott: It is really no good the Minister at this time in the morning trying to make the Committee's blood run cold with talk about child sex conspiracies. We know that the motivation for the legislation that is being presented in this very inopportune way has little to do with paedophilia as such and a lot to do with insistent pressure over the years from regimes such as Saudi Arabia and Nigeria which wish to deal with their dissidents. It is diversionary to try to frighten us by raising an issue that is not the substantive issue that motivates the Home Office in taking this draft Bill off the stocks and tacking it on to this Irish legislation.

Mr. Michael: My hon. Friend has her own way of making her point and she makes assumptions which I refute totally. I hope that my hon. Friend and all my colleagues accept that I have honestly tried to portray the target that we wish to hit. We have been very specific in the way in which we have introduced the legislation. My hon. Friend can make her judgments if she likes. I refute and reject the judgment that she chooses to make. The powers will deal with some very serious mischiefs and some very nasty people. They may be insignificant to my hon. Friend, but they are not to me.

Mr. John McDonnell (Hayes and Harlington): I understand the Minister's argument about the significance of paedophilia, which we all want tackle. We all want to ensure that we rid ourselves of child abuse. However, I understand, although I do not agree with the argument—*[Interruption.]*

The Second Deputy Chairman of Ways and Means (Mr. Michael Lord): Order. Madam Speaker takes a dim view of electronic devices going off in the Chamber. I hope that it will not happen again.

Mr. McDonnell: I shall plead innocence on that one.

I understand, although I do not agree, that the Government have responded in the first part of the Bill to the events in Omagh. However, has any evidence been presented to the Government showing that there has been some form of international terrorist activity planned in this country, linked to the bombing in Nairobi or Tanzania, and which has prompted the urgency of the

second part of the Bill? This is a very serious matter. If such evidence has not been presented to enable us to come to an urgent view, I agree that we should be considering the matter properly in the new Session of Parliament.

4.45 am

Mr. Michael: My hon. Friend misses the point. The legislation needs to be in place so that if there has been an element of conspiracy in this country in those or other incidents of terrorism or serious crime, the Bill's conspiracy provisions would allow prosecution in this country.

Mr. James Clappison (Hertsmere): I am grateful to the Minister for giving way. I am not accustomed to the role of coming to his rescue in these matters. The more I hear of this debate, the more I am inclined to agree with the assertion of my right hon. Friend the Member for Sutton Coldfield (Sir N. Fowler) that this is a less than ideal way of dealing with these matters—that was a masterly piece of understatement.

Is not the long and short of the Liberals' amendment that it would restrict the provision to what they describe as terrorist offences? It would not necessarily deal with the problem that they perceive in the legislation, but it would exclude many other types of crime involving, for example, football hooliganism, drug dealing and serious fraud. The public would like to see us dealing with them and preventing conspiracies being hatched in this country and inflicted on other countries.

Mr. Michael: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right, and I hope that I have conveyed that point to him in this debate. It is of course not ideal to deal with legislation during a short recall of Parliament, but, as I said, the recall of Parliament is triggered by events in Northern Ireland and elsewhere. We have taken the opportunity to introduce something to tackle a mischief that has been perceived for a long time and which the House has wished to tackle. Previously, the debates have been about how we make sure—

Dr. Lynne Jones: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Michael: No, I am bringing my remarks to a close.

In the past, the debates have been about how we make sure that effective legislation does what we intend, which is to detect terrorism and serious crimes rather than insignificant or minor incidents or deal with protest movements. We have done that. The legislation is satisfactory in that regard and contains the necessary protections. The amendment would undermine the very purpose of the legislation, and the House would quickly regret having limited the legislation in that way. I hope that having heard the debate and my responses to a wide variety of interventions, some of which ranged way beyond the amendment before us, the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed will feel able to withdraw the amendment.

Mr. Beith: The intervention by the hon. Member for Hertsmere (Mr. Clappison) from the Opposition Front Bench was accurate. The hon. Gentleman said that the amendment would prevent the Bill from dealing with football hooliganism and a variety of other matters.

There are many mischiefs that the law should attend to, but I do not claim the privilege of tacking them all on to the Bill. If that happened, the Bill could do an enormous number of things. Indeed, it is already about an enormous variety of things, some of which are significant. However, it is not our way to deal with significant matters in one night's debate and without the opportunity of prior examination of the Bill unless there are overriding reasons for our doing so. I am not criticising the hon. Member for Hertsmere; I am explaining why I believe that it is important that we narrow the focus of the Bill to what it was originally supposed to be about.

Mr. Dalyell: In all the talk about the modernisation of Parliament, there is the question of pre-legislative scrutiny. Is not this a classic case for some examination of the deep issues? As soon as one starts to look, all sorts of creepy-crawly things come out from under stones. What we are doing is ludicrous.

Mr. Beith: The phrase pre-legislative scrutiny sheds some light on our proceedings today. We certainly have not had much opportunity for that, but that is in the nature of the Government's rapid response to events in Omagh and the need to do something about them. I feel strongly that the Home Office has tried to get on the back of events at Omagh to deal with matters that it may have considered important, but which do not require or lend themselves to a similar procedure.

The Minister was drawn into replying to a number of amendments about the consent of the Attorney-General, which we have not yet moved. We have sought to tackle another side of the problem in other ways. The Attorney-General safeguard is useful and was lacking in the original Bill promoted by the hon. Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Waterson), but the safeguard is questionable in some respects. Given the autonomous nature of the Attorney-General's prosecution powers, he is not accountable to the House for them in the way that he is for his administrative responsibilities. Indeed, it is not thought appropriate that he should be accountable for decisions on prosecutions. Many questions remain about how views on the desirability of allowing organised groups that are resisting other regimes to operate in this country can be brought to bear on those decisions. However, we shall return to some of those matters in our debates on later amendments.

The crucial test on which the Minister relied for saying that we do not need to narrow the definition of what conspiracies can come under the Bill, as the amendments do, was that an offence has to be a crime in both the countries concerned, which is a low threshold indeed. It is an easy test to pass. Loads of offences are crimes in both countries. Criminal damage is an example that has been cited and that might be not merely graffiti, but breaking into or damaging a building, damaging vehicles or a series of other offences. In Britain, defining such offences as conspiracies would be unjustified because there are democratic means of protesting when one disagrees with something, but we might feel that they were justified in countries where there is no democratic means to do so. Such offences will be caught by this legislation unless we achieve some definitions. *[Interruption.]* My hon. Friend the Member for Montgomeryshire (Mr. Öpik) is assuring me that, under the Bill, he would probably have been sent to prison in

[Mr. Beith]

this country for assisting his friends in Estonia in their courageous battle for independence. Many of them put their lives at risk to win the independence of their country, with the general support of the people of this country, who have always had a feeling for the Baltic nations, which suffered repression under the Soviet yoke for so many years.

Those actions are not terrorist actions, but they are a crime in both countries. Therefore, we have sought to restrict the application of the conspiracy provisions of the Bill. The wide-ranging interventions and questions have reinforced my view that it was not appropriate to deal with something so complex on the back end of an urgent Bill relating primarily to Northern Ireland.

Parliament has a responsibility to consider legislation, to get it right in detail and to ensure that it does its job properly and is not prone to achieving the opposite effects to those intended or putting people in jeopardy for actions for which they ought not even have to fear prosecution. My party consented to a serious compression of the discharge of that responsibility to respond to what happened at Omagh. We consented to parliamentary proceedings that give no opportunity for the normal wide outside consultation on the contents of the Bill because we believed that to be exceptionally justified in those circumstances. We cannot extend that justification to the other parts of the Bill.

The Minister advanced arguments about the evils of paedophilia and the fact that conspiracies related to that offence could exist in this country. Of course, we agree, but this legislative mechanism is not the appropriate way to deal with those. The Minister did not seek to rest his case primarily on the technical arguments, although he advanced them, saying that the amendment tabled by the hon. Member for Sunderland, South (Mr. Mullin) would undermine legislation on sexual offences enacted a few years ago. However, that is because the Government have interlinked the two pieces of legislation; it is not the fault of the hon. Member for Sunderland, South. That defect and any technical defect in our amendment can be remedied in another place tomorrow.

The Government have at their disposal the means to meet the wishes of the House, and to do so in a technically satisfactory way. Instead, they are asking us to accept severely attenuated procedures, with limited debate and no realistic outside consultation, to deal with matters for which that is not justified by the arguments about urgency. I do not think that we can do it.

I say to hon. Members who have a variety of doubts about this part of the Bill that this is the first, and perhaps the best, opportunity that they will have in the course of these morning hours to set some limit on the extent of the conspiracy powers. Because we consented to the urgent procedures in the Bill, we have to show that we do not feel them to be right for matters that, although important, ought to have the normal legislative scrutiny that the House affords. We therefore wish to press our amendment.

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The Committee divided: Ayes 10, Noes 214.

Division No. 360] **[4.56 am**

AYES

Allan, Richard
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Breed, Colin
Burnett, John
Harris, Dr Evan
Heath, David *(Somerton & Frome)*
Öpik, Lembit
Rendel, David
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Webb, Steve

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Andrew Stunell and
Mr. Donald Gorrie.

NOES

Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Alexander, Douglas
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Banks, Tony
Barron, Kevin
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, Rt Hon Mrs Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blizzard, Bob
Boateng, Paul
Borrow, David
Bradley, Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brazier, Julian
Brown, Rt Hon Nick *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Butler, Mrs Christine
Cabom, Richard
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell–Savours, Dale
Cann, Jamie
Caplin, Ivor
Calon, Martin
Chisholm, Malcolm
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Iain
Colman, Tony
Connarty, Michael
Cooper, Yvette
Cousins, Jim
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Darvill, Keith
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, John
Dobbin, Jim
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Edwards, Huw
Ennis, Jeff
Etherington, Bill
Fisher, Mark
Fitzsimons, Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foster, Michael J *(Worcester)*
Foulkes, George
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry
George, Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Mrs Linda
Goggins, Paul
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mrs Eileen
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Grogan, John
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hanson, David
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Healey, John
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hewitt, Ms Patricia
Home Robertson, John
Hoon, Geoffrey
Hope, Phil
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Jackson, Ms Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Mrs Fiona *(Newark)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Jowell, Ms Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Laxton, Bob
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Lock, David
Love, Andrew
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Steve
McDonagh, Siobhain

Mackinlay, Andrew
McNulty, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mallaber, Judy
Mandelson, Peter
Martlew, Eric
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Merron, Gillian
Michael, Alun
Miller, Andrew
Moffatt, Laura
Moran, Ms Margaret
Morris, Ms Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon John *(Aberavon)*
Mudie, George
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Norris, Dan
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Organ, Mrs Diana
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Pendry, Tom
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Raynsford, Nick
Reid, Dr John *(Hamilton N)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Rowlands, Ted
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Ms Joan
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Salter, Martin
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sheerman, Barry
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Rt Hon Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Soley, Clive
Spellar, John
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Straw, Rt Hon Jack
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Rt Hon Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Vis, Dr Rudi
Wareing, Robert N
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*
Wills, Michael
Winnick, David
Woolas, Phil
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, Dr Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. David Clelland and
Mr. Greg Pope.

Question accordingly negatived.

Ann Clwyd (Cynon Valley): I beg to move amendment No. 80, in page 7, line 10, after 'Kingdom' insert 'other than a country or territory to which subsection (2A) applies.

(2A) This subsection applies to any country or territory which—

(a) is the subject of any embargo on trade agreed by the General Assembly of the United Nations, the European Union or Her Majesty's Government;

(b) has not ratified the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights; or

(c) in the opinion of the Secretary of State is a country or territory where human rights are not respected.'.

The Second Deputy Chairman: With this, it will be convenient to take the following amendments: No. 44, in page 7, line 13, after 'territory' insert

'provided that the offence, if it were an offence in any jurisdiction in the United Kingdom, would not infringe the terms of the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, agreed by the Council of Europe at Rome on the 4th November 1950.'.

No. 46, in page 7, line 28, at the end insert—

'(5A) The fifth condition is that the procedure for the trial of the offence in that country or territory, if it were the procedure for the trial of the offence in any jurisdiction in the United Kingdom, would not infringe the terms of the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, agreed by the Council of Europe at Rome on 4th November 1950.'.

No. 48, in page 8, line 4, leave out 'condition is' and insert 'and fifth conditions are'.

No. 49, in page 8, line 5, leave out 'a question' and insert 'questions'.

No. 53, in page 8, line 36, at end insert—

'who shall have regard to the human rights situation in the country concerned.'.

No. 83, in page 8, line 36, at end insert—

'(5A) Before deciding whether to consent to proceedings for an offence triable by virtue of section 1A above, the Attorney General shall have regard to the standards of respect for democracy and human rights in the country or territory where the result of the conspiracy was intended to occur and whether that occurrence was intended to combat injustice or oppression.',

No. 84, in clause 6, page 9, line 16, at end insert—

'(5A) Before deciding whether to consent to proceedings for an offence triable by virtue of Article 9 above, the Attorney General shall have regard to the standards of respect for democracy and human rights in the country or territory where the result of the conspiracy was intended to occur and whether that occurrence was intended to combat injustice or oppression.'.

No. 81, in clause 7, page 9, line 30, after 'Kingdom' insert 'other than a country or territory to which subsection (1A) applies.

(1A) This subsection applies to any country or territory which—

(a) is the subject of any embargo on trade agreed by the General Assembly of the United Nations, the European Union or Her Majesty's Government;

(b) has not ratified the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights; or

(c) in the opinion of the Secretary of State is a country or territory where human rights are not respected.'.

No. 85, in page 10, line 19, at end insert—

'(7A) No proceedings for an offence triable by virtue of this section may be instituted except by or with the consent of the Lord Advocate.

(7B) Before deciding whether to consent to proceedings for an offence triable by virtue of this section, the Lord Advocate shall have regard to the standards of respect for democracy and human rights in the country or territory where the result of the conspiracy was intended to occur and whether that occurrence was intended to combat injustice or oppression.'.

Ann Clwyd: I feel like one of the creepy-crawlies mentioned earlier by my hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell). After sitting here for 15 hours, I resent having to move an amendment at this time in the morning—especially as so many hon. Members have made it clear that they resent clauses 5, 6 and 7 in particular. Whatever other reservations they may have about the Bill, they resent those clauses being tagged on to it, and I entirely agree with them. We should have had time to consult human rights organisations, for example, about the implications of the proposals in the Bill; but we have not had time even to read the Bill properly ourselves, apart from the aspects in which some of us have a special interest.

If Ministers had been sensitive to the feelings of the Committee, they would have withdrawn clauses 5, 6 and 7. They would have left them for another occasion, when

[Ann Clwyd]

the House returns in October. There is no reason to rush through those provisions, but we have rushed through a law under which anyone in Britain who conspires to overthrow a Government—however awful and dictatorial—could be guilty of a criminal offence.

During the past 15 hours, we have heard examples of how this law could have been used in the past. If it had been in force 30 or 40 years ago, refugees in this country as diverse as Mahatma Gandhi and General De Gaulle would have been caught. As my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary has admitted, the word "terrorist" itself is very imprecise. The historical odium attached to conspiracy law ought to give us much cause for concern. As others have said, yesterday's terrorist is tomorrow's freedom fighter.

As chair of the parliamentary human rights group, I am particularly concerned about the many campaigning organisations in the country that may somehow or other, through their activities, be caught up in the Bill. Last night, at about half-past 11, I was telephoned by someone who told me that the US Congress had just voted a substantial sum for an organisation that I chair called Indict, which aims to bring Saddam Hussein before an international criminal court. Congress has also voted money for another organisation based in London, the Iraqi national congress, which has as one of its aims the overthrow of Saddam Hussein.

I recognise that this Government would be glad to see the overthrow of Saddam Hussein, but a previous Government who were trading with Iraq might not have been quite so happy. Such a Government might want to take action under the Bill against an organisation that was committed to the overthrow of that regime.

Those who campaign for democracy in Indonesia might want to distribute literature calling for the overthrow of President Habibie. This country has considerable trading links with Indonesia, and our arms trade continues apace, unfortunately, with the country. We might argue, as people do—wrongly, in my view—that jobs would be at risk in this country if that trade ceased, for whatever reason. We know that, in the past, British aid has been used to sweeten some of our arms deals with Indonesia. Suppose that we believed that the people campaigning in this country for the overthrow of President Habibie were a threat to jobs and to trade. What action might a Government take under the Bill to repress those people?

Many hon. Members have mentioned the situation in Saudi Arabia—again, a country with which we have a large arms trade. We do not know how much, because the Al Yamamah arms deal is still a secret in this country. However, Saudi Arabia has been identified by our human rights group as a repressive regime which tortures people in custody. We have uncovered horrific cases where human rights have been violated in that country.

If someone in this country criticised that regime or campaigned to change it, what would we—with our big arms trade with Saudi Arabia—do? What attitude would the Attorney-General take to somebody who might jeopardise that trade? We know that this proposal was a knee-jerk response by an Opposition Member who wanted to placate Saudi Arabia when it failed to extradite a dissident from this country. Nobody knows what would happen under this Bill, and I am concerned about all those groups.

I would prefer to see clauses 5, 6 and 7 scrapped altogether. Let us consider them at length at another time, but they should not be pressed tonight. I appeal to my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary, who is a reasonable man. I congratulate him on the way in which he has responded to the debate. We want to help him as far as possible, but not when we have serious concerns about the proposals in clauses 5, 6 and 7.

This law will, I suspect, be applied inconsistently according to political pressures and to placate Governments who are friendly to Britain, not according to the principles of justice. I do not intend to press the amendment, but I shall vote against clause 5 stand part.

5.15 am

Mr. McNamara: I will be brief.

My hon. Friend the Member for—

Ann Clwyd: Cynon Valley.

Mr. McNamara: For somewhere in Wales. At this hour of the morning, I would find it difficult to say Ballybunion.

My hon. Friend has advanced a compelling argument, so I do not want to go over the particular incidents that she has mentioned. I want to deal with the amendments in the name of my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn) and myself.

We seek in the amendment to set criteria by which one can examine whether a particular action should be taken. If these provisions are to go through—I agree with my hon. Friend that we would rather not have them at all—the action being followed in or for that state or territory should not infringe—if it were an action in the UK or in any of the UK's jurisdictions—the European convention on human rights. Those criteria are the entitlement to a fair trial, an independent judiciary, the ability of the defendant to see the evidence against him, and a balanced attitude towards both the defence and the prosecution. That is what is contained in the European convention.

If we were to adopt that attitude, it would go some way to meeting many of the misgivings that my colleagues have on these clauses. It would not overcome them, but it would go some way to meeting their misgivings.

We would then add a fifth condition to the four conditions that have to be met to bring such an action:

"the procedure for the trial of the offence in that country or territory, if it were the procedure for the trial of the offence in any jurisdiction in the United Kingdom, would not infringe the terms of the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, agreed by the Council of Europe at Rome".

If my hon. Friend the Minister is not able to accept the amendment—gracious though he has been all evening, I have the feeling that that will probably be his attitude—it would be helpful if he could indicate that the criteria in the convention are the type of criteria that will affect the Attorney-General's decisions. This is more concrete, more direct and a better set of criteria than anything called public interest, whatever that may mean at any particular time.

Therefore, we would be able to meet the particular problems that have been enumerated by my hon. Friend the Member for Cynon Valley (Ann Clwyd) in relation to countries such as Saudi Arabia, Indonesia and all the other

countries where we have a real fear that human rights are being abused. We have our own criteria for the proper way in which a trial should be held. My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary spoke about throwing the procedure open to the world, saying that we do it for the Council of Europe countries, for the United States and for India, so why should we not do it for others?

We should do it only for those others that have the same criteria for holding a fair trial. If we were certain that those criteria would be observed and followed properly, we could at least say that there would be the necessary objectivity and criteria for us to see how decisions were made. Public interest is nebulous. Here is an opportunity to seize the initiative of an ethical foreign policy and the incorporation of the convention. We can extend the principles of the convention throughout the world.

Mr. Allan: I speak in support of Liberal Democrat amendment No. 53. Our aim is similar to that of the Labour Members who have spoken—to make human rights explicit in the Bill. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) has said, it is not enough for the Attorney-General to be given broad discretion. He must be given the appropriate tools to justify his decisions. One such tool is that he can say that he is not prepared to take action because of the human rights record of a country.

I should like to give some more difficult examples than those already mentioned. In relation to Kashmir, many thousands of British citizens are organised politically in this country in a way that could be described as related to a conspiracy to carry out acts that may be criminal in India or Pakistan. Many citizens fear being drawn in to being described as part of a conspiracy because they have collected money or organised in a political party here. I am not going into the rights and wrongs of the case, but they have a justified concern about the Bill that needs to be answered.

Examples from closer to home include the recent situation in Bosnia, or that in Kosovo now. Those supporting the Kosovo rebels are supporting a group committing actions against the legitimate Serbian Government. The Bill must incorporate the respect for human rights that would enable the Attorney-General to say that our response would be proportionate.

Where people have justifiable concerns about the human rights situation in another country or have proof of violations that have been carried out against their people, a little more leeway should be allowed on their actions in this country. We do not want any legality given to those who carry out terrorist acts such as bombing a civilian area or hijacking and bombing aeroplanes. There is no justification for that under any regime, but there are grey areas in which incorporating the notion of human rights in the Bill would give us more clarity in dealing with them.

The human rights concern must lie at the heart of all our legislation, and should not be overridden by commercial or other concerns. We want it to be incorporated through our amendments or those of the Labour Back Benchers.

Mr. Canavan: I support what my hon. Friends the Members for Cynon Valley (Ann Clwyd) and for Hull, North (Mr. McNamara) have said, but I should like to concentrate on amendments Nos. 83, 84 and 85 in my name and those of my hon. Friends the Members for Dundee, East (Mr. McAllion), for Paisley, North (Mrs. Adams) and for Liverpool, West Derby (Mr. Wareing).

The three amendments are somewhat similar: amendment No. 83 refers to the position in England and Wales; amendment No. 84 to the position in Northern Ireland; and amendment No. 85 to the position in Scotland. In England, Wales and Northern Ireland, the Bill already requires the consent of the senior Law Officer—the Attorney-General—before a prosecution can take place of a person accused of conspiracy to commit offences outside the United Kingdom. Therefore, it seems reasonable to place a statutory obligation on the Attorney-General to take into account the standards of democracy and human rights in the country where the alleged offence was intended to be committed.

My hon. Friend the Member for Cynon Valley gave the example of people in this country who are intent on the overthrow of the fascist regime in Iraq. It could be argued that, if they went so far as to plot the assassination of Saddam Hussein, that assassination, if committed in this country, would, in strict technical legal terms, constitute a criminal offence. It certainly would constitute a criminal offence in Iraq.

Therefore, the principle of dual criminality would apply, so anyone plotting in this country to get rid of Saddam Hussein by the use of force could fall foul of the legislation. It seems perfectly reasonable that the Attorney-General should be under a statutory obligation to take into account the nature of the regime in the country where the result of the conspiracy is intended to occur, and whether that occurrence was intended to combat injustice or oppression.

There seems to be a difference between the application of the Bill in Scotland and its application in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. In Scotland, the Bill does not require the consent of any Law Officer before a prosecution can take place of a person accused of conspiracy to commit offences outside the United Kingdom. Amendment No. 85 would insert a requirement for the consent of the Lord Advocate in Scotland, just as, in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, the consent of the Attorney-General would be required.

If there is no statutory obligation for the Lord Advocate himself to look at the papers on the case and to give his consent, presumably it could be left to the local or regional procurator fiscal to decide, on the normal criteria, whether a prosecution should take place. When dealing with offences of a highly political or potentially extremely serious nature, we should make it incumbent on the Lord Advocate personally to take the decision on whether to prosecute. In other words, there should be a safeguard in Scotland similar to the safeguard laid down in the Bill for England and Wales.

The Secretary of State, if he is to wake up and reply to this debate, or the Minister of State may well say that procedure for prosecution is different in Scotland. No doubt the Lord Advocate and/or the procurator fiscal will apply the normal criteria. Perhaps he can refresh our memories as to what the criteria are.

[Mr. Canavan]

I understand that the criteria include whether there is sufficient evidence to obtain a successful prosecution; whether the prosecution would be in the public interest; whether the alleged offence is serious enough; and whether the person accused has any previous convictions or has received any previous warnings from a procurator fiscal about his or her conduct. There may be other criteria on which the Minister can elaborate.

5.30 am

It would be helpful if there were a statutory obligation on the Lord Advocate in Scotland parallel to the obligation on the Attorney-General in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. The record of human rights and democracy—or the lack of them—in the appropriate country should be one of the criteria on which the decision whether to prosecute is based.

It is a great pity and an absolute disgrace that, in the whole of this debate, not one Scottish Office Minister has sat on the Front Bench. I do not know whether any of them are in the Palace of Westminster, or even in London. We now have a Scottish Office Minister who is not a Member of either House, but four of the six Scottish Office Ministers are Members of the House of Commons; yet not one of them has come here to explain the Bill's implications for Scotland, which are different in many respects from its implications for England and Wales.

I know that the two Law Officers are not Members of the House of Commons—one is a member of another place—but during our many hours of discussion, someone should have spoken on behalf of one of the Scottish Law Officers.

Dr. Starkey: All the amendments are designed to get across one essential point, which has largely been accepted by the Minister in some of his previous replies: that offences that might be deemed terrorist offences, whether against property or against people, are of a different nature when they are committed in a democratic country, where there are ample democratic means of achieving political ends, from when they are committed in a wholly despotic country in which the ordinary democratic avenues are completely closed and more assertive methods may be the only means of changing the political situation. Amendments Nos. 83 and 84, in particular, represent an attempt to get that included as a factor that the Attorney-General must take into account when considering whether a prosecution would be in the public interest.

I should like to add an additional criterion, which does not, strictly speaking, come under the terms of human rights. When offences are committed in a country or territory under illegal occupation, that should be a material consideration, and should change our opinion about whether it was in the public interest to prosecute those who conspired in this country to commit the offences.

I am concerned about the amorphous concept of the public interest and the way in which the Attorney-General appears to have the impossible task of trying to second-guess what the public interest may be. It is not unreasonable for Parliament to be in a position to give the Attorney-General some guidance on the objective factors that he—at the moment it is he, but it might be she in future—should take into account in assessing the public interest.

The objective criteria should be related to human rights and democratic freedoms within the country that is being complained of, and to the status of its Government in international law. That would take account of the circumstance that I have suggested, of a Government illegally occupying the territories or countries in question.

It is unlikely that any of the amendments will be accepted, and it would be helpful if the Minister could try to be more definite about the precise criteria that the Attorney-General will be expected to take into account when assessing the public interest. Those are: issues of human and democratic rights, and the standing of the Governments in question under international law.

Mr. Corbyn: I support the amendment that was moved by my hon. Friend the Member for Cynon Valley (Ann Clwyd) and I obviously support the amendment that was tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Hull, North (Mr. McNamara) because I am one of the signatories. Trying to deal with clauses 5, 6 and 7, which have been tagged on to the legislation, at this time is utterly ridiculous. This is an important Bill with far-reaching implications. Plainly, it is not well drafted and is open to all sorts of interpretations. I pay tribute to those hon. Members who have managed to table sensible and intelligent amendments.

We should not have to deal with the Bill at this time. There should have been a separate Bill to be dealt with either when we returned in October, if it were that urgent, or in the new Session in November. Such legislation should be dealt with properly, but the Bill has all the hallmarks of a measure that somebody in the Home Office has for a long time wanted to put through Parliament. The opportunity was taken to remove it from the shelf and shove it in, and we are stuck with it.

The amendments that my hon. Friend the Member for Hull, North and I tabled would ensure that there was at least some consistency, in that the European convention on human rights would be the basis for any prosecution. Such a safeguard is also incorporated in the amendments that were tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Cynon Valley, because the United Nations would be involved. As the legislation stands, it would be possible for a regime such as the one in Nigeria to claim that the Ogoni people, who were led by Ken Saro-Wiwa, were terrorists. That regime claimed that they were terrorists who operated against the oil installations in Nigeria.

Such operations are illegal in that country and would be illegal here and, on that basis and because of a vast amount of commercial and other pressure, a British Government could prosecute a leader of the Ogoni people in Britain for raising funds to support his colleagues in Nigeria. Following the appalling way in which Saro-Wiwa was executed and all that went with that, I do not think that that would happen, but we can envisage a method of reporting building up a scenario in which British interests are damaged by people in Britain who are raising money for attacks on installations in Nigeria. The same could be said of what happens in many countries.

All over north London, in my constituency and in the constituencies of my hon. Friend the Member for Hackney, North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott) and

of many others, dozens of small organisations are campaigning for justice in their countries. There has been the Nicaragua solidarity campaign, the El Salvador solidarity campaign, the Chile solidarity campaign, other campaigns relating to Latin America, such as that for Colombia, the trans-Caucasus campaign and campaigns involving people from Indonesia, Malaysia, India and China. It would be possible to make a case against almost any of them by stating that, somehow or other, they are raising money that is used to support illegal activities in their countries.

Mr. Winnick: My hon. Friend is right to say that safeguards are necessary. People who campaign against repressive regimes should continue to have their freedom in Britain: it would be extremely unfortunate if it were otherwise. There is no disagreement between us on that, but is my hon. Friend aware that some people who live in this country and who were interviewed justified the bombing in east African countries? I am not saying that those people were involved in planning those murders, but, if they were, surely they have no right whatever to be in this country.

Mr. Corbyn: My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary dealt with that point quite clearly when he said that to express a point of view on those bombings was one thing, but to support them in a practical sense was another. I have no time whatever for that bombing. What happened was abominable and appalling and I do not seek to justify supporting people who do such bombings.

Many organisations give support to liberation movements—or whatever description one wants to apply to them—in their own countries, which, it could be argued, are giving material comfort to those who are committing illegal acts. It is a grey and complex area.

My concern is that the Bill may result in enormous commercial and political pressures being put on a British Government to prosecute people who have done nothing other than campaign for justice and for democracy in a land that is denied it.

Mr. Winnick: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for allowing me to intervene again. We agree that the freedom to campaign is essential. Are we in agreement that people in Britain who have been given the right to stay here, who organise murders abroad for political reasons, should not be in a position to do that?

Mr. Corbyn: I am not sure why I am the subject of this questioning by the hon. Gentleman. Obviously, I am not in favour of people organising murders anywhere. My purpose is to see peace in the world and a system of government that provides for the democratic resolution of conflict. Unhappily, many people in the world do not enjoy that privilege. Many British companies are happy to make a great deal of money out of those countries where democracy is denied. Much money has been made by oil companies in Colombia, for example. There are many other examples.

I support the amendments. If they were accepted by the Government, they would make the Bill less bad. However, inserting clauses 5, 6 and 7, with all the dangers attendant on them, is a great mistake. Rather than, at nearly 6 am, trying to rush through the Bill, there should be serious and proper discussion in which evidence and opinion can be taken from different organisations, such as Amnesty International and United Nations groups, which have a serious contribution to make to the debate. We legislate in haste and regret at leisure. There will be a lot of regretting to do if we start prosecuting people who legitimately pursue a peaceful solution to conflict in a violent world.

Mr. Donald Anderson: I well understand the concerns that have been expressed, and I could give other examples. For example, I recently read a book on the French Resistance in which the writer exulted at how he and his colleagues blew up trains, actions that we were supporting from this country. That is precisely the sort of area that would be blocked by the Attorney-General. That is why many of us who began by opposing the private Member's Bill introduced by the hon. Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Waterson) a year or two ago changed our minds when the mechanism of the Attorney-General was brought in.

I understand the concerns of colleagues, but they are essentially misplaced. My hon. Friends seek to fetter the discretion of the Attorney-General. The range of considerations is so wide that it is impossible to set out clearly answers to the multitude of considerations which may arise.

Consider, for example, the persuasive points made by my hon. Friend the Member for Cynon Valley (Ann Clwyd) on human rights and the convention. The Kenya bombing was an outrage. It was clear that whoever was responsible for that bomb outside the US embassy was wholly unconcerned about the loss of life which was likely to follow. More than 200 innocent Kenyans were killed, apart from those in the embassy and adjoining buildings. I heard an individual in this country almost exult in that, saying that if the cause was served, the deaths of those Kenyans was very sad, but that was just one of those things that happen.

5.45 am

Are we to say that, had we doubts about the validity or the legitimacy of the judicial processes in Kenya, we would take a different view? Kenya may be deficient in some ways, but we are broadly happy with the judicial processes. If anyone in this country had plotted or sought military materiel or anything else involved in the Kenya bombing, that could not be justified, whatever our concerns about judicial processes in that country. That is the real dilemma that we face. It was wrong, and it would be wrong even if the Kenyan judicial system were highly deficient.

Our starting point must be the fact that there is a deficiency in our law, a lacuna that must be corrected in a proper democratic way. It must be dealt with according to the traditions of the House and appropriate safeguards must be built in for human rights reasons. That is why, as there is no immediacy in clauses 5 to 7, I follow, as always, the wisdom of my hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell).

If the measure had been tackled properly, there would have been an opportunity for outside legal human rights opinion to be expressed in some sort of pre-legislative committee. There would have been a proper Committee stage. I am one of those who do not believe that the Home Office is infallible. One of my heroes, Cromwell, said:

[Mr. Donald Anderson]

"I beseech you, in the bowels of Christ, think it possible you may be mistaken."

Even the Home Office legal experts may be mistaken. Even what they say can be improved upon. There is no urgency and no reason why we should have gone about the matter as we have.

I heard what my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary said in an excellent speech. He observed that the matter had already been extensively canvassed in the abortive private Member's Bill. In my judgment, that was not so. It was a private Member's Bill, although I concede that the hon. Member for Eastbourne was acting as an agent for the Home Office. He received only a certain degree of support. The Bill was not studied with great care in the House or in Committee. If we are properly to advance, we must recognise that there is a lacuna, but the House of Commons must rectify it in the proper way, with proper scrutiny.

Mr. Öpik: If we did not have entrenched positions, Ministers should now be able to say that they will reconsider the measure and take a more balanced position in the light of the commonsense comments that have been made on the Floor of the Chamber. The intention is not to fetter the discretion of the Attorney-General, but to make it possible for him to exercise some judgment in the grey areas that arise when these clauses must be applied to a situation involving a country with a questionable human rights record.

Britain has been a crusader in the past, at least in some parts of the world, helping people who were seeking to create a democratic system where one did not exist. I draw the Minister's attention to the many examples that have been cited in the debate.

I know the example of Estonia well, and I know it to be a genuine case in which individuals operated from the United Kingdom to assist Estonian people to create a democratic system there. I am in no doubt that if Britain had not made it relatively easy for Estonian activists and fighters for independence to work from here, they would have had to find somewhere else from which to operate. I am also in no doubt that the work that the activists did in Estonia was illegal under the laws of the former Soviet Union. In some cases, it would have been illegal had it been done in the United Kingdom.

That does not make the activists terrible criminals; it simply underlines the core fallacy in clauses 5, 6 and 7, which is to assume that individual behaviour in other parts of the world can be assessed in the same context as behaviour here in the United Kingdom. That is the core mistake. It takes no account of the very difficulties that a fighter for independence or a political activist in a more oppressed part of the world has to face.

I hope that Ministers accept the need to think again about an inflexible part of the Bill which is causing many of us great difficulties, not least because we do not see the purpose of including it alongside clauses 1 to 4, which clearly have an immediacy and direct significance to the terrible tragedy of Omagh and the difficulties that face us in ensuring that the peace process in Northern Ireland can continue.

I throw the challenge to Ministers to discuss the matters privately among themselves, have some respect for the difficulties that we have raised here in Committee and come back with something that makes it a little easier for us to swallow this part of the Bill and, more than anything, something that makes it easier for Britain to continue to play a leading role in assisting those individuals who have the courage to fight for independence in their own country and use the United Kingdom as a platform to do so.

Ms Abbott: I represent a constituency in the east end of London that has been a haven for political dissidents since the Huguenots in the 16th century. In the present day, we have Kurds, Algerians and Nigerian dissidents. It is because this legislation could affect the lives and liberties of many of my constituents that I rise to speak. It is wrong that we should discuss legislation of this gravity in the early hours of the morning. The matter should have been dealt with in a separate Bill introduced in October. It should have proper scrutiny. As my friend and colleague the Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Select Committee, my hon. Friend the Member for Swansea, East (Mr. Anderson), said with such cogency, the arguments of urgency that applied to the earlier clauses of the Bill in relation to Northern Ireland do not apply to clauses 5, 6 and 7. There is no reason why we should be discussing these clauses at 6 o'clock in the morning.

I am glad to be able to speak in support of a set of amendments that has been moved so ably in the past hour. I do not wish to go over arguments that have already been made, but, precisely because the arguments of urgency do not apply, it seems to me that tagging on these three clauses is sheer opportunism by Home Office officials. It has all the hallmarks of a measure that has been dusted off and tagged on to the Northern Ireland proposals.

Much has been made of the safety mechanism provided by the Attorney-General and the fact that he will have to take questions of public interest into account. Much has been made of how we should not fetter him in examining the public interest, but I want to know—Ministers have not told me—precisely what aspect of the public interest he will give most weight to. Will he look at the public interest in relation to arms sales or in relation to international good governance? Will he look at the public interest in relation to ethical foreign policy or in not upsetting people who are big buyers of British goods?

We have the utmost confidence in the current Attorney-General. No one on the Labour Benches is seeking to fetter him, but we feel that he could benefit from more scrutiny of the legislation and more guidance and clarity. It is not clear how the legislation will work. I do not believe that that is clear even to Ministers and officials. The lack of scrutiny and the way the Bill is being bulldozed through Parliament is entirely lamentable.

In the coming months and years, this legislation could mean that some of the most repressive regimes in the world could reach their long arms into Britain and take action against people whose only real crime is that they are in political opposition to regimes that do not have the ordinary democratic processes that we know. The way in which clauses 5 to 7 has been introduced is wrong. They are ill drafted and ill thought out. There is no justification for provisions of this nature being introduced in this way. I am glad to have had the opportunity, albeit briefly, to support an important group of amendments.

Mr. Dalyell: I have two questions of fact. The first, following on from the speech of my hon. Friend the

Member for Falkirk, West (Mr. Canavan), is whether the Crown Office was consulted at an early stage. Was the Lord Advocate consulted? To what extent were they consulted? This is not simply an arcane question, because there are Lockerbie issues involving the importance of Scottish law about which we have heard a great deal. The question of fact is, to what extent was the Crown Office consulted?

Secondly, what are the cost implications? As I understand it, a phenomenal amount of money is already spent by Scotland Yard units monitoring various ethnic organisations and various countries' organisations. When one starts to take legal action against these organisations, bearing in mind all the family involvement, surely there must be cost implications and implications for police time. Could the Minister quantify the likely costs?

Finally, I say this to the Home Secretary at 6 am: he is the rarest of political creatures—a seemingly successful Home Secretary. He is certainly an authoritative one in this Government and he has done many good things. I believe that he has sufficient authority to do what has been done before. There is a precedent for a Minister going back to the Cabinet and saying that he has heard what the House of Commons has to say, that he is uneasy, that perhaps his parliamentary colleagues have a point, and that his Cabinet colleagues should postpone the action that they propose to take.

I do not think that members of the Conservative Front Bench will quibble if I use the example of Iranian sanctions. *[Interruption.]* I see the hon. Member for Ryedale (Mr. Greenway) nodding. Ministers went back to Mrs. Thatcher, as she then was, and said that there was great difficulty in the House of Commons and that they believed it to be genuine. They said that there was a problem of retrospection, and that perhaps she should postpone her proposed action and think again. I say this in no purgative spirit, but that was the first of Mrs. Thatcher's U-turns.

I suppose that I am asking the Home Secretary to make a minor, mini U-turn. I am asking him to go back to his colleagues and explain that there are great difficulties about tagging on clauses 5 to 7. I think that I speak for most of my colleagues when I say that, if he were to do that, it would be no disgrace for him. It is not disgraceful to put something before the House, to find that the House of Commons takes a more critical view than expected and then to start work on it again.

Mr. McDonnell: I wish to speak because, in the spirit of the Bill, I do not want people to infer that my silence is support for the legislation, or any form of guilt. The debate on the amendments has been a revelation. I realised during our debate on the previous group of amendments that my support for Greenpeace might be seen as part of a criminal conspiracy. During the debate on this group, I have realised that I have form as long as one's arm, given my support for Chile Solidarity, anti-Vietnam campaigns, law campaigns and support for the Kurds and a range of other groups—all actions which could fall within the ambit of this legislation.

The omnipotence of the Attorney-General has been a revelation to most new Members of Parliament, as have the breadth of the concept of public interest and its vagueness. A number of us want to fetter the discretion of the Attorney-General when considering the matter. The amendments would do that, because they draw attention to what should be his key consideration in exercising his omnipotence on that issue—the human rights records of other countries.

6 am

There are precedents. I can recall being a spectator in debates on extradition treaties in the House. In particular, I recall the debate on the treaty with India, which affected a large number of members of my community. During that debate, the human rights record of India towards Sikhs and other people who lived in or originated from the Punjab was discussed. That became a material factor in considering whether the treaty should be signed.

The previous Government also introduced a white-list system for asylum seekers and refugees. The human rights record and the judicial systems of the countries of origin or destination were material factors to be taken into consideration in decisions by the United Kingdom Government on whether someone should be accepted as an asylum seeker or refugee. There are precedents for certain elements of Government decision making being fettered as a result of considering the human rights record of certain states.

Therefore, I join other hon. Members in urging that, at this late stage in the debate on the legislation, which was forced on us, the clauses should be taken back. As an assembly, we should be mature enough to recognise that we may be blundering into an error that will drastically affect the lives of many of our constituents—not merely their well-being, but their very existence—so I urge reconsideration.

I would welcome a vote on the amendments, but, if we are not to have one, I want some assurance from the Minister that he will take the matter back to the Cabinet and that the Government will reconsider how we define the powers of the Attorney-General and the concept of public interest.

Mr. Winnick: In his reply, the Minister has a responsibility to give us some reassurance about the right of people who come to this country from abroad to demonstrate against foreign Governments. That is essential. Like many of my hon. Friends, I have campaigned on and off for more than 40 years about various foreign Governments. Indeed, I just reminded myself that it was as long ago as 1954 that, as a private citizen, I sent a telegram to try to save the life of the ex-Foreign Minister of Iran who had been involved with the Government of 1950-51—it did not do any good, although I wish that it had.

Our record in this country is essential. People are allowed to demonstrate. I have reservations about some of the remarks made by my hon. Friends, but I take on board the fact that foreign Governments could put pressure on this and future Governments and that dissidents living here could be pressurised by the police and the security authorities to stop what they are doing. That should not be the purpose, and we are told by the Government that it is not the purpose, of clauses 5 to 7; so, as I have already said, we need that reassurance to be absolutely clear about it.

The difficulty that I have with some of my hon. Friends is not—because of what I have just said, it cannot be—that we disagree over the right to demonstrate, the right

[Mr. Winnick]

to give asylum and the rights of people who have been given asylum and who want to demonstrate against the Governments and regimes from which they have come. We are in total agreement on those matters.

However, there is a problem that some of my hon. Friends may not have quite faced. Mention has been made of Kenya, but I remind the Committee that last year, when the killings of foreign citizens took place in Luxor, Egypt, the Egyptian Government said, rightly or wrongly, that they had been planned in the United Kingdom, which was used as a safe haven for terrorists.

The Home Affairs Committee, including the Chair, one or two other hon. Members and me, closely questioned my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary on that point. He may remember the occasion. We wanted to find out whether the British Government—the present or the previous incumbents—had inquired whether there were people in this country who had planned that terrible massacre of foreign citizens in Egypt.

We know why that massacre occurred: fundamentalist elements wanted to turn Egypt into a fundamentalist state and to stop tourism. That is why only foreign citizens were killed—to prevent foreign tourists from going to Egypt.

There are many aspects of life in Egypt with which I disagree. That is obvious. I am a democrat, and Egypt is nowhere near the kind of democracy that we would like to see. Although I disagree with the authorities there and with some of the repression that takes place, one thing is certain: I do not want to see it made worse and become a fundamentalist state.

The same applies to Saudi Arabia. We all know about the repression that occurs there, the amputations and the rest, which are repulsive to say the least. However, some of the people who are demonstrating, agitating and doing their best to overthrow that Government are not doing so for our reasons, to make it anywhere near a democracy. Far from it; those people are trying to make Saudi Arabia a fundamentalist state—and that includes the person mentioned earlier by my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn). Are we in favour of such people? We want reforms in those countries, and less repression, but we do not want regimes such as that in Afghanistan.

Dr. Lynne Jones: I do not think that there is concern in the House of Commons about the possible prosecution of people based in this country who conspire to carry out acts such as those that my hon. Friend described. We have had assurances from the Minister that such measures will not be used for fairly minor offences such as demonstrating against Governments, or even organising minor acts of vandalism and suchlike.

The concern is about actions in between those extremes, such as attacking military or other property within a state because that is the only way to take action in support of human rights. The example has been given of the actions of the military wing of the ANC in attacking property in South Africa.

Mr. Winnick: Fortunately, the position in South Africa has changed, the liberation movement has triumphed and we are in a new situation. I would argue that we should not harbour in Britain people who want to commit such acts abroad. I do not believe that Britain should be a haven for such activities. It should, however, give every opportunity to people who want to use Britain by living in this country because they have been persecuted in their own countries, and to agitate for more democratic regimes. That is perfectly legitimate.

The line that we have to draw is a very fine one. We want to defend our democratic rights in every way, but at the same time there is a problem that we must face whether we like it or not—that there have been, and will probably continue to be, elements in this country from abroad who want to use this country for terrorist purposes. I do not think that we should give them any help whatever.

For those reasons, with many, many reservations, I consider that clauses 5 to 7 are probably appropriate, in view of the curse of international terrorism.

Dr. Palmer: So far we have discussed these clauses from a somewhat "Westminstercentric" point of view. We have asked under what circumstances Ministers or the Attorney-General should take one action or another. However, if we turn the matter round and look at it from the viewpoint of an individual who is considering what action he or she might be able to take in pursuit of a cause that they support, we see the difficulties from a slightly different angle. The Minister may be able to help in that regard.

At the moment, the individual who, let us say, wishes to campaign against the Iraqi Government is faced with a grey area in roughly five dimensions. There is the dimension of the severity of the act; we have heard discussion of everything from graffiti to assassination. There is the dimension of the democratic or otherwise nature of the regime.

There is the dimension of the adequacy or otherwise of the legal system, and the other considerations that might come under the heading of public interest, such as those relating to trade or diplomatic relations, and the fact that the Attorney-General, and even the political party of the Government, can change. That means that the usual principle of jurisprudence, that a person is expected to follow the law because he or she knows what the law is, applies to a much weakened extent, because people do not really know what the law is. It depends very much on what the Attorney-General of the day thinks it is, and people know that it might be different next week.

Mr. McWalter: As the hour is very late and these are complex matters, might my hon. Friend consider curtailing his remarks so that we may consider clause 5 stand part, with a view to dividing the Committee on that, so that these matters might then return to the House at a time when we are all capable of paying attention to the intricacies of his argument?

Dr. Palmer: I am grateful for my colleague's suggestion. I have nearly finished.

I suggest that we should accept that each of the various attempts to limit the powers of the Attorney-General on a specific axis—such as the Liberal Democrat proposal to limit them according to the severity of the offence, or some of the proposals to limit them according to the

nature of the country—is open to the criticism that it will not cover every conceivable situation.

However, it would help the Committee a great deal, and I believe that it would help individuals in the group that we are talking about, if the Minister would develop the comments that he made in response to my question about severity, and if he would confirm that, in cases where the alleged crime has a political element, considerations of the human rights record of the Government, and of the nature of the legal system in the country, would be expected to be important to the Attorney-General in reaching a decision on public interest.

Mr. John Greenway (Ryedale): This is likely to be the last substantive debate on our proceedings on this important Bill. During most of the past five or six hours, I have listened from the Front Bench to the debate—in fact, I believe that I have sat there for about 12 of the past 16 hours. Much of those five or six hours has shown that my right hon. Friend the Member for Sutton Coldfield (Sir N. Fowler) was right when, on Second Reading, he said that this was not an ideal way for us to proceed with regard to these matters. However, he rightly signalled that we believe, as do the Government, that it is right to send a message to terrorists that we are united in every respect with the Government in the action that they have chosen to take.

The arguments that we have heard on this group of amendments included a plea from one or two Labour Members—the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) has made the point on several occasions—for the Government to take clauses 5 to 7 back and reconsider them. I must tell the Home Secretary that that is a problem for the Government, not for us; but, were he to feel obliged to take such action, Opposition Members would continue to support the Government in seeking to introduce the measures in clauses 5 to 7, because we have long considered them to be right and appropriate. Nothing that my hon. Friend the Member for Hertsmere (Mr. Clappison) and I have heard throughout the night has deflected us from the view that they would make a valuable addition to our criminal law.

6.15 am

We understand and sympathise with the concerns that have been expressed, particularly on this group of amendments, about human rights. This is not the group on which to debate whether it is reasonable to rely on the Attorney-General not to prosecute in cases in which it would be inappropriate to do so, although we believe that it is reasonable to rely on him in those circumstances.

The hon. Member for Swansea, East (Mr. Anderson) put his finger on the real issue. The real point addressed in the amendments is that whether a country has a democracy of the standard that we enjoy, and whether it has the standard of human rights that we enjoy, is of no concern or interest to the terrorist who takes the innocent human lives of those who have nothing to do with the political arguments, or the political struggles, that take place in some countries. The atrocities in Dar es Salaam and Nairobi make that abundantly clear: 300 innocent lives were taken.

I think it inconceivable that the Committee would want to agree to an amendment—however well-intentioned—that effectively says that, in countries where human rights and democratic standards are less than we would consider ideal, innocent people should be denied the protection that these clauses provide. As the hon. Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick) made plain, in the atrocity in Egypt that was precisely the point: innocent life was taken, quite deliberately, by an act of terrorism.

If some of that activity was plotted and planned from these shores, although we have voiced our concern—I have echoed it now—that we do not think that this was the ideal way of proceeding, it does illustrate the urgent need for Parliament to do something. I am not entirely surprised that the Home Secretary has taken the opportunity to add the clauses to the Bill.

It is tempting to say, at 6.18 am, that not only is this far from ideal, but it could and should have been handled better; but I am honest enough to admit that I suspect that I might well have done the same had I been in the Home Secretary's position. We must be honest. What has happened in Omagh—and, in the context of these amendments, in Dar es Salaam, in Nairobi and in Egypt in the past—should tell us one thing above all others: that the terrorist strikes when we least expect it. For that reason, we will support the Government again on Third Reading if there is a vote in a few minutes' time.

Mr. Michael: I thank the hon. Member for Ryedale (Mr. Greenway) for his last remarks. I accept his point that the way in which we are dealing with the Bill is not ideal, but he was honest in balancing his preference with a sense of the urgency. I congratulate all hon. Members on the quality of speeches in this important debate, in which some important issues have been raised.

I took particular comfort from the speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Swansea, East (Mr. Anderson), because I remember the powerful speech he made in expressing his concerns and reservations about the Jurisdiction (Conspiracy and Incitement) Bill. The power of his speech on that occasion makes it all the more valuable to have his support for a measure that is intended to help combat a series of evils which affect people throughout the world. That is the reason for the urgency.

I do not wish to reopen the question of the role of the Attorney-General, which I dealt with in response to a series of questions in the previous debate. There is no doubt that human rights considerations will be important where they are relevant to the public interest consideration on which the Attorney-General has to make a decision. I agree with the hon. Member for Ryedale that the main question will be the nature of the offences that are the subject of consideration for prosecution in respect of conspiracy—particularly the likelihood of the indiscriminate killing of innocent men, women and children as a result of the activities of those involved in the conspiracy.

Like my hon. Friend the Member for Hull, North (Mr. McNamara), the hon. Member for Sheffield, Hallam (Mr. Allan) and many others, I have concerns about human rights and the freedom of people in this country to campaign abroad. Along with many others, I played an active part in the anti-apartheid movement, and supported the ANC. That has been in the forefront of my mind when dealing with previous Bills and this one. I say to my hon.

[Mr. Michael]

Friend the Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick) that the right to demonstrate against regimes abroad is not threatened at all by the Bill. We want to combine in this country a commitment to promoting democracy with fighting terrorism and organised crime. We must not allow the two to be inconsistent, and we must pursue both objectives.

Amendments Nos. 44 and 46 stand on the implication that an offence can infringe the European convention on human rights. I am not sure whether that is the case. Even if an offence can infringe on the convention, the Human Rights Bill will provide the opportunities to test the compatibility of UK law with the ECHR and to obtain remedies where it is not. That is the reason we are incorporating the convention into our legislation.

Amendments Nos. 80 and 81 are an unnecessary restriction on the scope of the Bill which already contains the safeguards that were discussed fully in the previous debate. We should not restrict the application of the clause in that way, although I have explained the way in which important human rights considerations can be part of the Attorney-General's consideration.

My hon. Friend the Member for Falkirk, West (Mr. Canavan) asked about the role of the Lord Advocate, which we have debated previously. The problem is that there is a difference between the function of the Lord Advocate and the procurator fiscal in the Scottish regime, compared with the responsibilities of the Attorney-General here. However, I understand that, under Scots law, all offences are prosecuted with the consent of the Lord Advocate. That responsibility is put in the hands of the procurator fiscal in terms of the conduct of proceedings. The same limitations will be achieved without putting them into the Bill.

Reference was made to countries under occupation where the Government perhaps are not the legitimate Government of the country. That may be relevant in some cases, in which case it would be taken into account by the Attorney-General. Therefore, I can give the assurance that, where that is a relevant consideration, this mechanism does allow for it to be dealt with.

This is not a question of pulling a Bill off the shelf. The commitment to legislation is long standing. It pre-dates the recess. It goes back to debates in opposition. We certainly considered it in the Home Office before consulting colleagues throughout Government during recent months. That is why I can be confident in arguing for support for the Bill and in appealing to colleagues not to press their amendments. They would not bring about the results that they wish because the dangers that they perceive are not there. I hope that I have been able to satisfy them of the rounded and effective nature of this legislation and that it will have support from colleagues and hon. Members on both sides of the Committee.

Ann Clwyd: I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Clause 5

CONSPIRACY TO COMMIT OFFENCES OUTSIDE THE UNITED KINGDOM

Question proposed, That the clause stand part of the Bill.

Mr. McWalter: There is a very short time left for debate, but amendment No. 63, which stood in my name, effectively countermands this clause standing part of the Bill. If hon. Members vote against the clause standing part, the consequential amendments on the Order Paper will mean that it consists only of clauses 1 to 4. That would be a good night's work, because we would have sent a message to the bombers at Omagh that the policies that we want to ensure be proceeded with—the manifestation of our commitment to the Belfast agreement—go ahead. However, two Bills have been presented to us, and the second Bill is not a Northern Ireland terrorism Bill. It is a conspiracy Bill, and a conspiracy Bill is, by its nature, complicated.

The right hon. Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble) talked about how, if clauses 5 to 7 stopped the sort of events that happened at Nairobi and Dar es Salaam, it would be worth passing them, but he was talking with 20:20 vision, with hindsight. Of course, if we can connect conspiratorial actions with those vicious forms of attack, we should do everything in our power to ensure that they are curtailed, but what we have is a problem about conspiracy being detected, when we do not actually have the crime that is being conspired for.

We have an enormously complicated series of ideas about dual criminality, on which many hon. Members during today's long debates have made many fundamental errors. We have an annexe to a Bill that none of us has had a chance to read. Of course we support the Government's view that we must combat the increasingly international dimension to crime, but these clauses do not talk about terrorism. They talk about offences. They talk about matters, as Labour Members have said, such as theft. That is dually criminal, yet perhaps in some societies the way in which to undermine a despotic regime is to organise a campaign of theft. Yet that would be caught by the Bill.

It is too late to go into all the manifest reasons why we should consult Amnesty International and all those who are forces for good. We want to ensure that the objects of clauses 5 to 7 are achieved, but this is a rotten way to seek to achieve them. It will bring our process into disrepute in many ways. I was told earlier in the debate that, because I was a new Member, I did not know what was going on. A lot of people did not know what was going on. I had the advantage of discovering yesterday that the substance of the private Member's Bill of the hon. Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Waterson) was coming here tonight. I read the comments made in February 1997 by the current Minister. I know what I am talking about because I was here last night at 5.30.

6.30 am

It is no way to treat new Members to say that the proposals have been coming for some time and that we talked about the issues 17 months ago and reached an agreement, so now we just want to ram the measures through. New Members have the right to assess such

matters too. It is important that we debate the issues at length, in principle, with determination to commit ourselves to arresting international crime and conspiracy to commit offences on the international stage.

It is right that we have passed clauses 1 to 4. Like many others, I voted for Second Reading on that basis. However, I hope against hope that the Government will take note of the strong feelings that have been expressed today. Clauses 5, 6 and 7 may be all right in their objects, but they are rotten in the way in which they seek to achieve those objects. They do not take account of counter-arguments—the vital component of parliamentary democracy.

I ask the Government, if it is not too late, to take seriously the mood of the Committee on the clauses, and to withdraw them at this late stage. If they do not, I ask the Committee to vote against clause 5. It can be pulled away from the Bill, leaving an intact Bill with intellectual integrity. Amendments Nos. 63 to 69, in my name as well as those of other Labour Members and Opposition Members, would chisel out conspiracy and leave us with a Northern Ireland terrorism Bill. That is what we should have been dealing with today. We should deal with the other business in October.

Mr. Straw: Had it not been for procedural defects that caused the Bill of the hon. Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Waterson) to come to grief in early 1997, the provisions would have been on the statute book by early March last year. It would have gone on to the statute book with less discussion than the many hours that we have had today on clauses 5, 6 and 7.

This has been an intense debate on a day on which Parliament was recalled. Far more hon. Members on both sides have taken an interest in the subject. Important contributions have come from both sides. For reasons that we have well rehearsed and I shall repeat in a moment, I cannot accept the argument of my hon. Friend the Member for Hemel Hempstead (Mr. McWalter), but I do not in the least dismiss it. We shall take the fullest possible cognisance of the anxieties that have been expressed and shall monitor carefully the operation of the whole Bill.

Because we have not had a full chance to debate the matter in the time available, I have put my name to new clause 7, which was tabled by Opposition Front Benchers and which provides that there should be an annual report presented to Parliament by the Secretary of State on the operation of all aspects of the Bill, after it has been enacted. The reason we accepted the Opposition's new clause is that it runs wider than similar amendments tabled by some of my hon. Friends, which referred only to certain sections of the Bill.

The Minister of State, Home Office, my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth (Mr. Michael), has also set out the safeguards that will apply in respect of the conspiracy provisions, in clauses 5, 6 and 7. To pick up a point raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Hemel Hempstead, I accept that the drafting of those three clauses is certainly technical, as the area is one of some technicality. However, the issue at their heart is relatively simple: it is about ensuring, as the hon. Member for Ryedale (Mr. Greenway) and my hon. Friend the Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick) spelled out, that those who are conspiring—conspiracy is a narrowly defined set of activities, very different from incitement—in this country to commit crimes abroad should be capable of being brought to justice in this country in appropriate circumstances.

We are talking not about trivial cases, but about those who go in for organising paedophile rings abroad, drug runners, other serious acquisitive criminals and terrorists. When I am asked what was the urgency to introduce that part of the Bill yesterday and today, I repeat the point that I made 14 hours ago. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister sought the agreement of the Speaker to recall Parliament because of the outrage at Omagh, where 28 people lost their lives and scores more were seriously injured. However, last month, 10 times the number who lost their lives at Omagh lost their lives in outrages in Nairobi and Dar es Salaam.

The Cabinet view, which explains why the Bill is constructed in this way, was that, given that Parliament was being recalled to deal with Omagh and that we had already got ministerial colleagues' agreement in principle to the legislation, we would have been negligent had we failed to introduce clauses 5 to 7 as well. I therefore hope that they commend themselves to the Committee.

Mr. Peter Bottomley (Worthing): The Home Secretary has some good arguments and he has advanced them better than many others would have done. However, his hon. Friends on the Back Benches also have a strong argument. It is not sufficient to say that people have had notice, when they did not. It is not good enough—

It being six hours after the conclusion of proceedings on Second Reading, THE CHAIRMAN, *pursuant to the Order [this day], put forthwith the Questions necessary to dispose of proceedings to be concluded at that hour.*

The Committee divided: Ayes 220, Noes 24.

Division No. 361] **[6.38 am**

AYES

Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Alexander, Douglas
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Banks, Tony
Barron, Kevin
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, Rt Hon Mrs Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne
Berry, Roger
Blizzard, Bob
Boateng, Paul
Borrow, David
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bradley, Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brazier, Julian
Brown, Rt Hon Nick *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Butler, Mrs Christine
Cabom, Richard
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell-Savours, Dale
Cann, Jamie
Caplin, Ivor
Caton, Martin
Chisholm, Malcolm
Clappison, James
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Coleman, Iain
Collins, Tim
Colman, Tony
Connarty, Michael
Cooper, Yvette
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Darvill, Keith
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice)*
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, John
Dobbin, Jim
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Edwards, Huw
Ennis, Jeff
Etherington, Bill
Fisher, Mark

Fitzsimons, Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foster, Michael J *(Worcester)*
Foulkes, George
Fraser, Christopher
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry
George, Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Mrs Linda
Goggins, Paul
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mrs Eileen
Greenway, John
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Grogan, John
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hammond, Philip
Hanson, David
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Heald, Oliver
Healey, John
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hepburn, Stephen
Hewitt, Ms Patricia
Home Robertson, John
Hoon, Geoffrey
Hope, Phil
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Jackson, Ms Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jenkins, Brian
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Mrs Fiona *(Newark)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Jowell, Ms Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Laxton, Bob
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Lock, David
Loughton, Tim
Love, Andrew
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Steve
McDonagh, Siobhain
Mackinlay, Andrew
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNulty, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mallaber, Judy
Mandelson, Peter
Martlew, Eric
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Merron, Gillian
Michael, Alun
Miller, Andrew
Moffatt, Laura
Moran, Ms Margaret
Morris, Ms Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Mudie, George
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Norris, Dan
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Organ, Mrs Diana
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Pendry, Tom
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prior, David
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Raynsford, Nick
Reed, Andrew *(Loughborough)*
Reid, Dr John *(Hamilton N)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Rowlands, Ted
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Ms Joan
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Salter, Martin
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sheerman, Barry
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Rt Hon Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Soley, Clive
Spellar, John
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Straw, Rt Hon Jack
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Swayne, Desmond
Taylor, Rt Hon Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Touhig, Don
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trickett, Jon
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Vis, Dr Rudi
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*
Wills, Michael
Winnick, David
Woolas, Phil
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, Dr Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Clive Betts and
Mr. David Jamieson.

NOES

Allan, Richard
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Best, Harold
Canavan, Dennis
Clwyd, Ann
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Dalyell, Tam
Davidson, Ian
Fyfe, Maria
Heath, David *(Somerton & Frome)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Jones, Dr Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
McAllion, John
McDonnell, John
McNamara, Kevin
Öpik, Lembit
Pollard, Kerry
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Skinner, Dennis
Wareing, Robert N
Webb, Steve
Wise, Audrey

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Tony McWalter and
Mr. Andrew Stunell.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Clause 5 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clauses 6 to 10 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

New Clause 7

REPORT TO PARLIAMENT

'The Secretary of State shall lay before both Houses of Parliament at least once in every 12 months a report on the working of this Act.'.—[*Mr. Dowd.*]

Brought up, read the First and Second time, and added to the Bill.

Schedules 1 and 2 agreed to.

Bill reported, with amendments; read the Third time, and passed.

It being more than six hours after the conclusion of proceedings on Second Reading, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *adjourned the House without Question put, pursuant to the Resolution this day.*

Adjourned accordingly till tomorrow.

House of Commons

Thursday 3 September 1998

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Madam Speaker: There is no business for the House to transact until the Lords amendments to the Criminal Justice (Terrorism and Conspiracy) Bill are received, or until it is possible for the Royal Assent to be notified. Because the length of proceedings on the Bill in the House of Lords is unpredictable, I propose that the time for the resumption of the sitting of this House should be displayed on the annunciator as soon as it is possible to make a reasonable prediction of a convenient time. I shall also arrange for the bells to be rung five minutes before I intend to resume the Chair.

2.35 pm

Sitting suspended.

1.35 am

On resuming—

ROYAL ASSENT

Madam Speaker: I have to notify the House, in accordance with the Royal Assent Act 1967, that the Queen has signified Her Royal Assent to the following Act:

Criminal Justice (Terrorism and Conspiracy) Act 1998

MADAM SPEAKER *adjourned the House without Question put till Monday 19 October, pursuant to Order [2 September].*

Adjourned at twenty-five minutes to Two o'clock.

House of Commons

Monday 19 October 1998

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

SOCIAL SECURITY

The Secretary of State was asked—

Child Support Agency

1. **Maria Eagle** (Liverpool, Garston): What representations he has received on the Green Paper on reforms to the Child Support Agency. [53466]

The Secretary of State for Social Security (Mr. Alistair Darling): We published our proposals for reform of the Child Support Agency in July. The consultation period is not due to end until the end of November, but about 750 responses have been received so far. It is already clear that our proposals for a simple, straightforward and transparent service have widespread support.

Maria Eagle: I thank my right hon. Friend for his reply. I welcome him to his new position, as I think that this is the first time that he has appeared on the Treasury Bench since the reshuffle. I welcome also his ministerial colleagues, whose careers I am following with great interest. Has my right hon. Friend come across situations such as those in my constituency where self-employed absent parents who appear to be living wealthy lives seem to have received nil assessments from the CSA and are escaping maintenance? Will he devise a way to make sure that self-employed absent parents are properly assessed by the CSA?

Mr. Darling: First, I am grateful to my hon. Friend for her words of welcome. My ministerial colleagues and I will be glad to hear that she will watch our careers with great interest. Secondly, on her substantive point, it is a matter of concern to the Government that 1.8 million children are not receiving a penny in maintenance from their non-resident parents and, in particular, that there are self-employed people who have managed to avoid paying any money partly because of the assessment levied on them.

In the short term, we have established a special unit within the CSA to deal with self-employed people. In the long term—as we made clear in the Green Paper—we are looking at using the tax system to provide a clear indication of what someone's liability for tax should be. I am concerned that people who have money and are due money, pay money to their children. A central part of the reform of the CSA according to the new, simpler system that we propose is that, instead of spending 90 per cent. of our time making assessments and only 10 per cent. enforcing judgments, we will alter that balance greatly to ensure that people pay what they are due to their children.

Mr. David Rendel (Newbury): I join the hon. Member for Liverpool, Garston (Maria Eagle) in welcoming the Secretary of State to his new position. In doing so, I look forward to several months of constructive opposition from my party. Are the many supportive representations that he tells us he has received mainly on the ground that the over-complication of the present system is beyond belief? It is certainly causing enormous problems. Is it not true that, by simplifying the system, he may endanger himself, in the sense that the original system—introduced by the Conservative Government—was known to be unfair because it was so simple? Is there not a danger that, in the end, he may find that his own simplified system is more complicated? Is he prepared to listen to further representations from members of the National Association for Child Support Action when they visit the House on 18 November?

Mr. Darling: That was certainly a complicated question, Madam Speaker. I thank the hon. Gentleman for his kind remarks, and I hope that he will be in opposition for longer than just a few months. With regard to his point about the formula, we believe that a simpler formula will be quicker to implement, and that therefore we will get payment far quicker than at present. The system will be more readily understood, will deliver money to the parent with care and will benefit the children themselves.

Mr. Malcolm Wicks (Croydon, North): Given that the modern family tragedy is that most absent fathers do not pay child maintenance for their children and that, in turn, too many of those fathers are denied access to their children, will my right hon. Friend work with other Departments and agencies to produce a rounded family policy that will enable all the children in Britain—except in extreme circumstances—to be brought up by both their mother and their father?

Mr. Darling: I strongly believe that someone is a mother or father for life and that contact with children should be maintained. However, I do not believe that there should be linkage between access and payment of sums due for the maintenance of children—they are separate matters. However, I certainly agree with my hon. Friend that absent parents should be encouraged by whatever means are appropriate to maintain contact with the child for whom they are responsible throughout that child's life.

Mr. Edward Leigh (Gainsborough): Will the Secretary of State kindly direct me to the place in the Labour party manifesto where it states that the Government have plans to tax child benefit?

Mr. Darling: The hon. Gentleman will be aware of the fact that, in his last Budget, the Chancellor increased child benefit and he said that, if there were to be further increases, there was certainly a case for looking at taxation of the higher rate of child benefit, but the point

that most people will remember is that it is this party and this Government who have increased child benefit by a record amount. Most people support us in doing that.

State Pensions

2. **Mr. Austin Mitchell** (Great Grimsby): If he will make it his policy to uprate the state pension in line with the higher rate of earnings or the retail prices index. [53467]

The Minister of State for Social Security (Mr. John Denham): We are committed to retain the basic state pension as the foundation of pension provision in retirement and to increase it at least in line with prices. We have already honoured that promise with last year's increase. A statement on uprating for next year will be made in due course.

Mr. Mitchell: Does my hon. Friend agree that a strong earnings-related pension scheme is the necessary basis for both security in old age and the development of public-private pension partnerships? Does he further accept that, if the national insurance scheme and the Treasury grant had been combined with the restoration of the cut in employers' national insurance contributions, which was carried through by the previous Government, there would have been enough money to make pensions earnings related for the next five years at least?

Mr. Denham: As I have said, a statement on uprating for next year will be made in due course, but my hon. Friend will recognise the substantial action that the Government have already taken to benefit all today's pensioners, through, for example, winter fuel payments, as well as taking and promising action to give greatest help to the poorest pensioners: those on income support and those who are entitled to income support but do not receive it.

Mr. Michael Colvin (Romsey): Is the Minister of State aware that one group of British pensioners receives no uprate in its pensions—those living abroad in certain Commonwealth countries? As part of his pensions review, will he have another look at that injustice and see what can be done to rectify it?

Mr. Denham: I am interested to hear the point that is made by the hon. Gentleman. There seems to be some confusion on the Conservative Benches as to whether this Government should be spending less or more on social security, but I make it clear to him, as I have done in correspondence to a number of people, that there are competing pressures and demands on the social security budget and it is unlikely, under the present circumstances, that that particular plea will receive priority.

Ms Diane Abbott (Hackney, North and Stoke Newington): Is the Minister aware that many female pensioners were widowed before they reached pensionable age and were very grateful for the support that they were able to receive from widow's benefit? Does he agree that to replace a relatively simple-to-claim widow's benefit with an overlapping array of means-tested benefit would add to the misery and sadness of people at a very vulnerable time?

Mr. Denham: May I make it clear that the Government have no intention of making any changes to the arrangements for existing recipients of widow's benefit? In considering whether any reforms should be made to the system, I assure the House that they will be based on principle, that they will be fair to men and to women and that they will fit the modern world.

Mr. Archy Kirkwood (Roxburgh and Berwickshire): Does the Minister accept that there are some worries about the gap between the haves and the have-nots, particularly as evidenced by the recent study on households below average incomes? If he is looking at ways of getting extra help to low-income pensioner households and he is setting his face against linking real income with earnings, will he look at the possibility of getting extra help to the age cohorts at the elder end of the life span, so that we can get money to people who need it most, without the necessity of going through the bureaucracy of a means test?

Mr. Denham: The statistics to which the hon. Gentleman refers are an indictment of the record of the previous Government. They back this Government's case that reforming the welfare system so that it gives greater support and greater opportunity to those who wish to enter work is the right way to proceed. He is right to say that we have said that we want to make a priority of assistance for the poorest pensioners, including those who do not receive their entitlement to income support, many of whom are women living alone and in the older group of pensioners. In addition to the substantial increase in the guaranteed minimum income for pensioners, which we will bring in from April, we will make additional efforts to ensure that those who are entitled to that support receive it.

Pensioner Poverty

3. **Mr. Gareth R. Thomas** (Harrow, West): What further steps he is taking to reduce pensioner poverty. [53468]

The Secretary of State for Social Security (Mr. Alistair Darling): One and a half million of the poorest pensioners will benefit from a significant increase in their income support from next April—three times the amount that would apply under normal uprating. We are also committed to continue winter fuel payments for a further three years beyond this coming winter. From next winter, every eligible pensioner household will receive £20.

Mr. Thomas: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for that answer. Is he aware of the excellent teleclaims initiative, which helps people in my constituency to submit their pension claims in a more user-friendly and efficient way? Can he assure me that, when that initiative is evaluated, the voluntary sector—in particular, Age Concern and the citizens advice bureaux, which do excellent work in my constituency—will have a direct role in the evaluation of that scheme and others to combat the low take-up of benefits by some pensioners?

Mr. Darling: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for welcoming the initiatives that the Department has been taking to increase telephone take-up. I strongly believe that the Department of Social Security can do far more to use the telephone to reach people in their own homes. The experience so far with the take-up of pensions, and the

pilot programme to which he referred, shows that only 1.3 per cent. of cases required any further action. Getting cases right first time not only means that pensioners get the money that they need, but saves valuable resources in the Department, so we certainly want that to be encouraged. We also want to ensure that the voluntary sector, including Age Concern, continues to work with us, as its advice is sometimes invaluable.

Mr. Quentin Davies (Grantham and Stamford): The Opposition sincerely congratulate the right hon. Gentleman on his promotion, and indeed the Minister of State for Social Security, the hon. Member for Southampton, Itchen (Mr. Denham), on managing to survive the night of long knives.

The hon. Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell) has done the House a service by reminding us of one set of fraudulent expectations that were carefully and cynically cultivated among pensioners by the Labour party during the previous Parliament, but were cruelly dropped as soon as Labour came to power. Is not the so-called minimum income for pensioners from next April another fraud on the pensioner? Of course, we shall all be delighted at any initiative that is designed to get pensioners to claim the benefits to which they are entitled. However, does the right hon. Gentleman not agree that, contrary to the impression that he just gave, not one pensioner will be entitled to a single additional penny as a result of that fraudulent initiative? All that is happening is that those who are entitled to means-tested benefits will have some of them repackaged under a new name. This Government will in due time learn the hard way that pensioners are not as stupid as they think.

Madam Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman is required to ask a question at Question Time.

Mr. Darling: In the past 10 years, I have enjoyed many hours of exchanges with the hon. Member for Grantham and Stamford (Mr. Davies) on Finance Bills. I wondered where he had gone, but now I know. Frankly, putting this in the nicest possible way, he is talking complete nonsense. The Government have done more for pensioners in the past 18 months than the previous Conservative Government did in 18 years. This Government not only introduced the minimum pension guarantee, which is helping the poorest of pensioners, who lost out under the previous Government, but have cut value added tax on fuel to the lowest level that we could, have abolished the gas levy, which has meant that household fuel expenses have decreased for pensioners and, in addition, have introduced the winter fuel payment, which meant that pensioners got real help last winter with their fuel bills and will get it again this winter. The Opposition did absolutely nothing about that in the 18 years that they were in power.

Pensioners (Torbay)

4. **Mr. Adrian Sanders** (Torbay): If he will make a statement on the results of the pensioners benefit take-up pilot in Torbay. [53469]

The Minister of State for Social Security (Mr. John Denham): The Department has been running nine pilot schemes, of which Torbay is one, since April this year to find the best way to provide more automatic help to the poorest pensioners. The pilots are only just being completed. We have commissioned an independent evaluation of them, which is being carried out, and the results are expected early next year.

Mr. Sanders: I am afraid that we need to see the results before we can make any judgment. I hope that the Minister will agree that the Torbay citizens advice bureau, Torbay council, the Benefits Agency staff in Torquay and organisations such as Age Concern and Brixham Does Care should be congratulated on the part that they have played in trying to find the trigger points where pensioners come into contact with the Benefits Agency. Will he give me an assurance that, if the results show the pilot to have been a success, it will continue in my constituency and, more importantly, will be extended to benefit pensioners throughout the country?

Mr. Denham: As the hon. Gentleman knows, I have visited those involved in the take-up pilot in Torbay, and I am more than happy to pay tribute to everyone involved—those in the voluntary sector, the local authority staff and our own staff—for their efforts. The whole point of the pilot exercises is to find the best way of identifying those pensioners who are entitled to income support but are not receiving it, and enabling them to make a claim. That is the basis on which we want to implement the increased benefit from next April.

Winter Fuel Payments

5. **Mr. Christopher Chope** (Christchurch): If he will make a statement about winter fuel payments for the coming winter. [53471]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Social Security (Angela Eagle): This winter, we will give almost 10 million individuals in more than 7 million pensioner households extra help towards paying their heaviest fuel bill. Details of those payments were announced on 30 July and I wrote to all hon. Members last week providing further information.

Mr. Chope: That is all very well, but what are the Government doing to help those many pensioners who were expecting winter fuel payments last year and have not received them? My constituent, Mrs. Hinton, has been told that she will get her payment tomorrow. Many thousands of other pensioners are suffering, not only from that incompetence on the Government's part, but because of the failure of the new national insurance recording system—NIRS 2—in Newcastle, which is depriving many newly widowed people and pensioners of their entitlement based on a lifetime's contributions. The Government are not caring about those people.

Angela Eagle: It is nice to see that the hon. Gentleman is so caring. It was the Conservative Government who ordered the NIRS 2 computer system. More than 10 million payments went out at very short notice last year, when the new scheme was announced, and less than 1 per cent. went to the wrong place or did not turn up; the hon. Gentleman is being very churlish. This year, we have set up a national helpline, the number of which should be in the letter that I sent him: it is 0645 151515.

If any of his constituents have problems claiming the money that the Conservative Government never gave to pensioners to help them with their heaviest fuel bill—the Labour Government have committed nearly £1 billion for that in this Parliament—the helpline operators will be more than happy to help them.

Mr. Bruce Grocott (Telford): During the summer, when she read through the mountains of Department files and briefing notes from civil servants, did my hon. Friend come across any letters of apology from the Tories for imposing VAT on fuel for our pensioners?

Angela Eagle: Funnily enough, I did not come across a single such letter, but I think that the Tories owe the pensioners of this country an apology for the appalling way in which they were treated in the 18 years of Tory power.

Mr. Eric Pickles (Brentwood and Ongar): I congratulate the Minister on her new position. Given that the policy was announced in July, why was it felt necessary to repackage it in October without providing any new money? Can she explain to pensioner groups in my constituency and throughout the country why the Government spent a sum that would have provided winter payments for the whole of Greater Manchester on a misleading advertising campaign that left an awful lot money—more than 1 per cent.—unclaimed in post offices, because people thought that it would arrive on the doorstep? Will she ensure that no more propaganda will be paid for by ratepayers and that money will go to pensioners as it should?

Angela Eagle: I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on his first appearance at the Dispatch Box. It is important that he remembers that the information campaign is designed to ensure that pensioners know that the money is coming, so that if there is a cold snap they do not worry about turning up their heating. They know that they will get £50 help at the end of November if they are on income support and £20 by January if they are not on income support. No pensioner needs to worry about turning the heating up if there is a cold snap. The information campaign is to reassure pensioners that the money is on its way.

Mrs. Margaret Ewing (Moray): I welcome the progress that has been made on what is a serious issue for our society, but does the Minister's estimate of the number of pensioners on income support who are eligible to claim the £50 payment coincide with the estimate produced by Age Concern? There seems to be a difference and we must ensure that everyone who is eligible claims. On the subject of the special payments that may be made, are we to continue to rely on the geographical niceties of the various weather monitoring stations? Or will the wind chill factor—a great concern to people in my area of the north-east of Scotland—be taken into account?

Angela Eagle: The hon. Lady asks about the number of pensioners who are entitled to income support but who do not claim it. My hon. Friend the Minister of State has already explained to the House some of the pilot schemes designed to encourage people to claim. Any pensioners who are entitled to income support should claim it before 9 November, because that is the qualifying week for the payments. If they do not claim by then, they might lose out on the extra £50. Our estimates vary at between 750,000 and 1 million pensioners, but it is not possible to be precise. We do not quibble too much with Age Concern's estimate, and we join it in trying to persuade pensioners who think that they are eligible for income support to claim it at their local office. That will give them access to the extra £50 payment which will be paid by the end of November.

Pensioners

6. **Mr. Paul Flynn** (Newport, West): What new proposals he has to ensure that all pensioners share fairly in the increasing prosperity of the nation. [53472]

The Secretary of State for Social Security (Mr. Alistair Darling): One of the aims of the pensions review is to ensure that pensioners have an adequate income in retirement and that they share fairly in national prosperity. My hon. Friend will be aware that we intend to publish our proposals in the Green Paper on pensions later this year.

Mr. Flynn: Although I recognise the many good things that the Government have done for pensioners, I would like the new Secretary of State to explain to us—following the question asked by my hon. Friend the Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell)—why the basic pension was not increased last year or this year by the increase in the rate of earnings? The money was in the kitty and the increase could have been made without infringing the promises made by the previous Government or by this Government. The basic pension is not a handout or a gift: it is paid for by personal contributions, which take into account the rate of inflation and are made for up to 50 years. The words stating that all pensioners shall

"share fairly in the increasing prosperity of the nation"

are taken from our manifesto at the general election. Will the Secretary of State now renew that pledge?

Mr. Darling: My hon. Friend is right to the extent that the Government had a choice last year in the comprehensive spending review. Some £2.5 billion was allocated to pensioners and we chose deliberately to spend it on doing more for the poorest pensioners rather than spreading the sum thinly among all pensioners. The poorest pensioners have lost out in the past few years. The restoration of free eye tests, concessionary travel and the winter fuel payments will help all pensioners, but especially the poorest whom we were most concerned to help. That is why we took that decision and I believe we were right.

Mr. Peter Viggers (Gosport): I suppose that those most pleased with the minimum pension guarantee will be those who have done nothing to save for their retirement. Question 6 is about fairness. Can the Secretary of State confirm, for those who have saved for their retirement, that there are no circumstances in which they will be worse off than those who have not done so?

Mr. Darling: The hon. Gentleman raises a matter that is inherent in any system that has a degree of

means-testing. There is nothing new about the point, as means-testing has been with us for many years under successive Governments of different colours. However, I do not agree that the help is going to pensioners whom the hon. Gentleman dismissed as somehow not deserving of any help. Through no fault of their own, many pensioners do not have sufficient means on which to live, and it is those pensioners whom we want to help the most, as they would otherwise face real difficulties.

Mr. Andrew Miller (Ellesmere Port and Neston): One group of pensioners who will not share in the prosperity of the nation are the ex-employees of H. H. Robertson in my constituency. Now that the Serious Fraud Office has completed its inquiries into that company scandal, will my right hon. Friend liaise with colleagues in other Departments on whether mechanisms can be introduced to protect pensioners from having money removed from their pension schemes in future, and to ensure that they are treated as preferential creditors, and not in the outrageous way that they have been treated in that outrageous scandal?

Mr. Darling: I am aware of the case to which my hon. Friend refers. He is right to raise the matter. We are looking into it, and the regime presently in place quite clearly has not been able to deal with that situation. I hope to be able to report to the House in due course on proposals to deal with the problem that money that should be available for employees is not available because of action that should not have taken place.

Mr. Howard Flight (Arundel and South Downs): May I ask the Secretary of State about the position of people who have money purchase personal pensions, many of which are relatively small? In particular, may I ask about those who have already retired? As the Minister will know, one can delay buying an annuity until the age of 75. In view of the enormous rise in the cost of annuities, the fall in what we can get for our money and the weakness of markets, will the Government consider ending, or at least suspending, the age 75 rule?

Mr. Darling: I am aware of the point raised by the hon. Gentleman. I cannot say anything this afternoon, but the Government consider the point from time to time. I cannot make any immediate promises.

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Inverclyde): May I say to the Secretary of State that I was pleased to hear him point out to the Conservatives that many millions of elderly people were quite unable to save for their senior years because of the nature of their employment? One example is trawler company fishermen who were never given security of employment. May I say that much more needs to be done for the many elderly people who do not take up the benefits to which they are manifestly entitled? Pilot studies do not go far enough. Does my right hon. Friend agree that every Benefits Agency office should be told that more needs to be done for elderly people in their areas?

Madam Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman did not put a proper question, a point that applies to Back Benchers as well as to Front Benchers. We must have brisk questions at Question Time.

Mr. Darling: I shall endeavour to give a brief answer. My hon. Friend is quite right. Many pensioners are entitled to benefits that they do not take up. I have said that I wanted far greater use of the telephone than previously because experience shows that that is one way in which to reach pensioners at home to persuade them to take up money that they would not otherwise receive. We have been conducting pilots because the reasons why pensioners do not take up their entitlements are quite complex. They are not as straightforward as people may initially have thought. I am anxious to ensure that we pool the evidence that we receive over the next few weeks so that when we embark on a national take-up campaign we can use the best techniques we can find to ensure that we deal with the problem highlighted by my hon. Friend. Far too many pensioners will sit at home in hardship this winter when they need not necessarily have to do so.

Disability Living Allowance

7. **Dr. Vincent Cable** (Twickenham): What steps he will take to ensure that medical tests for disability living allowance are objective and professionally conducted. [53477]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Social Security (Mr. Stephen Timms): The conduct and quality of medical assessments that may be required in the determination of entitlement to disability living allowance are subject to close monitoring and regular and random audit against nationally determined standards specified in the Benefits Agency's contract with the SEMA Group, which provides medical services.

Dr. Cable: I thank the Minister. Is he aware that, with the current climate of financial austerity at the Department of Social Security, there is much anxiety among the disabled that their allowances may be cut as a result of cursory examination by medical generalists without reference to general practitioners? Will he examine the shortage of doctors in this field to ensure that a proper service is available?

Mr. Timms: Very specific medical quality standards on experience, qualifications and training are included in the Benefits Agency's contract with SEMA. All doctors undertaking examinations for disability living allowance must now be approved by the chief medical adviser on behalf of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State. I am aware of some of the concerns that the hon. Gentleman raised. We are satisfied that enough doctors are available and are determined that the standards to which they work should be of the highest possible quality. The assessments are vital to many people. We need to ensure that they are right and we are investing significant resources in ensuring that they are. As an illustration of our determination to secure the highest quality, we are working with the Royal College of Physicians on the first ever diploma in disability assessment medicine, which will be awarded for the first time next year, to raise standards in this important area.

Ms Sally Keeble (Northampton, North): I welcome my hon. Friend to his new position. I appreciate his comments, but I have two points. First, will he reconsider the position of children identified by schools as having general special needs without a specific need being diagnosed—children who are unable to work because of

a kind of general disability? Secondly, is enough advice provided to those who help people to fill in forms? Sometimes they are family members and have great difficulty in coping with the voluminous questionnaires that they are sent.

Mr. Timms: I thank my hon. Friend for her kind words. She raises two important points. We know that there are particular difficulties for people who become disabled when very young because they cannot gain national insurance credits and so do not become entitled later in life to incapacity benefit. We are considering that in our current review. We are also aware of the need for those who advise disabled people to have access to the best possible information. We will do what we can to make progress on that.

Mrs. Theresa May (Maidenhead): I congratulate the Minister on his elevation to the Front Bench. I am sure that he is aware that on 12 September, as reported in the press, the Prime Minister wrote to Lord Morris of Manchester saying that the Green Paper on welfare reform did not put forward any proposal to tax disability living allowance and that that remained the position. Is the Minister aware that, to many people, that seems reminiscent of the position when the then Leader of the Opposition said in April last year that the Labour party had no plans to introduce tuition fees for university students and then, three months later, did so? Will the Minister clarify the record, put aside the carefully chosen words of the Prime Minister and say that the Government will not tax DLA for existing or future recipients?

Mr. Timms: I thank the hon. Lady for her congratulations and extend mine to her on her appointment. The Government's action on student support has been widely welcomed. The position on taxation of DLA has been made very clear and has been accurately reported. There are no plans to introduce taxation of those benefits. That remains the position. Her statement of the Government's position is correct.

Pensions

8. **Mr. John Wilkinson** (Ruislip–Northwood): If he will make a statement on his Department's progress towards the introduction of stakeholder pensions. [53478]

14. **Mr. Andrew Lansley** (South Cambridgeshire): When he expects to publish his proposals for stakeholder pensions. [53487]

The Minister of State for Social Security (Mr. John Denham): We are developing a framework for stakeholder pension schemes, which will offer secure, flexible and value-for-money second pensions for people who do not have the opportunity to join an occupational scheme and for whom many personal pensions can be unsuitable. We will publish a Green Paper on pensions later this year, which will include more details of our proposals for stakeholder schemes.

Mr. Wilkinson: May I remind the Minister that, on 15 December last year, he said that early this year, the Government would publish their review proposals on pensions? Is not that Green Paper an unconscionably long time coming? Is not the delay even worse for those who read the Labour party's election manifesto of spring 1997, which said that low-wage earners and those with patterns of employment that were not fixed could expect a funded pension in their own right? It seems that that expectation has, along with the right hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field), gone walkies.

Mr. Denham: The welfare reform Green Paper that we published in the spring said that the pensions Green Paper would be published later this year, and that is the timetable to which we are working. We are keen to get our proposals right, because no one—at least, no one on the Government Benches—has forgotten the introduction of personal pensions by the previous Administration, or the mis-selling that was a consequence of the failure to get the regulatory and legal system right. I do not believe that anyone involved in the provision of pensions begrudges the Government a month or two in which to do the work necessary to ensure that our proposals meet the needs that we have set out.

Mr. Lansley: Will the Minister tell us the reasons for the delay in publishing the Government's proposals? Will he confirm that the delay stems not from him, but from the Treasury? Will he tell us why the Treasury blocked proposals, reliably reported to have been circulated by him and his Department, for a compulsory stakeholder pension scheme?

Mr. Denham: The hon. Gentleman refers to a series of myths of his own making. We set out the timetable for the reform proposals in the welfare reform Green Paper earlier this year and we are working to that timetable. What is different is that the current Government recognise the difficulties faced by people on low and modest incomes, or those who have intermittent working patterns, in obtaining a decent value-for-money pension. Instead of continually sniping, Conservative Members might better spend their time explaining why they did so little over so long a period to enable such people to get a decent pension.

Mr. Frank Field (Birkenhead): Are the Government planning a form of stakeholder pension that contains an element of redistribution, so that the poor can be made full members of the scheme; or will the Government be content to allow that most vulnerable group to be dependent on means-tested assistance?

Mr. Denham: My right hon. Friend will be aware that we shall publish proposals later this year. He can be assured that we are concerned about the ability of people on low incomes to build up adequate pensions for their retirement.

Mr. Desmond Swayne (New Forest, West): Given the tax increases that have taken place, especially the changes to advance corporation tax and the abolition of personal equity plans and tax-exempt special savings accounts, what are the Government going to offer people who have an acceptable disposable income to induce them to take up a stakeholder pension?

Mr. Denham: The hon. Gentleman will be aware that the changes made by the Government in our early months

in office, including a large cut in corporation tax on major employers, were part of a package of measures designed to put the economy and the public finances on a sound basis. The Government and the country are now able to benefit from that action, because it created an environment favourable to long-term investment in the economy—the sort of long-term investment that creates the wealth from which future pensions can be paid. By creating that sort of stable environment, we create the conditions for a sound pensions policy in future.

9. **Mr. Tim Loughton** (East Worthing and Shoreham): If he will estimate the number of self-employed people who do not have any pension provision arrangements. [53479]

Mr. Denham: In 1996, around half of all self-employed people were estimated to be contributing to a personal pension. A further 11 per cent. of the self-employed were not making contributions, but had contributed to a personal pension in the past.

Mr. Loughton: Does the Minister agree with the recent report published by the Federation of Small Businesses which warned that any compulsory increase in contributions above the current 6 per cent. level would have a devastating effect on that area of the small business community?

Mr. Denham: Evidence to the pensions review included quite a number of submissions calling for an extension of compulsion. However, those arguments were by no means unanimous—indeed, the arguments about compulsion are by no means one-sided. We promised to look seriously at all those arguments in the welfare reform Green Paper, and we shall do that. I assure the hon. Gentleman that my officials and I have had meetings with the Federation of Small Businesses and that we are listening carefully to its concerns.

Benefit Claimants

10. **Mr. Simon Hughes** (Southwark, North and Bermondsey): What plans he has for guaranteeing a minimum payment of *(a)* benefits generally and *(b)* housing benefit to claimants within 24 hours of the claim. [53480]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Social Security (Angela Eagle): We are committed to modernising the system of delivering welfare so that it is flexible, efficient and easy to use. The Department deals with more than 20 benefits and there are more than 47 targets measuring performance on the clearance of new applications. Those targets are achieved in 90 per cent. of cases, but I recognise that, in some cases, delays are long and difficult to explain.

For housing and council tax benefits, local authorities are required by law to determine claims within 14 days of receipt of a properly completed claim form.

Mr. Hughes: Will the Minister examine the performance of the London borough of Southwark, which is delivering neither a modern nor an efficient housing benefit system? Some people wait not just for 14 days or a month but for a year, and there are tens of thousands of unprocessed housing benefit claims. Pensioners are receiving summonses for eviction, as are single parents with young children, and the whole system appears to be on the verge of complete collapse. Will the Minister investigate the situation and undertake to report on it publicly and to the House?

Angela Eagle: I am aware of the problems being experienced in Southwark. My officials have received a detailed report from the authority which confirms that there are delays. An action plan has been drawn up to clear the arrears of work that have been implemented. I have asked to receive reports from the authority so that progress on the action plan can be monitored by my officials. Southwark and the private contractors to whom it contracted the work are working together to improve the situation. I am told that the arrears of work have been reduced considerably and that the authority expects to make further progress on the work load until the situation returns to normal in November.

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham): Given the Audit Commission's recent criticisms of local councils, will the Minister publish a list of the 50 worst offenders with regard to the non or late payment of housing benefit so that hon. Members on both sides of the House can see for themselves how many Labour local authorities are in the premier league of incompetence and mismanagement in this important area?

Angela Eagle: The hon. Gentleman seems to forget that most local authorities are Labour-controlled—the good and the bad.

Pensions Review

11. **Mr. Steve Webb** (Northavon): When he plans to publish the results of his pensions review. [53482]

19. **Mr. Graham Brady** (Altrincham and Sale, West): When the Green Paper on pensions will be published. [53492]

The Minister of State for Social Security (Mr. John Denham): At the risk of repetition, as set out in our Green Paper on welfare reform, we will publish a Green Paper on pensions later this year. There will then be a period of further consultation before final proposals are developed.

Mr. Webb: When the Green Paper is finally published, will it drop the absurd pretence that the Government are guaranteeing pensioners £75 a week? Does the Minister recall writing to me during the summer and admitting that, even when the so-called guarantee is in place, half a million pensioners with weekly incomes below £75 a week will not get a penny from the so-called guarantee?

Mr. Denham: The hon. Gentleman might have done more to welcome the fact that income support will increase in April by three times the normal uprating. That means that the guaranteed minimum income, subject to the usual assessment, will be £75 a week for a single pensioner and £116.60 for a couple. That will be coupled with action to bring that benefit to pensioners who do not yet claim it,

but who are entitled to it. No Government have taken action previously in that form and on this scale, and the hon. Gentleman might have welcomed our initiative.

Mr. Brady: The hon. Gentleman has repeatedly suggested that the Green Paper is on schedule and that it will be produced by the end of the year as originally planned. However, on 15 December last year, at column 11 of *Hansard*, the Minister committed himself to publishing the Green Paper in the first half of this year. As he is now already at least four months behind schedule, will he now commit himself to publishing the paper within the next month?

Mr. Denham: We shall publish the Green Paper later this year. The hon. Gentleman should accept that we have inherited major problems from the previous Administration, including that of the large number of pensioners who do not receive the income support to which they are entitled. The previous Government refused even to admit the existence of that problem, let alone address it.

Habitual Residence Test

12. **Mr. Peter L. Pike** (Burnley): What changes he proposes in the habitual residence test. [53483]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Social Security (Angela Eagle): I expect to bring forward our proposals for the future of the habitual residence test later this year.

Mr. Pike: Does my hon. Friend agree that many British citizens who return to this country are caught by the rule introduced by the previous Government and suffer great hardship as a result of the way in which it is enforced?

Angela Eagle: I agree with my hon. Friend's observation. The habitual residence test was introduced after the right hon. Member for Hitchin and Harpenden (Mr. Lilley) sang at the Tory party conference. The rule was intended to end benefit tourism, but 76 per cent. of those who fail the habitual residence test are UK citizens. We are examining the test in great detail to determine its future and find out what can be done to make it more effective. I assure the House that we shall make changes based on facts and cool reflection rather than bigotry and performances at the Tory party conference.

Child Support Agency

13. **Mr. Gerry Sutcliffe** (Bradford, South): What steps he has taken to improve the operation of the CSA. [53486]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Social Security (Angela Eagle): We want a child maintenance service that is simple and straightforward to use and that parents can trust, but that cannot be achieved overnight, so in the meantime, we need to improve the operation of the current scheme while we discuss the radical changes that are proposed in our Green Paper.

We want the Child Support Agency to reduce clearance times, eliminate backlogs of work and improve telephone contact with its clients. To that end, we have provided the agency with an extra £12 million to improve its performance in those areas.

Mr. Sutcliffe: I know that many people will benefit from those improvements. Will my hon. Friend consider the case of a family in my constituency in which both parents were absent and the grandparents took over the care of the children? The CSA, the local authority and the Benefits Agency were unable to help in that emotional situation. The CSA should try to improve its efforts to make absent parents pay. Will my hon. Friend include other agencies in the review? The grandparents in that case were told that, if the children had been taken into care and then fostered or adopted, the Benefits Agency and local authority could have helped. I find that unforgivable.

Angela Eagle: My hon. Friend has made a serious point about what happens when neither parent is able to look after children. If he will give me the details of that case, I shall consider what can be done to assist those involved. We shall consider that issue in our response to the Green Paper.

Miss Anne McIntosh (Vale of York): Will the Minister act quickly to reply to the strong criticisms made in the first annual report by the CSA watchdog, particularly those concerning instructing staff to respond more swiftly to queries and, when assessments have been revised, to process the revision as quickly as possible?

Angela Eagle: I shall do that. The Government recognise that the system is complicated and difficult to administer. That is why we have published the Green Paper, which suggests radical reforms. I remind the hon. Lady that the previous Government asked the CSA to administer a system that is so complicated that staff must spend 90 per cent. of their time making assessments and can spend only 10 per cent. chasing up payments.

Spending Targets

15. **Mr. James Gray** (North Wiltshire): What estimates his Department has made of the increase in social security spending for each percentage point which the September retail prices index exceeds the target set by the Chancellor of the Exchequer. [53488]

The Secretary of State for Social Security (Mr. Alistair Darling): Uprating of social security benefits based on the September retail prices index will not add to our prudent spending plans. I am currently reviewing the rates of social security benefits and I will announce the uprating of social security benefits shortly.

Mr. Gray: That is all very well, but is not the right hon. Gentleman—who, in his previous incarnation as Chief Secretary to the Treasury, so signally failed to achieve any savings in the benefits budget—ashamed of the fact that his budget will increase by £37 billion during the next three years, and that there is no likelihood that there will be savings of any kind anywhere in his budget?

Mr. Darling: The hon. Gentleman's difficulty results from the fact that he tabled his question before the summer recess; now that it is October, he has got things badly wrong. However, he might like to bear in mind the fact that, under the previous Government—whom, no doubt, he supported—social security spending was

increasing at a rate of about 4 per cent. a year. Under the present Government, it is increasing by about 2 per cent. a year.

Mr. Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford and Woodford Green): I welcome the right hon. Gentleman to his place, but is not the fact that he is now in place and that his predecessor has gone an admission by the Government that they have completely failed on that agenda? My hon. Friend the Member for North Wiltshire (Mr. Gray) asked a specific question about the Government's failure to cut any costs. By their own figures, everything that they have done has raised the cost of social security. Does the right hon. Gentleman now accept that Library figures show that they inherited a budget that was falling—[HON. MEMBERS: "No, it was not."] Yes, it was. Do not those figures also show that the Government have turned the budget around, and are increasing it? What will he do seriously to reduce a budget that is rising, and costs taxpayers money?

Mr. Darling: For the past hour, I have watched the hon. Gentleman pawing like a bull desperate to enter a china shop, and now here he is. He must face the facts that, under the previous Government, social security spending was rising at about 4 per cent. a year, and that inequality and exclusion increased nevertheless.

The question that we must ask ourselves is twofold. First, what can we do to ensure that the money that we spend is spent to best effect—to provide security for those who most need it? Secondly, we must ensure that, in the proposals that we shall shortly bring forward, we implement principled reform of the welfare state, not for the next two to three years, but for the next two to three decades. I respectfully refer the hon. Gentleman to the speech that I delivered this morning—which he will, no doubt, have available to him shortly—which sets out the approach that the Government will take.

Mr. Duncan Smith: Yet again, the right hon. Gentleman has adopted his predecessor's habits; he avoids the real question. Although, at the time of the general election, Labour pledged to cut the costs, every single thing that the Government have done has increased those costs. Moreover, as growth is now falling to 1 per cent., the budget will increase by nearly £1 billion in addition to their previous increases. I therefore make the right hon. Gentleman an offer.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): What would they do?

Mr. Duncan Smith: The hon. Member for Bolsover is tossing his right hon. Friend a question, asking what the Conservatives would do. We would cut the working families tax credit, thereby increasing the budget dramatically. Why does he not do that now—saving us all money—and stop wasting our time?

Mr. Darling: Now we at least have a policy from the Opposition, and it is to take away money that is being spent to ensure that work pays for hundreds of thousands of people for whom it has not paid in the past. This Government, unlike the previous Government, are determined to take measures that reduce the number of people who are out of work, including measures to make work pay. Therefore, we are reforming the tax and benefit system and have introduced the working families tax credit. Those are examples of methods by which the Government are helping people get into work in a way that did not happen in the past.

We are determined to ensure that the social security system and the welfare state are modernised to fit the country's needs, not only in the next two to three years, but in the decades ahead. If the hon. Gentleman is serious about reform, we shall look forward to receiving his support when we propose measures to do just that.

Child Support Agency

16. **Mr. John Healey** (Wentworth): What plans he has under the proposals for reform of the Child Support Agency to ensure that maintenance payments from absent parents who are self-employed are enforced. [53489]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Social Security (Angela Eagle): As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said earlier, those are some of the most difficult cases. We are considering basing the child support assessment on the most recent year's taxable income for self-employed non-resident parents. That information will be easy for non-resident parents to provide and should result in fewer disputed assessments.

If the non-resident parent refuses to pay, prompt action will be taken to enforce payment—for example, by sending in bailiffs or deducting money from bank accounts.

Mr. Healey: I was glad to hear from my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State earlier that the Government are considering the use of the tax system in the long term to clamp down on such absent parents. What would my hon. Friend say to a constituent from Rawmarsh who contacted me last week, whose husband left her with two kids and six months pregnant? He had a £25,000-a-year job, but within weeks went self-employed and has evaded any maintenance payments since. What encouragement can my hon. Friend give to that woman and many others like her that action will be taken in the short term, not just in the long term?

Angela Eagle: In the short term, the CSA has piloted arrangements including specialist teams to deal with self-employed cases. We have evidence that that is beginning to show beneficial results. However, as I said earlier, such cases are some of the most difficult to deal with. We believe that in the medium term, dealing with them through the income tax assessment system is a more effective way in which to get to the truth in these matters.

Mr. Jonathan Sayeed (Mid–Bedfordshire): Will there be a Child Support Agency Bill in the Queen's Speech? If not, how do the Government intend to implement their new proposals?

Angela Eagle: Madam Speaker, I am sure that you would not expect me to tell anyone in the House what was in the Queen's Speech. I hope that I can reassure the hon. Gentleman that we are determined to reform the mess that the Conservatives left us when they left office, and that the promise made by my right hon. Friend the Member for Camberwell and Peckham (Ms Harman) that there would be a draft Bill next year will be fulfilled.

Kosovo

3.30 pm

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Robin Cook): With permission, I wish to make a statement on recent developments concerning Kosovo.

In mid-June, in response to demands from the international community, President Milosevic gave an undertaking not to carry out repressive action against the civilian population. That undertaking lasted for barely one month.

By late July, the Yugoslav army and the Ministry of Interior police had commenced a widespread campaign of repression throughout Kosovo. During that campaign, they made no distinction between armed guerrillas and unarmed civilians. Whole villages were shelled, crops were burnt in the field and farm animals were incinerated in their barns. A quarter of a million people—a tenth of the entire population—have become refugees.

In September, Britain and France presented to the Security Council resolution 1199, which demanded that President Milosevic cease fire; withdraw his security forces; allow refugees to return to their villages; and make a rapid start to real negotiations on self-government for Kosovo.

Two weeks ago, Britain chaired a meeting of the contact group at Heathrow. That meeting sent Dick Holbrooke back to Belgrade with a mandate from all members of the contact group, including Russia, to secure an agreement that complied with the demands of the Security Council resolution.

Last Monday, NATO unanimously took the decision to authorise air strikes on Serbian military targets. The next day, President Milosevic gave his agreement to Dick Holbrooke on a settlement that commits Yugoslavia to full compliance with resolution 1199.

There can be no Member of the House who imagines that President Milosevic would have made such a commitment if the diplomatic efforts backed by the contact group had not also been backed by the credible threat of military action by NATO. His draconian steps to close the independent press to prevent it from reporting the agreements in full underlines his dislike of being forced into them.

A key concern that drove forward our efforts over the past month was the serious risk to the homeless refugees hiding on the hillsides of Kosovo. Our most immediate concern was to enable those refugees to return to sheltered settlements before winter. I am pleased to tell the House that the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the Red Cross have been able to return to their relief work in Kosovo, and that the latest evidence suggests that refugees have started to return to their settlements. Britain has already pledged £3 million to the international aid effort.

A central part of the Holbrooke package was the agreement by President Milosevic to a political framework to deliver self-government for Kosovo. This is the first time that President Milosevic has accepted the principle of self-government for Kosovo.

That political framework provides that the police in Kosovo will be under local control. There is a commitment to free and fair elections to a Kosovo assembly and to communal administrations. These elections will be supervised not by Belgrade, but by the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe. Belgrade has been pressured to agree to a tight timetable, which commits it to an agreement with the Kosovars on the central issues by 2 November.

The international community has no intention of leaving President Milosevic to choose whether or not he honours the commitments that he has given. That is why Belgrade has been obliged to sign two separate agreements on verification. The first agreement, with the OSCE, provides for the presence throughout the whole of Kosovo of 2,000 representatives of the international community. The agreement authorises them to verify the maintenance of the ceasefire; to monitor and accompany movements of the security forces and the police; to facilitate the return of refugees; and to supervise elections, the establishment of Kosovar institutions, and the development of a locally accountable police force.

The second agreement is with NATO, and obliges President Milosevic to accept daily overflight of Kosovo by NATO reconnaissance planes to monitor movements of the security forces and to verify compliance with the ceasefire. The agreement compels the Yugoslav authorities to switch off all relevant radar systems when NATO flights are taking place, and is a retreat from President Milosevic's position hitherto, which has been that NATO could have no role within Yugoslav sovereign territory.

The verification mission will not be armed because it is not there to enforce the agreements. The agreements do, however, enable both verification missions to report to NATO. The importance that NATO attaches to compliance by Yugoslavia was spelt out to Belgrade by Javier Solana, the Secretary-General of NATO, who said after meeting Milosevic that NATO

"will remain ready and willing to act"

if Milosevic does not meet his obligations.

In the meantime, NATO has maintained its air activation order while the two verification missions are put in place.

We also expect the Kosovo Liberation Army to abide by its commitment to honour a ceasefire. Over the weekend, there have been several breaches of the ceasefire by the Kosovo Liberation Army, including the murder of four policemen. Such continuing acts of hostility serve only the interests of those who wish to undermine the political process and return to war.

It would be a grave mistake to imagine that the Holbrooke package marks the end of the international community's pressure on President Milosevic. It is only the beginning of a process that will require the full commitment of the international community to achieve stability, security and reconstruction in Kosovo.

Britain is ready to play its part in making this agreement work. We have already committed ourselves to providing 150 members of the OSCE mission, with the expectation of a further commitment to a total of 200.

On Friday, I announced that a British Major-General with considerable experience in Bosnia would head the British contribution. He and the advance party are now already in Pristina.

We will also provide Canberra aircraft to the NATO air operation over Kosovo and will supply British personnel to the NATO unit in Macedonia, which will co-ordinate the two verification missions on the ground and in the air.

As the President-in-Office of the Security Council, Britain is taking a leading role in drafting a Security Council resolution that enshrines the commitments which President Milosevic has given and underwrites the agreements with the full authority of the United Nations.

I shall leave tonight on a tour of three of the neighbours of Yugoslavia to assure them of our continuing commitment to security and stability in the region. While in Macedonia, I intend to meet leaders of the Kosovar Albanians.

As I said last week at the Paris meeting of the contact group, the agreements are not perfect. International agreements rarely are perfect. There is, however, nothing to be gained by wasting our time wishing we had a different agreement. The reasonable approach must be for us to do everything we can to make this agreement work. It will take great effort by the international community to deliver on its contribution, and it will take heavy pressure on President Milosevic to ensure that he sticks to his side of the bargain.

Britain played a leading part within the international community in putting the pressure on President Milosevic that made these agreements possible. Britain is now demonstrating that we are among the first nations to make a practical contribution towards making a success of the agreements. We will not let up on our efforts until President Milosevic carries out his commitment to withdraw forces, and until the people of Kosovo can return to their homes without fear, can rebuild their villages in peace and can start to construct a self-governing Kosovo without repression from Belgrade.

Mr. Michael Howard (Folkestone and Hythe): I am grateful to the Foreign Secretary for his statement, and for the modestly encouraging news that he has reported to the House. Does he not acknowledge that, if action had been taken along these lines in March or April, as I then urged, hundreds of lives would have been saved, hundreds of thousands of people would still be living in their homes and enormous suffering and anguish would have been prevented?

Will the right hon. Gentleman now apologise for the inaccurate information that he gave this House on 14 July, when he told us that he had introduced a ban on flights into Britain by Serbian airlines? Is it not the case—as we discovered in September—that not only was that not true but that, as late as 11 September, Foreign Office Ministers were claiming that there were clear legal reasons why it was necessary to give 12 months' notice before implementing such a ban? Why was it that what were clear legal reasons on 11 September had mysteriously vanished five days later, on 16 September, when we were told that 12 months' notice was no longer necessary? Can the Foreign Secretary confirm that that ban is now, at last, in place?

On the agreement that has now been reached, what consultation took place with representatives of the majority Albanian population of Kosovo? Why was it that a deadline for implementation was imposed and then postponed for 10 days? Did that not give precisely the wrong signal to President Milosevic?

Is it the case that the NATO planning group which has been working on contingency plans for intervention should the agreement be breached has now been stood down? If so, why?

What can the right hon. Gentleman tell us about how the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe monitors will operate? Has a clear chain of command yet been established? Will he comment on today's worrying reports of large-scale Serbian troop movements in, but not out of, Kosovo, and the cancellation of refugee aid convoys? Will he undertake to keep the House informed of the progress, or lack of it, in the implementation of the agreement? What can he tell us about the action to be taken if Milosevic does not honour the obligations that he has made?

The agreement that has been reached is to be welcomed, but on the basis of "better late than never". We must all hope that it works, but it is certainly no cause for self-congratulation.

Mr. Robin Cook: May I thank the right hon. and learned Gentleman for what I take to be the support of the Opposition for the Government's line? I rather think he failed conspicuously to rise to what is a major international challenge, and I am glad that we managed to achieve more unity out of our 15 NATO colleagues than we can achieve with the Opposition in this Chamber.

Let me deal with the particular questions that the right hon. and learned Gentleman asked. First, there were extensive consultations with the Kosovar Albanians: indeed, that is exactly why Dick Holbrooke went repeatedly to Pristina and why Christopher Hill, accompanied by our British ambassador, went to Pristina.

On the question of a deadline, I am not quite sure what the right hon. and learned Gentleman is referring to as a deadline, but the decision that was taken by the North Atlantic Council on Friday was to extend the order authorising air strikes against Serbia. I should have thought that anybody who wanted to maintain pressure on President Milosevic would welcome the fact that that authorisation remains in force for a further 10 days and, indeed, would have denounced us if we had dropped it on Friday.

On the question of current troop movements within Kosovo, at present we have no independent corroboration, but we are urgently seeking information from our monitors on the ground. The difficulty of getting precise data on what is happening there instantaneously underlines exactly why it is so important that we get 2,000 monitors in with the right to be in every town and in every village in Kosovo in order that we can be sure exactly what is happening in terms of compliance with these agreements.

Finally, let me pick up the right hon. and learned Gentleman's comment about delay in reaching this point. I dare say that, if the topic were not so tragic, his criticism would be comic in its hypocrisy. Many of us remember exactly how the last Conservative Government dithered for three years while Bosnia burned. The right hon. and learned Gentleman sat in the Cabinet for those three years, and the only reference to Bosnia that we have been able to find for that period is a statement that Britain should not take any more refugees from Bosnia. If the right hon. and learned Gentleman really wants a remedy for those three years of shameful delay, the best thing that he can do is support, not oppose, the Government's efforts to bring security and self-government to Kosovo.

Mr. Menzies Campbell (North-East Fife): May I offer the Government my support for the agreement and the

[Mr. Menzies Campbell]

statement that we have just heard? Does the Foreign Secretary agree that the expression "better late than never" would have been a very accurate description of the last Government's actions in relation to Bosnia?

Does the right hon. Gentleman feel some concern about last week's statement by the president of the Yugoslavia war crimes tribunal, deploring the fact that the Milosevic Government are refusing to surrender three individuals against whom indictments have been made? Will he confirm that it is the policy of Her Majesty's Government that Mr. Milosevic must co-operate with the war crimes tribunal, as called for in the United Nations Security Council resolution of 25 September, and that any reports to the contrary are unfounded?

If the reports of continued use of military force today are found to be correct, what response does the right hon. Gentleman think NATO is likely to make? Finally, if the monitors are to be deployed on the ground without military protection, what is to prevent them from being subject to the same kind of intimidation as was found by the representatives of UNPROFOR during the Bosnia conflict?

Mr. Cook: I thank the hon. and learned Gentleman for his support in regard to the war crimes tribunal, about which he has written to me separately. The agreement with the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe, which has been signed by Belgrade, states explicitly that the purpose of the OSCE verification mission is to verify full compliance with resolution 1199, which calls on Belgrade to co-operate fully with the war crimes tribunal.

The three individuals to whom the hon. and learned Gentleman referred have indeed been indicted. We want them to be surrendered, but we should be clear that they were indicted for offences relating to Vukovar in 1995, not to activities in Kosovo. Nevertheless, I assure the House that the Government will continue to take the most robust approach to bringing indicted war criminals to justice. I do not believe that there can be peace and reconciliation in the Balkans unless there is justice against those who have committed atrocity in war. We now have a majority of those indicted under arrest awaiting trial, and we shall continue our pressure to ensure that the rest are brought to trial.

As I am currently unable to corroborate precisely what movements are taking place in Kosovo, it would be wrong to predict what NATO should do in response; but President Milosevic should be well aware that that activation order is still in place, and the planes are still on the runway.

Mr. Tony Benn (Chesterfield): Is my right hon. Friend aware that, although there is unanimous horror at the repression, tragedy and bloodshed in Kosovo, NATO's threat to bomb Serbia is contrary to the charter of the United Nations which provides that only the Security Council can authorise military action? It is contrary to article 1 of the NATO treaty that commits NATO to the United Nations charter; it would be likely to trigger a Balkan conflict, and a restart of the cold war; and it is in marked contrast with the total neglect of the plight of the Kurdish people in north Cyprus, and their treatment by the Turkish Government.

Is my right hon. Friend also aware that NATO is not the international community, and that to talk as if he and the United States speak for the world is to undermine the authority of the United Nations itself?

Mr. Cook: The whole strategy of the past month has been built around a partnership between NATO and the contact group, which included Russia. It has also been based on Security Council resolution 1199, which was passed overwhelmingly by the Security Council and was voted for by Russia. We are seeking to obtain from President Milosevic compliance with that United Nations Security Council resolution.

As I said, I do not imagine for one minute that we would be this far forward with a commitment by President Milosevic to meet resolution 1199 if he had not believed that the threat of military action by NATO was credible. I vigorously regret the fact—as does my right hon. Friend—that we are dealing with someone in power in Belgrade who only understands the language of force, but, so long as that is the case, we are right to make it clear that we are not prepared to allow him to turn his back and to ignore the reasonable demands of the United Nations.

Mr. Peter Brooke (Cities of London and Westminster): I am, perhaps a little improbably, vice-chairman of the all-party parliamentary group on Albania. Perhaps less surprisingly, I am on the all-party parliamentary group on refugees. When, during the Labour party conference, the Foreign Secretary referred on the "Today" programme to a string of Foreign Office successes throughout the summer, was he including Kosovo in the list?

Mr. Cook: Again, I welcome the reserved support offered by the Opposition on this issue. Throughout the discussion on Kosovo today and over the past few weeks, I have eschewed any talk of triumphs or victories. What should animate us all is the humanitarian crisis among the refugees in the hillside. I condemn as offences against humanitarian law the atrocities that occurred in the villages in which the paramilitary police took action. They should be of concern to all members of humanity. I would warmly welcome it if just one Opposition Member joined us in that concern.

Mr. Mike Gapes (Ilford, South): Will the Foreign Secretary confirm that, although President Milosevic has now agreed to a move towards some kind of autonomy, the Kosovar Albanians have not? The Kosovo Liberation Army wants complete independence. What pressure is being put on the exiled organisations that fund the KLA to ensure that attacks by the KLA do not undermine this process, and do not make it impossible for the OSCE to do its work?

Mr. Cook: I must correct my hon. Friend on one point: the stated objective of the Kosovo Liberation Army is not to achieve independence for Kosovo, but to forge a greater Albania. There is no place on the international map for a greater Albania—any more than there is for a greater Serbia or a greater Croatia. As I stressed in my statement, that is why the objective of our policy is to ensure that the elected, democratic politicians of Kosovo, and not the gunmen, are left in control of Kosovo.

Resolution 1199 calls on all members of the United Nations to co-operate in halting the funding and supply of weapons to the Kosovo Liberation Army. It is important that we put every possible effort into establishing law, order and security throughout Albania, because that country has provided a springboard for the KLA.

Through this agreement, we have provided a basis on which we can take forward a political process leading to self-government for Kosovo. If any force is needed to ensure that that agreement sticks, it should be force authorised by the international community. It should not be force provided by the Kosovo Liberation Army, which, far from making the agreement stick, would undermine it and pull it apart.

Mr. Michael Colvin (Romsey): The Foreign Secretary will be aware that Western European Union has been considering the establishment of a paramilitary police force to deal with situations such as that in Kosovo. Will he confirm that it is still Her Majesty's Government's policy to resist such a formation? The right hon. Gentleman said that once law and order is restored it will be up to the civil police to maintain it. If they cannot do so, troops—preferably under NATO command—will have to go in to give them the support that they need.

The Foreign Secretary mentioned humanitarian aid. Will he take this opportunity to congratulate those—such as Mr. Bernard Sullivan in my constituency, with his Operation Angel—who continue to take humanitarian aid to that beleaguered province of Serbia under particularly difficult circumstances?

Mr. Cook: I congratulate all those who have shown courage in taking humanitarian aid to those who most need it in Kosovo. Had it not been for the international humanitarian effort, there would undoubtedly have been many more casualties among the refugees over the past month. I particularly welcome the courage and dedication shown by the staff of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees and the Red Cross in returning immediately to Kosovo without necessarily waiting for the removal of the authorisation of air strikes. It is important that they get on with their work as quickly as possible.

On Albania, I agree that we would look, and look positively, at any way in which we could assist the Albanian Government—it would have to be at their request—in securing law and order. There is a new Government of Albania, and we are in dialogue with them. If there are reasonable things we can do to assist, we shall consider them, but it must be with their agreement. Which agency provides that assistance is a matter to be considered then.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): What would be the purpose of anyone in this House denouncing the crimes committed in Kosovo if those crimes could continue to be carried out by Belgrade? With the threat of force being applied, Belgrade knows what will happen if it continues its recent policies. Would it not be wise for any criminal dictator—whether in Belgrade or Baghdad—to bear in mind what is happening to Pinochet in this country?

Mr. Cook: I counted three separate international issues in my hon. Friend's question, and I congratulate him on that. If he will forgive me, I will stick to the narrow question of Kosovo and Yugoslavia, which is quite enough to sort out in one statement. I strongly agree that there is no point in our lamenting the behaviour of President Milosevic in Kosovo if we are not prepared to show resolve in making it clear to him that the action is not an internal matter for Yugoslavia. It is a matter that concerns the rest of the international community, and we are therefore entirely correct in putting pressure on him. Secondly, if President Milosevic was convinced that he was doing the right thing in Kosovo, and that his regime had nothing to be afraid of, he could simply reopen the four newspapers and the independent radio station that he has closed and let the people of Serbia know the truth.

Mr. Crispin Blunt (Reigate): Will the Foreign Secretary confirm that the Government had intelligence last year—not least within the Ministry of Defence—that there was likely to be violence in Kosovo? Will he explain why he has led the international community in setting its face against the aspirations for Kosovar independence, not least in the conclusions of the Cardiff summit? Does he agree that the delay in international action has radicalised the Kosovar people into supporting the Kosovo Liberation Army, while the moderates in Kosovo are now frankly politically irrelevant? Will he confirm that the KLA is not a party to the international agreements, and that the path down which we are going—with the use of unarmed international monitors—is likely to lead to us needing host-nation support from Serbia to protect the monitors from the KLA during the next six months?

Mr. Cook: I am not entirely clear what conclusion the hon. Gentleman draws for action by Her Majesty's Government. First, we never comment on intelligence reports, and I have no intention of doing so on such fraught circumstances as those pertaining to Kosovo and Yugoslavia. Secondly, it is absolutely plumb flat wrong to say that Britain led the argument against independence for Kosovo. There is not a country in the region that favours independence for Kosovo, and all three countries that I will visit this week would be deeply alarmed by independence for Kosovo because of its destabilising effect on the wider region.

On the question of the moderates being marginalised, that is precisely why we attach the greatest importance to the holding of free and fair elections in Kosovo to see who has the support of the Kosovar people. The last time there were elections in Kosovo was only three months ago. The KLA urged the people of Kosovo to boycott the elections, but 80 per cent. voted—and voted overwhelmingly for Doctor Rugova.

Mr. Gordon Marsden (Blackpool, South): In welcoming my right hon. Friend's statement and the robust position taken by the British Government over the agreement, may I say that I share his view that this is only the beginning of the process? That being the case, what consultations will take place with the Governments of Greece, Albania and Bulgaria over the implementation of the agreement? Does my right hon. Friend feel that there is enough in the agreement to create a political situation in the Balkans that will prevent further destabilisation?

Mr. Cook: I will visit Bulgaria later this week, when I will hold discussions with the Prime Minister and Foreign

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Minister about how we take forward this agreement and about wider questions of Balkan security. We are, of course, in constant dialogue with Greece, which, as a member of NATO, was present at all the NATO discussions and contributed to them, but I agree with my hon. Friend that one of the important aspects of trying to achieve a stable, secure outcome is to put it in the context of the wider security of the Balkans.

What is particularly distressing about President Milosevic and one or two of the other leaders who came to power in the post-communist period is that they appear to imagine that, by rebuilding ethnically based nation states with large borders against their neighbours, they are joining the modern Europe. They are not. They are going back to an ancient Europe that the rest of Europe is leaving behind. We wish to see what ways there are of constructing a Balkans that recognises that the way forward is to bring down borders between us and to avoid building statehood on ethnic identity alone.

Mr. Nicholas Soames (Mid-Sussex): Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that it is extremely important that the observers and monitors get out into the countryside as quickly as possible, and that they stay and take up place in the villages and hamlets around the countryside, so that they become, for the purposes of the next few months, part of the community, to ensure that these poor people are not further abused?

Will the right hon. Gentleman investigate what help could be given, perhaps via what was the Overseas Development Administration, to provide building materials? People are going to come down from the mountains and face increasing cold in houses that have been brutalised beyond anything that one can possibly imagine. What they need is the ability to build roofs. Money will not do them any good. They need building materials.

Mr. Cook: The hon. Gentleman raises two important points. I assure him that we agree with him on both. First, it is vital that the monitors should be able to go anywhere they want to in Kosovo. The urgent priority must be to verify that refugees are free to come out of rural high-lying areas and into the valleys and sheltered settlements.

Secondly, when the refugees do so, they will return not to their homes, but to homes that have been blown up by the Yugoslav army. It is therefore vital that, within the next month, they have an adequate supply of corrugated iron, cement and bricks, so that they can make those places habitable to see them through the winter. We agree on both those as being high priorities.

Ms Rachel Squire (Dunfermline, West): Does my right hon. Friend agree that, whatever those on the Opposition Front Bench may say, the Kosovo conflict is amenable neither to quick solutions nor to clear-cut victories? Does he agree that the immediate priority must be to enforce the international agreement by whatever means are necessary to bring humanitarian relief to a quarter of a million refugees, to end the murder and mayhem and to allow a political process for a long-term solution to be put in place?

Mr. Cook: I absolutely agree with my hon. Friend that there is no short cut to achieving a solution to the crisis. It will take us a long time to reconstruct Kosovo and it will take us some time to achieve the self-governing status that is provided for in the agreement, but although there is no short cut to it, I assure my hon. Friend and the House that we are determined to ensure that there is maximum momentum towards that goal. That is why the agreement has set up a very tight timetable for the early stages of that political process. I hope that, within the next few months, we will be able to put in hand successful free and fair elections in Kosovo, which should change the political reality.

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip-Northwood): May I express the gravest reservations about the insertion of unarmed British personnel, especially British service personnel, in a region of such brigandry and banditry as Kosovo? Although I applaud the long-term objective, to which Mr. Milosevic has signed up, of free and fair elections for Kosovo, I shall believe it when it happens. May I also express the hope that Her Majesty's Government will not frustrate any vote by a democratically elected Parliament in Kosovo for independence, if that is what the Kosovo Parliament decides to do?

Mr. Cook: First, I am not sure that it helps to achieve understanding and reconciliation between the two sides to characterise Kosovo as an area of brigandry and banditry. Dr. Rugova is well known for his pacific approach to the political problems and for the long period during which he renounced violence as an objective. Throughout that period, he had the overwhelming support of people in the area to which the hon. Gentleman refers as one of brigandry and banditry. I agree that it is important to ensure that elections take place. The agreement lays down a clear, finite period within which they have to take place. President Milosevic has committed himself to holding the elections within nine months maximum, and I hope that it will be possible to achieve them in a shorter period. As to the hon. Gentleman's doubts about whether the elections will take place, they are to be initiated, supervised and established by the OSCE. That is the specific task of the 2,000 people on the verification mission and we will certainly give it a high priority.

Mr. Robert N. Wareing (Liverpool, West Derby): Are there any plans to provide protection for the moderate Albanian leadership under Dr. Rugova, given that one of his closest associates, Mr. Ahmet Krasnigi, was assassinated by supporters of the KLA and that another, Mr. Sabri Hamiti, has been shot—although fortunately he survived? Unless the KLA is under firm control, its members may become agents provocateurs of a new conflict within Kosovo.

Mr. Cook: First, the agreement provides for the police in Kosovo to be under the control of locally elected politicians. Therefore, it is essentially for Dr. Rugova or whoever is elected by the Kosovo people to make the appropriate arrangements for protection and security. However, I would not disagree with my hon. Friend's central point, which is that there will be some people who will seek to destabilise the agreement for their own purposes during the coming months. It is important that we are all alive to the fact that those who seek to destabilise the agreement are neither acting on behalf of

nor representative of the majority of the Kosovar people, who would like to be able to return to their homes and construct a secure and peaceful Kosovo and to get on with the process of self-government.

Mr. John Randall (Uxbridge): I am sure that hon. Members on both sides of the House are grateful for the fact that NATO forces were not used against a sovereign country. Does the Foreign Secretary agree that one of the unfortunate effects of events in recent days has been the strengthening of President Milosevic's position within Serbia and his closing down of an independent radio station and four newspapers when he was given the opportunity, because of the threats hanging over him?

Mr. Cook: I have heard the debate: it has been said that if we bombed it would strengthen President Milosevic and that if we did not bomb it would do so. The only appropriate course for NATO to take was to make a judgment on the basis of what was most likely to get an agreement out of President Milosevic. That we did and that agreement we have got. It is perverse to argue that President Milosevic is stronger and to use as evidence of that strength the fact that he has been obliged to close down four newspapers and half a dozen radio stations. That seems to argue not strength of position, but that he is only too conscious of his weakness and the extent to which he is vulnerable once the people hear the truth. Britain will continue to do everything possible to press for freer and more open media within Yugoslavia and we will be stepping up our support for the B92 radio station, to which we provide material help. Whenever we have the opportunity, we will give interviews to the independent media in Yugoslavia.

Mr. Dale Campbell-Savours (Workington): Would not the consequences of military action in the form of air strikes inevitably be that the KLA would use those air strikes to further its military and political objectives? With that in mind, should not President Milosevic be reminded of the fact that it might be better for him to do a deal now rather than face the consequences of that military action?

Mr. Cook: I absolutely agree that it was in Milosevic's own interest to resolve the situation and, frankly, to do it six months ago when he could probably have done so at a much lower price than it is necessary to extort from him now.

We have no intention of NATO being conscripted as an air force for the KLA. If we are obliged to take action, we shall do so on behalf of the people of Kosovo—and in particular to ensure that they can have democratically elected politicians ruling them, not the KLA.

Mr. Andrew Tyrie (Chichester): The Foreign Secretary said that he was hoping for understanding and reconciliation between the Serbs and the Kosovo Albanian community. Does he not think that extremely unlikely in view of the events not only of the past year but of the past decade, and especially since the Serbs decided to put aside the 1974 constitution that had given the people of Kosova a measure of independence? What support does the Holbrooke plan really enjoy in the Kosovar Albanian community?

Mr. Cook: As far as I recall it, my reference to peace and reconciliation was made to underline the importance of bringing to justice those who have committed atrocities in the course of the conflict. I stand by that: I do not think that there is a prospect of peace and reconciliation if people do not believe that judicial process can be taken against those who commit atrocities against them and outrages against humanitarian law, and I would hope that that was not a contentious or divisive statement in the House. Of course peace and reconciliation seem a long way away in many parts of the Balkans, but it is important to encourage people to look forward rather than—as is too often the tendency in the area—looking back at past grievances, even unto the 14th century.

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Inverclyde): I welcome my right hon. Friend's remarks about free and genuine elections and self-government, but I wonder how President Milosevic defines self-government. What is likely to happen if the free and genuine elections lead to a genuine demand not for autonomy but for self-government? What value will the elections have if those in power refuse to uphold the rule of law?

Mr. Cook: First, let me stress that it will not be for President Milosevic to judge whether the elections are free and fair: that will be for the international community, through the OSCE. The proposals in the agreement secured by Dick Holbrooke in Belgrade are based on the package prepared by Chris Hill and negotiated in both Belgrade and Pristina. That is the package that we now expect to be implemented under the terms of the agreement.

Elections in Kosovo will be important in strengthening the hand of those who negotiate on behalf of the Kosovar people. Part of our difficulty in brokering negotiations over the past six months has been the difficulty in identifying people who can, with authority and without controversy, speak for the Kosovar people. The elections will help us to achieve that. To a degree, it is for the parties to the negotiations to decide between them what is an acceptable arrangement. We are determined that they should get on with the negotiations and, at the very minimum, honour the commitments in the contact group package.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Madam Speaker: Were all the hon. Members rising in the Chamber to hear the whole statement? I have the impression that one hon. Member was not.

Mr. Mike Hancock (Portsmouth, South): I heard the whole statement, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Did the hon. Gentleman hear it outside, or in the Chamber?

Mr. Hancock: In the Chamber.

Madam Speaker: In that case, I will call the hon. Gentleman. I have to accept his word as an hon. Member.

Mr. Hancock: I am grateful to you for allowing me to ask a question, Madam Speaker. I was here, but I had to leave briefly to go to the surgery, for which I apologise to the House.

[Mr. Hancock]

What commitments have been sought from the KLA and the Albanians who are currently fighting in Kosovo that, given the support that they might believe they have gained in the international community, they will not turn their attentions to the 25 per cent. of Macedonia's population that is Albanian, and cause problems in that country?

Mr. Cook: It is extremely difficult to get meaningful guarantees and commitments from the KLA, partly because it denies having any central command structure and partly because it appears to have some difficulty in passing messages throughout all its units. Last week it volunteered a unilateral ceasefire, and I very much regret the fact that the events of this weekend suggest either that that commitment has been broken or that there are elements within the KLA that are not aware that it has been made.

On the question of Macedonia, I will be there myself on Wednesday and will meet the President, Prime Minister and Foreign Minister. I will give a commitment to Macedonia and its territorial integrity and I hope that the presence of an additional NATO cell, deliberately sited in Macedonia, will provide a additional token of the international community's support.

Mr. Geraint Davies (Croydon, Central): For how long will NATO forces remain on standby? In particular, will they be available until the conclusion of the elections? One can imagine a scenario, if the elections do not turn out as the Serbians wish, in which the death of a Serbian in Kosovo sparks genocide or an invasion by Serbia.

Mr. Cook: The decision made on Friday by the North Atlantic Council extended for a further 10 days the authority given to military commanders to use force. Whether another extension will then be appropriate is a matter that can be judged in the circumstances. In particular, we will want to judge the extent to which the verification missions have been put in place and are able to get on with their job. However, in the past two months, NATO has made detailed and careful preparations for intervention and NATO's members have made a commitment to provide the force to carry out the plans. Those plans will not disappear with any cancellation of the authorisation order: they will remain in place to be activated. As the Secretary-General of NATO has said, we are ready and willing to activate them if necessary.

Points of Order

4.16 pm

Mr. Nick Gibb (Bognor Regis and Littlehampton): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. In July, the Chancellor of the Exchequer made a statement in the House about the Government's spending plans for the next three years. Two weeks ago, the Chancellor told the International Monetary Fund that the growth assumptions on which those spending plans were based were wrong. Has the Chancellor requested an opportunity to present to the House a revised statement of the public finances? Is it not a contempt of the House that the only revised growth figure published by the Treasury for 1999 has been contained in spin-doctor briefings to selected journalists?

Madam Speaker: I have not been informed by the Chancellor of the Exchequer that he is seeking to make a statement today. No doubt those Ministers present will have noted the Opposition's interest in the matter and the request for a statement, and will pass the Opposition's views to the appropriate quarter.

Mr. Paul Flynn(Newport, West) : On a point of order, Madam Speaker. Will you explain to me the reasons behind one of the great mysteries of the order of business of the House? About 18 months ago, an omission was made in the prayers that we say in the House. We have also heard that the ceremony for the state opening of Parliament will be changed. Today, as a regular attender of Prayers, I noticed many changes, probably beneficial, to their form. Why are changes to the ceremonial of the House not debated by Members? Some time ago, about 150 Members expressed their unhappiness with the form of the oath that we are obliged to take. Is not it right that such changes should be discussed by hon. Members?

Madam Speaker: Along with my Chaplain, I thought that it was right to look at the prayers in the House, for which I have responsibility. At my request, the Chaplain brought some Members together from all parties to discuss the matter. Other Members were invited to submit their ideas and, indeed, I submitted my own. I thought that the prayers today were most appropriate to this modern age. I am not certain whether the hon. Gentleman was at Prayers, although I know he often is. I hope that all Members will look at our prayers, because I think they will find them most appropriate.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. Hardly a day goes by without Members of Parliament being lectured by the media on our duties and responsibilities. You may have seen some of those articles. I realise that your responsibilities only extend as far as this Chamber—you would not want them to go further—but would it be possible for you to apply your authority to remind the media that the House sits on other occasions, not only on Wednesdays between 3 and 3.30 pm? The media seem to be unaware of that fact.

Madam Speaker: I am sure that they are thanking the hon. Gentleman for his point of order.

Mr. Michael Colvin (Romsey): Further to the point made by the hon. Member for Newport, West (Mr. Flynn),

Madam Speaker. I am sure that hon. Members who were present earlier for Prayers may have arrived with some doubts but would have found the changes quite acceptable. You will recall, Madam Speaker, that our Chaplain used to come into the Chamber, take one look at the assembled Members and pray not for them but for the people whom they represented. What is it about the present Parliament that makes it so necessary to pray for Members, which we did not do previously?

Madam Speaker: I thought it absolutely right to say prayers not only for Members of Parliament but for everyone in a decision-making capacity in this country. We have to safeguard the livelihoods of people in this country, as well as internationally, and it is right to remind ourselves every day of our responsibilities in that direction. I hope that Members will read the prayers carefully and agree with what I have said.

Orders of the Day

Strategic Defence Review

[*First Day*]

[Relevant documents: Fifth report, on the Reserves Call-Out Order 1998, Etc. (HC 868); sixth report, on the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency (HC 621); seventh report (also the eighth report from the Trade and Industry Committee), on Aspects of Defence Procurement and Industrial Policy (HC 675); and eighth report, on the Strategic Defence Review (HC 138-I).]

4.20 pm

The Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. George Robertson): I beg to move,

That this House approves the conclusions of the Government's Strategic Defence Review (Cm 3999).

Events in Kosovo have underlined yet again the fact that the modern world poses difficult and complex problems for the international community. They have also demonstrated that the British people are, by instinct and inclination, internationalist. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs has already made a statement about the situation in Kosovo, and, as he told the House, the crisis is far from over. The North Atlantic Treaty Organisation and the international community are taking care to ensure that President Milosevic lives up to his undertakings.

The House will join me in recognising the critical role played by the brave men and women in our armed forces, and the sterling efforts made by everyone in the Ministry of Defence who was involved in averting a humanitarian catastrophe in a benighted region of Europe. Two weeks ago, I met Royal Air Force personnel at Gioia del Colle air base in Southern Italy, who stood ready to take action against Milosevic as part of NATO's air operations. Let me tell the House that they did not relish their task, but they were determined to carry out their duty had Ambassador Holbrooke's mission failed. They, like the rest of us, will have applauded his success. Mr. Milosevic should be under no misapprehension that they stood ready to act if he failed to come to terms. They remain there primed for action should he renege on his agreements.

That was the second time this year that I have had to contemplate giving orders to the men and women of our armed forces to risk their lives in action to face down the unacceptable behaviour of dictators who defied the collective will of the international community. In February, it was Saddam Hussein; today, it is President Milosevic. Tomorrow, they will be ready again. Our armed forces are a vital part of our armoury in helping to enforce the rule of law in an unstable world. Their response to the call in the Gulf, in the Balkans, in west and central Africa and elsewhere is a living demonstration of the policy that underpins the strategic defence review that I ask the House to endorse tomorrow.

We as a nation are not prepared to stand idly by. When it matters, we want to make a difference, and we are prepared to take a lead in doing so. That is not a question of abstract philanthropy. We have international responsibilities that it is right for us to discharge, but we also have hard-nosed interests in a peaceful, stable, prosperous and democratic Europe, in a peaceful, stable, prosperous and democratic world. We will not achieve

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this goal by staying at home and wringing our hands. That is why British forces are committed to operations in support of our interests, commitments and responsibilities in the Balkans, Cyprus, the Gulf, Africa and a dozen other places throughout the world.

Wherever they are around the world, our armed forces can be proud of the uniform they wear. I am glad to tell the House that I have decided, following discussions with the Chief of the Defence Staff, to adopt a more open approach to the wearing of uniform in public. Our current policy requires service personnel travelling off base to be in civilian clothes unless they are in a military vehicle. We will shortly promulgate guidelines to allow service men and women to choose to wear uniform as they go about their normal business in our cities, towns and villages, subject to the local security situation. That will, I believe, enhance the public's awareness of the armed forces, and will be widely welcomed, especially by the services and communities with traditional service links.

Of course, making a difference internationally will not always involve our armed forces. Difficult and complex problems require a multi-faceted response, and crisis prevention must always be better than crisis management. While it would be neither sensible nor realistic to involve British forces in every international crisis, our armed forces are a vital means for Britain to play its part in the international community. Without the ability to project, use and sustain an effective military capability in the world's trouble spots, wringing our hands is all that we would be able to do in some crises.

The ability to make an effective military contribution is what counts. Past events in the former Yugoslavia and in Somalia have demonstrated graphically what can happen if armed forces are used ineffectively. They become part of the problem, not the solution. We would be asking our young men and women to take undue risks for uncertain gains, which I am not willing to do.

I turn for a moment to the disgraceful leak of the strategic defence review White Paper in July, which I considered an affront to this House. I promised to report to the House the outcome of the inquiry that I ordered. I have done so fully today, in a written answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Battersea (Mr. Linton) which is now available to the House.

After extensive investigations, it has not been possible to identify the individual who leaked the White Paper, which is a matter of the greatest regret to me. However, the House will wish to note that the inquiry concluded that it was leaked to the Opposition Front-Bench team and that subsequently copies were made within the House and made available to journalists. Conservative Members expressed much outrage at the leak, but I regret to say that, in spite of that, the Opposition Front-Bench team refused to speak to the independent investigators.

Mr. Hugh Bayley (City of York): Does my right hon. Friend recall that, back in the summer, the Conservative Front-Bench team promised to co-operate in every way possible with the leak inquiry? What assistance did he get with the inquiry from them?

Mr. Robertson: I did not conduct the inquiry. It was conducted by independent investigators appointed by the secretary to the Cabinet. I am as bemused as my hon. Friend that the Opposition Front-Bench team, who made such a fuss at the time, first agreed an appointment with the independent investigators but later refused to meet them.

The leak was a gross discourtesy to Parliament, and, as Secretary of State, I apologise to the House once again. The House will draw its own conclusions about the way in which the White Paper subsequently found its way on to the front pages of the newspapers.

Mr. Jonathan Sayeed (Mid-Bedfordshire): Will the Minister tell the House to how many inquiries into the leak of Conservative Government papers the Labour Opposition of the time gave any help? Was there a single inquiry instituted by a Conservative Government into the leak of Government papers that came into the possession of the Labour party in which the Labour party told the investigation who was responsible for the leak?

Mr. Robertson: I am responsible only for the current Government. I cannot recall—perhaps you, Madam Speaker, will agree with me on this point—any previous leak of a White Paper in which Opposition Front Benchers received the document the previous evening, but did not indicate to the Government that it had been found.

I draw the attention of the hon. Member for Mid-Bedfordshire (Mr. Sayeed) to the occasion when, under the previous Government, the *Daily Mirror* received a leaked copy of the Budget the night before the Budget speech was due to be made. In the name of honour and decency, and to his eternal credit, the editor of that newspaper handed back the documents to the Government, because he thought that that was in the interests of the country as a whole. Had Opposition Front Benchers learned from that example, the people would have greater regard for them.

The strategic defence review was launched to give Britain the means to make a difference. It does not commit us to being a world policeman, but it does enable us to play an effective part in international solutions where we choose to become involved.

Let me make it clear: we were building on success, not on failure. Our armed forces have a record that is second to none. Their people and much of their equipment are still the best in the world, as are the civilians who work throughout defence—our fourth service. However, when in opposition, our view was that modernisation and enhancement were needed in key areas; that people had to be given higher priority; and that defence needed a coherent vision to revitalise it to meet the challenges of the 21st century. That analysis was fully confirmed as the review progressed.

Mrs. Margaret Ewing (Moray): Speaking of modernisation, will the Secretary of State comment on the article that appeared in *The Herald* today? It refers to fact that approximately 45,000 people who are serving abroad because of their involvement with the armed forces might not be allowed to vote in the Scottish elections next year. In the process of modernisation can a system be introduced to allow those people to participate in the democratic process?

Mr. Robertson: I, too, was interested to read that article this morning. It may well be that the problem has

to do with the fact that the rules applicable to local government elections apply to the Scottish Parliament elections that will take place next year. It is a matter of concern to me, and is already the subject of investigation.

I am determined that all members of the armed forces, wherever they serve, at home or abroad, will have the right to vote in next year's elections, in the same way as they have the right to vote in general elections. Their future and the future of their country will be determined by those elections, and I am sure that they will want to vote. I doubt that many will want to vote for the Scottish National party, but time will tell. The electors in Scotland turfed out every Conservative Member of Parliament, and thereby proved their intelligence. I believe that they may go on to prove it again next year.

Since I announced the outcome of the review to the House in July, it has gained good notices, both at home and as far afield as Los Angeles and Tokyo. One senior NATO official described the alliance's reaction to our proposals as "qualified rapture". I welcome that support, but I am aware that it is not enough to set the right course. What really matters is to see that course through. My hon. Friend the Member for Walsall, South (Mr. George), the Chairman of the Select Committee on Defence, was right, in the Committee's admirable report on the review, to emphasise the importance of delivering on our commitments.

Mr. Bill O'Brien (Normanton): In considering the review, I am sure that my right hon. Friend will address the position of the Territorial Army. I know that many representations have already been made on the subject, but I shall add my voice, because we in the north-east are in danger of losing up to 1,000 jobs. I understand that there is little value to be gained from transferring the headquarters from York to Edinburgh. When considering responses to the review, will the Secretary of State examine that issue so that we might retain the Territorial Army headquarters in York and also save some TA units in the Yorkshire area?

Mr. Robertson: The future of the Territorial Army was considered as part of this review. The modernising and updating of our armed forces could not neglect the valuable role that the Territorial Army plays at present and will play in the future. That is why we not only made proposals in the review—which I stand by—but said that the eventual configuration of the Territorial Army would be the subject of detailed and widespread consultation throughout the country. We are undertaking that consultation at present.

I know that hon. Members on both sides of the House will want to express their views in the course of this two-day debate about individual TA units in their constituencies. We shall listen to those views, and also those expressed in the letters that we receive in the meantime. I want to ensure that the Territorial Army is usable, relevant and better integrated into the British Army. I want its value to the British Army to increase in the future as the role of the Army changes.

As to the decision about the eventual location of the headquarters in York and Edinburgh, the Minister for the Armed Forces is considering that issue in detail, and will make a statement in due course.

Mr. Nick Hawkins (Surrey Heath): When the Secretary of State considers integrating the Territorial Army into the Regular Army, will he bear in mind representations that were made to his hon. Friends, to me and to my right hon. Friend the Member for North-West Hampshire (Sir G. Young) when we participated in the armed forces parliamentary visits scheme during the summer recess? There are implications in terms of promotion opportunities for NCOs in the Regular Army, because many senior NCOs are appointed to assist Territorial Army units. Will the Secretary of State consider the possible negative impact on morale in the Regular Army if senior NCOs do not have the opportunity of being posted to TA units?

While I am on my feet, will the Secretary of State also accept my representation not to close the TA unit in Camberley, which is one of the main homes of the British Army?

Mr. Robertson: I note the hon. Gentleman's constituency point, and we shall also bear in mind his wider point. The matter has been raised with me as I have travelled around the country, and it is an interesting and potentially important point.

The hon. Gentleman referred to morale in the Regular and the Territorial Army. I believe that it is linked strongly to the role and the relevance of the Territorial Army today. If those serving in the Territorial Army do not believe that their roles relate to the world around them, morale is inevitably affected. That is one explanation of why the Territorial Army currently loses 30 per cent. of its new intake within the first year. We have had to address that issue while considering the future of the Territorial Army and how we can make it much more usable.

Mr. Chris Mullin (Sunderland, South): My right hon. Friend will be aware that there is considerable disappointment in the north of England that we are being asked to bear a disproportionate share of the proposed cuts in the Territorial Army. Will he undertake to consider carefully the representations on that point? I know that he will have received many of them.

Mr. Robertson: My hon. Friend's point is also made by others. He refers to an initial proposal that showed where changes in the Territorial Army might be made. We have listened to representations that have come from the north-east, Scotland, Wales and elsewhere about the ultimate configuration of the Territorial Army. We have laid out the principles on which we shall base the eventual decisions, and they were agreed with the Territorial, Auxiliary and Volunteer Reserve Associations throughout the country.

We believe that the ultimate decision, which my hon. Friend the Minister for the Armed Forces will announce in due course—he will expand on this issue at the beginning of tomorrow's debate—will be in the interests of both the Territorial Army and the armed forces as a whole.

I point out to my hon. Friend the Member for Sunderland, South (Mr. Mullin) one fact that we should bear in mind—the strength of the UK's Regular Army is 110,000, so a Reserve Army of 60,000 might be slightly disproportionate to the full strength of the British Army.

[Mr. Robertson]

We are suggesting a figure that makes sense to the Army, the country and its defence. We hope that the ultimate configuration will be right.

Mr. Mike Hancock (Portsmouth, South) *rose—*

Mrs. Ewing *rose—*

Mr. Robertson: I want to continue with my speech. The hon. Lady has already intervened. The Minister for the Armed Forces, will deal with this matter in greater detail tomorrow.

I hope that, during the debate, my ministerial colleagues and I can demonstrate that we are already working towards the implementation of this review. The Minister for the Armed Forces will tomorrow set out the work that is being done to implement the vital policy for people on which so much depends, and he will also speak on the modernisation of the reserves. As I have said, modernising and strengthening the role of all the reserves—the Royal Auxiliary, the Air Force, the Royal Naval Reserve and the TA—means making them better trained, more usable and therefore more relevant. That is one of the most important initiatives in the review, and one in which I know the House is interested. We have not made decisions on the detailed implementation of the review, and when we have, I shall make a firm statement to the House.

My aim today is to set out to the House the thrust of the review, and to respond to the important points made by the Select Committee on Defence and others. My hon. Friend the Member for Walsall, South, the Chairman of the Select Committee, has been here all along. He is not in his usual seat, but he has an eagle-eye view of what is happening, and he is watching the wastes as the debate takes place.

I shall deal with some of the points made in the Committee's report, and I thank it for producing such a thorough and thoughtful assessment, much of which I agree with. The report has made an essential contribution to the wider debate on security, which I am keen to encourage. It has rightly highlighted several issues on which more work needs to be done. I am glad that the Committee has welcomed the review as

"a positive advance in formulating a defence policy for the beginning of the new millennium".

The Committee missed the target with one assertion—that the strategic defence review did not consider the wider security context for defence, and that we therefore now need another strategic security review. Let there be no doubt—the foreign and security policy framework on which the defence review was based was a comprehensive and Government-wide re-examination of the international and domestic context for defence now and well into the next century. The idea that the strategic defence review was a narrow exercise in examining defence only in traditional terms might be a reflection of the way in which such work was done in the past, but it bears no relation to the way in which we now do business.

Mr. Michael Colvin (Romsey): Will the Secretary of State give way?

Mr. Robertson: I shall give way to the deputy Chairman of the Select Committee.

Mr. Colvin: In the context of what the Secretary of State has just said, is it not regrettable that the strategic defence review did not seriously consider two aspects that are exercising the minds of our European partners: the common and foreign security policy, and the need to try to find a European security and defence identity? No doubt many hon. Members are not keen on either of those important matters, but the review should at least have considered them, and made a straight statement about the Government's policy on them.

Mr. Robertson: The hon. Gentleman is very knowledgable about this subject. The Government's view on the common foreign and security policy and how it relates to European defence was determined definitively at the Amsterdam summit and in its conclusions, which have now been passed into British domestic law. We have a comprehensive view of the role of the European Union and the Western European Union, and the European security and defence identity of NATO. It is now necessary to make sure that those roles and identities work, which the defence review has set about doing.

We must make sure that the European security and defence identity inside NATO is operational, which is the big challenge for NATO in the lead-up to the Washington summit. The challenge for the Western European Union is to take on the tasks that it has been given by the Amsterdam treaty and effectively to use its new powers. The challenge for the European Union is relevantly to apply the common foreign and security policy to events in Europe where there is no need for the United States or Canada to become involved. Far from ignoring that crucial dimension, it has been at the very heart of our policy.

One of the key recommendations made about our review by other foreign partners has concerned the way in which we have dealt with those critical issues for European countries, and found a solution. Many countries are following our example and our review process to find a better remedy for the future.

We did not simply consider the foreign and security framework; we took a broader view of defence. The Committee rightly drew attention to emerging risks such as information warfare, the problems of dealing with so-called asymmetric responses to our conventional capabilities, and the challenges that are posed by new technologies. We dealt with all those issues in the review. The strategic framework will change, and this is not a static defence review fixed in stone for ever, so we shall, throughout Government, continue closely to examine those issues.

I do not want to dwell on what the review is not, because I want to remind the House what it is about—a robust long-term vision for defence.

Mr. Ge[illegible]ey Clifton-Brown (Cotswold): Will the Secretary of State give way?

Mr. Robertson: I have been generous in giving way up to now, and I should like to make progress before doing so again.

The review is about a new emphasis on what I have called defence diplomacy—making the most of opportunities to build mutual international understanding and confidence. It is about forces that have the greatest utility in dealing with today's risks but are robust against the widest possible range of eventualities tomorrow. They must have the ability to adapt should the world change, and be able to deploy quickly, operate effectively and sustain and support themselves in difficult environments. They must be usable and relevant across the crisis spectrum.

In practice, that means a series of enhancements to build a capability fit for the next century. Those include capable joint rapid reaction forces with substantial firepower and protection, and the new strategic airlift and sealift needed rapidly to deploy those forces. They include also the vital logistics, engineering and communications assets required to support those forces once they are deployed. We shall add 3,000 personnel to the Army. We shall have a sixth deployable brigade for the Army, and we shall develop an air manoeuvre brigade centred around the awesome capability of the Apache attack helicopter.

Mr. Gerald Howarth (Aldershot): As the Secretary of State knows, 5 Airborne Brigade is readily deployable at a moment's notice, but the Select Committee has suggested that the new Airmobile Brigade will be infinitely less so. For example, one squadron of Apache helicopters may require 220 support vehicles. How quickly will the Secretary of State be able to deploy the new air mobile force, which is important for the policy projection that he has in mind?

Mr. Robertson: That was considered in great detail during the review, and I am confident that our opinion, to which the Army strongly adhered, will be proved right in practice. We believe that the configuration that we are proposing makes the most sense in terms of readiness, deployability and the wider issues of sustainability. The new configuration for the Army will make it best able to deal with future threats and crises.

Some people will always disagree. Some people can question any defence proposal. Plenty of people, retiring when still young, can express their views about these subjects in another House of this Parliament or in the newspapers, but the comprehensive view backed up by the General Staff in the Army was that this was the best way to proceed. That is the key authority for recommending the review's conclusions to the House.

A significant investment is called for in enhanced medical support, including the acquisition of a 200-bed casualty-receiving ship and the creation of a new regular ambulance regiment. Between now and the year 2001–02 we shall spend an additional £140 million on defence medical services alone. I am sure that every hon. Member recognises the folly of defence costs study 15, which led to widespread demoralisation in defence medical services.

We also need a restructured, modern, relevant and usable Territorial Army. We need to extend our power projection capability by fitting all our nuclear-powered attack submarines for the Tomahawk cruise missile. There are plans for new, larger aircraft carriers and a joint Navy and Air Force unit to operate from them.

We need a significant change to our procurement practices which, I am confident, will enable us to obtain, more rapidly and more cost-effectively than ever before, the equipment we need.

Ms Diane Abbott (Hackney, North and Stoke Newington): On procurement, my right hon. Friend must be aware that, in 1996–97, the 25 largest United Kingdom military projects had a total cost overrun of £3 billion. How can he use the results of modernisation research to modernise the management of military projects to ensure that such overruns do not occur?

Mr. Robertson: Quite dramatically. I ask my hon. Friend to study the strategic defence review and to read the supporting essays—especially the essay on procurement reform. This is one of the most radical and dramatic changes to the way in which we purchase military equipment, and I believe that it will attack the roots of the problems that my hon. Friend identified.

As a taxpayer and a representative of taxpayers, I find such cost overruns offensive. As someone in charge of the defence of the nation, I am embarrassed and offended that, over the years, we have wasted so much money on equipment that often comes too late to be used, and does not work when it comes. We must set about dealing with that, and that is precisely what the defence review sets out to do.

It is one thing to set about putting new procedures in place, but another thing entirely to make them work. I am absolutely committed as an individual—as is my Ministry as an institution—to ensuring that we get to grips with the problem that my hon. Friend the Member for Hackney, North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott) has identified, and I believe that we have one of the best chances of doing so.

Mr. Ian Bruce *rose—*

Mr. Sayeed *rose—*

Mr. Robertson: No, I will not give way.

Mr. Sayeed: Just on—

Mr. Robertson: I will not allow a pleading game initiated from the Opposition Benches, however desperately hon. Members want to get in. I have a duty to the House of Commons—

Mr. Sayeed: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Robertson: No. I will not give way, so the hon. Gentleman may sit down.

[Mr. Robertson]

A policy for people is a key part of the defence review—a policy that will contribute directly to our military capability by looking after our most valuable asset.

This is the first ever defence review to have the public and private support of the chiefs of staff. I suggest that it is the first ever defence review to increase, not cut, the strength of the Regular Army, the first ever not to abolish any Regular Army regiments, and the first ever not to abolish any Regular Army bands. I believe that that is some achievement.

Modernising our armed forces has meant taking tough decisions. Modernisation is never painless, and the recognition by the chiefs of staff that force structures and equipment priorities had to change speaks volumes for their willingness to take the longer view. That longer view includes the recognition that, for the foreseeable future, most operations will involve some type of force projection, whether deterring threats to our allies in NATO, supporting peace and security elsewhere in Europe, dealing with dictators such as Saddam Hussein or Slobodan Milosevic, or playing our part in humanitarian operations in Africa and elsewhere. However, that does not mean that we have ignored the possibility that direct threats to the United Kingdom could re-emerge. Flexible, high-capability forces, both regular and reserve, would be as essential in those circumstances as they are today.

While large nuclear arsenals and risks of proliferation remain in the world, our minimum nuclear deterrent remains a necessary element of Britain's security. Our work on information, asymmetric or unconventional warfare, biological threats, ballistic missile defence and other new technologies is designed to ensure that we shall not be taken by surprise if and when the threat starts to change.

An area where work continues is the risk to British forces deployed overseas.

Mr. Alan Simpson (Nottingham, South): The Minister must be aware that he and I have been in extensive correspondence on the nuclear issue since the review was announced. In the light of what he said about the state of the world that we have to live in, why did he feel unable to commit Britain to a no-first-use position on nuclear weapons?

Will my right hon. Friend also explain his comment to the Defence Select Committee about the sub-strategic use of nuclear weapons, where it might be possible to use them if we felt that that was not likely to provoke a response? I had some difficulty in identifying which part of England or Britain might be considered a target that would not provoke a nuclear response if we were on the receiving end, and I wondered who might—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): Order. This is far too long for an intervention, and the Secretary of State is conscious of the fact that many hon. Members are trying to speak in the debate.

Mr. Robertson: I know that my hon. Friend disagrees with party policy on this issue. I know that, quite honourably, he takes a different view from the one that was expressed in the election manifesto on which he was elected—and the draft election manifesto that was endorsed by more than 90 per cent. of Labour party members. He is perfectly entitled to do that, but it does not make him right.

Instead of going into all the details now, may I give my hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham, South (Mr. Simpson) a flavour of what the Secretary-General of the United Nations, Kofi Annan, said in a letter to me, which I received in July, about the strategic defence review? He said:

"your decision to reduce by one third the UK's stockpile of operationally available nuclear warheads . . . is an important step towards the general disarmament envisaged in Article VI of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, and at a time when developments elsewhere are subjecting it to considerable strain".

He concluded:

"Such decisions confirm the high opinion in which all of us here hold the contribution your country makes to international peace and security."

Therefore, perhaps my hon. Friend should hold close to his heart the view taken by the Labour party in its manifesto before the most recent general election—which was overwhelmingly endorsed by the people of Britain, as the election result shows—and consider it yet again.

Mr. Christopher Gill (Ludlow): Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Robertson: Not now, because of the time.

Work continues on the risk that biological and chemical weapons pose to British forces deployed overseas. In July, in addition to announcing many measures that would immediately be taken to correct inherited shortfalls in our defensive capabilities against those weapons, I said that I had in hand a detailed review of the longer-term actions necessary to ensure a coherent UK response to these threats. I shall shortly report fully to the House on the conclusions of that review. In the meantime, I have agreed with the United States Defence Secretary that the United States and the UK should establish a formal programme of co-operation on the threat posed to our forces, especially by chemical and biological weapons.

I am satisfied that the package produced by the Ministry of Defence meets Britain's security needs at a sensible price, and that the sums underpinning it add up. We have produced a more balanced, better focused and affordable programme.

Meeting our 3 per cent. annual efficiency target is essential and will be a tough task, but our track record over the past year and a half is excellent, and I am confident that we shall again rise to the challenge. To help to ensure that, I have set up a team to look across all defence in order to encourage new thinking, co-ordinate progress and oversee implementation of the review as a whole.

The Select Committee and others will, of course, scrutinise closely the process of implementing the review. Let me help them in their work by suggesting some of the key areas on which I too shall concentrate.

We must deliver our "policy for people". The Select Committee is right to identify that as a major touchstone of the review's success, and the Minister for the Armed Forces, my hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, North (Mr. Henderson), will have a good tale to tell tomorrow.

Joint service co-operation and integration will be vital to maximise the military output from defence, improve our ability to support the front line and release resources through harmonisation, standardisation and economies of scale. We are pressing ahead on the joint rapid reaction forces, and the other front-line initiatives. One of those is the formation of a joint Royal Navy/Royal Air Force Harrier force to be known as Joint Force 2000, the headquarters of which will form within RAF Strike Command in the near future.

Likewise, we are making good progress on our plans for a joint logistics organisation. The Under-Secretary of State for Defence, my hon. Friend the Member for Warley (Mr. Spellar), will have a little more to say on both those matters when he speaks later in the debate. He will also have something to say about the smart procurement initiative, on which I touched in answer to a question.

In all this, I and my ministerial colleagues will be taking a direct role. We are determined that the atmosphere of openness and co-operation that characterised the SDR should continue throughout the implementation process. We must not pretend, however, that we can implement the SDR in isolation from our allies. Kosovo is a reminder of that, if we ever needed one. That is why our work in the modernisation of NATO's strategic concept will be so important in the run-up to the summit next year.

We must work with our friends to turn European rhetoric into practical defence co-operation, enhance the UN's ability to conduct peace support missions, and maintain the multinational interoperability on which our continuing operational success depends. Will our task be easy? Certainly not. Will we achieve our objectives? Yes. Will the outcome be good for Britain's defence? I am certain that it will be.

The real test will be our ability to deal effectively with the events that all Governments confront. Today's agenda—Kosovo, the Gulf, maintaining our engagement with Russia, dealing with the security consequences of economic crisis, Northern Ireland—will all be difficult enough, but perhaps the greatest test of the SDR will be its ability to deal successfully with the challenges that we cannot yet even predict or think about.

I am confident that we have produced the right framework to achieve this. In the SDR, we have given the armed forces and all those who work in defence a robust vision for the next century. Together, we are now putting that vision into practice. At a time when Britain's armed forces are once again in the headlines as a force for good in the world, I am delighted to be able to commend our work and the motion to the House.

5.3 pm

Mr. John Maples (Stratford–on–Avon): I beg to move, To leave out from "House" to the end of the Question, and to add instead thereof:

"welcomes those aspects of the Strategic Defence Review which build on Conservative policy and which take forward jointery and rapid reaction capability; but deplores the proposed cuts in money, men, ships and planes; notes that, far from being foreign policy led, there are no clear foreign policy objectives, that defence spending between 1996–97 and 2001–2 will fall by £2,166 million in real terms with inevitable consequences for capability, that the Territorial Army is to be cut by almost one third, that the RAF is to have fewer planes and the Royal Navy fewer submarines and surface ships; seriously doubts that the planned replacements for aircraft carriers will ever be built by a Labour Government; believes that the problems of over-stretch and morale have not been adequately addressed; and deplores the fact that the armed forces will be asked to do more in a dangerous world with fewer men and less equipment."

The strategic defence review assumes that

"there is no longer a direct threat to Western Europe or the United Kingdom"

and that

"the risks to international stability seem as likely to come from other factors: ethnic and religious conflict; population and environmental pressures. . . drugs, terrorism and crime."

Only a dangerous optimist would expect that scenario to last for 17 years. For the time being, the assumptions are probably right. The east-west strategic rivalry that dominated the global security environment for more than 40 years has been fundamentally altered. It is tempting to assume that we now face no serious threat to our national security, that crises are somewhere in far-away countries and that, in the words of the White Paper, we can respond

"where we can and when we choose".

Did the end of the cold war really bring a new dawn of world peace? Some 38 countries now possess ballistic missiles. Many nations have some form of cruise missile. Several states have or are developing weapons of mass destruction and the means to deliver them. Potential adversaries still include large states with powerful militaries whose future is uncertain, like Russia, or whose intentions are unknown, like China. New traditional threats to peace have emerged: Kosovo, tensions between Iraq and the United Nations, nuclear rivalry between India and Pakistan, and the impending delivery of Russian air defence missiles to Cyprus.

As a result of Richard Holbrooke's successful diplomacy, Kosovo has, I hope, ceased to be a potential source of conflict, but that is still far from certain. Will the Secretary of State ask one of his Ministers to tell us today or when winding up tomorrow what provisions have been made for the emergency evacuation of the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe observer force? Does he think that a United Nations resolution is necessary to permit its evacuation by armed force—something that we all realise may become necessary?

The Government's handling of Kosovo has been an object lesson in how not to do it. The fault has mainly been in the Foreign Office.

"Speak softly and carry a big stick"

was Teddy Roosevelt's advice on foreign affairs. "Carry a twig and shout" seems to be the motto of our student union Foreign Secretary. Bluster and bombast have characterised his handling of the situation since the spring.

Like many others, I have lost count of the final warnings that he issued to Milosevic before going totally silent in mid-July. During that time, Milosevic reversed all the KLA gains and apparently murdered hundreds of people while making thousands of others homeless refugees. Milosevic knew that Britain did not at that time have international agreement for military action. He knew that NATO was not united and that there was little immediate possibility of a UN resolution. He had the measure of our Foreign Secretary, but the whole world now has his measure. Although I welcome the outcome of Richard Holbrooke's mission, I must say that the Foreign Secretary is lucky that the United States has rescued him from the consequences of his own belligerent rhetoric.

[Mr. John Maples]

Britain's armed forces are taken seriously by the world. They are among the best, and threats to use them must not be made lightly. By sounding off before he had the support of our allies, the Foreign Secretary not only closed off some of his own options, but put NATO's credibility at stake.

The list of potential flashpoints in the world is a long one: the Baltics, the Balkans, the Ukraine, the southern rim, Turkey and Greece, the middle east and south-east Asia. Rogue states such as Libya, Syria, Iran, Iraq and North Korea pose a new kind of threat in an age of weapons of mass destruction. The situation in Russia could develop dangerously for the west. Our security is challenged by non-state organisations and individuals like bin Laden, perhaps armed with chemical, biological or even nuclear weapons. They pose a different, but no less real, threat than the Warsaw pact.

The review has not dealt at all convincingly with the possibility of developing a ballistic missile defence. That may be feasible against a rogue state in a way that it never was against the Warsaw pact. The review says that any such decision would be premature and that we shall simply "monitor developments". However, the possibility of a missile attack on a west European country by a rogue state or terrorist group must be faced. The Select Committee says:

"the SDR's reticence on this subject represents a missed opportunity."

I agree.

With all that as background, this is surely not a time to reduce our defence capabilities and to configure what we have as though its sole task will be to support peacekeeping operations and defend western interests outside the NATO area. Commitments cannot be predicted.

I am concerned about the Government's apparent desire to act as a sort of global policeman, interfering in countries where we do not like the Government and generally being "a force for good". That seems to me to be a return to a sort of liberal imperialism, and I caution the Government about such an approach. It must sound deeply patronising to most of the world, as became apparent in India after the Foreign Secretary's ill-judged intervention there. Quite apart from that, we no longer have the military might to pursue such a policy.

Recent conflicts have only too often demonstrated the damage and humiliation that can be inflicted on first-world armies by third-world tyrants, and how much easier it is to get in than to get out. The fundamental purpose of Britain's armed forces is, and should remain, to defend Britain's vital interests.

The Government promised to modernise and reshape our armed forces. Many of their proposals build on what we began when we were in government—the concepts of joint operations and rapid deployment were started by us. We agree that the nature of modern warfare demands that we fight as a joint team. I am delighted that the Government will equip our forces with Eurofighter, Challenger 2, Apache and other projects, which were all begun by us.

The new Navy-Air Force combat helicopter and Harrier commands, and the joint logistics organisation, are interesting ideas and we look forward to seeing how well they work in practice. Similarly, I welcome the plan to form a 400-man nuclear, chemical and biological reconnaissance regiment, although I note that it appears to be solely to assist and defend deployed British forces. The review makes no mention of the possibility of an NCB attack on the United Kingdom. I am also delighted with the plan to build two new aircraft carriers and to equip them with a new fighter. When I responded to the strategic defence review in July, I expressed doubt that the Government would ever build them and was assured by the Secretary of State that they would. I was also asked by a senior naval officer—no doubt at the Secretary of State's request—to stop raising those doubts as it was very unhelpful. I thought for a moment that I was being a little too cynical—that is, until I saw the Ministry of Defence's contract bulletin of 9 September. That official Ministry of Defence document was issued six weeks after the review was published and it invites companies to tender for a project to refit the existing carriers. It says:

"Studies are required to assess the affordability of the CVS class"—

that is, the existing three aircraft carriers—

"for conversion to operate and support . . . the Anglo-US joint strike fighter. If identified as the most cost effective option, the conversion would be expected to extend the operational life of the vessels for a period of 10 years from around 2012 to 2022."

Where will the two new aircraft carriers be? It is distinctly possible that we shall not get them until 2022, so what price the Secretary of State's commitment now? He is actively considering extending the lives of the existing carriers well beyond the date when he told the House the new carriers would be in service. Clearly, there is absolutely no commitment to build the two new carriers. The Royal Navy has been comprehensively misled, and the House and the public have been misled.

Mr. George Robertson: I know that the hon. Gentleman is new to the job, but does he accept that that precise notice in the contracts bulletin is routine practice and that, when the previous Government were in office, for every major procurement decision there was a sensible requirement to ensure, for value-for-money purposes, that every option was tested? For every procurement decision for which the hon. Gentleman was taking credit a moment ago, those options were all tested. Had they not been tested, the National Audit Office would have been on the Government in a flash to ensure that things were done properly.

Mr. Maples: If it is only a formality, why was it not done before the Secretary of State gave the House a commitment to build the carriers? If he is examining the option to extend the lives of the existing carriers and goes ahead with that, he will be unable to build the new carriers. When the Secretary of State made a statement to the House on 16 July, did he know about that? If so, why did not he tell us? Why did not he tell us then that he was examining that option as an alternative to building the new carriers? If he did not know on 16 July, I presume that the idea came to him later. *[Interruption.]* This idea is important. It may not interest the hon. Member for Chorley (Mr. Hoyle), but it interests many people outside the House. It is inconceivable that that option was not discussed as part of the review, so it must have been imposed on the Secretary of State after 16 July, probably by the Treasury.

There has been an uninvited guest throughout the SDR in the person of the Chancellor. His fingerprints are all over it. Just six weeks after the publication of the review, he is insisting on examination of the new option of postponing the new carriers for a further 10 years. As we suspected, the Government are not committed to new carriers, and I reiterate my belief that they will never be built by this Government.

Mr. Sayeed: My hon. Friend is right to say that this is an empty promise from the Opposition—[HON. MEMBERS: "From the Government."] I beg your pardon, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The Government made an empty promise to build two new carriers. According to the SDR, the in-service date for the new carriers is 2012, and there is no money in the MOD's long-term costings for those carriers.

Mr. Maples: In the light of this debate, it is quite understandable that my hon. Friend should momentarily confuse the Government and the Opposition, but he reinforces my point. The good faith of the Secretary of State has been compromised and I seriously doubt whether our armed forces will believe such commitments from him in future—not because they do not trust him, but because they will now have realised that he is not in charge. The Chancellor is in charge, and the defence budget has become the Treasury's contingency reserve.

Mr. Ian Bruce: My hon. Friend spoke about the Treasury's fingerprints, but it has left footprints, if not boot marks, on the suggestion that £700 million will be raised from property sales. Does my hon. Friend know that the MOD has just frozen all the sales because it has not yet done its homework to find out what it can sell? Portland was about to be sold but has been taken off the market while the MOD tries to decide whether there is a better way to make more money from those sales.

Mr. Maples: My hon. Friend may anticipate that, when we discuss the Territorial Army, I shall suggest that that is entirely what motivates the Government—the desire to raise money from the sale of premises.

Mr. Tom King (Bridgwater): As the Secretary of State keeps pointing at me as one of his predecessors—he seeks to draw comfort for his argument by so doing—I thought that my silence might be misinterpreted. I find the case that he made extremely interesting. The invitation has gone out to tender for the possible life extension of the existing fleet and the existing carriers, and the decision has already been taken to build new carriers. As the tendering process is extremely expensive for companies, have they been assured that their costs will be refunded? Have they been told that they are merely taking part in a Treasury exercise, or is it a serious invitation to tender, in which companies will be expected to carry their own costs and to submit the best price for the work?

Mr. Maples: My right hon. Friend makes an extremely good point. The contracts tender document published on 9 September goes into elaborate detail about what is required. It says that indications of interest are required by 6 November, so it was obviously thought that it would take companies a couple of months to respond. The Secretary of State should come clean—

Mr. Lindsay Hoyle (Chorley): What does it say that it is for?

Mr. Maples: I have already gone into what it is for—*[Interruption.]* All right, if hon. Members want it again, they can have it again. On 9 September, six weeks after the Secretary of State promised the House that the Government would build two new carriers, he issued invitations to tender for a refit of the existing carriers to extend their lives from 2012 to 2022.

I know that the Secretary of State is not good at knowing where his own documents are, but if he wants this document afterwards, I shall give him a copy.

Mr. Andrew Mackinlay (Thurrock): What is the source?

Mr. Maples: It is a published document. I do not accuse the Secretary of State of having been careless with it.

As the economy turns down and the Government's over-optimistic assumptions about public spending crash into reality, the Chancellor is to conduct further raids on the defence budget. Nothing could better illustrate where the Government's priorities lie and that the Secretary of State is not master in his own house. The only way that I can see of getting those new carriers completed is to build them at Rosyth—the Chancellor would at least have an interest in their construction. *[Interruption.]* When one catches the Government out blatantly misleading the Royal Navy and the House of Commons, one is likely to get a little carried away.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I must say to the hon. Gentleman that he must watch where his parliamentary language is going. It is not in order to accuse a Minister of misleading the House, and the hon. Gentleman is skirting on the borderline of what is improper.

Mr. Maples: While on the subject of the Chancellor's involvement—[HON. MEMBERS: "Withdraw."] I was told that I was skirting on the boundaries of what was acceptable.

On the Chancellor's involvement, let us digress for a moment on the little matter of the multi-million pound refit planned for HMS Spartan. There are five Swiftsure class submarines; two have completed refits, and one is due to be completed in 2000. Each refit has cost about £200 million, and the boats will serve, on average, a further eight years before being decommissioned. HMS Splendid was due for refit at Devonport in 2003. That refit has been cancelled and the boat will be decommissioned instead. That leaves us with HMS Spartan, which is due for refit in 1999. Guess where? Rosyth.

Even though HMS Spartan will still be decommissioned in 2006, only four years after its refit, that refit is to go ahead. Forgive my cynicism, but I cannot help wondering whether the Government would be spending £150 million-plus on this refit for only four years of extra service if the work were being done at Devonport.

[Mr. Maples]

The Chancellor has not only raided the defence budget for £1 billion and forced the extension of the existing carriers' lives for 10 years, but has made sure that a major contract planned for his own constituency will go ahead when any rational consideration would have called it into question. If the Secretary of State thinks that I am being overly partisan, I am sure that he will have noticed that the Select Committee came to exactly the same conclusion at paragraph 229, which states:

"We remain unconvinced"—

that is diplomatic language for what I have said—

"that a refit for HMS Spartan, to be completed only four years before her decommissioning, represents good value for money for the taxpayer."

I must tell him that I have referred that matter to the National Audit Office. Perhaps he would like to rethink the decision before it asks for his files.

Ms Rachel Squire (Dunfermline, West): Does the hon. Gentleman disagree with the allocated programme commitment that was made by the previous Government and that this Government have had the decency to confirm? Does he believe that the previous Government's decision to award the Trident refit to Devonport was cost-effective, given the National Audit Office report? Was he, or has he been, chairman of the public affairs company that was involved in promoting Devonport's interests during that refit decision? Does he recall the previous Chancellor's decision, six weeks after defence expenditure was confirmed, to announce a further £646 million of defence cuts?

Mr. Maples: I have absolutely no problem with the allocation of work, and I have no problem with HMS Spartan being refitted at Rosyth. If HMS Splendid were being refitted, I would have no problem with it being refitted at Devonport. What I have a problem with is that, when the previous Government made those decisions, HMS Spartan was to serve for a further eight years. It is now to serve for only four, but the Government are going ahead with a refit that will cost £150 million-plus, for four years of extra life. That seems to be a bad decision. The dockyard is in the constituency of either the Chancellor or the hon. Member for Dunfermline, West (Ms Squire)—I am not quite sure which. With a boundary change, it has moved from one to the other, but both of them have an interest in it. This is a bizarre decision, and, were HMS Spartan to have been refitted at Devonport, I suspect that the contract would not have gone ahead for four years of extra service.

Serious cuts in capability are planned in the strategic defence review. Defence spending between 1996–97 and 2001-02 is planned to fall in real terms by £2,166 million, or about 10 per cent. There are to be two fewer hunter-killer submarines, three fewer surface frigates and destroyers and fewer mine counter-measures vessels in the Royal Navy. There are to be fewer fast jets in the Royal Air Force and massive cuts in the Territorial Army. In this more dangerous world, we are to ask our forces to do more with less—less in the way of ships, planes and men.

I am especially concerned at the proposed cuts in the TA. I note that the Select Committee agrees. It regards the cuts as misconceived and states, at paragraph 268:

"The cuts in the Territorial Army infantry, engineers and yeomanry are shortsighted. The Territorial Army are still a valuable resource as long term insurance against the unexpected, and re-roling should be considered before cuts. We urge the MoD to reconsider the level of cuts proposed."

In all seriousness, I say to the Secretary of State that he has made a mistake. I hope that he will look at this again in the light of the proposals that are sitting on his desk or are about to land on it. I think that he is making a damaging decision.

With a small professional Army of only 110,000 men, as we have at present, there should be a general reserve, not only to support the Regular Army, but to build on in time of crisis. If the armed forces are not to become a world apart, they need strong links with civilian society. The TA provides those links.

Plans for TA cuts have been examined in extraordinary secrecy over the past few weeks. TA staff have been forbidden to talk to local Members of Parliament; a TA officer who gave me a modest amount of advice has been reprimanded for it; the Secretary of State banned all serving personnel from attending any of my "Listening to Britain" meetings; the Secretary of State—*[Laughter.]* If Labour Members think that those meetings are so unimportant, why did the Secretary of State go to the trouble of banning anyone working for the MOD from attending them?

The Secretary of State, I suspect, has been shocked at the public hostility to his plans—no wonder he wants to proceed in secret—but we shall make sure that every TA centre that is threatened with closure knows about that threat and we shall fight those cuts in every town, every city and every county where the TA is under threat.

Not only will the overall cut be damaging, but there appears to be a lot of political interference. Despite the Secretary of State's best efforts, I am glad to tell him that I have a copy of the new schedule, and a very interesting story it tells. A third of TA centres are proposed for closure, and that will end up with the TA being concentrated in cities and large towns with virtually no presence in rural areas. There will be only two centres in Norfolk and Suffolk, and only three in the highlands and north of Scotland. That is not a national footprint.

The schedule refers to "Rundolph" house; perhaps that means Randolph house in Warley. I do not know whether it is in the constituency of the Under–Secretary of State for Defence, the hon. Member for Warley (Mr. Spellar), but it must be close. I wonder how he engineered a reprieve, because in the first set of proposals it was designated for closure. Now it is, miraculously, to stay open. By contrast, the TA centre in my constituency, Stratford-on-Avon, which was to stay open in the first review, is to close. I did not know that I had offended the Secretary of State so badly as to bring this retribution on my constituents, but closing the TA centre in Stratford-on-Avon would be damaging—there would be no TA centre between Worcester and Coventry. I know that they are an awful long way from Scotland, but there is quite a long distance between the two. We shall be asking the Secretary of State, in the strongest terms, to reverse this change.

The fingerprints of the Chancellor are all over this, too, because when he sprung his last-minute demand for efficiency savings on the MOD, more money was needed. The TA has—surprise, surprise—provided a pot of gold

that no one had thought about. Those cuts in the TA are driven not by strategic considerations, but by the desperate need to raise cash by selling off TA premises. Cuts in the TA will save about £70 million a year, which is a relatively small sum in the MOD budget, but sales of TA property will raise hundreds of millions of pounds, and that is what it is all about.

The SDR seems to be more of a review of the management and configuration of our armed forces than a review of strategy or defence policy. There is little or no attempted rationale for the strategic stance adopted, and the Select Committee appears to share that concern. It says that the SDR is dominated by a vision of the United Kingdom as a force for good in the world, that that focus may had led to neglect of the level of insurance needed for home defence and that that may need rebalancing. I do not believe that the SDR's conclusions will last for long, and I expect that frequent updates will be needed to take account of the changing international environment.

My hon. Friend the Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key) will deal with procurement issues, and my hon. Friend the Member for Mid–Norfolk (Mr. Simpson) will deal with overstretch and personnel issues; I shall deal briefly with our relationships with our allies. Apart from defence of our overseas territories, are there any circumstances in which we would be prepared to act militarily without the support of allies, particularly the United States? At present, the answer seems to me to be a resounding no.

There is much talk of a European defence identity, but such aspirations have been cruelly exposed in regard to both Bosnia and Kosovo. Both have shown that Europe is incapable of undertaking such operations on its own, without United States involvement. That is so even when France and Britain—the only European countries with expeditionary capability—are united, as they appear to have been over Kosovo.

Those who talk loudest of such a European capability are often those with little or no capability of their own. The Maastricht treaty established a foreign and security pillar. We have tried to breathe an identity into the Western European Union, and have talked a good deal about common procurement; but is not the reality, in fact, American?

Somewhat by chance, NATO reinvented itself in Bosnia, but, once again, under the leadership of the United States. The limits of the willingness of the new NATO to act have been tested again in regard to Kosovo. Probably rightly, we are reluctant to suffer casualties in pursuit of peacemaking, even if we will take the much lower risks involved in peacekeeping. Even the willingness of the United States to do that was severely shaken by its experiences in Somalia.

I was amazed to read—perhaps the Minister of State will deny this when he speaks—that the Government are considering merging the WEU into the European Union, not for any good defence purpose but as a kind of Euro-sop, to make amends for not being in the first wave of the euro. If that is true, it is pathetic. Our country's defence alliances are apparently being played with like political pawns in the Government's never-ceasing quest for the good opinions of others, regardless of the nation's true interests.

The WEU has a useful potential role, but not as part of the European Union: that would exclude Norway and Turkey, two vital NATO allies. History teaches us that—in Henry Kissinger's memorable phrase—international stability can come only from equilibrium or domination. There is, as yet, no new world order but, if there is to be one, surely it will be American for the foreseeable future. Europe's role will be subsidiary, and should be supportive. While European co-operation at all levels is vital, the context for our defence partnership must be NATO, and cannot be the European Union.

My primary concern remains that we are in danger of being over-optimistic about the threats that we may face. Conflict is the history of mankind, and history has not ended. We may not, thank God, be facing a massive nuclear exchange or a major tank war on the north German plain, but the threats that we face will be dangerous, challenging and unpredictable. The foreign policy agenda can change overnight. We shall continue to need first-class armed services, with the best possible equipment, if we are to be able to secure our national interests in the future.

The reductions in spending and capability proposed in the strategic defence review are serious, short-sighted and Treasury-driven. There will be further instalments, and we can no longer have any faith in the Government's commitments to build new carriers. My right hon. and hon. Friends and I sincerely hope that we in western Europe will live in peace and security, without the need for armed defence of our vital interests, but history tells us that that is unlikely. When the day comes, the Government and the country will regret these cuts, and it will fall to a future Conservative Government to put our defences back on a sound footing.

5.33 pm

Mr. Bruce George (Walsall, South): Any Stranger stumbling into this afternoon's proceedings will have the impression that the House is greatly divided on the issue of security. We have heard criticisms of the Government's nuclear policy; indeed, we have heard a number of criticisms from the Opposition. I must say that, as I have listened to speeches and interventions, my desire to be non-partisan has been sorely stretched, but I must fight to resist making more than the odd criticism myself. If I am going to be objectionable to the Government I should, in the interests of fairness, be objectionable to the Opposition as well.

I spent a great deal of time between 1979 and 1997 fighting and, in virtually every instance, failing to achieve the objectives of the Select Committee on Defence, in resisting virtually every cut that was introduced from 1979 onwards. I would greatly object to the flogging off of Territorial Army centres, but that criticism should be seen in the broader context of the flogging off of the Ministry of Defence housing estate to a Japanese corporation.

I must tell the Government that I am very unhappy about the reduction in our strategic submarine nuclear force from 12 to 10, but I was equally critical of the reduction from 29 to 12 by the Conservatives in the last few years. I also object to the reduction in the number of frigates and destroyers from 35 to 32, as I objected to the cuts from 65 to "about 50" and then to "about 40". I wish to be reasonably even-handed in expressing my anger at the cuts that have been made.

I believe that there is a consensus, despite the noise. As an Opposition Member, I was roundly condemned by a colleague when I argued for such a defence consensus.

[Mr. Bruce George]

If that colleague comes into the Chamber—he is not here at the moment—he may object as he did then, but I think that there is far more agreement on what has emerged as a result of the strategic defence review. I am, however, sick of reviews. I have seen more reviews than the theatre critic of the *Evening Standard*, and I do not want to see any more. Since I have been here, I have seen the Mason review, the Nott review, "Options for Change", the Rifkind mini-review, defence cost studies and the elongated strategic defence review. On behalf of the armed forces and the Defence Committee, I urge this and any future Government not to produce more reviews.

I suspect that the Secretary of State slipped in a lengthening of the procurement life of our Invincible class carriers because, between now and 2022, there will be a Conservative Government. I suspect that, having seen what has happened to the elongation of the process involving HMS Fearless and HMS Intrepid, he is merely assuring the House that some alternatives will be available if any cuts are made. One of the principal arguments of the Defence Committee report is that we are watching carefully for any backsliding, under any Government, in regard to the future security of the carrier programme.

I am pleased that some nice remarks have been made about the Committee's report. I have invited Walsall's consumer protection department to investigate the quality of the Defence Committee's three volumes and their price, as compared to the three rather thin volumes of the SDR. I must concede that the SDR is far prettier, that the paper is better and that the production is probably better, but, in terms of value for money, I urge those with money to spare to invest in our three volumes. If their enthusiasm persists, they can then turn to the SDR.

I do have a criticism of the Secretary of State. Regrettably, the Defence Committee report did not attract great attention. If the Secretary of State was accusing the Conservatives of leaking the SDR, I only wish that the Conservatives on the Defence Committee had leaked our report; we might then have received rather more publicity than we did. If there are any Defence Committee leaks in future, I am afraid that I shall have to put my hand up. Having spent 14 months producing a scintillating report, I was rather unhappy about the indifference with which it was met.

If I were a cynic or a conspiracy theorist, I would say that the Secretary of State or one of his advisers—no doubt in the Box—knew Kenneth Starr, because our report was produced on the same day as his. The subject of defence, however, does not secure the same universal enthusiasm as the behaviour of the President of the United States.

I am proud of our report. We held more than 100 meetings directly, or almost directly, related to the SDR. During a hectic two weeks, when we had 11 sessions after the production of the SDR, we asked 2,476 questions—many of them very good questions. That, if not unique, is rather unusual in the history of Select Committees.

We travelled, we invited Ministers to attend and they attended. The result was a testimony to the efficacy of the Select Committee system which, I am reluctant to say, is probably one of the weakest Select Committee systems in the western world. I recently went to Georgia in the Caucasus. Its Defence Committee is more powerful than ours, although I am delighted that the committees of Azerbaijan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan have less formal power than we do.

Mr. Crispin Blunt (Reigate): Does the Chairman of the Defence Committee agree that it is a matter of some regret that, given the centrality of foreign policy to this review, the Foreign Secretary declined our invitation to give evidence to the Committee?

Mr. George: I very much regret that, and I also regret that the shadow spokesman for the Conservative party, the hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Mr. Maples), refused my request to attend.

Mr. Blunt: The hon. Gentleman did not tell the Committee that.

Mr. George: The hon. Gentleman is sorely provoking me. I urge him to keep quiet for the next 10 minutes or so.

We produced a good report. Most people would argue that the SDR was necessary. Over the years, Governments of both persuasions have continually failed to match commitments and resources. Many of the cuts that were made under the previous Government were not preceded by the serious strategic analysis that has taken place over the past 12 months. We have had the most root-and-branch review of defence policy and the armed forces this century. However, I must take issue with the Secretary of State. The security and intelligence aspect of the SDR was less complete than I had hoped.

The fruits of the Defence Committee's labour in the form of our report will, I hope, provide for a lively debate, and will help us create greater interest in defence issues among the public. It is sad that the quality press does not have a greater number of defence correspondents, and that there is far less interest in defence matters than there was 10 or 15 years ago. Perhaps that is the price of greater consensus. I hope that one day, we shall have not only a reasonable consensus, but a high interest in defence matters, and that the debate in the past 12 months and the post-SDR publication debate will produce a greater awareness of security issues.

Our report was unanimous, which may seem rather strange given that the participants included my hon. Friend the Member for Reigate (Mr. Blunt) and my hon. Friend the Member for Leyton and Wanstead (Mr. Cohen)—I am aware of parliamentary convention when I use the term "hon. Friend". We were occasionally close to having a vote, but we never had one. The strength of the report is largely due to the seriousness with which we undertook our task. Compromises were made, but I believe that our work will be appreciated.

We generally welcome and endorse this report, and many of its conclusions and plans for the future. However, we have identified a number of critical weaknesses and omissions or partial omissions. One of our criticisms concerns the proposals for the Territorial Army. The previous Government made equally stupid proposals to reduce the number of infantry battalions, but after enormous pressure, there was an add-back of two mergers. Four regiments were going to be merged, but were saved. That that should have happened was obvious. I hope that Ministers will not take the view that those who

argue for a stronger Territorial Army are either cranks or in the pockets of their local TA. There are sound reasons for some intelligent add-back.

The Secretary of State may ask where the money is to come from. Only 2 per cent. of the defence budget is allocated to the Territorial Army, and that is incredible value for money. We may remember how difficult it was for the previous Government to provide Steven Spielberg with 500 soldiers for his film "Saving Private Ryan". In the Normandy invasions, we had 21 divisions. This nation's desire to have a well-funded and sufficiently large professional Army has diminished, and we are not taking the opportunity to provide not just a greater footprint, but a greater capability for regeneration. I hope that the Government will reconsider, and I look forward hopefully to a more favourable announcement.

Mr. James Gray (North Wiltshire): Is the hon. Gentleman aware that, if the reasonable footprint for the Territorial Army were presumed to be one infantry company per county, it would require an add-back of only about 1,750 soldiers and a small increase in the amount of money that the Treasury would be sacrificing?

Mr. George: I have not seen those figures, but I have no reason to doubt them. I hope that the Secretary of State will see sense. It would not be to the Government's detriment to say, "Okay, we recognise that there is a case, so let's add back." One of the many things that irks me somewhat is the fact that the Government, the Treasury, the Foreign Office and the Ministry of Defence got together, produced a report, did a bit of listening and compromised, but once their decision was made, down went the flag and the thin red line formed a square. Anyone outside that who dissents from their view is fired on. It is not a weakness but a strength for the Government to listen to the arguments of the Defence Committee. If adjustments can be made, I hope that they will make them.

The Territorial Army can play an important role. I fear that the Government's proposals on asymmetric warfare—terrorism, the use of nuclear, chemical and biological weapons, messing around with computers and kidnapping—are not the totality of the picture. What worries me is that asymmetric warfare is the weapon system of the dispossessed. Those are the poor man's and poor woman's weapons, and they will be used in the future. Even though the Government have said that there is no threat to our home base, more attention must be given to the matter of how we deal with asymmetric threats. Surely the Territorial Army will have a role to play, and that should be properly pursued and examined.

The SDR provided a rigorous framework for the consideration of defence and security policy, and we welcome what has been produced. I would have liked the initial section of the SDR on the foreign policy baseline to be published, but many people objected to that. The treaties of Maastricht and Amsterdam, which we signed, have enshrined the new relationship between Europe and NATO, the European Union and Western European Union. As a rabid Atlanticist, and as someone who is totally committed to NATO and not in the van of those who argue for a European defence identity that either directly or surreptitiously excludes the United States—the Government are not in that camp, whatever might have been said—I would have liked to see rather more about what we are doing about a European defence identity. The Defence Committee intends to return to that matter in a forthcoming inquiry into NATO's new strategic concept.

The Government were more open in this review than previous Governments were in earlier reviews, although openness is a relative concept. The defence review has built on what has gone on in the past, and the spin, twist or policy change is welcome. We now have forces capable of operating across a wide spectrum of locations and opportunities—from high-intensity conflict to peacekeeping or conflict prevention. I am pleased that the Government have said that there will be greater jointery, and that there has been a greater integration of the commands of the three services.

The Committee is delighted by the establishment of the new post of Chief of Defence Logistics and is pleased that the Government have said that two supply logistical chains will be necessary. These developments must be welcomed.

It is important that the carrier programme is on target. The Navy has given up a lot as part of the defence review. The Navy and other chiefs have had to accept some trade-offs. For the Navy, that means losing destroyers, frigates and submarines. There are enhancements in the form of Tomahawks, but the Navy is taking part in the hope that the carrier programme is continued and reaches fruition between 2010 and 2017.

Frankly, despite what may be said, I cannot see the Ministry of Defence remotely wishing to backslide on the matter. However, I do not have the same high enthusiasm for the Treasury's motives. The Committee has decided to conduct an annual inquiry, which we may call the potential backsliding inquiry. We will know exactly what stages are necessary throughout the procurement of the two carriers. If those tasks have not been started, or completed, we shall know that some dirty work is afoot and we will shout as loud and as long as we can to expose it. I am confident that that will not happen, but there is a long time between now and 2017 or 2020. I hope that the younger Members of Parliament who are here will carry on the fight, should it be necessary.

Mr. Gill: As well as being the Chairman of the Defence Committee, the hon. Member for Walsall, South (Mr. George) is the chairman of the all-party maritime group and therefore has a great interest in naval matters. Is it clear to his Committee exactly what commitment has been given up to allow the Government to reduce the number of surface ships, as they have done? It will not be lost on the Government that to keep one ship on a commitment requires at least one ship in refit, and perhaps one on passage. It follows that a commitment must have been given up. Is it clear what that commitment is?

Mr. George: We could hire Uri Geller as an adviser on making things disappear. The Navy has not been highly enthusiastic about losing three frigates, but that is part of the compromise. Even though the defence review was a new approach, there are elements of old approaches. Losing three frigates will impose potentially a great strain on the sailors who remain. They will have to sail long and hard, and they may see even less of their families than they do at the moment. However, that was part of the deal. All the chiefs signed up for it—nobody went public. The compromise was generally acceptable.

[Mr. George]

Ten nuclear-powered submarines to cover all the oceans of the world—bearing in mind that three or four of those will be in refit—and 32 or 33 frigates and destroyers means considerable overstretch. I addressed a US navy in Europe dinner on Saturday, where I was compelled to admit that the statistics proved that we were no longer the largest maritime nation in the world. I am afraid that the figure of 32 frigates looks puny when one realises the range of tasks. I hope that the decision was made on sound grounds and that my anxieties are unfounded.

Mr. Sayeed: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. George: No, I am sorry. I have spoken for far too long. I wish to make a few more points in winding up.

The question of the reserves has been misconceived. I hope that the package, which is finely balanced, will prove to be correct. The Committee spent considerable time looking at costings, and it would not require an enormous amount of wind to blow those costings off course. I hope that the Government's figures are sufficiently robust to survive what may happen. Many defence reviews in the past have been blown off course by war or—as may be more likely—economic circumstances. I very much hope that what the report has said on people will be delivered, and I think that the Government are sincere in their arguments. I hope that the overstretch we have seen in recent years will not recur, and that the Committee will look carefully at the matter.

On procurement, it would be wonderful to have smart procurement, having had un-smart procurement over the years. I argued truculently a few years ago that the best use of the naval college in Greenwich would be to establish a theme park for War Office, Admiralty and MOD foul-ups—I did not use the word "foul-ups". However, at the end of my study, I realised that the site was not quite large enough. I hope that we shall not see in future the procurement foul-ups that we have seen in the past. The Government are right to argue that they should look in a new way at the procurement of weapons systems. As has been mentioned, the cost overrun is unacceptable. I hope that the MOD will get it right.

Like every other defence review, the greatest area of vulnerability is the defence budget, which has reached an historically low level. Some hon. Members will dissent from what I say, but I believe that we have an obligation as Members of Parliament not necessarily to reflect public opinion immediately—although I suspect that public opinion is smarter than we are on the question of defence expenditure.

I was a Labour Member in 1982—just before the Falklands war—and I recall looking at polling data which showed that defence did not figure among the 20 issues affecting the population. Within a couple of days, it was the top issue and, at the 1983 election, it was deemed to be the second most important issue. I urge hon. Members to go back to their history books to see what a dangerous world we have lived in, are living in and—unless history has come to an end—will be living in.

Some may think that we can sustain a strong defence at a level of expenditure that is just over 2 per cent. I would argue that they are being excessively optimistic. During the last Parliament, the Defence Select Committee—then chaired by my good friend the hon. Member for Romsey (Mr. Colvin)—said that defence expenditure had fallen to such a level that, should it fall any lower, it would endanger the defence of the realm. If we wish our defence policy to be capable, any further cuts will be damaging.

We may wish to say to our constituents that we will settle down to a comfortable existence within NATO, as is enjoyed by Denmark and Belgium which, when they wish, join in. If we wish to be a force for good in the world, that will not be enough. It is not immoral to use our armed forces around the world to save people from being killed, as opposed to going around the world killing people. That may be a necessary role for our forces, and I am proud that they will be capable of doing that.

I urge all hon. Members to say that these should be the last cuts in defence expenditure, unless the Government have the guts to say that they will qualitatively change the nature of our armed forces. Perhaps the MOD was smart in making a pre-emptive strike against the Treasury by throwing money at it. I likened that to the villagers in "King Kong" hiding behind their stockades and sending out an occasional virgin in the hope that the monster would go away. *[Interruption.]* That may have been politically incorrect, but it was not meant to be.

I strongly argue that enough is enough. This defence review has done a very good job in reconciling commitments and resources, and in genuinely providing a set of forces that can meet most of our objectives, but if we come back a year from now, the world economy is blown off course and the Treasury says, "Oh well, let us have a few more cuts," and two years from now, we go down from 12 to 10 to eight submarines, or we cancel this or that, I hope that we will at least have the guts as a Parliament to say that the public therefore cannot expect us to do things that they had hitherto demanded of us. The Defence Committee says, "Eight out of 10 for the Government on their SDR."

When I made our presentation at the Royal United Services Institute, I said that we would be monitoring what is being done. I cited the words of a 1970s, early 1980s pop group, the Police, in which they said—as an aging rocker, I can recall the words—"Every step you take, every move you make, we'll be watching you."

6 pm

Mr. Menzies Campbell (North-East Fife): I hope that the hon. Member for Walsall, South (Mr. George) will forgive me if I do not follow him down the road of the metaphor of the sacrificial virgin because I fear that I might not be able to escape the charge of political incorrectness as easily as him, but it is worth remembering that, when in his party the tide of opinion was substantially against nuclear weapons, he swam with great vigour against that tide. Perhaps that is a measure of his political correctness, rather than his incorrectness.

I am sorry that he has just left, but I wanted to welcome the new Minister for the Armed Forces to these debates. He is rather more athletic than some of his predecessors, but I am sure that he will rapidly get the measure of our proceedings.

At the same time, I pay tribute to the right hon. Member for Hamilton, North and Bellshill (Dr. Reid), who was the Minister for the Armed Forces in his previous incarnation and, before that, the shadow Minister for the Armed

Forces. He made a notable contribution—sturdy and robust—and it is a measure of his sturdiness and robustness that he has gone to the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions, and is apparently, even though he owns a Jaguar, doing his best to outlaw the use of cars of a particularly high cubic capacity. We shall certainly miss him from these proceedings.

My hon. Friend the Member for Portsmouth, South (Mr. Hancock), if he has the good fortune to catch your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker, or the eye of any other occupant of the Chair tomorrow, will deal with personnel and procurement. Today I want to deal with some of the general issues that the defence review has thrown up, and with the Territorial Army, because that is an issue on which there is great concern among hon. Members on both sides of the House—and rightly so.

This defence review has turned out much better than could have been expected. Its reception was infinitely better than the Government could have expected. There is a curiosity, because the Secretary of State for Defence is unable to accept the public congratulations to which he is entitled. He cannot accept in public the plaudits of victory over the Treasury, because, to do so, he would have to concede that he has been engaged in a battle with the Treasury.

That would be a concession that the so-called foreign-policy-led review was at the very least influenced by the Treasury, so there is no public laurel wreath for the victor, but we can perhaps present our own in private, which the Secretary of State can wear in private, along with his CBE from the Federal Republic of Germany.

The defence review was memorable for its premature publication, but not for the clarity of the foreign policy objectives that the armed forces are being redesigned to support.

I think that I heard the Secretary of State say that those on the Opposition Front Bench with responsibility for defence declined to co-operate with the inquiry into the leak. If that be so, I hope that they will reflect on that decision, because I suspect that, not only inside the House but outside, some people will find it a surprising decision, and will attribute it to base motives, in the absence of any other explanation.

I had no part in those matters, but, if I had been asked to co-operate, I would certainly have done so. In a matter of the importance of the strategic defence review, it is the duty of all hon. Members to co-operate if an inquiry of that sort is set up.

The reader of the defence review document requires to show much diligence to find the detailed references to foreign policy on which it is said to be based, but, in so far as the review places a premium on flexibility, mobility, joint operations and rapid deployment, it must surely be welcomed. It is not the objectives of the review about which I have reservations, but the hopes of their implementation.

As the Chairman of the Defence Committee said, those hopes depend on defence spending. Defence spending as a proportion of gross domestic product will go down from 2.7 per cent. in 1998-99 to 2.4 per cent. in 2001–02, the lowest level in the history of the United Kingdom. When we look at the proposals in the defence review, it is clear that the savings depend on asset sales and efficiency savings.

Both are highly unpredictable, and can be blown off course by events entirely outwith one's control. Hazarding a proper budget for defence on the property market seems a fragile basis on which to rest so much that is good in the defence review. Obtaining 3 per cent. efficiency savings year after year will be more than challenging, as the Chief of the Defence Staff apparently described it to the Prime Minister. It will be miraculous if it can be done without affecting capability.

Those of us with an interest in these matters know that the enemy of sound defence is the mismatch between capability and commitments. The enemy of morale in the armed forces is overstretch of men and women and equipment. All the Government's financial assumptions will require to be accurate if we are to avoid those last two.

The Government still have time to rethink their proposals for the Territorial Army, which almost everyone with an interest in the matter, with the sole exception of the Ministry of Defence, believes to be misconceived and damaging to the defence of the realm. Why is it that, after nearly three months, the Government have not yet published and put into the public domain their detailed proposals? Is it true that there is a document circulating privately entitled "TA Restructuring", which sets out those detailed proposals? If so, why has it not been provided to the House of Commons?

Do the Government realise that the prevailing uncertainty has caused much damage to morale? What financial savings precisely do the Government expect from their proposals for the TA? How much do they expect to realise from the sale of TA drill halls and properties? What calculation has been made of the effect on recruitment to the Regular Army in Scotland, for example, if the rumoured cuts in the TA are implemented?

What account has been taken of the damage to the link between the military and the wider civilian community, which only the TA provides in so many parts of the UK? What assessment has been made of the value to the armed services in the minds of the public when there are disasters such as flooding, and TA units are visibly present and providing assistance? Are the Government seriously saying that there should be no TA engineers in Scotland? That is one of the rumours, based on leaks, of what the document contains.

Mrs. Ewing: The hon. and learned Gentleman has anticipated to a certain extent my question, but knowing of his interest in the RAF Leuchars command and the importance of RAF squadrons 236 and 237, which are based in my constituency and which played a major part during the flooding in Moray last July, does he accept that the Government are bringing forward proposals that will leave us with no engineers north of the M62?

Mr. Campbell: We cannot assert with confidence that that is precisely what is proposed, because our information on the matter is based on leaks and reference to a document that is not in the public domain, but one has only to visit any of the TA engineers' units—I have one in my constituency: 76 Engineers—to see how committed they are. One has only to visit them to see their skills, which are available to the civilian community in times of disaster. From the Government's point of view, I should have thought that this was an enormous

[Mr. Campbell]

opportunity to create and maintain good will, which will be squandered if they say that there is no longer any scope for engineer units in Scotland.

Mr. Hancock: My hon. and learned Friend has made a strong case for Scotland, and I would be interested to know his opinion about the situation in Hampshire, which is interesting.

If we are to believe the report that is supposedly circulating in the Ministry of Defence, no Territorial Army units will be based in Aldershot, the home of the British Army, 50 per cent. of all TA units will be done away with in Southampton, and the unit in Winchester, which was praised on both sides of the House in a defence debate a few months ago, is to go. There will be a sizeable cut in the TA in my constituency. So there will be a 43 per cent. cut in Hampshire, the home of the British Army.

Is my hon. and learned Friend as optimistic as the Minister that there is still time to pull back from those horrendous cuts and the effect that they will have, not only on the morale of people in the TA but on the wider population they serve?

Mr. Campbell: I use Scotland as an illustration simply because it is the area that I know best, and because there are two TA units in my constituency—76 Engineers and the Fife and Forfar Yeomanry. However, the lessons I derive from my personal experience seem to be applicable throughout the United Kingdom. I have no doubt that many hon. Members will want to draw on their personal experiences when arguing the general case for the Territorial Army, as my hon. Friend has done.

What importance do the Government attach to the voluntary ethos of the reserves? Do they not accept that the TA provides a low-cost military capability by way of an insurance in what we know to be an extremely uncertain world? Is not the truth of the matter that the proposals for the TA are driven entirely by financial considerations?

I suggest the following: the Government should postpone decisions on the Territorial Army for six months, open the books to public scrutiny and go back to the drawing board. As I said, there are two TA units in my constituency: 76 Engineers, based at RAF Leuchars, and the Fife and Forfar Yeomanry at Cupar. I have no doubt that other hon. Members have similar units at similar installations in their constituencies. Both those units have honourable traditions, and have made and continue to make a significant contribution to the life of the community and the defence effort. It would be a tragedy if they were disbanded. It would be bad defence, and also bad politics.

One question affects Scotland in particular, but has consequences for the whole of the United Kingdom. It arises out of the fact that the defence review does not refer to or give any decisions about the level of senior officer representation in Scotland.

Those who know Scotland will know that the Flag Officer Scotland and Northern Ireland, FOSNI, the Air Officer Scotland and Northern Ireland, AOSNI—the most difficult of acronyms—and the General Officer Commanding, Scotland, for the Army provide an important link with the armed services in the United Kingdom. The point that has a general rather than a limited application is that, at a time of constitutional change, when defence remains the responsibility of Westminster, such links are a visible and necessary reminder that we are a united kingdom.

The representational role played by those senior officers—for example during the general assembly of the Church of Scotland and the annual visit of the Queen—is sometimes inadequately understood outside Scotland, which is not simply a region of the United Kingdom but a part of it that has its own national institutions. By their representation at a high level, the services underpin those institutions.

There should be no watering down of those links, and no reduction of the level of representation in Scotland. Proposals to reduce costs by altering the seniority of representation in any service in Scotland would give the impression of a weakening of commitment to Scotland. The Army, Navy and Air Force in Scotland should be visibly and administratively commanded in Scotland.

Mr. Bayley: The hon. and learned Gentleman will be aware that one proposal being considered by the review is to merge the second division of United Kingdom Land Command, which is headquartered in York, with the Scottish district. He has powerfully argued a good case for the retention of a land command major-general in Scotland for the 2,600 regular troops there. As a spokesman who represents his party on defence policy throughout the United Kingdom, does he believe that there is an equally strong case for retaining a major-general to command the 10,700 regular soldiers in the north of England?

Mr. Campbell: The hon. Gentleman has been assiduous in promoting the interests of his community and constituency, and I certainly do not stand in the way of that. I have no access to the detailed financial costings on which sensible judgments could be made, but, if the Government are hell-bent on proceeding with the proposals for the Territorial Army, their obligation to ensure that the representation of the Regular Army is maintained at visible levels is almost certainly enhanced.

The Government should not be guilty of double distress—of reducing the TA throughout the country and also reducing the level of seniority of representation. We need both, and the essential link between the civilian and military communities is at grave risk of rupture unless the Government take a much more sensitive and—let us be overt about it—a much more political approach to the matters.

The intervention of the hon. Member for Moray (Mrs. Ewing) was particularly apposite. I have recently done some research on the Scottish National party, because, as the House will know, there is soon to be an election in Scotland, and that party argues for an independent Scotland with an independent navy, army and air force. Those policies have been proclaimed from the correspondence columns of the Scottish newspapers, but not, apparently, until today, from the Floor of this House.

I have checked, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and I hope that you will give the hon. Lady a warm welcome if she catches your eye. Since 1987, we have had a two-day debate on defence every year. To the best of my

researches, since 1987, the contributions made by SNP Members have been as follows: 18 October 1994, an 11-line intervention in column 156 by the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond), followed by a 10-minute speech on Rosyth in column 208; and, on 16 October 1995, when the hon. Lady joined us, she made a seven-line intervention in column 49 and, emboldened by that, an eight-line intervention the following day, in column 173.

A party that argues as strenuously as does the SNP for an independent army, air force and navy ought to be a little more robust in explaining the details of its proposals on the Floor of the House. The Scottish nationalists should not be the Scarlet Pimpernels of defence debates. We should not seek them here or seek them there. Sir Percy Blakeney is a rather curious role model for the SNP. Those who know Scottish literature will know that Quentin Durward would have been rather more appropriate.

I support an expeditionary strategy that has as its objective the fulfilment of the United Kingdom's treaty obligations, its responsibilities as a dominant member of international organisations, and the protection of its vital interests. Often, but not always, those will coincide with the interests of the United States of America, but there should not and cannot be an automatic assumption that that will always be the case. We must retain the right to exercise independent judgment.

The hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Mr. Maples), who opened the debate for the Opposition, said that the United Kingdom was not the world's policeman, but the analogy is perhaps better expressed thus: if the United States seeks to be the world's policeman, the United Kingdom should not automatically be available as its special constable.

The costs that go with an expeditionary strategy are not only financial but political, and there may even be costs in casualties. We should not lightly embrace such a strategy without accepting that, if we carry it through in all circumstances, there will eventually be a time when we pay with casualties.

If we are anxious about public opinion, which obviously influences events, it makes little sense to press on with changes in the deployment of the TA or in the level of representation in parts of the country that will split the link between the civil and military communities.

If we are to have an expeditionary strategy, we must provide the equipment with which to implement it. I support—as I believe the whole House now does—the commitment to Eurofighter, although we now have to call it Typhoon, which is rather difficult for those of us with some memory of the second world war. It is a rather different aircraft, although the name is the same.

Heavy-lift capacity makes sense. I am intrigued to hear that we are to buy or lease C17s or the equivalent, because, as far as I am aware, there is no equivalent. I confess that the Secretary of State and I have been in a C17 together, on the ground at RAF Leuchars on Battle of Britain day. Without putting words into his mouth, it would be fair to say that we were both extremely impressed, although it was a pity that he had not brought his cheque book with him.

The hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon gets rather carried away on the subject of aircraft carriers, but there is a central point in what he says that is sound and substantial: if the new generation of carriers were not built, there would be significant consequences for our expeditionary strategy. If, as the Secretary of State says, we have to be able to go to the crisis rather than having the crisis come to us, carriers are essential, especially if we believe that we may not be able to rely on host nation support. Even with a mid-life update, Invincible and her sister ships cannot be expected to run on for ever.

The Government propose to order only two carriers, so they run the risk that one will not be immediately available at a time of crisis. The advantage of having three was shown towards the end of last year and through to February this year, when we were able to deploy a carrier to the Gulf immediately, and, in due course, to arrange for its replacement. A helicopter carrier, which is one of the alternatives being touted for use if one of the two proper carriers is unavailable, would not be an adequate substitute.

Mr. Gerald Howarth: The hon. and learned Gentleman has declared strong support for the Government, except where they are falling short. He seems to be asking for more expenditure on the TA, and on more and bigger aircraft carriers. I wonder whether he is in the van of a convoy of Liberal Democrats, or whether he is out there on his own. Why did his party have no separate debate on defence at its conference? Is it Liberal party policy to increase expenditure on defence?

Mr. Campbell: The hon. Gentleman was out of the House for a bit, and we lost touch with his capacity for being partisan even in such simple exchanges as these.

Mr. Maples: Patronising.

Mr. Campbell: The hon. Gentleman is trying to patronise me and my party. We had a three-hour debate on international affairs and defence at our party conference, so the hypothesis on which his question is based is wholly inaccurate.

I believe that the current level of defence expenditure is right, and that there should be no more reduction. That is why I believe that, if the carriers can be accommodated within that expenditure, they should be, and that we should not make the marginal savings on the TA that have been proposed. To imperil our strategy for the sake of the sale of property or of efficiency savings would be extremely dangerous. The hon. Member for Aldershot (Mr. Howarth) can rest assured that, as long as I have any influence on my party's defence policy, I shall do my best to ensure that it is sound and makes common sense.

When it was produced, I criticised the document for its inadequate consideration of our defence relationship with Europe, which is dismissed in about 20 lines. Lo and behold, there are some stirrings in the undergrowth. So many reports appeared in one day that they could only be the result of some efforts at briefing, and it now appears that the Government are considering how Europe can improve its defence capability—and about time, too.

We need a Europewide defence review and a European security and defence identity that allows us to maintain an effective partnership with the United States—the bedrock of NATO—but is sufficiently developed to enable Europe to handle crises such as that in Kosovo.

[Mr. Campbell]

Of course we should be thankful for the contribution of the United States in present circumstances, but we should be ashamed that we need it.

At the very least, it is essential that we discuss with our European allies how our defence can be better co-ordinated. We are already engaged in seeking to establish better co-ordination of the defence industry in Europe; to do the same for defence itself seems to me to have an inevitable logic. If we are to have the confidence to embrace common procurement and interoperability, force specialisation may not be far behind. Nothing would be worse for the defence of Europe than individual countries unilaterally abandoning particular capabilities and making unjustified assumptions that others will continue to provide them.

Mr. Blunt: Will the hon. and learned Gentleman give way on that point?

Mr. Campbell: No, I want to make some progress.

Nuclear weapons were deliberately excluded from the review, which is entirely understandable in view of the embarrassment that unilateralism previously caused the Labour party; it was also absolutely necessary if Lord Gilbert was to be persuaded to join the Government: like old habits, old hawks die hard. The Government's policy, repeating that of their predecessors, is of minimum deterrence, regarding nuclear weapons as weapons of last resort. Those, indeed, are NATO's principles, but we expect a new NATO strategic concept in 1999, as part of the 50th anniversary celebrations, and that is bound to embrace a much-reduced reliance on nuclear weapons.

The Government have made some welcome but minor changes in the United Kingdom's nuclear posture. We welcome the restriction on Trident to Polaris levels—first called for, if I may say so, by Liberal Democrat Members, but the Government can do more: they can abandon the Moscow criterion, which says that we can regard a system as valid only if it can penetrate all the defences around Moscow; that is far in excess of the classic definition of minimum deterrence.

If the Government are, as they say, committed to our obligations under the nuclear non-proliferation treaty, why do they give the impression that they are content to wait for progress between Russia and the United States? There are steps that we can take at no risk to ourselves to provide a productive and exemplary lead.

The review's consequences are far-ranging and wide-reaching, and some very complex and difficult issues will need to be resolved. For example, the relationship between the Chief of Joint Operations and the single service chiefs is a complex and novel arrangement which we shall have to consider extremely carefully to ensure that it works as intended. The single service chiefs could simply become force providers, with a momentum towards the unification of armed services, and I would oppose that. It is wise to recognise that the new relationship may bring such consequences. I am pleased that the Royal Air Force is to remain a strategic service, although there are those who argued both before and during the review that it should become a support service.

To be fair to the Secretary of State, he recognised that a proper analysis of defence requirements is a continuing exercise and cannot be simply a snapshot. The House will need to return to these matters, through the medium not only of the Select Committee but of the single service debates, which are frequently said to be under threat. I hope that, in the light of the importance of the review and its long-lasting consequences, we will hear no more talk of abandoning such debates, which give the House the opportunity to focus on the interests of a particular service and to make a critical analysis of the review's consequences for that service.

In recent weeks, we have once again asked the men and women of all three services to be ready to face dangerous and unpredictable events. But danger and unpredictability are facts of life for every service man and woman, and we sitting comfortably here should never forget that. Part of the ritual of these parliamentary occasions is the expression of our support for the armed forces, but it should be more than ritual: it should be an affirmation of our admiration for them and a commitment that, as they do their best for us, so we will do our best for them.

6.29 pm

Mr. Syd Rapson (Portsmouth, North): Like the hon. and learned Member for North–East Fife (Mr. Campbell), I welcome the new Minister for the Armed Forces to the Front Bench, although he is not in his place at present. I wish also to thank the previous incumbent of that post. I am a member of the armed forces parliamentary scheme, as are my hon. Friend the Member for Chorley (Mr. Hoyle), the hon. Member for Lichfield (Mr. Fabricant) and my hon. Friend the Member for Jarrow (Mr. Hepburn). The four of us travel around the country and abroad, and, wherever we have met the Royal Marines, they have mentioned their great support for the previous Minister for the Armed Forces. I do not wish to detract from the other members of the team, because they also get a mention, but the previous Minister scored a hit with them. It is nice for a Labour Minister to have such support from the armed forces. They are sad to see him go, but they are pleased that his replacement is just as good.

I wish to make one or two simple points. As the Member for Portsmouth, North, my interest lies especially with the Navy. We have our fingers crossed on the possibility that there will be only two aircraft carriers in the future, and I have had much correspondence on that point. It is a good idea to have two large aircraft carriers to deter aggression rather than to deal with aggression once it has started. If we could rely on that policy to run through, everyone would see the benefit of deterring aggression. That is worth pursuing, but we must have those two aircraft carriers.

Mr. Hancock: I also represent Portsmouth, and I am sure that the hon. Gentleman is also concerned that, for long periods in the past few months, all three of the current aircraft carriers have been alongside in Portsmouth dockyard. My hon. and learned Friend the Member for North–East Fife (Mr. Campbell) made the point that, if we are to have only two aircraft carriers, we must ensure that we are ready and prepared for every eventuality. Having only two may not be the answer to future problems.

Mr. Rapson: I am sure that my Front-Bench colleagues can answer that point well later. I hope to visit HMS Ocean, which has just come on stream, in Antigua in a

few weeks' time with the other three musketeers from the armed forces scheme, and I am sure that it will provide a good back-up.

I worked for the Ministry of Defence as a civilian for 39 years before I became a Member of Parliament. I faced continual cuts in the defence budget. As a representative of Ministry of Defence employees, I oversaw the sad loss of 21,000 jobs in Portsmouth dockyard alone. In my establishment, I managed to avoid job losses, but unfortunately 200 jobs were lost after my election to Parliament.

Mr. Maples: Under Labour.

Mr. Rapson: The hon. Gentleman comments from a sedentary position, but I saw the continual undermining of the defence industry by the previous Government, through cuts made for financial reasons. Our own strategic defence review contains a hidden cut, because an efficiency saving is required which amounts to 30 per cent. over five years. Although everyone in the defence industry feels that they can work with that, it is still a cut, and people in charge will have to reduce staff numbers to save money.

I am pleased with the strategic defence review, and grateful for the way in which it has been done. I also like the aim of having armed forces that will deter aggression. However, in the back of my mind I am still worried about the long-term future of people's jobs.

Mr. Blunt: The hon. Gentleman makes his point well. Is he aware that the size of the efficiency savings sought over the next four years will amount to the equivalent of 40,000 jobs lost, not 20,000?

Mr. Rapson: I do not accept those figures. Other efficiency savings can be made. The view from inside the Ministry of Defence is that jobs need not be lost, because other efficiency savings can be made. We all know that there is still some fat to be trimmed.

I am probably one of the House's foremost experts on repairing and maintaining helicopters. That is completely useless to anyone else, and no good to me now, but I have worked on every helicopter that has been in service.

I look forward to the introduction of the first Merlin on 1 December. Unfortunately, I cannot go to Culdrose to see it, but it is a fantastic aircraft. As an engineer, I know that we overload aircraft, and the Merlin will have to be some aircraft to cope. However, we will have only the first batch of 44, because the second batch of 22 will not go ahead.

Although I understand the need for efficiency savings, it seems stupid to have a range of aging aircraft, with the stores having to carry spares and equipment for each type, instead of one type that can do all the necessary jobs well. In the long term, that would lead to savings. The second batch of Merlin aircraft should be considered, because we need to get rid of some of the old aircraft.

I was recently in South Armagh with the hon. Member for Lichfield, and we had to travel by aircraft because movement by road in the area was constricted. It would have been a disaster if we had been shot, because the parties' finances could not have stood the by-election expenses.

We travelled by helicopter and, on one occasion, three aircraft broke down as we were waiting to be picked up. We ended up in an old Wessex, which was on its last legs, but I was prepared to repair it if it broke down. The services rely on all sorts of aircraft—the Lynxes, the Gazelles, the Sea Kings and the Pumas. They have had their day, and the Merlin would completely outshine them. I hope that we can concentrate on the Merlin and make it an aircraft worth having, so that other countries will be interested in obtaining it. That will enable us to make savings.

I also wish to represent views on the airborne stand-off radar system—ASTOR. I shall blatantly promote one of the companies in the competition, because it is in my constituency. I admit a slight interest, in that the company gave me a free ticket to Farnborough and a buffet lunch. However, I assure the House that I was not bought by that bribe, and I reveal it only because I feel embarrassed about it.

Lockheed Martin is based in the IBM buildings in Portsmouth, and its ASTOR programme has impressed me. The ASTOR team showed me the mock-ups of how the system will work. I was so impressed that I went into the subject in greater depth, and I found that the British engineering content will be retained. It is important to keep that expertise in this country. Some 2,000-odd jobs are tied to it, and they would be to the UK's benefit.

British companies are involved in the scheme, and I am committed to encouraging the Government to consider, in their balanced way, the outstanding advantages of retaining jobs, expertise and efficiency in our country and helping those companies for the long term. They were the client contractors for the Merlin programme, and virtually saved it during the seven years for which they took that responsibility.

I welcome the strategic defence review. It was long needed, and was based on foreign policy rather than cuts proposed by the Treasury. I applaud the Labour Front-Bench team for choosing to have two aircraft carriers, and I hope that they will be based in Portsmouth, which we claim as the home of the British Navy. I have asked for some suggestions to be considered when they are named. It is an affront, of course, for a politician, a democratically elected representative of the people, to suggest that the people should choose a name, but I have suggested that the carriers' names should have something to do with Portsmouth.

We cannot have an HMS Portsmouth, because of the tradition that the name of a ship that has done something wrong, or sunk without credit in battle, can never be used again. Unfortunately, "HMS Portsmouth" can never again be painted on a ship, which is strange in this modern age. I hope that the powers that be will give the ships names that are something to do with Portsmouth, although I have suggested that they should be called the HMS George Robertson and HMS John Reid. Perhaps the HMS Gordon Brown would be even more to the point. I am afraid that John Spellar did not come into it.

I should not like to have the American system of naming ships. They have an HMS Ronald Reagan, and I can think of a name cropping up by popular request from

[Mr. Rapson]

some quarters that would not go down well with the rest of us. However, there should be some public involvement in the naming of future ships.

Mr. Peter Viggers (Gosport): One constituency nearly adjoining that of the hon. Gentleman contains more Navy residents than the whole of Portsmouth. Perhaps Gosport would be a suitable name.

Mr. Rapson: I never cease to be amazed at the opportunities that the hon. Gentleman takes to get in. Whatever the name, I feel that it is old-fashioned to have a small clique in a closed room picking names that are not always relevant. I hope that my argument will upset that method.

Portsmouth has a great interest in the defence industry, but the strategic defence review has not resulted in many people coming to my surgeries to raise worries. Many shop stewards are pleased with how the review has gone. As a member of the parliamentary armed forces scheme, I have been able to live day in and day out with Royal Marines in the Arctic circle and Spain, among other places, and service people have been able to talk to us as friends. My hon. Friend the Member for Chorley will confirm that they tell us the truth because they see us as friends. Mucking in together creates that camaraderie. They are comfortable with the review, and pleased with the position of the Royal Marines. We have had great feedback from them.

All power to the elbows of the Front-Bench team. We need an amphibious fast reaction force, and it seems that we will get one. The review is the best that we could get at this time, and I hope that it will improve as people respond to it.

6.43 pm

Mr. Michael Colvin (Romsey): I congratulate the hon. Member for Portsmouth, North (Mr. Rapson) on his speech. I am delighted to hear that he is a member of the armed forces parliamentary scheme. When I first came to the House, half its Members or more had experience of service in the armed forces, many of them as regulars. The numbers are down now to single figures. Similarly, at least half those on the Conservative Benches in those days had experience of farming and land owning, and those numbers, too, are down to single figures. If ever there were a case for the retention of the House of Lords, it is that the upper House still has enormous experience in both those areas. I am, however, delighted that the hon. Gentleman is on the scheme. I shall make a strong bid to have him placed on the Select Committee on Defence. He is a dab hand at repairing helicopters and he may recall that, during some of our recent visits to Bosnia, the American helicopters constantly broke down so that we had to thumb a lift from British helicopters, some of which he no doubt had a hand in maintaining during his time in industry.

It is unusual to have a Select Committee report somewhat weightier than the White Paper into which the Committee was inquiring. That is precisely what we have here, however. The report runs to 177 pages of opinion and 551 pages of evidence. It is a magnum opus in Select Committee terms. I want to record the Committee's thanks to our staff who stayed on during August to prepare the report in time for hon. Members to take it to the beach with their buckets and spades so that they could be ready for our debate today.

The hon. Member for Walsall, South (Mr. George), the Chairman of the Defence Committee, referred to the unanimity that the Committee managed to maintain. During our deliberations on the report, there was nearly a vote on the proposed aircraft carriers, but that arose over whether a newspaper cartoon might have been included in the report. There was a heated debate, as some hon. Members felt the cartoon to be appropriate while others thought that it was not right to include humour in a Select Committee report. I am afraid that the latter argument won the day.

The cartoon showed one of the proposed new aircraft carriers with the First Sea Lord and the captain looking over the bows while, down below, there were three rows of oars sticking out of the sides, as if from a Greek trireme. It seemed to us to say a lot about the strategic defence review, which contains a great many promises, but raises serious doubts about whether money will be available to keep them.

I shall pay the common courtesies of congratulating those concerned on the report before going on to what I hope will be regarded as constructive criticisms. The Secretary of State and his ministerial team can be congratulated on one of the finest governmental public relations exercises on record. Wide and intensive consultations took place, and there can be no criticism of the opportunities that many people were given to say what they thought. The question is whether those views were acted on, or whether the consultation process was no more than a PR exercise to soften us up for the report that would come after it.

The down side of such wide consultation, lasting 13 months, was a heightening of press speculation on the outcome of the review. Rumour ran rife, some of it pretty daft. The detailed contents of the SDR were leaked 24 hours before the Secretary of State's statement to the House: that was a great pity, and we have heard today what he has had to say about it. The initial reaction to the review was one of relief, and of a feeling that it could have been worse. Many of the press stories turned out to be highly exaggerated.

The fact that the defence budget now forms the lowest percentage of gross domestic product since the mid-1930s at 2.7 per cent.—and only 6.8 per cent. of total Government spending, 40 per cent. of which is on procurement—means that the Secretary of State must achieve his targets on efficiency savings, the sale of assets and smarter procurement to keep the Treasury happy.

We were repeatedly told during the consultation period that, when the SDR was published, it would be foreign policy led. However, there was no foreign policy White Paper before the review, merely the Foreign Secretary's mission statement. The failure to produce a White Paper first was a serious omission.

It has been remarked that the Defence Committee's report was published at the same time as the Starr report. A more unfortunate coincidence was the fact that the SDR was conducted during the Treasury's comprehensive spending review, which was published only one week after the SDR. The House is asked to believe, with no

foreign policy White Paper and with the two reviews running concurrently, that it was not a Treasury-led exercise.

It is difficult to fault the principal assumptions underlying the SDR. I say "principal" because some of the other assumptions are wrong. The centrality of the North Atlantic alliance to Britain's security; the importance of remaining a credible nuclear power; the confirmation of Eurofighter; maintaining the quality of our armed forces; the maintenance of a full spectrum of war fighting capability; and those key principles of war, mobility and flexibility—going to the crisis, not waiting for it to come to us, as the Secretary of State said—are all fine.

I also welcome some of the new themes in the SDR such as the changes within the force structures and the move towards more joint force formations without creating a sort of purple single defence force. That would be a great mistake. It has been tried out in other countries and been unsuccessful. There is a welcome emphasis on personnel issues and management changes in the way in which the defence establishment operates. There is also the more explicit foreign policy focus in defence policy—although, alas, we did not see a White Paper before the review came out.

If there is one area in which Ministers got the review seriously wrong, it is their plans for the Territorial Army. Every speaker has picked up on that. The heaviest force reductions fall on the TA. The plan to cut it from 56,000 personnel to only 40,000, and the recent leaks suggesting that the MOD sees the need for only 7,000 territorials, is dangerous and disastrous, as our report says. I was interested to receive letters from Territorial Army units where people have read the report and written to us saying that hon. Members do not need to elaborate on what we feel the Government have got wrong—we merely need to read out the conclusions of the report. I shall not do so, although it is a pity that we cannot do as the American Congressmen do. They can go to the lectern in the chamber, say that they want something put on record and the whole thing goes in. I draw the House's attention to the section in the Defence Committee report that deals with the TA.

The Government's basic assumption that the TA's role is home defence, and that, because the British Isles are unlikely to be invaded in the near future, it can be cut to the bone, fails to take account of its role in supporting regular troops on active service. Those of us who have been to Bosnia to see our armed forces in action realise that the TA is an important part of those forces. Some 3,500 TA personnel have served in Bosnia, both in IFOR and UNPROFOR, often in specialist roles as engineers or medical services. They are a vital element.

Mr. Gray: My hon. Friend is right to say that many TA soldiers in Bosnia serve in specialist roles, but does he not fall into the Government's hands by suggesting that the TA's job is in specialist tasks such as medicine, gunnery and signals? The point about Bosnia is that there is almost no infantry battalion there that does not have up to a company of TA infantry soldiers serving in the front line as non-specialist infantry soldiers.

Mr. Colvin: That is an important point. When the Government review their decisions on the TA, they should consider the experience of Northern Ireland and the Royal Irish Regiment. There, TA units serve alongside regular battalions as part of the same regiment. It works well. The Government must think again about the future of the Territorial Army. If there was one thing that they could have done to create uncertainty, damage morale, harm recruiting and weaken retention, it was to propose decimating the TA in this way.

Reference has been made to local interests in the TA. I was at a community centre only last Friday where I met members of a local cadet force. They were seriously worried about what would happen to the TA unit on which their cadet force was based; it was going to go. The hon. Member for Portsmouth, South (Mr. Hancock) noted that half the TA units in the city of Southampton, which I represent in part, are to go. That will seriously affect army cadet units and have a knock-on effect on recruiting. The Government must reconsider.

Although some hon. Members have suggested that this was a Treasury-led initiative because the Treasury wants to get its fingers on the proceeds of the sale of TA headquarters units, I believe that many of them belong to trusts. If sold, the money would not come to the MOD or the Treasury.

Although we are cutting our defence budget, our principal ally in NATO, the United States, has announced an increase of 10 per cent. in its defence budget. It is also recruiting reservists through the internet to fight computer hacking in high-tech cyber defence units to safeguard the Pentagon's information systems. On Saturday, *The Daily Telegraph* drew attention to the fact that the United States—having, like our previous Government, reduced its defence expenditure in the light of the collapse of the iron curtain and the new worldwide security scenario—is now seriously questioning whether it can cope with the diverse threats likely to arise today. The article states that there is

"mounting concern that American capabilities have dwindled dangerously, leaving the country ill-prepared to meet dangers posed by rogue states, weapons proliferation and rising instability in the post-Cold War era."

If the United States is having serious second thoughts about the way in which it has cut defence expenditure, so should our Government.

While I am on the importance of high-tech, the internet and computer hacking, I note that that is one area in which the territorials could be called upon to help because they are more likely to have such expertise. A report to the Pentagon from a special commission set up by the President of the United States focuses on the vulnerability of America's information and telecommunication systems. It even warns about an electronic Pearl harbour. The report in *Defense News* of 12 October states:

"There is no doubt that computer and communications networks have become the soft underbelly of America's entire economic and security system."

Today, most nations operate, whether in the military or in the civil sector, on an international electronic infrastructure; therefore, an attack on that infrastructure is an attack on all countries. NATO should put that matter on its agenda for its next summit, to be held in Washington, where NATO's new strategic concept is to be discussed, because the notion of cyber-attack on security and defence computer systems is truly worrying. The SDR does not take on board the more radical implications of the revolution in military affairs of which the microchip and smart weapons are a part.

[Mr. Colvin]

I realise that we have a credible nuclear deterrent, but does that mean that we can ignore defences against long-range ballistic missile attack? The United States is having second thoughts on that in respect of domestic defence. From newspaper reports, I understand that it now proposes to withdraw from the medium extended air defence system proposal for ballistic missile defence in Europe, in which its partners are Germany and Italy. If the US is pulling out because it has to concentrate its efforts on home defence, I wonder whether the time has come for the United Kingdom to consider going into that programme.

That leads me to the question of our defence industrial front. I congratulate the UK's industrialists on the way in which they have responded to the challenge of restructuring the European defence industry in order to compete internationally with the three giant American companies that have arisen from the US restructuring. I welcome the Government's lead in that respect and their establishment of the OCCAR body, which is doing a great deal to get commercial collaboration on major defence projects.

The seedcorn of defence industries is research and development, which can be funded either from a company's profits on the sale of defence products, or by Government. Our Committee was concerned about the proposals for the privatisation of the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency, in part or in whole. From reading between the lines of the SDR, I gather that DERA might be privatised in part. In the long-term budgeting, provision is made for the receipt of about £250 million in year 3, which seemed to us to indicate the partial sale of DERA.

Our Committee questioned the wisdom of that privatisation, because we felt that preserving DERA within the public sector would do a great deal to preserve its impartiality when carrying out evaluations and giving advice, and to win co-operation from other countries. There is a strong case in favour of companies in Europe collaborating and sharing their investment in research and development. From talks with Procurement Ministers at the Pentagon, I know that the United States, with fewer defence companies than it previously had, urgently needs partners in research and development and is willing to build on the two-way street of cross-Atlantic defence sales in terms of joint research and development projects with the United Kingdom.

Since the SDR was published, there has been escalating violence in Kosovo and the collapse of the Russian economy. As the countries of the former Soviet Union struggle to maintain domestic peace and their new democracies, they will flood international markets with military hardware in the scramble for the dollars needed to get their economies in order. There have already been reports that Russia has entered into a new arrangement with India to supply it with arms; I have seen a report that Ukraine is about to sell more than 300 tanks to Pakistan; and both Russia and Ukraine are supplying intercontinental missiles to countries that we would regard as being potentially unfriendly towards the UK.

The world is becoming increasingly unsettled. Britain's interests are world wide, as are those of many of our European partners. That is why I raised the question of the common foreign and security policy, even though I have severe reservations as to whether a European security and defence identity will ever emerge. The important point is that, whatever is done on those two fronts—incidentally, I strongly support the Government's decision in not merging Western European Union with the European Union—we must do nothing that will undermine the North Atlantic alliance, which remains the basis of Britain's and Europe's defences.

In three years' time, our defence budget will be 4 per cent. less in real terms than it is now. If the savings from smarter procurement, greater efficiency and the sale of assets are not achieved, the cut will be 8 per cent. Such a reduction in our defence resources would not be acceptable to the House, or to the people whom we represent. When the Secretary of State prepares his annual defence White Paper, will he include a progress report on how his savings targets are being met? Will he confirm that those savings, especially those arising from the sale of assets, will be retained by the Ministry of Defence, and not grabbed by the Treasury? The defence of the realm is any Government's first responsibility and, in the final analysis, the new Labour Government will be judged on their success in meeting that responsibility.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Lord): Order. Before I call the next speaker, I remind the House that, although this is a two-day debate, many hon. Members are trying to catch my eye. Unless speeches are shorter than they have been until now, many hon. Members will be disappointed.

7.6 pm

Mr. Douglas Alexander (Paisley, South): I rise to speak because of a strong constituency interest in the matters being debated. My constituency is home to 102 Field Support Squadron, Royal Engineers (Volunteers). As a result, I have taken a close interest in the strategic defence review, especially as it relates to reserve forces.

The review has been supported by the chiefs of staff. It reshapes and modernises our forces on the basis of our foreign policy needs. The review was necessary and I support it. It addresses the changed realities of the post-cold war world. The Government have recognised that the Territorial Army should no longer be a force of last resort, to be used against a major conventional threat to the United Kingdom and our NATO allies; thankfully, that possibility has become more remote. As the review states:

"the main contribution of Reserves should switch from being insurance against a struggle for national survival to supporting Regular Forces' deployments abroad, both with individuals and formed units."

The SDR suggests that the TA will in future be able to contribute to our ability to project military power abroad in pursuit of our foreign policy aims. One of the consequences of that approach is that the TA will have to be able to provide support to a full range of military roles, such as signallers, artillery, air defence and, of course, engineering capability. Against such a backdrop, I am convinced that a strong case can be made for the retention of the Paisley Royal Engineers whom I represent, without in any way undermining the integrity of the new approach to the reserve forces outlined by the Government.

The military engineering capabilities of the 143 men and women based in my constituency are ideally suited to meet the challenge of becoming more integrated into our regular forces' operations. The squadron, which has a proud 110-year history, including service in Norway, Iceland, the middle east and France, has in recent years supported the Regular Army in operations in Bosnia, Canada, Cyprus, Kenya and Northern Ireland. A brand new TA centre in Paisley is under construction and nearing completion at a cost of £2.5 million. It will provide a state-of-the-art facility that is ideally suited to allowing the engineers to meet the new challenges of greater integration with the regular forces.

Yet there is a further aspect of the strategic defence review approach to the question of the Territorial Army to which I draw the attention of the House this evening. In the supporting essays to the review, the Government mention the vital work that reserve forces carry out in the civilian community. As an example of that vital work, the Government cite military aid to flooded areas. No one can over-estimate the importance of that work to my constituents. During the floods of 1994, which so badly affected Paisley, the 102 Field Support Squadron played a critical role in providing military aid to the civilian community in circumstances of great difficulty. Similar support was provided by the squadron to the citizens of Perth when the River Tay flooded. The squadron is regularly called upon to use its engineering expertise and equipment in support of humanitarian work. In recent years, the searchlights based in Paisley have been used in support of mountain rescue teams in Arrochar, Glencoe, Ben Lomond and Crianlarich. Those examples alone make a strong case for retaining such an engineering capacity in Scotland.

I believe that there is a compelling military and civilian case for retaining the TA squadron in my constituency without undermining in any way the new role for the reserve forces that the Government have set out in the strategic defence review. I urge my right hon. Friends to bear in mind those considerations over the coming weeks as they undertake detailed work and consider how the review will impact on individual units and communities.

7.10 pm

Sir Geoffrey Johnson Smith (Wealden): We heard today a nice speech by the hon. Member for Walsall, South or North—

Mr. Blunt: Walsall, South.

Sir Geoffrey Johnson Smith: Thank you. I am still getting oriented. I know where the hon. Gentleman comes from and I see a great deal of him in the NATO parliamentary assembly, where he rules the roost and bosses committees around. We know that he will always win because his arguments are full of good common sense.

In that context, I sometimes wish that we would pay a little more attention to the reports prepared not only by the hon. Member for Walsall, South (Mr. George) but by others in that illustrious assembly. Some of those reports are regarded objectively by the world community as the best-informed non-classified documents anywhere on the subject of defence and its economics. I hope that, when we next debate Government defence policy—especially when we celebrate the 50th anniversary of NATO next year—we will recognise that parliamentary assembly, which has provided much information and performed many worthwhile duties over the years. It has tried to involve other countries through "Partnership for Peace" and comprises associate members from eastern and central Europe, including Russia. The Visegrad countries have become full members of that assembly, which I am glad to report will meet in Edinburgh this year.

I admired the Select Committee report for its objectivity. It was fair and I think that the hon. Member for Walsall, South, the Chairman of the Defence Select Committee, was also fair to the Government. We can agree with certain aspects of the Government's strategic defence review, but I shall turn later to the points of disagreement and to some of my suspicions about it.

I begin by referring to the historical context within which the hon. Gentleman viewed the report. He made an interesting comparison with previous occasions when Governments have revisited the strength of our armed forces, dating back to Napoleonic times.

Despite several unflattering comments, I should point out that I was not old enough to serve in the first world war. However, I grew up in the shadow of it. The report refers to a similar exercise conducted after the first world war to cut back the armed forces. That review proceeded and there was a mutiny in the Navy at Invergordon because the chaps were not being paid enough. Lloyd George decided eventually that the exercise could not continue and Winston Churchill persuaded the Government of the day to go no further because the armed forces were cut to the bone.

We did not begin to pick up the pieces until the 1933 report. The Royal Air Force benefited particularly from its findings and was able to provide the aircraft that saved us from national defeat in the battle of Britain. Service morale was not particularly good and the rundown of numbers and equipment in our armed forces was appalling. I saw the soldiers returning from Dunkirk and joined their ranks two years later. It is true that we were not as well trained as we should have been and that we lacked good equipment. Any good equipment that we had was sent to Africa.

I mention that point to emphasise that it is easy to cut resources. It is easy for Government bravely to grasp the nettle because they want to spend money on other things, assuming that they can turn on the tap again when they can afford to do so. As hon. Members on both sides of the House have said, it is a gamble to assume that we can preserve the efficiency of our armed forces and the quality of their equipment and training and hope that it will be paid for with efficiency gains and the sale of property. It is a gamble to assume that, within a few years, we shall be able to rebuild the loyalty of our armed forces to the cause, their discipline and the respect that they have earned from the people of this country.

Many hon. Members are present for this debate because they recognise the important links that exist with the Territorial Army. I recently attended a civic occasion in my constituency. It was a commemoration service attended by 100 or so TA soldiers. I talked to some of them and they were as keen as mustard. However, the regular officer who was in command said, "I don't think that I can do this next year. We will all be split up and the company will be reduced in number. It will be so

[Sir Geoffrey Johnson Smith]

spread out that I am not sure that I will be able to bring the men together." I think that we shall regret that consequence if we continue to assume that we are doing no harm to the TA and that it is only the front line that counts—when even that is being squeezed.

We are so short of men in Bosnia that we must draw upon TA infantry, not just specialists. The strategic defence review goes even further: it says that we must think in terms of compulsory call-out. Some members of the TA will accept compulsory call-out willingly as part of their duties. Some will welcome it as a release from their normal day-to-day jobs; they joined the Territorial Army to serve their country. However, the review refers to individual compulsory call-out. The Select Committee draws attention to the fact that, if individuals with specialty knowledge are called out, they will wonder why they are being picked on and their employers will question the policy of cherry-picking. Employers will say, "These people have special skills that are useful to my company and, although I do not mind if they are called out as part of a group when the country is in danger or there is a particularly serious problem to face, picking out one of my best engineers or someone with specialist computer skills says something about the way in which we are financing our defence force." I fear that that will put too great a strain on Territorial Army volunteers in the same way that, if we continue in this manner, we shall put too great a strain on our regular forces.

I do not wish to go into great detail, but I refer to a letter that I received from a person serving in the Green Jackets. He writes:

"We have 23 per cent. of our battalion strength from the ethnic minorities against a Regular Army figure of less than 2 per cent."

Yet do we not all recognise that we ought to aim for higher figures? We are doing so in the police force, so why not in the armed forces?

Mr. Julian Brazier (Canterbury): Does my right hon. Friend acknowledge that that is the case all over the English-speaking world? For example, the National Guard has been far more successful in attracting Hispanics and others for whom English is not the first language than the American regular forces.

Sir Geoffrey Johnson Smith: That is true. It is thought that people will be brought together into hybrid groups. I was in a regiment that was converted from anti-tank to gunners—the machine gun battalion of the Gordon Highlanders. One may ask why I joined that regiment. The war had finished; I was born in Glasgow, which made me a Glasgow highlander. I had never known such a fierce bunch. Whenever we went through a town in Bangalore and other British troops were around, they fought them almost to the death. Of course, they all drank too much, but they had fierce regimental pride. It was an honour to belong to that regiment and I would have gone anywhere with those lads. They were the cocky wee Gordons, the pride of them all; the rest were rubbish. It is such spirit that keeps alive people's loyalty to their regiment. They talk not about the Army but about their regiment. Far too great a strain is being put on that.

I hope that we can make progress on ballistic missile defence, but the role of nuclear defence is just as important. I do not want to make mischief out of that because I know that it is a complicated subject, but it is dealt with in the essays in the second part of the strategic defence review. It says:

"There is no 'silver bullet' which will provide a complete answer to the risks posed by chemical and biological weapons. What is needed is a balance of capabilities, to deter, counter, and defend against the use of such weapons."

Nothing in the strategic defence review explicitly deals with what role, if any, British nuclear weapons are to play in determining the chemical and biological weapons threat.

The only assurance that the UK gives concerning nuclear weapons is that we shall not use them against a non-nuclear state. However, if such a state is involved with another that has nuclear capability, it might be subject to nuclear retaliation. The International Security Information Service—to which I am grateful—points out that

"one question for policy makers is why should aggressors who do not have nuclear weapons but who are contemplating the use of chemical and biological weapons be given an assurance that nuclear retaliation to such use is entirely ruled out?"

I should welcome a comment on that today or tomorrow.

Dr. Julian Lewis (New Forest, East): I can, perhaps, throw a little light on this matter. In the late 1970s, the Government signed positive and negative security assurances that committed us to giving assurances that we would not respond with nuclear weapons against countries that had non-nuclear mass destruction weapons, but no nuclear mass destruction weapons. I hope that my right hon. Friend is making the point—which I intend to emphasise if I am fortunate enough to catch your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker—that those assurances should be rescinded, particularly in the light of the fact that biological weapons have not been abolished, although that was supposed to have happened in 1972.

Sir Geoffrey Johnson Smith: That is an interesting point that must be followed up. The Secretary of State said that talks were going on with the United States to find out whether a policy can be developed to deal with that vexatious problem. In addition to the question of how we respond on that matter, there is the problem of the ballistic missile defence system.

Several hon. Members have referred to the European defence identity. The House will be aware, as the Secretary of State informed us earlier, that there has been a great analysis of the manner in which the European defence manufacturing industries should work together and copy the Americans by providing more effective and efficient defence manufacturing. We should heed the report and take that wise step. The Government welcome that and there is no dispute in the House on that matter.

The consolidation of European defence manufacturing industry is absolutely vital. The current structure is inefficient, today's markets are smaller and there is not as much money to spend on expensive weapons systems. I am also concerned about the growing technological gap between the European forces and our own, which makes it increasingly difficult to co-operate in important peacekeeping missions, let alone going to war. There are threats that European members of NATO could face that would demand our attention without us asking for, and expecting, American military support.

The way in which the report is interpreted may be unfair, but it has led to speculation that its real intent is to prepare not only for a single defence market for manufacturing industry but for a European defence community responsible to, and run by, the European Union. The link between the WEU and NATO has been discussed, and as my hon. Friend the Member for Romsey (Mr. Colvin) pointed out, if that move were made, the WEU would be no more and the relationship between Europe and NATO would be subject to change. That poses the question, whither NATO?

I meet people from the continent who study those matters carefully, and most of them are NATO-oriented, as they are bound to be when they come to the North Atlantic Assembly. Representatives of the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe are not as NATO-oriented and are able to view matters from another perspective. They recognise that there is a European Union and a Common Market and that it could move into the field of defence.

Speculation on that issue has, in more than one responsible newspaper, encouraged the rumour that the Government, who for years have set an example in promoting international co-operation in defence, while simultaneously earning the reputation of being a member of the awkward squad in Brussels, might use that turn of events to get on-side with their European partners, particularly the French, and wave the green flag in favour of an EU common defence system. On 7 October, the *Financial Times*, which does not usually gossip, said that it thought that

"the Government is shortly to recommend that the European Union should take on a defence capability 'in order', in the words of an unnamed senior official, 'to offset the damage caused by Labour's decision to stay out of the first wave of monetary union'."

The Conservative party could be criticised for not joining the Common Market right at the beginning, so I am not making a party point.

I do not know whether that speculation has any substance, but the forthcoming calendar of European high-level meetings suggests that there will be plenty of opportunity to add substance to the rumour, and it ought to be scotched. I would not put it past the Government, with their obsession with image, to take the opportunity to demonstrate that they are good Europeans. There are high stakes here and we can gain popularity with those European Union members who think that we drag our feet on co-operation.

On 24 and 25 October, there will be informal meetings. One dreads those, because people get indiscreet on such occasions. Those meetings concern the future of Europe and will be attended by the EU Heads of State and Governments, including the Secretary and State and the Prime Minister. On 3 and 4 November, in Vienna, there is to be the first-ever meeting of European Union Defence Ministers. I wonder what mischief will be got up to there, especially as Austria will host the event. The Secretary of State will attend. This will be a flyer, will it not? It will be the first time that we have had anything like it. On 17 and 18 November, in Rome, the WEU ministerial meeting will take place. Thank goodness Lord Gilbert is in place; we shall see how he gets on in that crowd.

I do not want to be mistaken, so I shall conclude. In my judgment, there are solid grounds for establishing a European identity which can, by working together, ensure agreement on our European priorities and our ability to meet them. In the WEU, we already have the mechanism to do things or suggest how we might be able to work together more effectively, and it is gradually developing a system described as separable from NATO but not separate, and capable of using NATO assets.

Most European countries belong to the WEU and see it as an organisation that can, and should be, encouraged. The First Commission on the European Union recently published a report in which it said that it had

"discussed . . . the development of WEU itself . . . it was again broadly agreed that WEU should be used as the vehicle for providing a stronger bridge between NATO and the EU."

I attended a meeting in Florence, which was brought together by retired diplomats and a few generals. People thought that it was just a bunch of old buffers getting together, but they combined not only centuries of age but more than centuries of wisdom. I was interested to note that, in their draft conclusions, they said:

"A common European security and defence policy must include . . . the capacity to execute missions of the WEU-Petersberg spectrum"—

peacekeeping duties and so on—

"as well as collective defence. Within this context, collective defence will remain NATO's core function, as NATO remains the essential forum for consultation among"

the

"Allies".

And so say all of us.

For NATO, that obviously means improving the co-operative relationships that it has established in Bosnia with the United Nations, the WEU and the OSCE. The hon. Member for Walsall, South attaches great importance to the value of OSCE as a means of following up the work that is done by NATO and the UN, when it is trying to bring about and consolidate the peace that has been brought, temporarily, as a result of military intervention. He is absolutely right to do so. The many interlocking institutions set up since the end of the cold war can cause confusion. They get in each another's way, add to the confusion and make it more difficult to preserve the peace. I have no experience of this, but it seems to me that, as we enter the new era of the post-cold war, we are starting to learn, from our experiences in Somalia, the Congo, Bosnia and Kosovo, which of those organisations can best carry out the duties that we consider could be laid on them.

It seems to me that, in the end, if we are to think that the defence side is best accomplished by having a common European defence run by the EU, we are taking the most sensitive step of all. One cannot have an EU defence policy of the nation states of western Europe without first having a political union; and that seems to me to be a long evolutionary step to take. My judgment is that, if we want to move forward successfully into the next century, we should put our trust in the machinery that has shown itself to be adaptable. I would judge that adaptability of NATO, working with Europe through the WEU, to be possibly the best bet of all the measures that are suggested by those who think of alternatives, and I would go for it.

7.33 pm

Laura Moffatt (Crawley): I am delighted to speak in this important defence debate, and specifically on the strategic defence review. It is a very important debate.

[Laura Moffatt]

Some people say that it is not relevant—that it is not a sexy subject, that it is not worthy of too much of our time—but, obviously, hon. Members in the Chamber know that that is not so.

Defence of the realm is a fundamental task of Government. It is vital for the House to address itself to looking after the well-being of our armed forces, the equipment that they need and the way in which the personnel are called upon to do the job. We are charged with the duty of ensuring that we examine those issues—on housing, health and family relationships—of ensuring proper progress with equal opportunities within our armed forces and of scrutinising equipment procurement and getting the best deal from the defence industry.

The list of issues is endless. That is the very reason that the review has been such an amazing feat. There has been a great sense of openness, with a couple of notable exceptions—I am sure that the Chairman of the Select Committee on Defence would like to elaborate. We have embarked on what I believe to be an amazing review. More important is the scale on which the forces have been consulted. That makes this strategic review very special. It has been widely welcomed from many quarters. It has given me, as a new member of the Defence Committee, the opportunity to get to grips with the wider defence issues facing us today, in the preparation of our response to the SDR.

In the short time allowed, it will be impossible to address all the subjects tackled in the SDR, so I shall concentrate on only three areas of concern that I should like to bring to the House's attention. I hope that the first will be properly remedied by the Government.

There is little doubt that the Defence Secondary Care Agency was dealt an almost fatal blow by the previous—Conservative—Government. In its third report of 1996-97, on forces medical services, the Defence Committee concluded:

"Staff shortages in the defence medical services are so serious that it is not clear whether it will recover".

I saw the doctors, nurses and ambulance crew at work in Bosnia, and it is clear that the service must recover. Those doctors and nurses work alongside their national health service colleagues in peacetime, gaining the skills and experience that they need, but offer the added bonus of being able to mobilise in a crisis and continue their work in what can be very dangerous situations. I pay tribute to those reserve forces who work alongside their regular colleagues in delivering care wherever in the world it is needed. They should be nurtured and encouraged in their very special duties.

I was delighted that the SDR recognised the need to strengthen the medical services, not only in the Secretary of State's welcome statement at the start of the debate, but in the introduction to the White Paper, which says:

"the deep seated problems must be corrected".

It is vital that we follow through with the necessary funds for this much-needed and much-admired service.

My second concern was expressed by the hon. Member for Romsey (Mr. Colvin), but I want to speak about the future of the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency. As a Member of Parliament in whose constituency are many jobs connected to the defence industry, I am committed to the agency's remaining independent. We should not have to operate without a strong defence industrial base on which our forces can rely. We must be able to equip our forces with the modern technology that they need. We have rightly witnessed the end of the production of anti-personnel mines, but many thousands of workers throughout the UK are involved in the very successful business of producing high-quality equipment to allow our armed forces to do their job on our behalf.

Many of those companies have been through enormous change already. They welcome the smart procurement initiatives. They rise to the challenge of the giant United States defence companies. They are taking on the difficult task of restructuring the European defence industry and they are determined to modernise.

I sound a word of caution about the public-private partnership of DERA. The Ministry of Defence and the defence industry must have complete confidence that evaluation and research are free from partial commercial pressure. It is essential to safeguard the integrity of the MOD in the task of procuring equipment. I ask that DERA remain independent.

In conclusion, I raise an issue that is crucial to the Government. They have taken a lead in the strategic defence review, as they have on many others issues. They have shown openness and honesty. To declare our defence stance, particularly in relation to nuclear weapons, is a strength, not a weakness. The Government have published the number of warheads and the amount of fissile material, which demonstrates their openness. I urge the Government to take the lead and reduce the nuclear threat to humanity. As they have stated so encouragingly:

"The Government wishes to see a safer world in which there is no place for nuclear weapons".

That is a statement with which, I hope, none of us would disagree.

7.40 pm

Mr. Julian Brazier (Canterbury): It gives me great pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Crawley (Laura Moffatt). I agree with what she said about the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency and the regular and reserve medical services. She and I have tabled an early-day motion to speak up for the reserve forces in the south-east, who are among the most threatened of all. Under the present plans, we would end up with almost the smallest proportionate share of the reserves.

I congratulate the Government on one matter. I welcome the decision to look at the armed forces' opportunities in wider society, through what the press has labelled the GI Bill initiative and through the wider study of the problems from which armed forces families suffer in the civilian community. Sadly, the results on the latter score will be very modest unless there is a willingness, of which we have not yet seen any evidence, on the part of other Cabinet members to take action to give service families fair access to schools, health care and other public services.

That one cheer, or half a cheer, takes me directly to my central criticism of the strategic defence review—that, in so many other ways, it has lost sight of defence as a national, rather than a narrowly professional, issue. It has lost sight of what armed forces are for.

As I have said in the House before, I left my post as a Parliamentary Private Secretary to campaign against the defence posture of the previous Government and, in particular, to call for a strategic defence review. I would have been the first Member in the House to cheer if this defence review had been what it claimed to be. Many of us feel, however, that it has missed the point of what our armed forces are for. Our Select Committee report states:

"The Government's manifesto promised 'a strategic defence and security review'. . . we are still awaiting the strategic security review".

Rather defensively, the Secretary of State picked out a reply to that.

The Government seem to have bought the line from their professional advisers that defence is the business of providing well-equipped professional units to carry out certain overseas tasks, providing they do not last too long.

Let us take the Navy, first. I remember working a decade ago as secretary of the parliamentary maritime group to try to persuade the then Government to do something about the decline in our Merchant Navy. From a position a generation and a half ago, when we were the largest carrier by far in the world, we are now down to 1 per cent. of world sea trade. However, if we look back over the broad sweep of this century, the battle of the Atlantic—a battle on which the survival of this country as an independent democracy depended—was not won just by the courage and professionalism of the Royal Navy. The Merchant Navy had proportionately much higher casualties than the Royal Navy, and neither could have done its job without the reserves who were clearing mines around the ports from which they were operating, and without the largely civilian effort in breaking the Enigma code.

More recently, the Falkland islands could not have been recaptured without the many merchant ships that supported that task force, even in such a very short campaign, yet today we have a Government who have so completely given up on trying to revitalise our Merchant Navy—I do not defend the record of the previous Government on this—that we have bought—

Dr. Doug Naysmith (Bristol, North–West): Can you tell us a single thing that you urged the previous Government—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The Chair is not involved in the debate. I should be grateful if the hon. Gentleman would use the correct parliamentary language.

Dr. Naysmith: The hon. Gentleman says that he urged the previous Government to act to halt the Merchant Navy's decline. Can he tell us a single thing that the previous Government did which helped?

Mr. Brazier: There were some changes in the tax arrangements for seafarers which, from memory, cost about £30 million a year. There were also some rather larger changes in capital write-offs for ships. It was too little too late and I do not defend it, but the present Government have so despaired of doing anything about the Merchant Navy that they have bought six ships to carry an expeditionary force—just six ships, at a time when highly effective mines, deployable from civilian vessels, are widely available and extremely cheap. That comes just a few years after we abandoned our reserve mine-clearing capability in the Royal Naval Reserve. We must never forget that mines are the poor man's weapon against the rich man's navy.

The aim of defence should be to protect this country and its vital interests in short conflicts and also in long wars. It is nations that win wars, not just professional armed forces.

Our two most recent conflicts, the Falklands and the Gulf, were short. They were fought over open terrain with little civilian population. Those conditions were ideal for high technology deployed by professional armed forces. That is the sort of war for which generals like to plan. Most generals like planning for the last war anyway. Predictions about the past are easier than predictions about the future, as Churchill once commented.

Sir Robert Smith (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine): With hindsight, had the generals planned for such a war? One never gets the war for which one has planned.

Mr. Brazier: The hon. Gentleman anticipates my point. Recent history is littered with examples of conflicts in which terrain has frustrated a reliance on high technology. What did high technology do for America in Vietnam? What did it do for Russia in Afghanistan or, more recently, in Grozny? In each case there was a large, hostile civilian population.

If we were to become involved in serious fighting in the Balkans—perhaps even in Kosovo—how many people believe that the magic wand of high technology would bring us a speedy victory? Air power and massed armour did not work for Hitler in the last war in the Balkans.

Of course our professional armed forces are extremely important. I am the son of a regular soldier and I have family connections with all three regular services. However, they are not everything. The wider population, through reserve forces for all three services and through related industries, such as merchant shipping, civil aviation and our munitions factories, are vital to provide sustainability in a major conflict.

With regard to the RAF, the Government have acknowledged that there is a growing shortage of fast jet pilots. In his testimony before our Committee, the Chief of Air Staff impressed us all with his grasp of the problem, but his recipes seemed to many of us to be unworkable. How many of us believe that there is a group of 18 and 19-year-olds out there who are willing to join the Air Force three years earlier, giving up going to university? How many people believe that RAF service will be more attractive to married pilots if there are even fewer turns at the desk jobs which give their families some sort of break from the long periods away from home, which are increasingly inseparable from squadron service?

The RAF is in danger of becoming involved in a battle of attrition with the civilian airlines. In the long run, it can only lose that battle, even if substantial sums are thrown at the problem. It is a little like trying to stick band-aid plasters on an open wound. Instead of waging that battle with its civilian counterparts, we should do what has already been done in America—go with the grain of the aviation industry and construct proper air formations, allowing the RAF to continue to benefit from the skills of

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fast-jet pilots after they have moved their main employment to airlines. That would allow us to capitalise on the millions of pounds that it costs to train each of them.

The armed forces must do what every other organisation in the civilian world is doing—make more, not less, use of part-timers, who are much less expensive. All the evidence from the English-speaking world is that part-timer sailors, soldiers and airmen work best in part-time units with reservist commanders because they alone understand how to balance military service with civilian employment. The initiative to recruit a handful of part-time reserve fast-jet pilots into the Royal Auxiliary Air Force will wither unless there is a proper reserve squadron structure and command opportunities for reservists.

I draw a parallel with the Territorial Army, which has been mentioned in almost every speech today. The Secretary of State said earlier that he was concerned about the 30 per cent. turnover in our Territorial Army, to which I have referred in many debates. I have often pointed out that the figure is much lower in the US National Guard, and in Canada and Australia. In those countries, the Territorial Army's counterparts serve in formed units designed to work as formed units, almost exclusively commanded by reservist commanders. However, one organisation that has a much higher wastage rate than ours—nearly 40 per cent.—is the US Reserve Army, which is separate from the National Guard. It is based on the very model towards which our chiefs of staff are trying to drive the Territorial Army—service support oriented, and with units designed as gap fillers for its regular counterparts.

America and Australia plan to deploy reserve combat units in action as formed units—the National Guard and the Australian Reserve Army. I have alluded before to the remarkable testimony which Brigadier Hammerbeck paid to the American National Guard artillery brigade attached to our division in the Gulf war. Incredibly, however, Ministers believe that British territorials should be used only for gap filling and supporting roles. Our pitifully small TA—less than half the size of its regular counterparts, although in the other countries that I mentioned, it is roughly equal—is to be still further reduced. Just as there was an exodus of the best people from the Royal Navy Reserve when its vessels were taken away and it became a gap filler, the same fate awaits the Territorial Army.

Not only will there be far fewer combat units—fewer infantry and armour and fewer engineers—but who do Ministers seriously believe will join an infantry battalion that is incapable of training at battalion level because it is spread over such a large area? Does the Minister for the Armed Forces, who has just arrived in the Chamber, seriously believe that good-quality TA officers will spend 10 or 12 years sacrificing their families and careers to rise to the height of company commander, only to command a company that will be pressed to produce a platoon-sized turnout on a training weekend?

With the reduction and emasculation of our remaining TA combat forces, how would we rebuild a substantial Army if, for example, the Balkans were to catch fire or the Russian threat were to re-emerge, or if, as the Chairman of the Select Committee said, there were an NBC—nuclear, biological and chemical—threat from terrorists? Let us remember that it takes at least 10 years in peacetime to build volunteer units with their officer and senior NCO structures.

On the subject of structure, I wish to say a word about the Territorial, Auxiliary and Volunteer Reserve Associations, which get so little credit for administering all three of the reserve services, and all three cadet organisations. They were established by Haldane, who was a Liberal but, I believe, one of the greatest Secretaries for War of all time. The aim was to ensure that the recruiting and administration of territorials, auxiliaries and cadets were kept local and close to the civilian population, rather than absorbed by an insensitive regular command structure.

Those associations, whose membership is almost entirely ex-reservist, can draw on the many skills of their members, who are judges, accountants and property developers, to mention just a few, without being charged for those services. By being allowed to manage their own budgets, those organisations have proved far more successful than their civilian counterparts in the Ministry of Defence. I have seen evidence that that has led to jealousy and resentment among some civil servants, especially those who have so badly mismanaged parts of the armed forces estate. In many parts of the country, the cadets whom those associations look after are now the only uniformed presence.

My county, with 3 per cent. of the population of Britain, has many thriving sea cadet units whose entire regular backup is one sergeant-major from the Royal Marines. Without the south-east TAVRA and its Kent county association, the sea cadets would wither, as would recruitment to the Royal Navy. More than two fifths of our fast-jet pilots began their service in the air cadets, and more than two fifths of all recruits to the Regular Army started as territorials or Army cadets.

Instead of recognising the vital role of the TAVRAs, as the previous Government did, to their credit, this Government propose to place them in all but name under the command structure of the Regular Army. Quite apart from the fact that the Regular Army has nothing to do with the air and naval components, it means requiring a single TAVRA, corresponding to the relevant regular brigade, to provide a supposedly local presence from Berwick-upon-Tweed all the way down to north Lincolnshire. It makes a mockery of the local function of the TAVRAs. If the proposed changes to the TAVRAs go ahead and many TA drill halls are closed, the consequences for cadet forces will be devastating and the impact on regular recruiting is difficult to exaggerate. Recruiting may enjoy an Indian summer, with the recession coming, but where will it leave us in 10 years' time?

As I said at the beginning of my speech, the Government have lost sight of the principal purpose of defence, which is to provide for a sustainable defence capability for the nation as a whole in a dangerous world. In 1919, the chiefs of staff went to the then Secretary for War, Winston Churchill—indeed, they went over his head and lobbied the Cabinet behind his back—to try to persuade the then Government to disband the Territorial Army and focus Britain's forces on a small, highly relevant, all-professional expeditionary force. The world looked much safer in 1919 than it does today. Thank God

that Churchill rejected that advice. In contrast, this Government plan to allow our elite professionals to march into the distance virtually alone.

7.57 pm

Mr. John Hutton (Barrow and Furness): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Canterbury (Mr. Brazier), who speaks with passion and conviction on this subject. I respect his concern for the well-being of the Territorial Army, about which he spoke with considerable authority.

The hon. Gentleman may not agree with my view that the strategic defence review and its publication are a considerable landmark in the evolution of British defence and security policy. He and his hon. Friends may not agree with all its recommendations and conclusions, but there are two reasons why they should be more positive about the SDR.

First, it provides us with a genuine basis for developing a new national consensus about Britain's defence policy. Its conclusions are sensible and balanced. It has correctly identified the major challenges facing the United Kingdom, and has tried to put in place the right configuration of forces to meet those challenges.

It is a matter of regret that Conservative Members have tonight, and on other occasions, excluded themselves from that new national consensus. In short, the Opposition have at times been guilty of succumbing to temptation. They have postured their way through the debate, and have developed the art of naked opportunism to a considerable extent. Some Conservative Members, especially in their comments about the territorials, were guilty of irresponsible scaremongering. I hope that those mistakes will be corrected when the right hon. Member for Fylde (Mr. Jack) winds up for the Opposition.

The second reason why the strategic defence review should be more broadly welcomed than it has been by Conservative Members is that industry and informed opinion have given it a warm welcome. The hon. Member for Canterbury, who is a distinguished member of the Defence Committee, rehearsed some of his concerns about the SDR, but it might be helpful to remind him of one of the central conclusions of the Defence Committee report, which I strongly welcome.

Paragraph 406 states:

"We join in welcoming it"—

the SDR—

"as a positive advance in formulating a defence policy for the beginning of the new millennium. It provides a coherent framework within which our Armed Forces can be structured, and it consolidates and advances the changes in our defence posture that have been in train since the fall of the Soviet Union."

That is the conclusion of the Defence Committee, but people would never guess that from some of the contributions from Conservative Members.

I shall also quote Gerald Segal, director of studies at the International Institute for Strategic Studies, who is respected considerably in the defence community. On 8 July, he said:

"A cynical observer of previous British Strategic Defence Reviews could be forgiven for thinking these exercises are never strategic and rarely real reviews. But the SDR . . . is different. Britain now looks set to have a modern military prepared for the likely wars of the future . . . Some may wish to whisper it quietly, but the SDR will ensure that, at least for a generation, Britain will rank second only to the United States in deployable military power."

Those are considerable endorsements of the Government's strategy, and I should like to add my own endorsement to those of many of the speakers in tonight's debate.

I shall develop three issues, in the hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will be able to respond positively. I am pleased that the review discusses the necessity for developing closer collaboration with the MOD and the defence industry. Listening to some Conservative Members in the debate and on other occasions, one reaches the perhaps reasonable conclusion that defence industry employment increased during the years of Conservative government, which were somehow a golden age for the defence industries of the United Kingdom.

The truth, as most hon. Members know from reading the literature or from their experience in their constituencies, is that almost the opposite is the case. From 1980 to 1997, defence employment fell by 50 per cent., so Labour Members are not inclined to take lectures from Conservative Members about their commitment to defence. Many of our constituents have experienced exactly the opposite.

The need for closer collaboration with the MOD and the defence industry is important, and I am glad that the SDR represents a step forward on that front. The smart procurement initiative will play a significant role in improving our procurement procedures, and the Government's commitment to developing a new defence diversification agency within the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency is especially welcome.

One of the tragedies of the past decade and a half has been the haemorrhaging of important skills from the defence industry; there was little support and encouragement from the then Conservative Government. In my constituency, 10,000 jobs were lost in the shipyard in five years, and there was little effective regional industrial policy to sustain the hugely valuable skill base in the Barrow and Furness constituency.

The same pattern of industrial vandalism was repeated right across the country, with vital skills being lost and the Government of the day shrugging their shoulders, claiming that they were impotent, that trying to develop a strategy would be uncompetitive and so on. Those arguments were unconvincing then, and I am delighted that the Government do not subscribe to them.

I hope that the proposals in the defence diversification agency Green Paper can be more broadly focused over time. I understand that, at the moment, the Government are primarily focusing the work of the defence diversification agency on existing DERA research sites. There is an obvious attraction in that—administratively, it makes sense—but the pattern of the past 15 years shows that job losses in the defence industry were not concentrated around DERA research facilities. They occurred in my constituency, in other parts of the north-west and in the south-east—right across the country.

I should like the new agency to focus its attention on the need to develop much closer partnerships directly with the private sector—the defence companies themselves. There is no reason why we cannot have diversification initiatives in those constituencies that have well-established research facilities in the defence sector. They may be in the private sector—for example, those within GEC Marine in my constituency or the

[Mr. John Hutton]

computer-aided design and computer-aided manufacture facilities at the Vickers Shipbuilding and Engineering Ltd. yard in Barrow, which are among the best in the world.

There is no reason why, with a bit more imagination, we cannot develop proposals that will allow the new defence diversification agency to develop new initiatives with the private sector in constituencies such as mine, and to take forward the diversification initiative much more extensively.

A lot of comment tonight has been focused on the Government's commitment towards the Navy and, in particular, their decision to replace the Invincible class carriers. I am absolutely delighted by the cross-party support for the importance of the carriers and the replacement programme. It is clear from the thrust of the SDR that the emphasis in future defence policy will be on developing a more flexible and mobile—expeditionary—capability which recognises the important role of power projection. There is no question but that the Royal Navy can make a significant contribution to NATO, to the United Nations and to humanitarian work by developing and improving its amphibious capability.

The shipyard in my constituency is constructing two of the new assault landing ships which will enter service in the new millennium for the Royal Marines. We have recently completed construction of HMS Ocean, the new helicopter carrier for the Royal Navy, as well, but a key part of that amphibious jigsaw will be the carriers, especially the ability to operate fixed-wing aircraft.

When my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence introduced the defence review to the House on 8 July, he made it clear that the Government had decided to replace the two aircraft carriers, and that the in-service date was expected to be 2012. That news was very welcome in my constituency and around the shipbuilding constituencies of the United Kingdom.

I hope that the Minister will be able to say that the Government remain committed to that time scale, that nothing has changed in the meantime, and that the firm statement that my right hon. Friend made to the House and the evidence given to the Defence Committee, which questioned my right hon. Friend and senior officers, remains the Government's position—those carriers will be replaced, with an in-service date some time around 2012.

The other issue affecting the Navy is the strategic submarine nuclear fleet. Some hon. Members have expressed concern about the reduction of the SSN fleet from 12 to 10. My hon. Friend the Member for Walsall, South (Mr. George), who chairs the Defence Committee, pointed out that the previous Government cut the SSN fleet by 60 per cent., from 28 to 12. On this score, we are again not inclined to take lessons from Conservatives about the need to maintain an effective SSN fleet. The point that has escaped some Conservative Members is that the new Astute class submarines, three of which will be constructed in my constituency, represent a significant enhancement of the capability of the Royal Navy's nuclear submarines.

I am encouraged by the fact that the Government have said in the SDR that they want to procure the optional two further Astute class submarines. That is a significant decision, and, although the number of SSNs might be falling by two, the fleet will be significantly enhanced by the addition of five new Astute class submarines, especially because they will be fitted with the Tomahawk cruise missile. That is an extensive improvement in the capability of our SSNs.

I understand that the decision to procure the additional two Astute class submarines is likely to be taken in 2002-03. There would be significant cost savings to the taxpayer and significant improvements in the efficiency of the SSN fleet if the Government reconsidered that timetable, and, perhaps with the industry, considered bringing the procurement of those submarines forward to 2001, rather than wait that additional 18 months or two years. I think that such an acceleration of the programme would give the taxpayer significant benefits, and I hope that the Ministry of Defence will consult the industry closely about it.

I want to say a little about the Territorial Army, about whose future many hon. Members are understandably anxious. I shall make two points, one about the Government's proposed reduction, and another quite separate point.

The 4th Battalion the King's Own Royal Border Regiment, in my constituency—an excellent regiment, well led and well motivated, which performs extremely well against any measurable yardstick—contains members who serve on a full-time basis for the regular forces. I have mentioned the matter that I am about to raise in correspondence with my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State, but I should like to point out to my hon. Friend the Minister—I welcome him to the Front Bench; I am sorry that I did not do so earlier—that a member of a Territorial Army unit that enlists itself full-time with the regular forces is currently not entitled to participate in the Army's pension scheme.

I do not think that acceptable or fair. It does not matter how long a member of the TA serves as a full-time soldier; he cannot have access to the Army's pension schemes. None of his service as a full-time soldier is regarded as pensionable.

We are dealing with some difficult issues relating to the future of the Territorial Army. Some Conservative Members have expressed concern about the implications for future recruitment and retention. I think that one of the issues that we should consider very carefully is the whole service package that goes with enlistment in the TA. I hope that a way will be found to extend access to the Army's full-time pension scheme to members of the TA who serve on the front line in regular units, because I do not consider it acceptable for them to have no pensionable service.

As for the review of the TA itself, I want to do as many other speakers have done, and make one or two comments about the TA in the county of Cumbria. I know that the unit concerned is also contained in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Lancaster and Wyre (Mr. Dawson). As I have said, it is an excellent regiment. I hope that the Government will seriously consider the option of a two-company solution to the reform of the TA in my county. I am thinking of units based at Workington and my constituency, Barrow, with detachments at Carlisle and Lancaster. I think that that would be sensible.

There are many difficult issues to address, and there are many strongly held views on what the Government are doing. Ultimately, however, we must work towards the best conceivable solutions—the best technical solutions,

and the best wider solutions that will reinforce the connection between the Territorial Army and local communities. I have no doubt that, for the county of Cumbria, the new two-company solution—units based at Workington and Barrow, with detachments at Lancaster and Carlisle—represents the most viable future for the 4th Battalion the King's Own Royal Border Regiment.

Mr. Hilton Dawson (Lancaster and Wyre): I, too, welcome the Minister to his post.

Does my hon. Friend accept that people in Lancaster may have a slightly different view of the future of the 4th Battalion the King's Own Royal Border Regiment? Does he accept that the view in Lancaster is that the headquarters of the battalion should be in Lancaster, and that there should also be a company in that city?

Mr. Hutton: I recognise the strength of feeling that doubtless exists in Lancaster, and I am sure that, in due course, my hon. Friend will have an opportunity to make his own contribution. I certainly think that the battalion's headquarters should be in his constituency: I hope that will emerge from the review of the TA, and of the 4th Battalion in particular.

Those are the key issues that I wanted to mention, but I want to make one last observation. I believe that, in general, the strategic defence review represents a sensible solution to a difficult range of problems. It provides a balanced configuration of forces, it correctly identifies the main security challenges we face, and it puts the right emphasis on the need to develop an expeditionary capability—the ability of our forces to project themselves significantly overseas in out-of-theatre operations. Essential to all that strategy, however, will be the decision to replace the carriers.

8.14 pm

Mr. Peter Viggers (Gosport): Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for allowing me to contribute to the first debate of the new parliamentary Session. It has been an interesting debate, featuring constructive speeches. I want to add my voice to those who have said that the Territorial Army appears to be under a degree of stress in the SDR, because I think that it can make a significant contribution to our armed forces, especially as formed units.

I shall restrict myself to one subject—the continuing crisis in the defence medical services. My starting point is the Defence Committee report of February 1997, which stated—on page xix of the preface—

"We can only report to the House our firm view that the state of morale at all levels of the Defence Medical Services is lower than we have ever encountered in the armed forces."

Another sentence was quoted earlier by the hon. Member for Crawley (Laura Moffatt). The report continues:

"We conclude that the staff shortages in the Defence Medical Services are so serious that it is not clear whether it will recover. It is possible that the military ethos of medicine in the regular armed forces has been destroyed."

Those are extremely strong words, which I must say that I helped to write. They stress the importance of medical service to the armed forces, and the stress under which they were then placed.

The defence medical services are crucial. They save lives, they return people to the operating units, and they are, of course, crucial to good morale. That is why every ship carries a doctor or paramedicals, and why every four-man Army patrol—whether it be the SAS or patrols in Northern Ireland, as they then were—carries one man who is medically trained and has medical equipment.

The fact is that we did reach the position referred to in the Select Committee report, and we must ask how we reached that position. I am convinced that we did so because we had been so incredibly lucky in our recent confrontations. In the Falklands, we had tragic losses, but, tragic though they were, they were light compared with the size of the operation in which we were engaged. In the Gulf war, we were engaged in a kind of technical electronic warfare. We were all able to see on our television sets the way in which bombs were dropped down chimneys and cruise missiles turned left at the traffic lights. It seemed, in a sense, a war without risk: a war fought with electronic machinery.

Because of those two engagements—because of our incredible skill, yes, but also because of luck—it must have been quite difficult for defence planners and their Treasury equivalents, who monitor all Government expenditure, to justify large amounts of expenditure on the defence medical services. They must have felt that it was possible to save money. That is why the number of hospitals in the armed forces went from seven to five to three to one in five years; and that no doubt is why, while the armed forces were cut by 30 per cent. overall, the defence medical services were cut by 40 per cent.

Some of the savings were no doubt projected to result from a change in strategy. It was decided that, although primary medical care was needed at the front or in ships, secondary medical care—because of the improvement in communications—could be carried out at home, in the United Kingdom, in civilian national health service hospitals. I want to make two points about that.

First, it is impossible to guarantee that casualties can be moved away from the battle area: that is why it was necessary at Ajax bay in the Falkland islands to have a joint medical unit dealing with troops who were wounded there, as it was not possible to fly them back. Secondly, I am sure that, with the changing pattern of world danger, there will be more opportunities—which we should grasp—for free-standing medical facilities to be available to United Nations peacekeeping operations such as the one to which British medical forces contributed in Rwanda, without the contribution of other military forces at the same time.

I maintain that the argument that we do not need such large medical forces is fallacious. Let me back that up by saying that, as recently as the Korean war, we were losing—through the United Nations side—2,500 casualties every month. We should also look back to the Kuwait-Iraq Gulf war, and think of the thousands of soldiers who were killed in the slaughter that happened with the Iraqi withdrawal. We should also think about the empty wards that were planned to deal with the casualties that we expected to come back from the Gulf. It was a daunting experience to visit local hospitals and to hear about the plans that were being made for hundreds of casualty evacuations to be treated in UK hospitals. We should not assume that defence medical services will not be needed for casualties—perhaps in considerable numbers—in a future conflict.

[Mr. Peter Viggers]

We also need our medical forces to be sufficiently large to withstand attrition. The rather optimistic assumption was made in defence cost study 15 that there would be no loss of life and casualties among medical staff, which unfortunately cannot be the case.

The crisis was recognised in 1997, but what has happened since then? Following defence cost study 15 in 1994, we established a core hospital for defence medical services. I am delighted to say that the Royal Hospital Haslar in my constituency was chosen, and there are military district hospital units at Derriford, Peterborough and Frimley. Those MDHUs were intended to provide the extra throughput and patient experience that doctors needed.

Another development in the past year has been the recognition of staff shortages in the defence medical services. The independent Review Body on Armed Forces Pay recommended an increase of 5.2 per cent. for ranks of major and above and 4.2 per cent. for ranks below major. The Government said yes to that significant pay increase, and then phased it in, so that pay increases were below the level of inflation. That has had a negative impact on pay.

A further development has been extraneous to the defence medical services: it has been the result of some rethinking within the national health service. It had been thought that a district general hospital would be viable with a patient catchment area of 250,000 people, but the new thinking is that such a hospital is viable only if it has a catchment area of 500,000 patients.

That may be merely a matter of fashion. The closure of my local hospital at Gosport was proposed because it was thought that cottage hospitals were out of fashion, but suddenly, as we campaigned against the closure, it became fashionable to have community hospitals. Gosport hospital was expanded and became a community hospital, which was more fashionable than a boring old cottage hospital.

As a result of those developments, there is a challenge to the Royal Hospital Haslar in Gosport, despite its being the designated core hospital. The nature of the challenge is clearly revealed in the business plan for the Defence Secondary Care Agency for 1998–99 and 1999–2001. On page 44, it says that the core hospital should work with the surgeon general

"to establish the need for a core hospital and thence determine its essential characteristics."

The Ministry of Defence is saying that one of the duties is to examine the need for a core hospital and to determine its essential characteristics. The timetable for implementation is that a paper should go to the chief of staff by the end of May 1998, and the document says that an action plan to protect Royal Hospital Haslar in the interim is necessary. Under risk assessment, it says:

"Planning uncertainty worst option for all DSCA staff."

That is exactly where we are: we have the worst option.

Despite the fact that £35 million has been spent on Haslar in the past 10 years, that the medical defence college has moved in alongside, that doctors, nurses and other staff have been moved from the Cambridge hospital at Aldershot and from RAF Wroughton, and despite the concentration on Haslar hospital, we now find to our horror that the role of Haslar is under question.

One of the reasons for the uncertainty is that defence cost study 15 recommended that Haslar should be increased from 230 to 300 or even 375 beds. That expansion has not occurred, so the studies of the economy of the hospital and the number of people who are treated give the impression that it is not efficient. A further factor is that the Portsmouth and South East Hampshire health authority, which has a budget of £230 million, £7 million of which it has to offset against the facilities provided by Haslar, recognises that the difficult job of running medical services in that area is made more difficult by the complication of having a military hospital at Haslar.

In its proposed reorganisation, the Portsmouth Hospitals NHS trust suggested that the Ministry of Defence might like to take two floors of an expansion of the Queen Alexandra hospital at Cosham. The reply was required by the end of August, but reply came there none, so the trust has proceeded with its private finance initiative bid without the support of the Ministry of Defence, and without knowing what the Ministry wants. I wish the health trust well in its bid, but it would have been so much better if the Ministry of Defence had made up its mind before the end of August.

The problem at Haslar derives from the fact that it is difficult to get accreditation of doctors as required by the royal colleges in all areas of medicine because of the insufficient critical mass of patients. For instance, ophthalmology is a single specialist faculty at Haslar.

Mr. Gerald Howarth: What my hon. Friend is telling us is seriously alarming. I was told that the Cambridge military hospital in Aldershot had to close because it was no longer likely to secure accreditation to the royal colleges. If my experience in Aldershot is anything to go by, my hon. Friend should beware, because this is clearly the harbinger of the closure of Haslar.

Mr. Viggers: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. This is a deeply concerning problem. After the decision, as part of the revision of medical services, to focus on one core hospital, that core hospital is now under threat. That threat must be resolved.

An even better example of the difficulty in obtaining accreditation at Haslar is in vascular surgery. I am told that four specialists are required to provide a viable unit, and there is an insufficient throughput of patients for that at Haslar. Similarly—merciful though it may be—there is an insufficient throughput of cancer patients to provide accreditation in that area.

What can we do about this? We must deal with the shortfall in patient throughput. The failure to expand Haslar has partly caused that problem. What is the way ahead? We must have a core hospital to retain the medical military ethos. People who choose to go into the defence medical services do so deliberately. They have a very special chosen role. Their skills are eminently transferable: they can walk away—many have done so. They can obtain higher remuneration outside the armed forces: they are better paid, and have a more relaxing life style.

Exceptional measures are required to keep our medical forces in the armed forces. It is not just the phasing in of a 5.2 per cent. pay increase; the problem is much more serious. Defence medical staff have a unique role.

I had the honour to speak at a Trafalgar night dinner at the Haslar hospital some years ago. It was moving to hear the message before battle given by Nelson to the fleet,

and to hear the chaplain read the prayer before action—before the guest speaker had to speak to the assembled company. I served in the Air Force and in the Territorial Army—not in the Navy—and it brought home to me the need to preserve the best elements of tradition and comradeship, as well as sport and adventure, for medical staff in the armed forces.

I have visited the military district hospital units which, on the face of it, can provide the training that the armed forces need. The people there told me that they were getting on quite well, but that it was not what they had joined the armed forces for—every one of them said that. We must cater for the special need for medical staff in the armed forces. We must confirm Haslar, and build on it.

Some medical and surgical specialties are already fully viable. Others can be made so by providing incentives such as more attractive waiting times. I suggest that it could be possible to provide some support for transport and visiting. We need more cross-posting between Haslar and elsewhere in the civilian NHS. Some specialties will not be viable at Haslar, so links will be needed with other specialised units. Links are being developed with the burns unit at Odstock near Salisbury. Similarly, there must be more co-operation with Portsmouth, Chichester, Southampton, Winchester and other hospitals which are close enough for easy commuting to and from Haslar.

The crucial point is the retention of Haslar as a centre of excellence. I have pitched my arguments on the basis of the importance of Haslar to the armed forces, as part of this debate on the strategic defence review. It is also true that Haslar provides much-respected facilities in my constituency. It is a much-loved hospital, with dedicated staff and superb facilities. Since it became clear that Haslar's future was not secure, I have received hundreds of representations, a high proportion of which came from former patients, who paid tribute to the treatment they received.

Page 44 of the business plan states:

"Paper to Chief of Staff by end May 1998."

It is crucial that we resolve the issue quickly now. If it is not possible for Ministers to respond with an undertaking about the future of Haslar at the end of this two-day debate, we will be entitled to ask the Minister to agree to write or answer a parliamentary question—within, say, seven days—about the revised timetable if the chief of staff has not acted, as stated in the timetable for implementation on page 44 of the business plan. We are entitled to know what the changed timetable is. We must end the uncertainty, and confirm Haslar.

8.31 pm

Mr. Hugh Bayley (City of York): When I made my maiden speech in the House six years ago, I was followed by the hon. Member for Gosport (Mr. Viggers) who made some kind remarks on that occasion. I am pleased to follow his fine and informative speech in which he made some important points about the defence medical services—an issue in which I share an interest with him.

I congratulate the Government on the strategic defence review. It has been extremely well received within the armed forces and by our allies. However, I would like to concentrate on two issues which matter in my constituency, City of York, and in my part of the country, the north of England—first, the decision to restructure UK Land Command, and secondly, the new role that the Government envisage for the Territorial Army.

My constituency has been a garrison town since the Romans were there. The last time that England was successfully invaded, in 1066, there were two great battles. One was in the north of England—five miles outside my constituency—at Stamford Bridge, which we won and successfully defended England. The second, of course, was in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Hastings and Rye (Mr. Foster), and had a different result. The military tradition in York and the north of England runs very deep. The north of England provides 39 per cent. of all the recruits for the British Army, yet there is little representation from the top level of the Army in our part of the country.

The essays accompanying the strategic defence review confirm that the Army is considering reducing the number of districts and divisions in UK Land Command from six to three. I wish to thank my hon. Friend the Minister for the Armed Forces, who has received a number of letters on this topic from me in the three months during which he has been in his job. He kindly met me to discuss the issues, and I thank him for his courteous and careful response to the points that I have made. I also wish to thank my hon. Friend's predecessor as Minister of State, my right hon. Friend the Member for Hamilton, North and Bellshill (Dr. Reid), who also listened to and weighed carefully the arguments that I made.

There is a need to change the structure of UK Land Command, which was structured to deal with a threat from the east—from the Warsaw pact—which is no longer there. I am not sure that the three district and division structure is the right structure. I have a particular interest in the proposal to merge the Army's second division—with its headquarters in York, at Imphal barracks—with the Scottish district.

When he speaks tomorrow, I should like my hon. Friend the Minister to give the House the assurance that when he comes to make a decision on whether the merger of the second division and the Scottish district should go ahead—and, if so, whether the new headquarters will be in York or Edinburgh—he will make it solely in terms of what is best for the defence of the UK, both north and south of the border.

The strategic defence review was foreign policy led. It has been successful and has been praised because of that. I hope that it does not degenerate into a domestic policy-driven set of decisions on the final unresolved questions, such as the land command structure and the disposition across the country of the TA.

York has been shown to be the best location for a UK northern command in military terms because the vast majority of the soldiers who would come under the command of that northern division are in the north of England—most within a 100-mile radius of York. Although it is technically possible in an era of modern communications for a general to communicate and to issue orders electronically over great distances, in terms of building military morale and commitment it is important for a general to be seen out and about by the soldiers he commands. Logistically, it would be much easier if the commander of the northern division were based close to the majority of his soldiers.

I have listened carefully to the arguments from Scottish Members for retaining a General Officer Commanding, Scotland—a major-general commanding land command troops in Scotland. There are not enough soldiers in

[Mr. Hugh Bayley]

Scotland to make up a division on their own. There are 2,596 regular soldiers and 7,084 TA soldiers—altogether, less than 10,000. However, there are important representational duties that the General Officer Commanding has in Scotland—as we have heard today, these include the Queen's visit and Remembrance Sunday.

It has been pointed out to me that it would be wrong, or "unthinkable" as some Scottish Members have said—I see some hon. Members nodding—that Scottish soldiers from Scottish regiments could be put under the command of an English general based in York. I do not want to provoke cross-border conflict, and I accept the arguments. However, the respect that the Scots and their representatives in this House ask of the English and of English Members of Parliament as an important part of the maintenance of the Union needs to be reciprocated. The Union relies on a two-way traffic in respect, and we need respect from the Scots for English traditions, and for English military traditions in the north of England in particular. The Union will be maintained if there is healthy two-way respect.

Ms Squire: May I assure my hon. Friend that every Scottish soldier, sailor or airman to whom I have ever spoken, while being proud to be Scottish, is also proud to be a member of Her Majesty's United Kingdom armed forces and recognises the contributions that all members of those armed forces make?

Mr. Bayley: I welcome that comment, share it and reflect it. It is a sentiment that English soldiers have. We are a united kingdom and those who serve in our armed forces serve in the armed forces of the United Kingdom and are proud to do so. Sometimes they are posted in their own part of the UK, sometimes in other parts, but their commitment is to Queen and country, the whole country. However, if it is unthinkable that Scottish soldiers in Scotland could be put under the command of an English general in England, when there are some 2,600 regulars in Scotland, it should be equally unthinkable that the 10,700 regular soldiers who are based in the north of England should be put under the command of a general in Edinburgh.

Like his counterpart in Scotland, the general officer commanding the 2nd Division, with its headquarters in my constituency, has important representational duties. We have an important north of England Remembrance Sunday ceremony at the cenotaph at York, in which the military contingents are led by the general. On the Queen's birthday, York is a saluting base for the north of England. The general represents the armed forces on that occasion, during royal visits and on other important state occasions in the north of England.

There is only one general left in the north of England. Despite having less than 3,000 regular soldiers, Scotland has two generals. I am not saying that Scotland has too many generals, because there are 16 generals in London, with hardly more soldiers than there are in Scotland, eight in south-east England and 15 in the south-west, but there is only one in the north of England, the region that provides more recruits to the British Army than anywhere else in the UK.

As part of the Army's recruitment strategy, the Army has a Keeping the Army in the Public Eye—KAPE—programme, but we will not keep the Army in the public eye if we remove the last remaining general from the Army's key recruitment ground. I accept the argument for a Scottish presence—a Scottish general in Edinburgh—but I say to Ministers: think carefully before abandoning the last general in the north of England.

Last weekend, civilian staff who work at the headquarters in York launched a website putting forward the case for retaining a divisional headquarters in York. In the first 24 hours, that website received 600 hits—600 people logged into it to look at the information. Dozens of responses have come from people not just in the north of England, but elsewhere, saying that they believe that the case for retaining the York headquarters has been well made. If a formal proposal were made to close the north of England divisional headquarters, many more representations would land on all our desks and certainly on the desks of Ministers.

There is one local issue that I particularly wish to put to the Minister. In 1995, the Conservatives decided to bring together all Army personnel functions into one centre, the Army Personnel Centre, based at Kentigern house in Glasgow. As a consequence, last year, 250 MOD civilian Army pay and records staff from York lost their jobs; the jobs moved to the Army Personnel Centre in Glasgow.

On paper, there were convincing arguments about the administrative benefits of centralising. At the time the decision was made in 1995 and subsequently in 1996, the then Minister for the Armed Forces gave clear indications to me that it was the MOD's intention to find an alternative use for the 20,000 or so square feet of purpose-built office accommodation in York that the pay and records staff had used. We are still waiting for a single job to move in.

I know, because I have put this point to both the Minister for the Armed Forces and his Labour predecessor, that there are still moves afoot to try to find alternative jobs to move in to the premises. It makes good common sense for the armed forces to do that because the offices cannot be let to some commercial user. They are within the security perimeter of Imphal barracks, which houses the divisional headquarters. It also houses the 15 Brigade headquarters and 2 Signal Regiment. It is not a site that is going to be got rid of by the armed forces and there is a huge amount of purpose-built modern office accommodation, which should be used and is a financial burden on the armed forces if it is not used.

The Army Personnel Centre in Glasgow has just published its first annual report for its first full year in operation. Sadly, that report reveals that the new personnel centre has failed to meet some of its performance targets. One performance target was to have a single site fully operational by now, which it does not have yet. Another was to have a new management information system, which it contracted in from a contractor, but the contractor failed to deliver and the contract was terminated. The centre also had a target of reducing operational costs by 23 per cent. A 17 per cent. reduction has been received, so there is a £2.2 million shortfall.

When the case was presented for the York offices to be closed and the jobs moved to Glasgow, the costings were on the assumption that the savings that the Army hoped

for by the centralisation of the personnel centre would be achieved. They have not been. I know that the Minister is being presented with figures that argue for the removal of the divisional headquarters from York. He should look carefully at those figures. They will need to show substantial savings, which I know they do not, for the Minister to be sure that going ahead would actually provide savings.

The Government are absolutely right to envisage a new role for the Territorial Army. Let me leave aside for a moment the important work that is done by the specialists, the medics, the linguists, the signallers and the engineers, and talk about the infantry soldier in the TA.

Under the previous configuration, the TA was designed as a force to counter a threat from the Warsaw pact, a military alliance that no longer exists. It is clearly pointless and wrong to devote MOD resources to maintaining a force to counter a threat that is no longer there. I am glad that the Government have grasped the nettle and are proposing a new role for the TA, where its infantry arm will be slightly smaller, but better trained and better equipped to respond to the real defence threats that this country now faces.

Since Aden, the first TA infantry unit that was deployed on active service overseas as a pre-formed unit came from my constituency of York. It was a detachment from the 3rd Battalion the Prince of Wales's Own Regiment of Yorkshire. That unit, which has been followed by many other TA units since, is the model of the new TA that the Government are developing and which the strategic defence review envisages. There is a model in York and I hope that the Government will build on it.

On 19 September, I attended a ceremony at Imphal barracks—the presentation of colours by Field Marshall Lord Inge to the 3rd Battalion Prince of Wales's Own Regiment of Yorkshire, which is the TA battalion of my local regiment. I was horrified to learn during the presentation that those colours were likely to be hung up within a few months because the battalion is likely to be wound up as a result of the changed role of the TA and the soldiers formed into a new regiment together with TA infantry soldiers from west Yorkshire. As a consequence, two of the three TA centres in York would close. Since York was at the forefront of demonstrating what the new role of the TA might be, I ask the Minister—I realise that hon. Members representing constituencies throughout the country have asked him similar things—to think about the contribution that York TA soldiers have made, and can and will make in the future, if he ensures that TA soldiers in York have a real new role and that any reduction in the numbers in York is proportionate to reductions throughout the country as a whole.

8.50 pm

Sir Robert Smith (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine): The hon. Member for City of York (Mr. Bayley) made a strong case for York and the surrounding area. He made two points that are germane to the review. One was on the importance of keeping the Army in the public eye, which can be achieved differently in different parts of the country. The Territorial Army is very much the remaining public face of the Army in the highlands, and it is facing a 48 per cent. cut, which I would call not a slight but a major cut. Secondly, in a good warning to Ministers, the hon. Gentleman asked how robust were the savings projected from some of the reorganisations. In the past 20 years, there have been many reorganisations, but the savings achieved have never quite reached the levels expected.

The hon. Member for Barrow and Furness (Mr. Hutton) said that the strategic defence review had been welcomed. Had it been completely revenue neutral, it would have been welcomed far more. The signs of cuts and the projected efficiency savings in the review make one worry that not all the consequences have been thought out. By their very nature, efficiency savings tell us that the review has not worked out how savings will be achieved but wants them to be there at the end of the day.

The Ministry of Defence might take some time to consult the oil industry in my constituency, which has gone through a similar economic change. In the early days, the oil industry in the North sea was very much a cash-flow industry. It was a case of throwing money at the problem: the goal was to get the oil out of the ground and achieve the ultimate objective, regardless of the cost. Similarly, at the height of the cold war, defence was about achieving technical solutions and certain military advances regardless of the cost. During the oil industry's second phase, it realised that it had finite resources to spend and asked how it could spend them most efficiently. Much work has been done to turn the industry around, turning around the technology and driving home many efficiencies, finding effective new ways to work in the forefront of the industry's technology. To some extent, those lessons could be learned by and transferred to the Ministry of Defence, which is having to consider ways to deliver the same goals and objectives with a finite resource.

There is real concern about the Territorial Army in the north of Scotland. In many areas, it is the last remaining military presence. It is the only means of bringing the public into contact with the military and maintaining the idea of a military existence. As the hon. Member for Canterbury (Mr. Brazier) said, in the end it is nations that win wars, and not merely their forces. If we do not bind the wider community into the role of the military and give them an awareness of what it is about, we will have problems in a time of severe emergency when people wake up to the extra burdens on the community. Without such a presence, there will be recruitment problems. If a community has no awareness of the military, which is a different and distant way of life to many people outside—

Mr. John Smith (Vale of Glamorgan): Does the hon. Gentleman therefore welcome the statement by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence about wearing uniforms in the community, which, as an ex-regular service man, is the best news that I have heard from a defence spokesman in 20 years? It was bizarre that the spokesman for the official Opposition did not refer to that point.

Sir Robert Smith: I would happily welcome that statement in terms of presence.

Mr. Robert Key (Salisbury): I will do so tomorrow.

Sir Robert Smith: I think that the Opposition will welcome it tomorrow. I am happy to do so today. My

[Sir Robert Smith]

limited military experience was in the Royal Air Force cadets. If we were using a warrant, we were not allowed to travel if we were not wearing our uniforms. Obviously, we created a slight presence.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: A substantial presence.

Sir Robert Smith: I was slighter in those days.

The wearing of uniforms will have an impact only if there are people in the area who can wear a uniform to travel about. That is the point that I was trying to make about the highlands, which the Government must consider seriously. The TA provides the majority of the uniforms in that part of the country.

Interestingly, the Minister for the Armed Forces circulated ministerially endorsed planning assumptions for the reorganisation of the Territorial Army. In the four pages circulated, the only criterion underlined reads:

"Geographical factors. Due attention should be given to the representation in the nations, regions and counties of the UK."

When the Government consider the review of the TA, it is important that they also consider geographical factors and the fact that one cannot make the same cost assumptions in areas throughout the United Kingdom. In an area the size of the highlands and the north-east of Scotland, delivery per person recruited and used will be more expensive. Infrastructure support will be more difficult to provide. One cannot make the same assumptions in a sparsely populated area that can be made in a concentrated area.

The Government continue to make a solid commitment to the cadet force. However, one must recognise that, if the Regular Army has no presence, the cadet force must fall back on the Territorial Army. If the commitment to the cadet force is 100 per cent. cast iron, one must again consider the cost assumptions carefully. For example, the TA centre in Laurencekirk is projected to close; however, the cadet force is to be maintained and, as it currently uses many TA resources, the savings there do not amount to real savings. What is the marginal cost of maintaining a TA presence? The Minister will have to consider that point.

The hon. Member for City of York said that he thought that the cuts in the Territorial Army were okay as long as they were applied equally throughout the country. However, the feedback from each constituency seems to suggest that the cuts are too great and that they are not working there.

There has to be a point at which one feeds back into the loop at the Ministry of Defence. It may be that the overall cut cannot be achieved and, as the Chairman of the Select Committee said, there is no loss of face for the Government to say that they have considered the detail and decided that, when it comes to the crunch, part of the review cannot be implemented and the assumptions about how great a cut can be imposed must be changed at the centre.

Mr. Gray: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that a reasonable footprint would be one infantry company per county throughout the United Kingdom? As I understand it, that would increase the number of TA soldiers required from the 7,150 projected in the review to only 9,000, so the cost would be very modest.

Sir Robert Smith: Before agreeing to any details, we would have to consider the technicalities of how the counties would work out in the context of the highlands, where we have had regional government for so long and where the implications might be fairly serious.

The Government talk a great deal about joined-up government, cross-departmental working and other such jargon. How much feedback has the Ministry had from other Departments, such as the Department for Education and Employment, about the effect of the TA cuts on their objectives of getting skills into the community and providing a more flexible work force and greater personal well-being?

I have met people in the TA on exercise, and many felt that they could take the experience of team working back to their workplace and expand it there. The TA provides hidden benefits to the economy and to society. Has that been taken fully on board in consultation with other Departments and has the Ministry of Defence fully recognised that wider role in the community?

The Government will not lose face if they say that, in the light of the technical realities on the ground, it is not possible to implement this part of the review without failing to follow the four pages of guidelines set out by the Minister for the Armed Forces in his assessment of how implementation should take place. I hope that the Government will reconsider their proposals and ensure that we have a TA that continues to thrive.

As the hon. and learned Member for North–East Fife (Mr. Campbell) said, a TA footprint on the ground provides an insurance policy, and once the drill halls are sold and the network in the community is closed, the ability to recruit and to kick-start the system again is lost. Much could be lost for the sake of a very minor part of the review.

Has the Ministry of Defence ever found that a conflict that it was involved in fitted the model of its threat analysis beforehand? The TA is cost-effective and provides a lot of troops and flexibility for a little investment. It is worth preserving for the future.

9.1 pm

Mr. Barry Jones (Alyn and Deeside): I am glad to follow the hon. Member for West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine (Sir R. Smith), who made a very committed speech.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State deserves great credit. The review is unique, because it has been open and foreign policy led rather than being a Treasury-driven cost-cutting exercise. It is the first ever to increase, and not cut, the size of the Regular Army and to enjoy the whole-hearted support of all the chiefs of staff, both in public and in private. It is an impressive piece of work, and its inclusiveness is unique.

I wish to make some brief constituency points. In 1996, the work force at RAF Sealand in Deeside—the Ministry of Defence's leading electronic repair establishment—was market-tested under the previous Government's "Competing for Quality" strategy and won that market test with a very competitive in-house bid. It is successfully

delivering a new and more efficient repair service under a service level agreement that is due to undergo competition again between 2002 and 2007. However, RAF Sealand is soon to be subsumed into the new defence aviation repair agency, which has the declared aim of being a trading fund by April 2001.

The Sealand work force are looking forward to the new challenge and recognise that they will have to deliver further efficiency savings over and above those generated from the market test, but they would greatly prefer to do that as an integral part of the defence aviation repair agency family rather than under the threat of a further market test in 2002 or later. Does the Minister not consider it reasonable at this stage to lift the threat of additional re-competition that is hanging over that loyal work force and to allow them to participate on equal terms with everyone else in the new defence aviation repair agency trading fund? RAF Sealand is now 1,700 strong and is of great importance to my constituency's economy. It has earne a positive reply to the request that it makes through me tonight.

On the subject of the airborne stand-off radar project, I hope that the Government will reassure me, and those of my constituents who are employed by Raytheon Systems, that the Ministry of Defence requirement for five ASTOR aircraft will be fulfilled. That capability is essential and is fully supported by the strategic defence review. ASTOR also has civil applications, such as monitoring oil spillages, natural disasters, smuggling and terrorist activities. The need for five aircraft is clear.

I ask the Government to note that the Raytheon ASTOR team solution would provide jobs in Scotland, England, Northern Ireland and Wales. In these uncertain times, those jobs would be a real boost for local communities. I remind the Government that the radar on the Raytheon ASTOR team's solution has been tried and tested, and I hope that Ministers agree that the Ministry and the Treasury cannot afford to take risks with such a key element of the ASTOR system. The platform that Raytheon would use—the Global Express—is widely recognised as the best aircraft. Raytheon also has the only proven radar in its advanced version, which currently flies on the U2 aircraft used by the United States of America.

The future large aircraft is also mentioned in the review. Can Ministers confirm that no more than four short-term heavy-lift aircraft are envisaged in the review? What is the probable length of the lease and can Ministers guarantee that the lease will not turn into a buy? If a lease turned into a buy, it would prejudice the prospect of the 40 to 50 future large aircraft that are required to secure the desired share of the work for the United Kingdom, including work for my constituents at Broughton in making the wings of the aircraft.

I ask the Minister to give a status report on the future large aircraft. We have a new Government in Germany. What is their position on the project? Are the French now supporting the project? Does the Foreign and Commonwealth Office assist our Government on that issue on the continent? Are the Germans still flirting with the idea of striking a deal with the Ukrainians, who now build the world's largest aircraft, the Antonov? My constituents very much want to build the wings of the future large aircraft, because that would assure the future of their jobs into the next century.

Many hon. Members have mentioned the Territorial Army. The new large and impressive drill hall at Queensferry in my constituency should not be closed. Twice a week, I see 40 cadets drill and train, effectively and with good discipline, on those premises. That is youth work of the highest order, in a locality with unemployment, social distress and increasing crime and drug abuse.

A Ministry of Defence document leaked to the *Sunday Telegraph* said that the drill hall was to close. It would cost as much to replicate it as would be saved by closing it. To close it would be nonsense. The public would not accept it, and the cadets and their fiercely supportive parents would not stand for it either. The hall also supports the Women's Royal Voluntary Service, North Wales police and countless voluntary organisations. My point for the Government is that, if it works, do not fix it. We have an excellent arrangement, and my constituency wants it to remain.

Let me mention briefly, but sincerely, the 3rd Battalion Royal Welch Fusiliers TA. I want it to remain at its current strength. I gather that the official recommendation is to have one large battalion in Wales. That will mean headquarters in Cardiff—but there are already five headquarters in Cardiff. I ask for two small battalions in Wales. We need to retain our traditions in north Wales. There is a major unit headquarters in north Wales in Wrexham, and that means opportunities for our young people and for undergraduates from the universities and colleges.

If the Government want to set north Wales afire, let them put the headquarters in Cardiff. If they want to excite the forces of nationalism in north Wales, let them put it in the headquarters in Cardiff. If they want to baffle parents and volunteers, then Cardiff it should be. Again I say, if it works, do not fix it. I hope that Ministers will hear my plea.

My remarks are unashamedly constituency orientated. However, there are 3,600 British Aerospace workers, 1,700 RAF Sealand employees and 120 Raytheon employees in Deeside, and my constituency knows which way its bread is buttered. I want those establishments to prosper. Having more than 5,000 highly skilled and nationally important wealth-creating jobs gives Deeside a wealth-creating base in manufacturing and servicing that is unrivalled in Wales. I ask the Ministers to hear what I say.

9.11 pm

Mr. Michael Jack (Fylde): I am delighted to follow the hon. Member for Alyn and Deeside (Mr. Jones), who has spoken, as I shall, of constituency matters. The hon. Gentleman has a long, proud and continuous record of service to his constituents, and tonight's speech was no exception.

The review is vital to Fylde, which is the home of British Aerospace's military aircraft division, where 6,000 people work on such projects as the Tornado mid-life update, Hawk final assembly and Eurofighter. Skilled teams of designers, engineers, technicians and electronics experts also work hard on such projects as Nimrod 2000 and the beginnings of development work on the future offensive air system. Fylde is also home to a large military barracks at Weeton where regiments come and go. They all serve in difficult parts of our military terrain, so Fylde knows what it is talking about on military matters.

[Mr. Michael Jack]

The heart of the review is a proper focus on the people in our defence industry and our armed forces, and I, too, shall focus on that. Keeping British Aerospace and the projects that matter to people there in business and keeping together its teams of vital experts are important parts of the outcome of the defence review. Before I turn to that, however, I want to reflect on two facts.

The first has come up already tonight, and it relates to the cadet forces. I am the president of our Air Cadet Force, 2486 Squadron, which operates from temporary facilities at Lytham St. Anne's high school. The force hopes to find a permanent home, but in light of what many right hon. and hon. Members have said, it is worried about what is happening to the territorial forces. If the Government are interested in contributing to the development of young people, who sometimes come from the most difficult inner-city environments, they should know that the work of the cadet forces—particularly of the Royal Air Force—is vital. Without proper support, those young people will not have their enthusiasm and commitment properly recognised and rewarded. If the Government want top-quality recruits, they have only to look at those cadet forces. I put on record my sincere appreciation of the work of the chairman of our Air Training Corps squadron, Jackie Allen, and the officer in charge, Phil Massey, who give up a huge amount of their time to serve the interests of those young people.

In debates such as this, in which we look forward, we sometimes forget those who have fallen in the past. I had the honour this year of being with my local Royal Air Force Association at the launch of its wings appeal. It had managed to persuade the RAF to bring a Spitfire to Warton. We had the remarkable symbolic sight of the older fighter juxtaposed with Eurofighter Typhoon to remind us that, without the sacrifice of those brave pilots in the second world war, we could not talk today about projects such as Eurofighter 2000. However, the efforts of George Wigan, Eric Barrowclough and Dennis Rowland, of whom the House will not have heard, have, with those of their colleagues in the RAFA, raised £4,500 in Fylde for the welfare needs not only of victims of the second world war but of service personnel sadly no longer in the RAF. The House would do well to acknowledge and remember their contribution.

The Secretary of State has got away lightly this evening on finance. None of the projects that we have discussed, particularly in procurement, could be achieved without the necessary resources. It has not been one-way traffic with no one commenting adversely on the defence review. *Defence Industry* contains critical comment and states:

"New Labour's widely praised plans depend on economic buoyancy."

That was written before the truth that Conservative Members knew but Labour decided not to look at had became apparent: the economy has gone flat.

I am surprised—perhaps I should not be—that the Secretary of State did nothing to reassure us that his budget in the defence review, which is for only three years ahead, is bombproof against further dawn raids by the Treasury. Having been in the Treasury, I strongly suspect that the knives are already out and being sharpened. The Government are already telling us that education and health will be the priorities. That is interesting language because the Secretary of State talked about priorities in defence but was not prepared to back it up by referring to solid cash.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Jack: I must resist my hon. Friend's invitation. I hope that I am not being rude, but I have several points.

On one project that has been secured, Eurofighter 2000, I have a question for the Government. We are delighted with the work of the previous Government in securing the project, and I am delighted that the present Government have seen it through to the production phase, but what will they do to support the industry in furthering the export prospects of this remarkable piece of technology? Thank goodness we got the dotted line signed before the German election.

Much has been said about the technologies involved in various procurement projects. In a way, the defence review missed out. Kevin Smith, one of the managing directors of British Aerospace, in a recent edition of *Defence Review*, rightly noted:

"We ought to have not just an MoD strategy, but a defence technology strategy for the UK."

I hope that, before this debate is out, we can have an assurance that the Government will go into more depth about the technologies that we need for the future. If companies such as British Aerospace and their growing band of European partners are to be able to plan properly for their future, and if we are to keep together the vital teams of very clever people who hold the technology, they need to know what is required and to be able to plan accordingly.

I have often felt that, in its own way, technology contributes to deterrence. The phrase I use to describe that is the deterrence of technology: if potential aggressors know that we have better systems, better kit and better people, they will think more than twice before deciding to have a go at us. Central to the question of retaining those talented groups of people, not only in BAe in my constituency, but throughout the United Kingdom defence industry, are projects such as the future offensive air system, which is in its infancy in terms of thinking, but which is utterly vital to the maintenance of a Europe-UK based technology pool that is at the leading edge.

Much has been said about another crucial project: the so-called joint strike fighter project. BAe, together with Lockheed Martin and other partners, is straddling the Atlantic on that project, which is important to carrier-based activity and to other aircraft with short take-off and landing capability. However, vital though that project is, and although it has the potential to open access for BAe to some technologies currently denied it, at the end of the day, such new technologies are not of BAe origin. By contrast, in the case of the future offensive air system, many of the new technologies—for example, the development of more stealth capability from a European source—will be our technologies.

It is that element that I regard as being absolutely vital, and I should be grateful to hear the Minister acknowledge that the Government distinguish carefully between the nature of the future offensive air system project and that of the joint strike fighter project. If we do not maintain technology bases within the United Kingdom and Europe,

we shall be unable to attract the completion in terms of European partners in alliances that will be vital if we are to secure a technology and, subsequently, a manufacturing base for defence systems in Europe and so compete with the might of the big three manufacturers in the United States.

We have to maintain an element of co-operation across the Atlantic and I congratulate BAe and the previous Government on their action in respect of the Nimrod 2000 project, which did exactly that. British airframe technology and British systems integration excellence were coupled with Boeing's maritime surveillance systems. That is good, but we have to tackle the central issue of maintaining a technological base in Europe and the United Kingdom.

If the work, which I hope that the Government will continue to timetable, on the future offensive air system proceeds and a stealthier inhabited air vehicle becomes a real possibility, is there any chance that the arrival of such an air vehicle will affect the configuration of the final batch of Eurofighter Typhoon production? I should be grateful if the Minister would comment on that tonight.

One of the key elements in the debate has been smart procurement, but I remain somewhat sceptical that it will deliver the sort of savings mentioned. I was exposed to a civil aviation project, where Air Canada and Virgin negotiated with Airbus Industrie about a project on paper, the A340. They decided exactly what they wanted and, three and three quarter years later, on time, to specification and on payload, the aircraft appeared. That is in stark contrast to the C130J procurement programme currently before us: it is two years late and the product does not exist.

I wonder whether the Government will adopt the procurement philosophy exemplified in the A340 project—that of a true partnership with industry—or whether they will find it difficult to change the culture within the Ministry of Defence. Will they get away from the current competition-based philosophy to one of trust and partnership with industry? If they do not, they will not achieve savings. I support strongly the suggestion made earlier in the debate that we should have a progress report on how smart procurement is working and on the progress of the savings. If the savings are not made in time, it will be the undoing of the Government's proposal.

The future large aircraft project is vital for aviation in the north-west. That has been mentioned in the debate. I was struck by the endorsement in the report produced by Professor Philip Lawrence and Dr. Derek Bradman from the university of the West of England. The report was not sponsored by the industry, but it makes a compelling case regarding our future heavy-lift capacity and the future large aircraft. The Government should stand up and say that they will use smart procurement to secure that project and an Airbus-based new tanker fleet. Those projects are not at the margins of technology and the new smart procurement scheme could deliver the goods as far as the United Kingdom is concerned.

Getting the review right is vital for my constituents, for the United Kingdom and Europe and for our contribution to world peace. If the Government get it wrong, they can only blame themselves that they have put another TSR2 on their doorstep.

9.25 pm

Ms Rachel Squire (Dunfermline, West): I have removed large chunks of my speech because time is very limited.

I follow the right hon. Member for Fylde (Mr. Jack) in expressing concern that Britain should retain the lead in the avionics industry. However, the Treasury-led defence policy of the previous Government did the industry no favours and did not assist it in developing a technological lead, in procurement or in securing the future of Britain's defence industry as a whole. I have listened with amazement to some of the comments tonight from Conservative Members who seem to have forgotten completely that, in the early 1990s, the previous Government reduced armed forces expenditure by more than one fifth and cut force numbers by 29 per cent.

I welcome very much the strategic defence review for which so many hon. Members on both sides of the House have called for so long. I welcome the level of consultation and involvement that is finally beginning to lift the iron curtain of the MOD at Whitehall. In the few minutes available, I signal my pride in, and praise for, the United Kingdom's armed forces. Whatever our differences, all hon. Members recognise our armed forces' reputation for professionalism and high standards, and are committed to maintaining that reputation throughout the world.

Focusing briefly on constituency concerns, I welcome the stability that this Government have brought to Rosyth dockyard by confirming its allocated programme of refit. However, I ask the Minister, first, to consider immediately moving the Ark Royal from Portsmouth, where it has been sitting for months on end awaiting refit, to Rosyth as an early Christmas present. Secondly, will he ensure that, in the face of increasingly fierce competition for shipbuilding and refitting work among those with maritime interests, a more open and co-operative approach is adopted?

I see that the hon. Member for Moray (Mrs. Ewing) is in the Chamber. Although I defend Rosyth's and Scotland's interests, I believe that the last thing that we need is to go down the road of separatism. I cannot believe that anyone would think that a separate Scottish navy, army and air force is credible.

As to other matters affecting Rosyth, I have been lobbied by the MOD police who plead not to be reviewed yet again. They would like some assurance that that will not occur.

I pay tribute to the Rosyth naval stores depot, which is due for closure but welcomes the 18-month staged approach which allows alternative training and education to be developed so that, hopefully, people can find other jobs.

Recently, I made enjoyable visits to the Rosyth sea cadets and to the Royal Naval Auxiliary Service Rosyth association. I support the points that have been made about the importance of our volunteers and sea cadets.

I welcome the stability and the three-year planning cycle that the review has brought to defence industry, the efforts that are being made to rationalise European defence industry and the commitment to a defence diversification agency. However, I share hon. Members' concerns that, if the DDA becomes part of the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency, DERA should keep its exclusive British rights to the best brains in the country and should not go too far towards privatisation.

[Ms Rachel Squire]

I applaud the review and I welcome the good reputation that our armed forces maintain in spite of the efforts of politicians.

9.30 pm

Mr. Keith Simpson (Mid-Norfolk): The hon. Member for Dunfermline, West (Ms Squire) spoke for almost everybody who has attended the debate when she reminded us that, whatever our differences, we have the greatest admiration for all the men and women who serve in our regular and part-time armed forces, the civil servants who support them and all those involved in British industry. They are regarded throughout the world as having the greatest reputation. Hon. Members must remember that, since 1969, 452 British service men have given their lives in defence of freedom and democracy, combating terrorism within the United Kingdom.

We all welcome the opportunity to debate the strategic defence review. In his opening speech, the Secretary of State mentioned that the SDR had been welcomed by a senior NATO officer with "qualified rapture", which is an interesting expression. I suspect that those in the military expected that, with an incoming Labour Government, they would be like a patient who was to have his leg amputated, and they were therefore quite cheery when it was proposed to cut off only one foot, but in the post-SDR euphoria, many of them are beginning to sniff the touch of gangrene.

The Government have made much of the review being open and having involved a great deal of consultation, which has been the case. However, many hon. Members know that we have had great difficulty in getting information out of Ministers. I was amused that in the review, Ministers point out that there have been many debates on the SDR. Those debates over the past 18 months were initiated by hon. Members: for example, the hon. Member for Chorley (Mr. Hoyle) initiated a debate on defence procurement; my hon. Friend the Member for Canterbury (Mr. Brazier) and my right hon. Friend the Member for Maidstone and The Weald (Miss Widdecombe) initiated debates on the Territorial Army, and I initiated a debate on the SDR.

Like the hon. and learned Member for North-East Fife (Mr. Campbell), I should like to know when we might expect the single service debates on the Royal Navy and the Army. We had a single service debate on the Royal Air Force. Have the others disappeared down a parliamentary black hole?

The Labour party manifesto referred to a defence and security review. So far, we have had the strategic defence review, but there has been no wider review of security policy. That point was made by the Select Committee and its Chairman. On countless occasions, I and other hon. Members have asked why, if the defence review is a foreign policy defence review, as the Government have continually argued, there has been no foreign policy baseline. What is wrong in publishing such a baseline?

Many of us believe that, if the Government had had a foreign policy baseline, their policy towards Sierra Leone and the Balkans might have been more coherent. This afternoon, the Foreign Secretary might have been asked a very fair question: "What exactly is the Government's long-term strategy for the Balkans?" We do not know.

The SDR was presented in one volume, with a separate volume of supporting essays and 41 separate fact sheets. Information must be sought among many documents. For example, there is no one detailed document on the defence budget, except for one page of four paragraphs on resources. Several hon. Members have pointed out that this appears to be an absurdity, given the importance of resources in terms of implementing the defence review. However, if one searched the press summaries, one did find some information on the costings of force enhancements not covered elsewhere.

I should congratulate the Select Committee on Defence on extracting some costings on a wide range of policy areas, from efficiency savings to extra money required for welfare. Those cannot be found in any Government document. Obtaining information about the defence budget is rather like being an accountant trying to pin down Del Boy and Trotter and Sons on their family business—almost impossible.

As the shadow Secretary of State for Defence, my hon. Friend the Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Mr. Maples), pointed out, between 1996–97 and 2001–2, defence spending will fall by £2.1 billion in real terms. That is not merely a debating point between the Opposition and the Government. I believe that most hon. Members realise that resources will be absolutely crucial for the Government in delivering the contents of their strategic defence review. They will be crucial to the major procurement projects that the Government have outlined.

Resources will be crucial if the Government wish to acquire not just two carriers, but the type of naval and air support package that goes with them; if they wish to acquire at the same time future large aircraft; if they wish to acquire all the various equipment for the Army; and if they wish to acquire the unglamorous but absolutely crucial logistical effort that goes into sending an expeditionary force abroad. It is not carping criticism to have doubts about that; the matter is fundamental to our national security, even without taking into account the problems that will be connected with maintaining our high-quality personnel. I am afraid that, even if we have the kit, if we do not have the excellent personnel whom our armed forces have at present, we shall end up in the second eleven.

Many of us believe that the strategic defence review has been about reducing defence expenditure and forces while maintaining our current commitments. Many observers have noted that our commitments have actually been expanded by things such as coercive diplomacy—to use the in phrase—and of course an expeditionary force capability. One is forced to conclude that our armed forces are being asked to do more with less. Moreover, if one talks to them, it becomes obvious that both regulars and reservists know that.

The whole SDR is based on a deal struck with the Treasury on efficiency savings. The SDR report admits that resources depend on an expanding economy. Well—tragically—it is no longer an expanding economy, as many of our constituents know. Britain is teetering on the edge of a recession. As recently as a fortnight ago, the Chancellor admitted that he would have to adjust growth forecasts, perhaps to 1 per cent. or less. There is a potential black hole of about £36 billion in the middle of the public finances. It is a downturn made in Downing street, and it will challenge Ministers. *[Interruption.]* Ministers smile about that, but many hon. Members

present remember the defence record of previous Labour Governments. The track record in the 1960s and 1970s was not good. Perhaps as in the case of the Healey and Mason reviews, the Robertson review will end up with the Secretary of State having to come back to Parliament in a year with supplementary defence estimates forced on him by Government policy. That brings no cheer to any hon. Member.

The Ministry of Defence will have to implement the strategic defence review with restrictions on its budget. Rumours are already seeping out of the MOD that there is an interesting financial black hole in the long-term costing for 1999. Even with the projected efficiency savings, which have been described by the Chief of the Defence Staff as challenging, one is left in doubt whether the Ministry of Defence will be able to achieve its objective.

It is interesting, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Wealden (Sir G. Johnson Smith) and my hon. Friend the Member for Romsey (Mr. Colvin) pointed out, that just at the time when the Government are effectively cutting defence spending, the United States intends to increase its defence spending by 10 per cent. Our major ally recognises that its armed forces are likely to be busier in the next decade and that the weapons needed are much more costly.

Several hon. Members have pointed out contradictions in the SDR. The SDR maintains that there is now no direct military threat to the United Kingdom, yet further on it states:

"There is an increasing danger from the proliferation of nuclear, biological and chemical technologies."

The Select Committee rightly pointed out that ballistic missile systems and other weapons of mass destruction, as has been recognised by the United States Government, will pose a threat to us and to our allies. I ask the Secretary of State to reconsider the resources that he has allocated to that—an issue that we debated before Christmas, when my right hon. Friend the Member for Haltemprice and Howden (Mr. Davis) raised it in an Adjournment debate.

The muddle in Government thinking and the imbalance between resources and commitments have been laid bare in the debate by hon. Members in all parts of the House who have mentioned their concerns about the Territorial Army. The hon. and learned Member for North–East Fife, the hon. Member for Portsmouth, North (Mr. Rapson), my hon. Friend the Member for Romsey, the hon. Member for Paisley, South (Mr. Alexander), my right hon. Friend the Member for Wealden, my hon. Friend the Member for Canterbury, the hon. Members for Barrow and Furness (Mr. Hutton), for City of York (Mr. Bayley), for West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine (Sir R. Smith) and for Alyn and Deeside (Mr. Jones) and my right hon. Friend the Member for Fylde (Mr. Jack) all expressed their fears about the Territorial Army.

Ministers claim that the reorganisation of the Territorial Army is predicated solely on making it modern and more usable. That is just not true. No one would deny that the TA, like other parts of the armed forces, must be prepared to face the threats of the future. It cannot be preserved in aspic, merely as a museum piece. Having spoken to serving soldiers in the Regular Army, let alone the Territorial Army, I and many others have concluded that the real drive behind the reduction in the TA has been the need to find money to fund the Regular Army.

The MOD has failed to follow its own logical policy on the TA. A year ago, according to initial MOD policy documents, the TA was to have been reduced to about 5,000. Many people in the Royal Air Force and the Royal Navy saw the logical conclusion of such a reduction. Now the TA is to be reduced only to 40,000. How do Ministers explain that range of figures? As many hon. Members have asked, what criteria have been used in the restructuring of the TA?

There is a fight over resources, with the Regular Army fighting for every extra pound and Ministers having to respond to pressure to maintain a credible TA. We guess that about 150 TA centres will close to find savings, and about 20,000 TA soldiers, mainly from the infantry and the yeomanry, will be cut. The remainder will be cadre-ised into soulless holding battalions. If that happens, many of the remaining men and women who belong to them will leave the Territorial Army. The future of the TA has been subject to delays and leaks, which has had a major effect on the roll and on recruiting. The MOD is full of leaks—just like the SDR.

Ultimately, the SDR has been not just about administrative reorganisation and foreign policy, but about making our armed forces do more with less. The Opposition welcome many aspects of the SDR in terms of continuity over matters such as jointery, the continuing desire to get better value for money from defence procurement. I say to the Front Bench, "Welcome aboard reality. You have been out of step for the past 20 years and you have now rejoined mainstream thinking on defence policy."

The SDR, published in July, was a statement of intent. We shall now see a continual rolling defence review. I fear that, with the economy teetering on recession, the Ministry of Defence will be unable to manage its budgets and that there will be further cuts and possible humiliations. The Secretary of State will have to explain that to the men and women in our armed forces.

The Opposition welcome parts of the strategic defence review, but regret the fact that the Government have not been open in publishing the foreign policy baseline and that Ministers have failed to accept that most of the determinants behind the defence review have been financial.

9.46 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. John Spellar): Hon. Members on both sides of the House have paid tribute to the work of the new Minister of Transport, my right hon. Friend the Member for Hamilton, North and Bellshill (Dr. Reid), who made considerable contributions to these debates from both Opposition and Government Benches. I understand that he is having some difficulty in adjusting to his new role, as, whenever he goes on a bus or train and sees someone in uniform, he or she fails to salute him. He was a good team player, and has been replaced by another excellent team player in the new Minister for the Armed Forces, my hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, North (Mr. Henderson).

As shown by a survey in *The Sunday Times*, which said that the Secretary of State was the fourth most powerful man in the country, defence is an important issue. As we heard today, the strategic defence review has set the scene for our armed forces in the next 15 or 20 years. It has laid

[Mr. John Spellar]

down a framework which will guide the shape of British defence well into the next century. It thoroughly merits a two-day debate and a full report from the Select Committee.

As usual in these debates, hon. Members have displayed considerable knowledge and interest. In closing the debate, I shall respond to a number of the points that were raised, although I fear that I shall be unable to respond to them all, and will have to deal with some in correspondence or tomorrow. Although I recognise the keen interest shown in reserves, most of the points on that subject will be covered by my hon. Friend the Minister for the Armed Forces when he opens the second day of the debate tomorrow.

I confess to some disappointment—no mention has been made of the 10 per cent. increase in the Navy and Air Force reserves.

Mr. Brazier *rose—*

Mr. Spellar: There has been no acknowledgement of the need to reshape the Army reserves for their role in the new strategic environment, ensuring that they are relevant, trained and equipped.

Mr. Brazier: That is untrue.

Madam Speaker: Order. Did I hear the hon. Member for Canterbury (Mr. Brazier) say that that was untrue? If so, I must ask him to withdraw that statement.

Mr. Brazier: I am sorry, Madam Speaker. I withdraw. The Minister may inadvertently have—

Madam Speaker: Order. I think that the hon. Gentleman was frustrated because he was not allowed to get in. I accept his withdrawal.

Mr. Spellar: On the radio this morning, the shadow Opposition spokesman spoke about the use of the TA to fill gaps. That is important, but so is trying to avoid the gaps in the first place. It is ironic that the last big drops in TA membership took place precisely during the period when he was Economic Secretary to the Treasury. In the early part of this decade, TA membership went down from 86,000 to 59,000. Much as I should like to pursue that line, I must leave it to my hon. Friend the Minister for the Armed Forces. I will say a few words about the most important changes to our organisation that we shall be making as a result of the SDR.

We expect future operations to be conducted increasingly on a joint basis, and, throughout the SDR, we have aimed to ensure that a joint approach forms a central part of all our defence activities. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State spoke about our plans for a joint Navy and RAF Harrier force, and mentioned our plans to take forward jointery in the area of logistic support.

On the joint Harrier force—Joint Force 2000—I am pleased to announce that the chiefs of staff have agreed that the force will form within RAF Strike Command under the command and control of a two-star Navy rear admiral. A one-star RAF air commodore, working to the rear admiral, will command the force on a day-to-day basis. We envisage that the headquarters will be operational in 2000, but our front line can operate only if the kit works. We have been making major strides in logistics.

Mr. Blunt: Will the Minister make it clear that future appointments to the joint Harrier force, and every other joint force appointment, will be on merit and not some sort of carve-up?

Mr. Spellar: The service men involved would be extremely resentful of the implication that the appointments were not made on merit, but we will draw that to their attention. We absolutely deny that suggestion.

We intend to form three new defence agencies to support the front line: a new defence transport and movements agency to manage all our strategic movement, including deployment for operations; a single defence storage and distribution agency; and a single defence aviation repair agency to undertake deep repair and overhaul of all fixed-wing and rotary-wing aircraft. The role of DARA was mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Alyn and Deeside (Mr. Jones), and my hon. Friend the Member for Portsmouth, North (Mr. Rapson) mentioned the role of the Navy repair organisation, which he served for so many years. I especially welcome his genuine feedback from the shop floor and from the Marines. Both those sites—Sealand and Gosport—and Perth and St. Athan will play a major role in the development of the aviation agency.

In addition, we intend to form two joint force logistic headquarters to co-ordinate the provision of joint logistics support to deployed operations. To take forward the concept of joint logistic support, we are creating a new unified logistics organisation to replace the current separate logistics organisations of the single services. That will be controlled by a chief of defence logistics.

The CDL's role will be to deliver to the front line joint, cost-effective support that is responsive and reliable. Such integration will provide for greater commonality of systems and approaches across the defence logistics area. That in turn will provide the opportunity for strategic management of all logistics support, thereby enhancing efficiency and cost-effectiveness—in short, achieving better, more effective support through the application of sensible processes and common practices.

The first steps towards that goal have already been taken, with the appointment of the Chief of Defence Logistics (Designate), General Sir Sam Cowan, and his implementation team, led by a senior civil servant, Mr. John Oughton. I hope that there is no complaint about that from the Opposition. The team will be put into place by 1 April 1999, and the essential elements of the core headquarters will enable the CDL to assume budgetary and management control of the current logistics areas.

By April 2000, it is planned to have a fully integrated defence logistics organisation providing logistic support to the armed forces. That will be a change of the greatest magnitude and a huge challenge, but it underlines our commitment to achieving greater effectiveness in delivering military capability while securing better value for money. I welcome the interest in that shown by the Select Committee.

More detailed points were raised during the debate. First, the speech of the hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Mr. Maples) was interesting not so much for what it did say, but for what it did not say. There was no comment on why the Opposition did not co-operate with the leak inquiry or why they did not even turn up to it. Those points were put strongly by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, and there was no response at all from the hon. Member for Stratford–on–Avon or from the hon. Member for Mid–Norfolk (Mr. Simpson) in winding up.

Mr. Maples: Will the Minister explain how the Opposition can leak a Government document?

Mr. Spellar: The Secretary of State made it very clear that it had been established that a document had got into the hands of the Opposition, and that copies had then been made and leaked to the press. They refused the opportunity to go to the leak inquiry and give evidence: that was stated clearly by the Secretary of State, and there was no response from the Opposition Front Bench.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: The Minister criticises Opposition Front Benchers. Does it occur to him that they were members of the very same Government who changed the criminal law to make silence capable of an adverse interpretation?

Mr. Spellar: I think I remember that the phrase used so often by their spokesmen at the time was, "Those with nothing to hide have nothing to fear."

Equally misleading and wrong is the dead horse being flogged by the Opposition to hide their frustration about the widespread support for our decision to build a new generation of aircraft carriers. Those carriers were mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Barrow and Furness (Mr. Hutton), and by the hon. Member for Romsey (Mr. Colvin) and the hon. and learned Member for North–East Fife (Mr. Campbell).

Let me put the facts on record. First, there has been no change in the Government's commitment to this project. We need two large carriers to provide the Navy with a harder-hitting, more versatile platform for force projection operations, and we will make sure that the Navy has those two larger carriers.

During the SDR, we looked at other options, including life extension of the current vessels, and concluded that none of them met our requirements satisfactorily. No one in the Navy, the Ministry of Defence or the Treasury—or the Chancellor—has re-opened, or queried, the SDR decision, so we are now in the process of implementing that decision. As part of that work, we are doing what the Ministry of Defence has done since 1992 to demonstrate to the House, the National Audit Office and the taxpayer that we have selected the most cost-effective solution to our requirements.

We are comparing in detail the option that we have chosen with a "do nothing" option—abandoning carriers entirely—and a "do the minimum" option, which, in this case as in many others, constitutes a life extension programme. The contract bulletin simply asks for tenders to provide a study: we have a copy here. The hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon did not read out all of it. It talks of Invincible class

"further special refit cost studies."

It uses the word "studies," which deals with the point made by the hon. Gentleman.

We are talking about a contract for a study. The MOD pays for the study, under the contract: I should have thought that was self-evident from the definition. It is standard practice, and it is unfortunate that the Opposition feel the need to engage in such scaremongering to hide their complete lack of any ideas.

As I have said, these were prudent Government arrangements, nothing more and nothing less, and exactly what was done before. I hope that we can now lay that canard to rest. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Mid–Norfolk has nothing else to say, so it is not surprising that he wants to keep on. Oh dear, oh lor': the trip to Eastbourne obviously did not do the hon. Gentleman much good.

A second myth propagated by the Opposition Front Bench was that decisions about the refit of HMS Spartan were made for constituency reasons. Here, too, the facts are fundamentally different.

HMS Spartan will be a key part of our attack submarine force until 2006: she therefore requires a refit, which will provide more than four years' operational service. It will not be a full refit, but it will involve refuelling and essential maintenance. The full refit that was originally planned was part of the programme for Rosyth, agreed by the last Government as part of the sale of the dockyard. Cancellation would have incurred charges, with no benefit to the MOD or the taxpayer, in the region of £60 million—plus £30 million for earlier than planned redundancy costs. The reduced refits will cost less than originally planned, and meet our operational requirements.

While on the subject of the Navy, I can reassure my hon. Friend the Chairman of the Select Committee on Defence that there has been no casting aside of peacetime tasks for the destroyer and frigate force. The Navy will be able to meet those tasks with 32 ships by managing the force more flexibly, so that deployments can be adjusted to match changing political and operational priorities. That will enable us to meet commitments in the Gulf, the Falklands and the Caribbean, and to provide a regular presence off west Africa and make regular deployments in the Asia-Pacific region.

We conducted the review in a remarkably open and inclusive manner. I am confident that, when we return tomorrow, there will be a similar consensus on the good sense of our proposals. My hon. Friend the Minister for the Armed Forces will be talking about our policy for people and our proposals for reserves. That will show the work that has been undertaken and the strength of the defence review.

It being Ten o'clock, the debate stood adjourned.

Debate to be resumed tomorrow.

Mr. Andrew Mackinlay (Thurrock): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. Have you had a request by a Foreign Office Minister to make a statement tonight on the reports that 24 officers have been executed in Sierra Leone following courts martial? Twelve journalists are also under sentence of death, including a British national, Hilton Fyle, who is a former BBC correspondent. Given

[Mr. Andrew Mackinlay]

our considerable support for President Kabbah and his Government and our human rights policy, I am anxious that a Foreign Office Minister should clarify whether the United Kingdom Government have been able to make representations, opposing these executions and supporting clemency for those who are under sentence of death.

Madam Speaker: I have not been informed that, at this stage, any Minister from the Foreign Office is seeking to make a statement to the House.

PETITION

Former Firing Range (Salisbury)

10.1 pm

Mr. Robert Key (Salisbury): I wish to present a petition raised by almost 500 of my constituents from East Gomeldon, the Winterbournes and other parishes, which asks the House to urge the Ministry of Defence to clear a former range adjacent to their homes where more than 2,000 metal objects have been identified that were buried many years of ago, some of which might contain high explosives, phosgene or mustard gas. Since we began the petition, the Ministry of Defence has said that it will clear the ground, but it has not started yet and this is our insurance policy. The *Journal* of this House for 10 December 1640 records that a petition was found on Salisbury plain, brought to the mayor of Salisbury, sent by an hon. Member to the Committee on Petitions, which found it of no better consequence than to be burnt. I urge this honourable House not to burn this one, but to give it its support.

To lie upon the Table.

Whittle Colliery

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Hanson.]*

10.2 pm

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): In the quiet countryside of Northumberland, an environmental disaster is waiting to happen. It will happen around the middle of 2000 if nothing is done to prevent it.

Immediately south of Alnwick, alongside the A1, there are two former pits, Shilbottle and Whittle, which, during my time as a Member of Parliament, employed 1,500 men. They produced coal that was famous for household use. The wife of my former colleague, the late Jo Grimond, told me that her coalman in the Orkney islands used occasionally to appear with a look of triumph on his face and say, "I've got you some Shilbottle coal, Mrs. Grimond." No one can have Shilbottle coal any more, because those pits have been closed.

The two collieries are connected underground. In their flooded state, they are a single water system. Shilbottle closed in the 1970s, but Whittle remained open longer. It was closed by the Coal Board in 1987, and was re-opened under licence. It went through a series of financial problems, until it passed into the hands of a company called Stonegate Mining, which went into receivership.

What went on immediately before final closure was a scandal. Men were sent underground without employers' liability insurance cover, and the mines inspectorate seemed powerless to stop it. There are men who are still unable to obtain compensation for injuries they received because the company is in receivership and there was no insurance. The receivers sold the surface assets to a non-mining company.

In March 1997, the pumps were stopped because the electricity bill had not been paid. They had been pumping 1 million cu m a year to keep the water level down. When the mine was working, they pumped 3 million cu m a year. The Environment Agency identified the seriousness of the problem in its local Environment Agency plan for the area in July 1997, and immediately public concern grew. Water levels are rising by 9 cm a day, and it was accepted that the mine was likely to overflow on a very large scale early in 2000.

Heavily polluted water would pour into the River Coquet through the Hazon burn and by other routes, destroying the entire ecology of a famous and beautiful salmon river with a rich variety of wildlife. As a site of special scientific interest, it would be destroyed. Very large costs would also arise because water is extracted from the Coquet for domestic supplies serving a large area. As the agency began further investigations, using boreholes, public concern grew.

There was an additional concern about stythe—mine gas—being forced upwards by the water. There has been a tragic death in my constituency from stythe in the Widdrington area. We have debated the issue before, as the Minister knows well. I hope that he can assure us that this aspect of the problem is being watched carefully.

Every level of local government became involved in the pressure for a solution. The county council organised some of the meetings, and the district council was very active. The local parish councils were particularly

concerned. All sorts of local organisations and many individuals made representations to me of their concern, and I pay tribute to all their efforts and to the public bodies which recognised the urgency of the issue. We are all conscious of the fact that, for every day that went by, a million gallons of water were added to the flood level, with the water rising 3 to 4 in a day.

It became clear that treatment of the water was the only feasible solution, although there were some technical arguments about the relative contribution of chemical and reed-bed treatments, and about whether a longer-term system could be devised which required less energy. A scheme has been identified, with capital costs of around £450,000 and initial running costs of £30,000 to £80,000 a year.

On 16 July this year, the Minister for the Environment, the right hon. Member for Oldham, West and Royton (Mr. Meacher), was interviewed about the issue on Radio 4. I was delighted to hear him say:

"There's no question, action is going to be taken—no question whatsoever."

He referred to the Strathclyde principle, under which the Coal Authority has moral obligations beyond its legal duties in cases of severe breakout of water. But it was still not clear who would be paying.

The Minister for Energy and Industry, who is to reply to tonight's debate, issued a press release on 2 October in which he announced:

"the Coal Authority will take the lead role in preventing pollution and . . . funding will be provided to ensure a scheme is in place in good time."

That sounds fine, but there is a rather worrying line in the press release which refers to the Coal Authority, the Environment Agency, Northumbrian Water and other local groups, and says:

"these organisations will now decide the best way of making provision."

Is it clear that the Coal Authority will foot the bill? If not, who else? What if it does not agree that it should contribute? Are the Government guaranteeing, as the Minister implied on the radio, that the money will be produced on time without any doubt or delay? Delay, of course, would be utterly disastrous, but we are entitled to some reassurance. I want to know whose name will be on the cheque.

Minewater flooding is a widespread problem in many parts of the north-east, and the British Geological Survey team has drawn public attention to it. There are other instances in my constituency. At Spittal, which lies across the Tweed from Berwick, we had serious flooding in the main street across from old mine workings in June this year. Large numbers of homes were flooded by polluted water, and there was a lot of damage to property, as well as a lot of distress to residents, many of them elderly.

In the context of today's defence debate, I should mention that tremendous help was received by residents from soldiers—fusiliers from the local TA company—who were on the scene within 25 minutes of being called in. We will lose that kind of practical help if we do not have the TA in Berwick. Residents of Spittal and the council are now having enormous difficulty in getting anyone to accept liability for the damage caused by flooding, and for the cost of preventing it from happening in the future.

It has happened before. It happened before the war; older people remember it. The Coal Authority denies liability. The water company whose sewers are involved does not accept it, either. The Environment Agency cannot seem to help. Meanwhile, the residents of Spittal, who have had to face flooding from both directions—from the sea and from the land—are left with the worry that flooding from the old mines might happen again. I appeal to the Minister to use his influence to ensure that the Coal Authority sorts it out.

Returning to the issue of flooding at Whittle, I am grateful for the prompt response of Government—it needed to be prompt—and for the firm indication from the Minister for the Environment that it is going to be dealt with, but we need to know who is paying the bill, or at least that someone is going to pay the bill, and that the Government have underwritten a solution. Without action, the biggest environmental disaster in the country will be Northumberland's millennium experience. We need to be sure that it is going to be prevented.

10.9 pm

The Minister for Energy and Industry (Mr. John Battle): I congratulate the right hon. Member for Berwick- upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) on securing this debate. I thank him for his persistence and the clear and succinct manner in which he has raised the serious issue of minewater flooding. It is not only of local concern, but of national importance.

In opposition and in government, we have made it clear that our concern for coalfield communities throughout the country relates to the legacy of mine workings in those communities. It is not surprising that the Government's actions to establish a level playing field on which the coal industry can compete, both here and in Europe, have attracted most attention in recent weeks and months. That is, perhaps, inevitable, but we have, I hope, also shown our determination to face up to the difficult legacy of former coal mining.

Any of us familiar with coalfield areas will be familiar with the impact that coal mining can have on rivers and streams—a working mine, a spoil heap, a blackened river. When mining ceases, the picture changes, sometimes over a long period. The mine is abandoned, the pumps that once drew cleaner water to the surface to keep the workings dry are switched off and water begins to rise. As it does so, it often picks up mineral deposits, principally iron, but sometimes lesser quantities of manganese and aluminium.

If the rising minewater surfaces and overflows into a river or stream, the iron within it generally turns the river not black but orange. The watercourse not only becomes an eyesore—not an amenity—but, depending on the severity of the pollution, loses much of the life within it. There are other repercussions—for example, if the watercourse is used as a source for abstraction by water companies.

As the right hon. Gentleman will recognise, what I have described is exactly the situation that faces us at the former Whittle colliery, near Warkworth in Northumberland. Here we have a mine where the surface land and shafts were sold in the 1980s by British Coal to a private operator. Over time, it changed hands until, in 1997, the last owner went into receivership, the mine was abandoned and the pumps switched off.

[Mr. John Battle]

In due course, the Environment Agency raised concerns over the possible effects of that action—that contaminated water was rising through the workings and might eventually discharge into the nearby Hazon burn, a tributary of the River Coquet. The Coquet is a site of special scientific interest. It is home to a range of aquatic life, including salmon, otter and lamprey and, further downstream, is used as an abstraction point by Northumbrian Water. Therefore, it was unsurprising that the agency's worries led to a good deal of local concern from the right hon. Gentleman, the local council and other organisations that have raised the matter.

The challenge was how best to deal with those concerns. To do that, a partnership of interested parties—the Environment Agency, the Coal Authority, Northumbrian Water, local councils and others—was put together. That partnership approach reflected the fact that Whittle was in private ownership. That is a different situation from others in which the Coal Authority was involved, as they were ordinarily linked to mines that were formerly owned and operated by the National Coal Board and by British Coal and are formally vested in the Coal Authority.

At the same time, the situation at Whittle clearly had to be dealt with. The Coal Authority had found that a partnership approach had been successfully adopted at other sites; I mention Bullhouse in South Yorkshire. It was clear to that partnership that, before any action was taken, the agency's predictions had to be objectively tested by independent research to get the appropriate remedial action right. That research was carried out by the consultancy Entec UK Ltd., primarily with funding from the Coal Authority.

Entec's findings, which became available for consideration by the partners in September, provided the necessary information on the status of the water within the mines, the rate at which it was filling the workings, whether and when it would overflow and the likely severity of any pollution. In the light of that, Entec's report set out the expected time scales, the options for treatment and the estimated costs of that treatment.

With that information to hand, it is now possible for the Coal Authority, in liaison with the other partners, to take decisions on the most appropriate method of treatment and how it will be implemented. I understand that, in the light of the Entec report, the authority has identified various potential sites for the location of treatment systems. As at other sites, decisions on the precise method of treatment to be used will be for the authority to take.

Typically, treatment at minewater sites involves the removal of iron deposits through aeration and filtration, followed by the passive absorption of further iron by reed beds, after which the water can be safely discharged to the watercourse.

I shall now turn to a point on which the right hon. Gentleman sought specific reassurance. On 2 October, I was able to confirm that the Coal Authority would oversee implementation and that the Department of Trade and Industry would ensure that the necessary funds would be available to allow it to do so. The first estimates are that the capital costs of the treatment will be around £450,000, with annual running costs of between £30,000 and £80,000. That spend will not adversely affect the authority' s existing minewater programme. As a result of that action, any pollution of the River Coquet will be avoided.

The Coal Authority has developed considerable expertise in dealing with minewater from coal mines, which it can bring to bear at Whittle. That expertise can be seen at first hand throughout the coalfield areas of Britain in the series of eight minewater remediation projects, including Polkennet in Scotland, where an overflow was prevented by the installation of pumps by the authority. Obviously, the authority's commitment does not stop there. It also carries out pumping to prevent pollution at a number of stations, notably not far from the right hon. Gentleman's constituency in Durham, where pumping protects the River Wear, and it has carried out feasibility studies on a number of other serious overflows with a view to treating them in the future.

The authority has agreed a priority list of around 50 of the most serious minewater pollution problems with the Environment Agency and the Scottish Environment Protection Agency. So, all its research, preventive and treatment work is carried out in close co-operation with the organisations that monitor water quality and pinpoint potential problems. The authority spent more than £3 million on its programme in 1997–98 and expects to spend around £4 million this year. I hope that that reassures the right hon. Gentleman that a coherent programme is in place to prevent minewater pollution from Whittle, that funding is available to enable it to be carried out and that the key organisations are involved in the process.

Mr. Beith: I am grateful to the Minister, who seems to be assuring me that the Coal Authority not only will be able to fund the work, but will do so without detriment to the rest of its programmes. I hope that I should rightly take that to mean that the Government, however they provide funding to the Coal Authority, will make good the exceptional costs involved there so that the rest of the programme is not disrupted. If that is so, it is the clarification that I wanted from this debate.

Mr. Battle: I think that I can give the right hon. Gentleman that reassurance. Such problems have to be tackled and we are determined that they shall be.

We firmly believe in the "polluter pays" principle and we should always reinforce that. Having said that, it is fair to say that the legal framework for responsibility for pollution from abandoned mines is complex. Under the Water Resources Act 1991, it is an offence knowingly to cause pollution from an abandoned mine, and the Environment Agency has powers to prosecute those who do so. That statute was augmented by the Environment Act 1995, and after 31 December 1999 it will be an offence to permit pollution from an abandoned mine.

In July this year, new regulations came into force setting out the procedures for those operators intending to abandon mines, requiring them, among other things, to give the agency six months' notice of their intention to abandon and to advise it of the measures being taken to avoid a pollution incident.

In the case of both coal and non-coal mines it is the agency's responsibility to take a view on whether the Water Resources Act 1991 has been broken and, if so,

whether to prosecute. I emphasise once more to the right hon. Gentleman the fact that not all abandoned mines produce overflows and that, where they do, the level of pollution can vary greatly in severity.

The Coal Authority takes very seriously the problems posed by stythe or mine gas produced by former coal mines. The movement of water in former mine workings can push mine gas towards shafts and up to the surface. I understand that the Coal Authority has sought particular advice on the problem from the consultants who are advising on Whittle, and that the British Geological Survey has suggested the production of a hazard map, showing sites of potential overflows. As operational decisions on the minewater programme are for the Coal Authority and the agencies to take, it is for them to determine whether such a map would be useful.

The position in respect of non-coal mines is somewhat different, not only because of the scale of former coal mining but because, unlike most mining and minerals industries, coal mines were publicly owned and operated. That is why, during the passage of the Coal Industry Act 1994, a commitment—the so-called Strathclyde principle—was made that the Coal Authority would seek the best environmental result in the area of minewater treatment that could be achieved within available resources.

The Coal Authority has a programme to deal with minewater from abandoned mines within its ownership—mines owned and operated by the National Coal Board or the British Coal Corporation. I understand that the Environment Agency has spent £9.5 million since 1990 on research and treatment at the Wheal Jane tin mine in Cornwall and is monitoring the situation at the recently abandoned South Crofty mine, and that it has commissioned a report on the environmental implications of the end of commercial operations at the Grove Rake fluorspar mine in Weardale, County Durham.

We take pollution from abandoned mines seriously, but it is important to keep the problem in clear perspective. Coal mining has been carried out in this country since Roman times, and more or less intensively for the past 400 years. Although overflows occur throughout the coalfields, the number of serious pollution incidents is amazingly low, given the scale of former coal mining. The priority list agreed between the Coal Authority, the Environment Agency and the Scottish Environmental Protection Agency includes about 50 sites with serious discharges. Other pollution incidents do not figure on that list, but they are relatively minor in scale and impact.

The agencies are monitoring recently abandoned mines that have not yet produced overflows, and if they are felt to require treatment or preventive action they can be prioritised accordingly.

I hope that I have been able to convey to the right hon. Gentleman the seriousness with which the Government take their responsibility to deal with the historical legacy of former coal mining and minewater pollution problems in particular. The Coal Authority will deal with the problem and the money will be available to allow it to do so. The pollution of the River Coquet from the Whittle colliery will be avoided.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twenty-three minutes past Ten o'clock.

House of Commons

Tuesday 20 October 1998

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

ENVIRONMENT, TRANSPORT AND THE REGIONS, RELATING TO ENVIRONMENT AND THE REGIONS

The Secretary of State was asked—

Wheel Clamping

1. **Mr. Robin Corbett** (Birmingham, Erdington): What proposals he has to regulate the use of wheel clamping on public land. [54325]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (Ms Glenda Jackson): The Government understand the concern of those who have felt intimidated or tricked by unscrupulous wheel clampers looking to make easy money. Such behaviour should not be allowed to continue. In our transport White Paper, "A New Deal for Transport: Better for Everyone", we announced our intention to introduce regulation of wheel clamping as part of a package of statutory measures to regulate the private security industry as a whole. My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary intends to introduce firm proposals to that end later this year.

Mr. Corbett: I thank my hon. Friend for that reply, but I urge her not to delay bringing to an end the harassment and intimidation of motorists by cowboy clampers. One woman was threatened that her three-year-old child would be held to ransom until she paid £60; another's gold tooth was demanded in payment; and a hearse was clamped with a body still inside it. Many people in the industry observe codes of practice, and I urge the Government to act quickly, unlike the Tory Government.

Ms Jackson: My hon. Friend listed only three activities which are utterly reprehensible and which, I am sure, the whole House abhors. Let me reassure him. The private security industry encompasses a wide range of activities and occupations that bring individuals into contact with the public, who can, as a result, be put at risk. The scope of the proposals to be contained in the White Paper will include any sector of the industry that places employees in positions of trust and the public at risk. Wheel clampers, whether employees of private security firms or operating independently, will be covered by the proposals.

Standard Spending Assessments

2. **Mr. Bill Michie** (Sheffield, Heeley): What representations he has received from *(a)* local authorities and *(b)* other organisations in respect of future SSA levels. [54326]

The Minister for Local Government and Housing (Ms Hilary Armstrong): Since February, I have received many letters from local authorities and others about standard spending assessments. Last month, I also met groups of local authority representatives to hear their views on possible changes to SSAs.

Mr. Michie: I thank my hon. Friend for that reply, and the Government for last year's adjustment, which was most welcome. In considering the area cost adjustment, will she reject totally the Elliott general labour market approach, which in practice will shift resources from poor to rich areas, and instead go for something such as the AC18-AC19, or, if that is too radical, what about an AC14-AC16, or, if that is too narrow, what about an AC14-AC16 with an E4, an E5 and an E6? That way, perhaps some time we shall get rid of this crazy system.

Ms Armstrong: Now, Madam Speaker, you will understand the level of technicalities that people get into when talking about SSAs. In fact, we are considering 90 different options and about 25 of those are concerned with area cost adjustments. The subject arouses a great deal of excitement in various parts of the House. We are considering all the options and expect to report back to the House around the end of November or the beginning of December.

Mr. John Townend (East Yorkshire): Does the Minister accept that the present methodology for calculating SSAs favours urban areas at the expense of rural areas such as my constituency, which has done very badly compared with Hull, which includes the constituency of the Secretary of State? Does she accept that there is such a thing as rural poverty and that, with agriculture going the way it is, such poverty is getting worse by the month? What plans does she have to redress the unfairness in the system?

Ms Armstrong: I do not accept that the formula is biased towards any area. All areas face difficulties caused by the complexities of the system that the hon. Gentleman's Government left us, and we are considering a range of alternatives. I need no lectures about rural areas, because I live in and represent one of the most rural areas in the country. We are as determined to represent effectively people who live in rural areas, where poverty of course exists, as we are to represent people in urban areas. I remind the hon. Gentleman that more Labour Members represent rural areas than do those Conservatives who are left.

Mr. Bill O'Brien (Normanton): May I advise my hon. Friend that the Special Interest Group of Metropolitan Authorities welcomes the Government's move towards more accountability to the electorate? Given the three-year freeze on local government finances from central Government, it is important to get the standard spending assessments right. Contrary to the comments

made by the hon. Member for East Yorkshire (Mr. Townend), there is a lot of poverty in urban areas, and especially in my authority area. The SSAs should be fairer to those communities that are suffering the most, and I appeal to my hon. Friend the Minister to ensure that that happens.

Ms Armstrong: The Government are committed to a fairer distribution of the grants to local authorities and we are seeking to introduce stability. Local authorities spend a lot of money and we want them to do so as responsibly as possible. We made it clear in the White Paper published in July that we want local authorities to plan their priorities effectively and to spend money on the priorities that the electorate have determined. The three-year freeze on methodology will give the stability that local government needs.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard (South-West Norfolk): Is the Minister aware of the report published by the County Councils Network last month? Does she agree with its conclusion that it costs more to deliver social services in rural areas than in urban ones?

Ms Armstrong: I read the report and I met the County Councils Network last month. I listened carefully to its representations, and to those of other groups, including the unitaries, the SIGOMA authorities and the Association of London Government. All those authorities have significant representations to make. The right hon. Lady will remember that her Government, when they examined the issue of sparsity, came to the conclusion that the formula was about right in its comparison of the costs created by sparsity and density. The working group—on which the County Councils Network is represented—has not undertaken specific work this year that advances the discussion of sparsity, but I am sure that the right hon. Lady will wish to put her mind to the problem during the three years of stability so that she can propose ideas in the future.

Mrs. Shephard: The point that the County Councils Network will have made to the Minister is not about the formula that existed, but about the fact that she distorted the formula this year by switching £100 million of funding from shire areas to urban ones. I am sure that it will also have made the point that the Minister would have done better not to exercise such a blatant anti-rural bias in the first place. What is she going to do about it?

Ms Armstrong: The right hon. Lady comments more on the actions of her Government than on those of this Government. I remind her that we did not meddle with the settlement on sparsity that her Government set out.

Mayors (Direct Elections)

3. **Shona McIsaac** (Cleethorpes): What assessment he has made of the level of public support for the direct election of mayors in English towns. [54327]

6. **Mr. Graham Stringer** (Manchester, Blackley): What assessment he has made of the level of public support for the direct election of mayors in English cities. [54330]

The Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (Mr. John Prescott): On 7 May, the people of London gave a resounding 72 per cent. yes vote in favour of a directly elected mayor. Our local government White Paper proposals will give people everywhere the opportunity to say, in a referendum, whether they want a directly elected mayor.

Shona McIsaac: I welcome the proposals to have directly elected mayors in English towns and cities. Does my right hon. Friend have proposals that will go further towards supporting English towns and cities?

Mr. Prescott: As my hon. Friend knows, the Select Committee on the Environment, Transport and Regional Affairs unanimously called on the Government to produce an urban White Paper. I intend to publish such a White Paper next year. It will describe how the Government will enable our towns and cities to prosper and to offer a better quality of life to all who live in them. In other words, it will facilitate more sustainable communities. Vibrant and attractive towns and cities complement thriving rural areas, but we shall pay separate attention to the specific issues affecting rural areas. I shall make an announcement on that shortly.

Mr. Stringer: My constituents and those who live in urban areas throughout the country will welcome my right hon. Friend's statement on an urban policy White Paper. They will also welcome the opportunity for communities to elect mayors, which will lead to direct improvements in those communities. That stands in stark contrast to virtually every announcement made by the previous Conservative Government, which led to life being worse in the inner cities and in urban areas. Will my right hon. Friend tell us how the urban policy White Paper will add to the initiatives already taken?

Mr. Prescott: The urban White Paper will take a more comprehensive view of the quality of life in towns and cities. It will show how the many initiatives that we have already taken will fit together, and will link with work on issues such as education, training, crime reduction, regional development agencies, planning, transport, housing and others. All these will contribute to ending social exclusion and to building sustainable communities.

In answer to a written question, I shall give more details later today, and the House will have an opportunity to debate these issues on Thursday.

Mr. Adrian Sanders (Torbay): All that has nothing to do with accountability, which is reduced if power is put in the hands of one person rather than being shared among a group of councillors. The idea of elected mayors does not address the fundamental question of public disengagement with local decision making. Only proportional representation could do that. What representations has the right hon. Gentleman received against the idea of elected mayors?

Mr. Prescott: "PR" also seems to stand for please return to the same old question. The hon. Gentleman must know that our proposals leave councils' budget and policy decisions totally with the councils. We have received very few representations against directly elected mayors.

Mr. Richard Ottaway (Croydon, South): While the debate on elected mayors continues, will the right

hon. Gentleman encourage councils not to indulge in excesses like those of Labour-controlled Hammersmith and Fulham, whose newly created executive mayor has been declared unlawful? Under Conservative pressure, the mayor's £40,000 allowance has been halved. His efforts to streamline procedures have resulted in agendas of 250 pages, and in one case of 750 pages. The number of meetings has increased, not decreased. Is that an example of how to modernise local government?

Mr. Prescott: Our proposals for local authorities are clear. We want to give people the opportunity to have directly elected mayors. Our local authority White Paper makes clear exactly how we want to distribute decision making, budgets and accountability. The White Paper has been well received in the country, and we intend to implement it.

Mr. Gordon Prentice (Pendle): Elsewhere in the European Union, where there is experience of directly elected mayors, is it not the case that men seem to be disproportionately represented? Given that we shall not have a regional list system, because people will stand to be the directly elected mayor of Manchester, Birmingham, Edinburgh or wherever, what reassurance can the Secretary of State give that there will be even representation of the sexes when we move to having directly elected mayors?

Mr. Prescott: That is an important point, but, as democrats, we rely on the good sense of the electorate.

Rail Freight

5. **Mr. Graham Brady** (Altrincham and Sale, West): What action his Department is proposing to mitigate the environmental nuisance caused by increased levels of rail freight movements through residential areas. [54329]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (Mr. Alan Meale): Overall, rail freight causes less pollution and noise than road traffic. It can, however, cause local environmental problems, particularly in terms of noise. We expect Railtrack and the freight operating companies to minimise the environmental impacts of their operations on their neighbours.

Mr. Brady: I thank the Minister for his helpful response. While I welcome increased freight moving on the railways, as I am sure all hon. Members do, real problems are caused in certain communities, including one in my constituency, where rail freight is causing vibration, which damages properties, and noise, which wakes people up in the middle of the night. In many instances, the effects can be mitigated by using different types of wagon or other measures. I impress on the Minister as powerfully as I can the importance of addressing those concerns.

Mr. Meale: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his efforts, and especially for corresponding with me to let me know about the problems. I am aware of the noise problems in relation to rail freight traffic generally and in particular in respect of the Brunner-Mond chemical plant. I am pleased to be able to inform the House that Railtrack has entered into discussions with English, Welsh and Scottish Railway, the freight company involved, and the local authority to try to solve the problem.

Dr. Rudi Vis (Finchley and Golders Green): EWS took over the transport of spent nuclear fuel on rail privatisation. It has now been taken over by Direct Rail Services, a wholly owned subsidiary of British Nuclear Fuels plc. Is my hon. Friend aware that BNFL wrote on 25 September to the London borough of Barnet, without any negotiation or prior information, saying that it was going to use Cricklewood sidings to park spent fuel?

Mr. Meale: I was not aware of that detail. I will gather information when I return to the Department and give my hon. Friend a full response.

Mr. Norman Baker (Lewes): While it is right to minimise the environmental impact of rail freight movements, is not far more environmental damage caused by the movement of freight by road? The Government's priority should be—as I think it is—to secure a shift of freight from road to rail, which causes less pollution and noise. I am happy to have more rail freight move through Newhaven.

Mr. Meale: I thank the hon. Gentleman. I can enlarge on what he said. Moving freight from road to rail creates major environmental benefits. In our 18 months in power, the Government have effected a 5 per cent. growth in that transfer.

Regional Development Agencies

8. **Mr. Bob Blizzard** (Waveney): What plans he has to encourage sub-regional structures within regional development agencies. [54332]

The Minister for the Regions, Regeneration and Planning (Mr. Richard Caborn): In our guidance to regional development agencies on their regional strategies, we will encourage them to address the needs of the whole of their regions, but we will not prescribe what sub-regional structures they should adopt. We are publishing a draft of the guidance today; copies are in the Library.

Mr. Blizzard: Is my hon. Friend aware of the eastern region of the Norfolk and Waveney enterprise partnership and its economic development strategic forum, which is called "Shaping the Future"? As it is a well-established body already well supported by industry, does he agree that it is ideally placed to work with the RDA for the eastern region in addressing the problems of the north and east of the region, where unemployment is highest?

Mr. Caborn: My hon. Friend knows that, when I visited his area, I met some people from that partnership, which was impressive. Although I have not seen a document, I am sure that "Shaping the Future" reflects the partnership that I encountered. I hope that the RDAs will look seriously at sub-regional partnerships. We want to build on them. We do not want to reinvent the wheel, but to develop the best in the regions to ensure that the bottom-up process starts to address the regions' real problems.

Mr. Owen Paterson (North Shropshire): Is the Minister aware that, in rural areas such as Shropshire,

there is real alarm that RDAs will be dominated by urban interests? Can he assure the House that, in constructing these new institutions, the Government will give a strong voice to rural areas so that they will not be swamped by the urban majority?

Mr. Caborn: We gave that, assurance on many occasions during the passage of the Regional Development Agencies Bill. We have ensured that every RDA board will have one person with responsibility for rural areas. As my right hon. Friend said, we will address rural areas as we are addressing urban areas in a White Paper. An announcement will be made on that in the near future.

Ms Margaret Moran (Luton, South): Will my hon. Friend ensure that sub-regional arrangements within the regional development agencies will reflect the fact that some areas such as Luton have interests that cross RDA boundaries? For example, although we are in the eastern region, we share a great deal with London and the south-east. Will he ensure that sub-regional arrangements reflect those interests?

Mr. Caborn: My hon. Friend has raised an important question. I want positively to encourage that relationship between the regions. In a few weeks, my hon. Friend the Minister for London and Construction and I will meet the Thames Gateway partnership to make sure that it continues in the positive work that it has done. That partnership crosses three RDAs. We shall be positively encouraging such co-operation. Administrative boundaries, not Chinese walls, surround the RDAs.

Housing Development

9. **Mrs. Ann Winterton** (Congleton): When he last met representatives of the construction industry to discuss future housing developments; and if he will make a statement. [54333]

The Minister for London and Construction (Mr. Nick Raynsford): My colleagues and I have frequent contacts with the construction industry to discuss a wide range of matters, including future housing developments.

Mrs. Winterton: Bearing in mind the high level of public concern about the location of future housing development, should not the Minister, as a matter of urgency, have talks with the housebuilding industry to discuss how best it can help to regenerate our towns and cities? Would that not be better than waiting for months for Lord Rogers's task force to report?

Mr. Raynsford: I have had frequent meetings in the past 18 months with the housebuilders and other interests to stress the importance of building as much as possible on brown-field sites.

Mrs. Winterton: When was the last occasion?

Mr. Raynsford: The last occasion was yesterday evening. I have to put it to the hon. Lady that, especially by comparison with the previous Government, who failed entirely in their period of office to ensure coherent planning for the housing needs of our country, this Government have done more in the past 18 months than any Government could have been expected to do.

Mr. Barry Gardiner (Brent, North): Is my hon. Friend aware of the problems encountered by those home owners who apply to leasehold valuation tribunals for the right to manage their own homes? Is he aware that, earlier this summer, one tribunal could not tell the difference between a manager and a managing agent, as a result of which the people concerned were forced to contract with the person who was in prison at that time for defrauding them? Will he investigate the quality of leasehold valuation tribunals and undertake to look into the backlog, which at present in London is running at more than 90 per cent?

Mr. Raynsford: My hon. Friend has shown great ingenuity in extending the boundaries of the construction industry to embrace issues of leasehold reform, but I do not begrudge him that, because he has been an assiduous supporter of leasehold interests and has advocated reform most persuasively throughout the past 18 months. The Government are very serious about this issue. They have given extremely serious attention to it and expect to publish in the near future detailed proposals for consultation, which will deal with a range of issues relating to leasehold, including the future remit and role of leasehold valuation tribunals.

Mr. Simon Burns (West Chelmsford): Will the Minister confirm that, yesterday, the Deputy Prime Minister issued a statement saying that he strongly welcomed the Environment, Transport and Regional Affairs Committee's report on housing? Is he aware that the Select Committee said that the Government must support local authorities when they restrict the use of green-field sites? How does he square that with his right hon. Friend's decision to force West Sussex to build 13,000 extra homes, despite the opposition of even Labour councillors and his own officials? Does he understand that the rhetoric of the Government has failed to be met by their actions, and that their green credentials are torn to shreds as a result of their ludicrous building programme?

Mr. Raynsford: The hon. Gentleman knows only too well that the issue of West Sussex is subject to legal action. West Sussex challenged the Secretary of State unsuccessfully, but, because it may pursue an appeal, the hon. Gentleman will appreciate that I am not at liberty to say more about that. However, unlike the previous Government, who had a consistent record of allowing development, often against inspectors' decisions, on green-belt land—not just green-field land—this Government have extended the green belt and increased to 60 per cent. the target for development on brown-field sites.

Regional Development Agencies

10. **Mr. Austin Mitchell** (Great Grimsby): What proposals he has for giving regional assemblies an advisory role in regional development agencies. [54335]

The Minister for the Regions, Regeneration and Planning (Mr. Richard Caborn): The Regional Development Agencies Bill currently before Parliament

provides for regional chambers—which are now coming together in each English region—to have an advisory role in relation to the RDAs. The establishment of regional assemblies in England is something for the future, depending on popular demand.

Mr. Mitchell: I am delighted that, in those areas where regional assemblies have been set up thanks to local pride and local initiative, they will play a part in the chambers. I hope that my hon. Friend will pay attention to the strong feeling over the whole of the north of England that we should be moving to elected regional governments for those areas that want them during this Parliament rather than postponing the proposal to the next one. If we had elected regional government, it could give to the development of the RDAs the synergy of democracy that will exist in Scotland so that we can compete effectively, and it would also put an end to the rubbish about an English Parliament which is being talked about by the Opposition.

Mr. Caborn: I am sure that my hon. Friend knows that we are not into gesture politics like the Opposition. In our devolution, we are managing change in concert with what the British people want. As we know, in Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and in London, all that has been tested by the popular vote and the electorate have said overwhelmingly that they want that devolution. In the same way, we shall manage the change for England through the regional development agencies and the chambers and, in the fulness of time, through regional assemblies. That is what we said in the manifesto and that is what we will deliver. We will keep to our election promises.

Mr. Michael Fabricant (Lichfield): On the subject of what people want, exactly how much will that extra tier of bureaucracy cost?

Mr. Caborn: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman was present during the debate on the Regional Development Agencies Bill. We said clearly in Committee and on the Floor of the House that it would be contained within present expenditure.

Mr. Michael Clapham (Barnsley, West and Penistone): Will my hon. Friend be meeting his colleagues in the Department of Trade and Industry to discuss the role of the training and enterprise councils, to ensure that they work closely with the RDAs to provide the necessary skills and training in the areas where that is required?

Mr. Caborn: That is an important part of the remit of the RDAs. I have already announced the strategy document this afternoon—copies are in the Library—and part of that strategic overview will be to look at the skills needs of particular regions. That is important and will be carried out across all Departments of State.

Local Authority Capping

11. **Dr. Vincent Cable** (Twickenham): If he will report on his progress towards removing capping from local authorities. [54336]

The Minister for Local Government and Housing (Ms Hilary Armstrong): Our White Paper in July announced our intention to end crude and universal capping while taking a new reserve power to limit excessive council tax increases.

Dr. Cable: Will the Minister acknowledge that there are many councils under all three parties that cannot meet the Government's expectations for improved education standards, care in the community and the new best value requirements for replenishing reserves without much greater freedom to set expenditure and local tax levels than the Government are willing to give them?

Ms Armstrong: In the comprehensive spending review we announced what we feel are substantial and realistic increases for Government contribution to local government spending and for overall local government spending. I am convinced that the spending limits about which we have been talking will enable local government to meet its targets and its commitment to improve services, and enable local people to take advantage of the opportunity offered by those services. We are ending crude and universal capping but, it is none the less, in the interests of the entire country for an eye to be kept on overall public spending, and that is what we intend to do.

Mr. Andrew Lansley (South Cambridgeshire): Will the Minister explain how it can make sense for the forthcoming budget round to set capping criteria only after local authorities have set their budgets? Will she also explain why the Local Government Association takes the view that her proposals will lead to

"increased uncertainty and subjective judgments"?

Ms Armstrong: The system that we shall operate this year was introduced by the previous Administration, who changed the way in which they implemented legislation when they felt that local authorities were out of control. We cannot, this year, amend the legislation, so to end crude and universal capping we need to work within the existing legislation, which means no presignalling of individual budgets.

ENVIRONMENT, TRANSPORT AND THE REGIONS, RELATING TO TRANSPORT

The Secretary of State was asked—

Road Congestion

1. **Mrs. Ann Winterton** (Congleton): What representations he has received on his Department's proposals to reduce congestion on Britain's roads. [54357]

The Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (Mr. John Prescott): We received more than 7,000 responses to our integrated transport consultation, the great majority of which were concerned with the impacts of congestion. Since publishing the integrated transport White Paper, I have received many letters broadly welcoming our proposals.

Mrs. Winterton: Bearing in mind the fact that 80 per cent. of goods in the United Kingdom are transported by

freight on the roads for the simple reason that there is no good alternative, is the right hon. Gentleman aware of the costs of congestion, for example, on the M6 around Birmingham and the M62 around Manchester? Furthermore, is he aware that a company based at Sandbach in my constituency has estimated that congestion on the M6 alone costs it £500,000 a year in vehicle and driver delays? That figure can be multiplied many times for business and industry in the north-west of England. What does the Secretary of State propose to do to assist business and industry in moving their goods?

Mr. Prescott: The hon. Lady has given a catalogue of the disasters that we inherited after 18 years of Tory non-transport policy. We have produced a paper on integrated transport—the first for 20 years—which demonstrates how we give a higher priority to rail transport. We have doubled the amount of freight grants, which has increased freight by 5 per cent. in one year—more than the figure has increased over the past decade.

On road congestion, we have considered the part of the M6 to which the hon. Lady referred as part of a transport corridor study to find out how we can use under-utilised rail more effectively and reduce congestion on the road. That is the intelligent approach to transport that is embodied in our White Paper.

Ms Hazel Blears (Salford): As a keen motor cyclist, I am delighted that the White Paper recognises for the first time the role that motor cycles can play in reducing congestion, particularly in urban areas. Will my right hon. Friend encourage local councils to promote the role of motor cycling in tackling congestion in experiments such as those in Reading and Bristol, where motor cycles have been allowed to use bus lanes to great effect? Does he intend to experience the delights of motor cycling in the near future?

Mr. Prescott: No, but I have ridden motor bikes from time to time. They have a role, which must be encouraged, in reducing congestion and providing alternative choices. My hon. Friend referred to towns where motor cycles have been given priority in bus lanes, and I am pleased to say that Hull has done the same. That is in response to the ideas in our White Paper.

Mr. Tom Brake (Carshalton and Wallington): Before the election, Labour promised to reduce traffic. The party's election internet site said that Labour would

"reduce and then reverse traffic growth".

Since the election Ministers have repeated that pledge. In June last year the Deputy Prime Minister said:

"I will have failed if in five years time there are not . . far fewer journeys by car. It's a tall order but I urge you to hold me to it."

The White Paper on integrated transport refers only to reducing traffic growth. Will the right hon. Gentleman reassure the House, business—which loses billions of pounds to congestion each year—and the one out of seven children who suffer from asthma triggered by pollution that the Government will keep their election promises and reduce traffic levels overall, not merely the growth in traffic?

Mr. Prescott: The hon. Gentleman quoted both the question and the answer and I agree to keep to that commitment: judge my performance in five years.

Mr. John Home Robertson (East Lothian): I welcome my right hon. Friend's proposal to designate the A1 trunk road a core national route. Does he agree that the only way of relieving congestion on that single carriageway bottleneck in the national highway system is by dualling it? Will my right hon. Friend encourage his colleagues at the Scottish Office to follow his lead by designating the A1 in Scotland a core national route?

Mr. Prescott: Our position on the A1 was made clear in the roads paper and announced to the House. The proposal requires a great deal of co-operation between us and the Scottish authorities, and we are working to that end.

Mr. Bernard Jenkin (North Essex): I thank the Secretary of State for the illuminating answers given by his Ministers. Despite his newly announced policy on integrated road transport, my question about reducing traffic growth forecasts over the next 20 years has received simply a holding reply. The Secretary of State repeated at the Labour party conference that the volume of traffic is expected to continue to grow, by 30 per cent. over the next 20 years. How will the Government curb congestion and pollution—that is the right hon. Gentleman's manifesto commitment—when even the slashed roads programme that he announced at the end of the summer does not contain a single start date or commitment to beginning a new roads scheme before the next general election?

Mr. Prescott: The 30 per cent. growth figure is based on historical trends. It is estimated that, if we do not change to a better public transport system, we will face that kind of growth.

Our policies in the integrated transport White Paper are about reducing that figure and getting people to change from using cars to public transport. Our policies, once implemented, will begin to have that effect. We face the current problem because the previous Government refused to put resources into either road or rail, and left us with a total mess and the cost of dealing with congestion.

Mr. Ian Pearson (Dudley, South): Is my right hon. Friend aware that the congestion problem in the west midlands involves not only the raised section of the M6 but all the roads beneath it? It is almost impossible to travel around the black country. Does my right hon. Friend accept that light rail systems are a viable way forward for the black country, where priority bus lanes are unfeasible because of general geographical problems? Will he look sympathetically at the three packages that have been submitted to him jointly by the west midlands local authorities, particularly the line 3 proposal, which involves a £20 million private sector contribution towards opening up rail transport between Walsall, Dudley and the Merry Hill shopping complex?

Mr. Prescott: I am prepared to consider any proposals that reduce congestion and help the public transport system. I do not readily accept that there cannot be priority bus lanes in the area that my hon. Friend mentioned. I think that hon. Members recognise that light rail systems are an extremely expensive way of dealing with congestion problems. We have several of them in this country, but I think that buses can play a greater role than light rail systems.

Heavy Freight

2. **Mr. David Heath** (Somerton and Frome): What plans he has to reduce the level of heavy freight transport using unsuitable roads in rural areas. [54358]

The Minister of Transport (Dr. John Reid): Heavy lorries should not travel on unsuitable roads when an alternative route exists for collection or delivery. When drawing up their local transport plans, we shall expect local authorities to bring forward strategies to ensure that heavy lorries are routed away from unsuitable roads. We are examining ways of streamlining the use of local traffic authority powers to specify through routes for heavy lorries or to prohibit or restrict heavy lorry movements on particular roads.

Mr. Heath: I welcome the opportunity to ask the right hon. Gentleman a question about roads rather than aircraft carriers. Does he agree that many rural roads in small communities were not designed for heavy lorry traffic and cannot, and should not, take it? Rather than spending Government and local authority money strengthening bridges so that they can take heavy lorries, surely the time has come to say that lorries should not use rural minor roads.

Dr. Reid: Yes. The Government share the concerns that the hon. Gentleman outlined. That is why we are taking positive action, together with local authorities through their local transport plans; with industry, by designing a sustainable distribution and logistics policy; by means of the subsidies that we have given to rural transport—£50 million extra for rural buses—and by means of the freeze that we imposed on vehicle excise duty last year. A range of measures have therefore been taken. We share the concerns and appreciate the problems of rural areas, which is why there are now so many Labour Members representing rural areas.

Mr. David Hinchliffe (Wakefield): I welcome my right hon. Friend to his position. Does he agree that one way of tackling the problem of road freight is to shift freight, wherever possible, on to inland waterways? Will he consider an example from my constituency? Sand and gravel are being extracted adjacent to the River Calder in Wakefield for use on the A1-M1 link near Leeds, and the company concerned cannot move the material by waterway simply because of the size of one lock. May we bang some heads together and get such freight off roads and on to waterways once again?

Dr. Reid: Yes. As my hon. Friend says, we should all be keen to transfer or encourage the transfer of freight from road to waterways or rail wherever possible. On the specific case that he mentions, I believe that there are many examples throughout Europe where low-cost, high-volume goods are transferred very efficiently by waterways, so we would be keen to do anything that we can to support such transport.

The other alternative is rail. As my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister pointed out earlier, we have been extremely successful in getting freight off roads and on to rail. Last year there was a 5 per cent. increase in rail freight, which I believe is a bigger increase than the Conservative party managed in 18 years. I am pleased that that trend continues. Yesterday, Rover announced that it would put one third of its deliveries on to rail; I am sure that we all welcome that.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield): I fully accept the need for an integrated transport strategy and I welcome the additional funds that the Government are directing to rural transport, but does the Minister accept that in some areas, such as my village of Poynton in the Macclesfield constituency, such expenditure and such an integrated transport strategy will not really help, and new roads will be required? Does he accept that the Poynton bypass, which feeds through the Manchester airport eastern link road to Manchester international airport, is a vital strategic road, and that it is no good merely reducing it from a trunk road to a county road to fob off responsibility? Will the Minister meet me to discuss that matter, which is so vital to my constituents?

Dr. Reid: Of course I will give full consideration to that road, which is either, as the hon. Gentleman points out, vital in our strategic national interest—the Poynton bypass—or, perhaps more relevantly, vital in his future political interests. However, I shall examine it seriously. I merely point out that, in the roads announcement some months ago, I announced 15 bypasses, which I believe is three times more than the previous Government announced in five years.

Ms Joan Walley (Stoke-on-Trent, North): I welcome my right hon. Friend to his post. In his efforts to encourage the switching of more heavy freight from road to rail, will he do all that he can to take the wonderful opportunity that we now have to get piggyback on to the west coast main line? Will he give the House an assurance that he will do all that he can to bring about that switch from road to rail?

Dr. Reid: My hon. Friend knows that we have made our views known on that. Those matters are being considered at present by Railtrack. Although I read in the newspapers speculation on the matter, no proposals have been received by our Department. I shall of course consider them sympathetically when they come in.

Rural Motorists

3. **Mr. Howard Flight** (Arundel and South Downs): If he will make a statement on the impact on motorists in rural areas of the proposals in the transport White Paper. [54359]

The Minister of Transport (Dr. John Reid): The measures in the White Paper will produce a transport system that increases choice for all, including those who live in rural areas. As part of our strategy, my right hon. Friend the Chancellor announced in March an additional £50 million a year to improve the public transport alternative in rural areas.

Mr. Flight: I am sure that the Minister would agree that the substantial rise in petrol taxes falls disproportionately on people in rural areas when they take children to school or go to the shops, and particularly when they travel to work. Will the Government ensure that the new taxing powers in the White Paper are used

to mitigate that, and will they consider tax incentives for businesses in rural areas to bus people into work, which under the present tax arrangements is taxed as a benefit in kind?

Dr. Reid: The hon. Gentleman will know that the Government fully appreciate the benefits of car ownership, especially in rural areas. The point that we have always made is that the benefits of car ownership that have been gained by previous generations will not be gained by future generations unless we change car use. We accept that for many people in rural areas a car is a necessity. The Chancellor's announcement in the last Budget that vehicle excise duty rates would be frozen and a graduated scheme introduced for cars should help to offset higher fuel costs, especially for rural motorists with smaller, cleaner cars.

The hon. Gentleman should remember, however, that a significant proportion of people in rural areas—upwards of 20 per cent. in rural households—have no access whatever to a car. That is why we are equally committed to providing decent, safe, reliable public transport. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will welcome the £50 million extra that this Government have allocated, over and above any plans that his Government had.

Mr. Lawrie Quinn (Scarborough and Whitby): Will my right hon. Friend confirm that he understands that, in my constituency, only 57 per cent. of rural dwellers have access to a private vehicle? The initiative taken forward with the county council to introduce community transport and improvements in rural bus services will play an important part in dealing with the problems of social exclusion that manifest themselves in the north-east of England.

Dr. Reid: Yes, indeed. My hon. Friend gives a prime example of the difficulties faced by many people in rural areas. That is why I am extremely pleased and proud that this Government have taken measures, as I mentioned earlier, to allocate an additional £50 million towards public transport in the rural areas. He will also know that the Chancellor announced an increase in bus fuel duty rebate worth £40 million to protect bus operators from the increases in diesel duty over the next 12 months. My hon. Friend can be sure that we shall continue to bear in mind the particular circumstances of people in rural areas.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard (South-West Norfolk): Earlier this afternoon, the Minister for Local Government and Housing seemed not to have understood the consequences of this Government's deliberate switch of £100 million of council funding from shire to urban areas this year. Does the Minister at least understand that that switch of funding—which is his Government's policy and nothing to do with the previous Government—has had a devastating effect on minor roads, roads maintenance and transport packages in rural areas? What does he intend to do to correct that imbalance?

Dr. Reid: The right hon. Lady would do well to reflect on the fact that it was the destruction, division and devastating effects of 18 years of her party's government that resulted in the rural areas being so well represented on the Labour Benches.

As my hon. Friend pointed out earlier, the statistics and methodology that are being used to allocate that money are based on sparsity and density of population—precisely the criteria used by the previous Government. As I have pointed out, we shall provide extra finance for local transport in the rural areas. As my hon. Friend the Minister for the Regions, Regeneration and Planning stated earlier, rural areas will be an essential part of our regional development plans throughout the country. In all three respects, we are initiating plans for progress in the rural areas the like of which was never seen under the previous Government.

School Routes

4. **Mr. Mike Gapes** (Ilford, South): What plans he has to introduce safer routes to school. [54360]

Dr. Reid: High priority will continue to be given to schemes to provide safer routes to school. We are also actively encouraging schools to establish green transport plans. In addition, we are establishing the school travel advisory group, with the aim of reducing car use and improving children's safety on the journey to school.

Mr. Gapes: I welcome my right hon. Friend to his post, and also his answer to my question. Does he agree with me that it is noticeable that when there is a school holiday, there is far less traffic on the roads at certain times of the day, and that, in cities such as London and elsewhere, pollution and congestion are much related to very short journeys to take children to school? Will my right hon. Friend do all that he can to emphasise to local authorities and others the importance of providing safe routes so that we can reduce unnecessary car journeys to and from school?

Dr. Reid: Yes, indeed. As my hon. Friend points out, the statistics have changed considerably over the past 10 or 20 years. Two decades ago, one child in three, I think, walked unaccompanied to school. The figure now is one in nine. Improving the safety of walking and cycling, especially round schools, is not only one of our manifesto commitments but would be of enormous benefit both to children and the wider community. However, we recognise and fully understand concerns about the personal safety of children walking to school. We also understand the pressures, especially of time, on parents and schools. We have established—we had the inaugural meeting last week—the school travel advisory group so that we can consider concrete, practical proposals to provide safer and more secure routes to school so as to alleviate parents' concerns and encourage more children to take such routes to school.

Mr. Jonathan Sayeed (Mid-Bedfordshire): The route to Ridgemont school in mid-Bedfordshire is one of the most dangerous in the county. That is because heavy goods vehicles travelling between the A1 and the M1 go through the very small village of Ridgemont. The county council has put a bypass for Ridgemont at the top of its priority list. Will the Minister do the same?

Dr. Reid: As for heavy lorries and freight, the hon. Gentleman will no doubt have listened to my detailed answers to Question 2. As for the hon. Gentleman's local

plan, I shall always consider plans within the context of the criteria that we set out in the White Paper some months ago. I must remind the hon. Gentleman, however, that, despite the pressure on resources, we announced considerably more bypasses in the roads review this year than the Conservative Government did over a period of years.

Mrs. Anne Campbell (Cambridge): Is my hon. Friend aware that there is a proposal in Cambridge to encourage people who drive their children in from outside the city to use collection points at the park-and-ride sites around the city, thereby reducing the number of cars that come into Cambridge at a very congested period of the day? Does my right hon. Friend agree that this is an innovative and interesting idea and one which should be supported?

Dr. Reid: Yes. We want to examine all such proposals with the purpose of producing practical alternatives. We have to recognise the concerns of parents about the security and safety of their children, which are understood by us all, while providing alternative real choices. Part of the answer may be safer and more secure routes, and part of that may be public transport. Presenting people with a choice, and a substantial means of exercising that choice, is the hallmark of the Government's transport policy as well as of our wider aims.

Road Traffic Reduction

5. **Mr. Peter Bottomley** (Worthing, West): If his Department has specific targets in respect of road traffic reduction. [54361]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (Ms Glenda Jackson): Relevant targets include both local and national targets. The Road Traffic Reduction Act 1997 obliges local traffic authorities to consider whether to set targets for road traffic reduction on local roads in their area. In considering national targets for road traffic reduction, we will seek advice from the commission for integrated transport, the new independent body that we will set up to review progress on implementing our integrated transport policy.

Mr. Bottomley: With acknowledgements to the hon. and green Member for Ceredigion (Mr. Dafis), who introduced the Road Traffic Reduction (National Targets) Act 1998, may I ask whether the Minister will announce national targets? Will she also set an example by announcing the miles travelled by Ministers in ministerial cars and targets for reducing them?

In addition, will the Minister consider particular areas, such as my constituency? It is virtually impossible for a pedestrian or cyclist to cross the A27 in Worthing, where, because the Government have not provided crossings across trunk roads, many people have to use cars.

Ms Jackson: National targets for the reduction of road traffic must have a clear and specific justification in terms of the environmental benefits that they are expected to achieve, and must, in order to be preferred to other measures, represent the most effective method of achieving those objectives. My right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister stood by his commitment on where we will be on road traffic reduction in five years' time, and I stand by the assurance that I gave to the House on Second Reading of the 1998 Act on 30 January, which was that the first report under that Act would be prepared within 18 months of enactment—by the end of 1999. As regards safe routes across trunk roads, I am sure that the hon. Gentleman is aware that Sustrans is engaged in that matter with Government support. Local transport plans will have £700 million more during the next few years. Since we came to office, we have asked local authorities to prioritise the needs of pedestrians, cyclists and public transport. We expect the issue of improving facilities and encouraging more cyclists to take a prominent place in local transport plans.

Mr. Hilton Dawson (Lancaster and Wyre): On a point of order, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Points of order come after statements. I shall look the hon. Gentleman's way then.

Easter Floods

3.31 pm

The Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr. Elliot Morley): With permission, Madam Speaker, I should like to make a statement following the publication of the report by the independent review team on the flooding that occurred at Easter this year. I do this as the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food has policy responsibility for flood and coastal defence issues in England. Operational responsibility for delivering the flood defence service rests with a number of operating authorities, the principal one of which is the Environment Agency, as well as with other authorities responsible for providing emergency services.

Following torrential rainfall, many areas across central England and Wales were affected by floods, which were the worst for decades. In many respects, they exceeded the floods of 1947 which have hitherto acted as a benchmark for inland flooding in this country. Sadly, five people died as a result of the floods. I offer my deepest sympathy to their families and friends. Thousands had to leave their homes. Many people have still not been able to return more than six months after the event. I have seen for myself the devastation caused by the flood water and repeat the Government's profound sympathy to all those affected. I am sure that I shall be joined in that by the whole House.

The Deputy Prime Minister visited many of the affected areas on the Easter Sunday to assess the scale of the damage caused by the floods and my hon. Friend the Minister for Local Government and Housing is announcing today financial assistance under the so-called Bellwin scheme for Northampton borough council, Warwickshire county council, Stratford-upon-Avon district council and Worcester city council. This is in addition to the financial assistance already announced for Northamptonshire police authority and for Warwick and Wychavon district councils.

It was clear from the outset that issues in relation to the floods needed to be reviewed. No warnings were given in Northampton and Kidlington, two of the towns that were worst affected. There were also allegations that flood defences were operated in ways that sacrificed one town to save another. Such issues needed to be addressed, and lessons identified.

The Environment Agency is the principal flood defence operating authority in England and Wales with responsibility for flood defence in main rivers and sea defences. It also has specific responsibility for flood warning dissemination. I agreed the agency's proposal that an independent review of the floods should be commissioned, with wide terms of reference.

The agency commissioned Mr. Peter Bye, former chief executive of Suffolk county council, to chair the review, with Dr. Mike Horner acting as technical assessor. The review team received and assessed much evidence—both orally and in writing—including visits to the areas worst affected. Its report to the Environment Agency was published on 1 October. It is a balanced, hard-hitting and authoritative document on which Mr. Bye and Dr. Horner are to be congratulated. They acknowledge that the floods were the worst for many years and presented extreme challenges to those with responsibility for responding. That includes not only staff in the Environment Agency, but those in local authorities, the emergency services and the military. Many people worked long hours over the Easter weekend to respond to the emergency, and the Government pay tribute to their dedication.

The report also finds that, in many respects, the Environment Agency's policies, plans and operational arrangements are sound, and that staff did their best in extreme circumstances, within the limits of agency guidelines and resources. It is also important to note that, rather than defences being breached, the flooding was generally the result of defences being overtopped by water to a depth that exceeded their design specifications. Importantly, too, the report does not find evidence that some areas were sacrificed to save others.

The review team did, however, conclude that there were instances of unsatisfactory planning, inadequate warnings for the public, incomplete defences and poor co-ordination with emergency services. The report deals with those issues in some detail, identifies lessons to be learned and makes recommendations for improvement of the whole service.

I wish to report to the House that I met the Environment Agency chairman, Lord De Ramsey, on 14 October to consider the report and the agency's response to it. He agreed that there are lessons that the agency must learn from the report and that appropriate response measures must be implemented. Without wishing to detain the House too long, I should like to explain briefly the action that will be taken.

As a starting point, Lord De Ramsey and I agreed that there must be a seamless and integrated service of flood forecasting, warning and response. Weather forecast information needs to be integrated with reliable information about flood risk in particular areas—relating to their topography and the protection offered by the flood defences—to generate a flood forecast and, if appropriate, a flood warning. Flood warnings need to get to the people in the area at risk of flooding in time for them to respond appropriately. Local emergency plans must be ready to be activated, and must work when they are implemented. That needs to happen.

At Easter, there were deficiencies. The agency therefore intends to carry out a thorough review of the whole system to ensure that it is focused to deliver the required service, that management arrangements make that possible and that there are clear lines of accountability and responsibility.

The review will need to take account of experience in recent years of current arrangements and increased understanding over that period, as well as addressing the individual recommendations in the report, some of which can, and must, be implemented ahead of others. The agency will publish its detailed action plan next month.

Having made clear the need for a systems approach, I then considered with Lord De Ramsey each of the five broad areas of criticism in the report—management structures and skills shortages; flood forecasting; flood warning; standards of defence; and emergency response.

On management structures and skills shortages, the agency will carry out a review of its internal management structures by April 1999. That must also take account of the concerns about skills in the report.

On flood forecasting and flood warning, we will be considering with the agency its proposal to develop a national flood forecasting and warning service to bring

together existing expertise in a more integrated way. Flood forecasting relies on key information on flood risk in river or coastal flood plains. Improvements will be made in the agency's telemetry systems by March 2000. Before then, improvements will be made in other hydrometric standards, including identification and extension of best practice.

The agency is engaged in a five-year project of flood risk mapping. Priority will be given to publishing the best available information, even if in a relatively unrefined state, by September 1999.

We cannot provide defences that are guaranteed to defend against every flooding event. Flood warning is therefore the Government's highest priority. Flood warning dissemination plans must be checked to ensure that they contain no obvious errors or omissions. The agency already has that in hand and expects to complete the work this year. That is but the first step. The agency must go on to consider the content of the plans, their scope and their coverage. It will need to check plans against parameters and targets, which the Ministry will define in consultation with the agency. That will obviously take more time, but the agency is clear about the need to complete that task by September 1999.

Those actions relate to the plans for dissemination of flood warnings. Obviously, warnings must get to the right place at the right time and ensure the right response. We will therefore be reviewing with the agency the content of flood warning messages to ensure that those who receive them understand their significance and what they must do.

On standards of defence, the agency is part way through a complete survey of its flood defence assets. I have agreed with Lord De Ramsey that initial visual surveys must be completed by April 2000 and kept up to date thereafter. Those inspections will be supplemented by more rigorous, but less frequent, structural surveys of the defences.

The agency's responsibility is to issue flood warnings; its having done so, the emergency response is the responsibility of others. Local authorities generally co-ordinate the local emergency planning process, but when those plans are implemented the co-ordination role normally falls to the police, although they will clearly need strong support from the fire and ambulance services, and emergency planning departments in local authorities, social services and other similar agencies.

Although the first priority is to complete the review of emergency plans, we are also taking up another recommendation in the report, which concerns the need for emergency exercises to test the arrangements. I see the need for a mixture of regular, small-scale exercises coupled with less frequent major exercises to provide a rigorous test of the arrangements.

In relation to flood warning, emergency response and exercises, there are a number of key partners. The Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department, my hon. Friend the Member for Knowsley, North and Sefton, East (Mr. Howarth), is therefore writing to local authorities, police and fire chief officers to stress the importance of effective liaison with the Environment Agency in its review of flood warning dissemination plans. He will also stress the importance of ensuring that emergency plans remain up to date and of active participation in exercises.

I have set out a series of measures that represent a positive response to the recommendations in the report. I have not addressed every recommendation, although the agency will do so next month. However, I assure the House that the Government and the agency take the report extremely seriously and are moving swiftly to address the key issues that have been identified.

In addition to its role as a flood defence operating authority, the Environment Agency is required, under the Environment Act 1995, to exercise a general supervision over all matters relating to flood defence. The Ministry will work with the agency and the other operating authorities—local authorities and internal drainage boards—in considering how that general supervisory duty should be developed to ensure a greater consistency of service and to ensure that best practice is shared. Targets will also need to be set—I have outlined some key ones today.

The Ministry will consider with the agency the cost of the programme of improvements. We will also liaise with local authorities to emphasise the importance of their contribution to adequate funding through the levies that they pay to the agency. Regional flood defence committees are being made aware of the priority that I attach to achieving those targets. The agency will provide progress reports. I will monitor and be prepared to intervene through ministerial direction if necessary.

I acknowledged at the beginning of this statement that many areas were affected by the floods. It may be invidious to single out one place as being particularly badly affected, but I think that that can be fairly said of Northampton. The town is one of five that were subject to special case studies in the report. Two people died and thousands had to leave their homes. Many have yet to return and some may never do so.

The town's residents have pursued a vigorous campaign for a judicial public inquiry into the floods. They have presented a petition to the House, and, all along, their efforts have been assiduously supported by my hon. Friends the Members for Northampton, South (Mr. Clarke) and for Northampton, North (Ms Keeble). Because of those representations, I have given careful thought to the call for a judicial public inquiry. On balance, however, I am not persuaded that an inquiry of that type will add to the detailed findings of Mr. Bye's thorough and independent report. Even the most cynical of observers could not accuse the report of being a whitewash. It pulls no punches in its conclusions.

I believe that there is a compelling need to move on, to learn the lessons identified and, above all, to implement the appropriate measures that I have set out today. A public inquiry would distract attention from that and inevitably result in further and, I suggest, unnecessary delay. It would also divert considerable financial and staff resources from the vital task of reducing the risk of a recurrence of the devastation of the floods.

Mercifully, serious floods are relatively rare in this country, thanks to the investment that successive Governments have made to protect our natural and man-made assets—an investment which this Government increased in the recent comprehensive spending review by some £23 million for capital works over the next three years.

In exercising their flood defence responsibilities, the chairman, board and staff of the agency have onerous duties in protecting the public. They need the support of

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the House and of the Government in achieving that. However, the Government must ensure that everyone concerned in the operation of flood defence learns lessons from experience. The independent report provides the basis on which to build real improvements in the systems and procedures for the future.

Mr. Tim Yeo (South Suffolk): I welcome the Minister's very full statement on this issue, and I am grateful to him for making it available to me just before 3 o'clock. It is an extremely important subject. The Easter floods caused substantial damage: there was a high financial and personal cost to many people—I went to St. Ives on Good Friday and saw the extent of the flooding in that area. I should like to join the Minister in expressing sympathy to the people who were affected by the floods.

Nevertheless, many farmers will note that, although an Agriculture Minister can make a statement in the House about flooding after 11 weeks of a recess during which the problems in farming have worsened so fast that the industry now faces its worst crisis for 60 years, there is still no word from the Government about how they propose to respond to the real threat of agricultural depression.

I welcome the conclusions in the Bye report, and I agree with the Minister that its findings are balanced and firm. I broadly support the steps that he is taking with the Environment Agency, in particular to examine the system of flood forecasting, warning and response. I accept his reasons for not proceeding with the suggestion of holding a public inquiry into the flooding in Northampton. I particularly welcome the co-operation between the Minister and the Environment Agency in considering what lessons can be learned.

I have a small number of specific questions. If the analysis that is undertaken results in an increase in the costs of the agency or the local authorities that are affected, because of the measures required to be taken, do the Government intend to cover those extra costs with additional funding from the centre or will the agency and the local authorities be expected to make savings from the other services that they currently provide?

Does the Minister accept that the risk of flooding can be affected by large-scale new development, including housing development, on green-field sites? Such developments may restrict drainage on areas in the historic flood plains. Will the Government issue, as a matter of urgency, new planning guidance that not only incorporates the promised sequential approach to planning decisions on where new housing should be built, so that brown-field sites are used before green-field sites, but requires more consideration of how any proposed development may affect flood risks in the surrounding area?

Does the Minister agree that a significant part of the difficulties at Easter arose from the speed with which the floods took place? Are any studies planned into that aspect of the problem? Flash flooding was a feature in many areas.

The review makes strong criticisms of the system of warnings. I agree that people are entitled to better warnings of when exceptional conditions may occur than were given in some places at Easter. Has the Minister noted the view of the Select Committee on Agriculture that, if warnings are not to be devalued, they must be issued prudently, and only when there is a real risk of flooding?

Does the Minister agree that, although, as the review acknowledges, the conditions at Easter were exceptional, the prospect of climate change means that such exceptional conditions may become more frequent? Surely that not only reinforces the need for the reconsideration of flood preparations that the Minister has put in hand, but makes even more urgent the need for the Government to publish their own, long overdue, climate change strategy.

Does the Minister agree that it is important not to act like King Canute? No amount of words can prevent flooding. The risk cannot be entirely eliminated, as the review states. Does the Minister accept that, on this issue, as, I am afraid, on other issues, Government actions across a range of policy, such as their approval of so many large-scale housing schemes on green-field sites, have made matters worse rather than better? Another example is their extraordinary recent decision to block the construction of more gas-fired power stations, although such power stations are one of the cheapest ways in which to slow down the process of climate change.

Given that the Minister—quite reasonably—expects the Environment Agency to do its best to reduce the risk of a repetition of what happened at Easter, would it not be helpful if the rest of Government policy were co-ordinated to achieve the same aim?

Mr. Morley: I welcome the hon. Member for South Suffolk (Mr. Yeo) on the occasion of his first outing as Opposition agriculture spokesman. I am sorry, however, that there has been an attempt to divert attention from the serious issue of the 2,000 and more people who were severely affected by the floods. The normal procedures of the House will give us opportunities to discuss agriculture in an entirely proper way, but today we are concerned with the effect on those people, and the important responses that we as a Government must make to the report.

As I said, we are discussing the costs of changes with the Environment Agency. We accept that there will be costs; it will be the agency's responsibility to meet some of them from its budget, but the Government will have to meet others, and we are prepared to consider the requests, and the commitments, that have been made. If there are implications for local authorities in terms of increased costs, those implications will be considered in the context of their standard spending assessments for flood defence.

The Agriculture Committee report touched on the risk of development on flood plains, and we have made our response to that report available. The issue was flagged up in the Bye report, although that report pointed out that, in recent years, more account had been taken of Environment Agency recommendations.

The question of warning systems, and how they should be applied, certainly needs to be considered. Climate change is being taken into account in future projections for both sea and flood defence. I must tell the hon. Member for South Suffolk that the climate change strategy is not overdue, and that my right hon. Friend the Minister for the Environment will report on it soon.

As for the hon. Gentleman's final question, about large-scale housing developments, there has been a great deal of housing development over the past 18 years. All I will say about Government policy is that this Government's target for brown-field rather than green-field development is considerably higher than that of the last Government.

Ms Sally Keeble (Northampton, North): I welcome the report and the statement, and, in particular, my hon. Friend's comments about the disgraceful slur that we heard from the hon. Member for South Suffolk (Mr. Yeo).

Does my hon. Friend seriously think that the general public—especially those in Northampton who suffered so much—will have confidence in the Environment Agency's ability to implement these important recommendations, given that that will call for qualities that, according to the report, the agency does not possess? I refer particularly to co-ordination between agencies.

Does my hon. Friend accept that much of the suffering of people in Northampton was caused by the fact that the last ministerial directive, signed by the hon. Member for Daventry (Mr. Boswell), was not implemented properly? Will my hon. Friend look again, very carefully, at the way in which the recommendations will be implemented, and consider whether there could be an independent mechanism or person, and a proper reporting process, so that everyone can be absolutely sure that the disasters of last Easter are never repeated?

Mr. Morley: My hon. Friend has made some important points.

We are responding by setting the Environment Agency targets that it will have to meet, and whose progress we will monitor. My hon. Friend's suggestion on how we can report on that progress, in a transparent way, is worthy of consideration, and we will give it further thought.

Mr. Tom Brake (Carshalton and Wallington): I welcome the statement, and congratulate the emergency services on the role that they played in tackling the floods. I also extend my sympathy to the families who were affected.

I am glad that the Government are talking to the Environment Agency about the costs of the improvement programme, but will they make contingency funds available now for the £1 million programme of work in relation to warning systems and flood defences that the agency has already said is necessary, so that the agency does not need to cut other equally important programmes? Will they also consider tighter controls for building on land that may be vulnerable to flooding?

Mr. Morley: I can confirm that we are talking to the Environment Agency about the cost. Its provisional estimate is that the immediate cost is about £1 million, and the Ministry is considering how we can make the necessary allocation.

The issue of guidelines was raised by the Agriculture Committee, and we made a formal response. My colleagues in the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions are also giving thought to the matter.

Mr. Tony Clarke (Northampton, South): The past six months have without doubt seemed much longer to those who were affected at Easter, many of whom have still not returned to normality, as my hon. Friend the Minister said. He mentioned the two fatalities in my constituency and the five nationally. It is important to place it on record that the list of fatalities grows longer by the day. For those who have died since Easter, the cause of death may have been given as pneumonia or natural causes, but there is little doubt that the trauma of the event has led to premature death.

Does my hon. Friend agree that his comment about the report being tough hitting does not go far enough for Northampton, and that the word "damning" should be used? The report says that, without doubt, the intensity, severity and depth of the flooding were increased by the failure of the Environment Agency to act on several factors: reservoirs were full; sluice gates were inoperative—last week, I passed to my hon. Friend a picture of floodgates held together with cans of WD40 jammed in their mechanisms; watercourses were blocked; and flood defences were missing, not with small gaps but with gaps which stretched up to 95 m in Northampton alone. Does he agree that the report is damning, and not just tough hitting?

Does my hon. Friend appreciate the anger felt by both Government and Opposition Members who are calling for the resignation of Lord De Ramsey? There is a belief that the buck stops at the top. Is it not, therefore, incredible that, in the six months since the Easter floods, before Members of Parliament called for his resignation, Lord De Ramsey did not make one public comment or offer one word of sympathy or acknowledgment of his responsibility as chair of the Environment Agency?

Will my hon. Friend assure the people of Northampton that he will intervene to ensure that Northampton's flood defences are brought up to scratch as soon as possible, so my constituents can once more sleep safely in their beds?

Mr. Morley: I well understand the trauma and distress suffered by my hon. Friend's constituents, as well as the anger that they feel. I know from my visit to Northampton how much work he and my hon. Friend the Member for Northampton, North (Ms Keeble) have done to support those who were so severely affected and to relay their concerns.

I do not think that the report can be described as damning. It is balanced and hard hitting and identifies the failures, many of which have been accepted by the Environment Agency. It is important that we get on with implementing the recommendations and learning the lessons.

It is for Lord De Ramsey to consider his own position, but I should point out that he went to Northampton and faced the local people in a public meeting where they had an opportunity to question him at first hand. We must learn the lessons and look forward, not backward, so that we can deal with the problems, especially in Northampton, and ensure that such events never happen again.

Mr. Tim Boswell (Daventry): The Minister will be aware that I preceded him in the responsibility for flood defence and gave the agency its current remit. I, too, welcome the Bye report and his statement and I endorse the comments of the hon. Member for Northampton, North (Ms Keeble) about the importance of monitoring

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the action plan as it develops. The Bye report concentrated heavily on the problems of the borough of Northampton, to which the Minister has promised Bellwin aid today, but my constituents who reside in Daventry district and especially in south Northamptonshire also suffered real and substantial problems. Will the Minister consider those problems and ensure that action is taken? Where there is a clear case that the Environment Agency has failed in its duty, will he undertake to consider losses sustained by constituents, wherever they live, that seem appropriate for compensation and recommend to the agency that it should recognise its responsibilities?

Mr. Morley: I certainly understand the hon. Gentleman's involvement in flood defence and accept that he knows the issues well. Close monitoring is needed, and I have already freely accepted that point. That measure will be implemented and we intend to set targets for the agency, which will be monitored. That means a new, close and, I hope, more transparent relationship with the agency.

I freely accept that others were affected. Although Northampton was the most severely affected, that is no consolation to others who were flooded, and I concede that their needs must also be considered.

On compensation claims, the policy of this Government, as of previous Governments including the one in which the hon. Gentleman served, has been not to compensate for insurable risks. It is difficult and divisive to do so.

Mr. Phil Hope (Corby): My constituency, too, contains people affected by the floods. Many of my constituents in Corby and east Northamptonshire are engaged in lengthy legal battles with developers, local authorities and water companies over liability for the costs of the floods. Many of my constituents believe that their homes are almost unsaleable because of the damage that was wrought, and they fear the response if they put their homes on the market in future.

I echo the comments made by my hon. Friend the Member for Northampton, South (Mr. Clarke): the report was a damning indictment of the Environment Agency and its chairman should look to his position. If the report is to be implemented in full, we in Corby and east Northamptonshire must be assured that the Environment Agency is up to the job.

Mr. Morley: I cannot comment on individual legal cases on flood plain developments and potential losses. However, I can give my hon. Friend the assurance that he seeks that the Government will ensure that the targets are monitored. I accept that the report was critical in some areas, and those criticisms have to be faced by the Environment Agency. It must rectify the faults in its systems and we will set targets to ensure that it does.

Mr. Peter Luff (Mid-Worcestershire): I thank the Minister and his Department for the statement today and for the full response to the Agriculture Committee's report on flood and coastal defence, which will be published shortly. We are grateful to him for the seriousness with which he has taken that report. All my constituents who were so badly affected by the Easter floods in Evesham and throughout Wychavon will welcome what he has said today about the Environment Agency's future action, especially on flood warnings which did not work locally as well as they should have done. That welcome will also be extended by members of the Agriculture Committee, whose recommendations are clearly reflected in the Minister's comments today.

It is all very well having excellent flood and coastal defence works in place, but if inappropriate development takes place on the flood plain the floods will occur again. There is no point in putting a party slant on that, because district councils of all political persuasions bear a share of the responsibility. What will the Minister do to ensure that inappropriate developments do not take place in the future?

Mr. Morley: The recent report of the Select Committee on Agriculture was an important advance. It dealt with serious issues in a balanced, thoughtful and weighty way, and I am glad that the hon. Gentleman, who is Chairman of the Agriculture Committee, appreciates that we have tried to respond in kind.

The report points out, and I accept it, that flood warnings clearly failed in certain parts of the country last Easter. We are determined to rectify that and to ensure that they work better in future. I understand the concern raised by the hon. Gentleman and by others about inappropriate development on flood plains. The Bye report said that matters had improved in recent years—there is more awareness of the potential risks of developing on flood plains. I welcome that, and we must take the risks into account. They are a matter for planning, and my colleagues at the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions are giving thought to whether there should be improvements in guidance for planning authorities.

Dr. George Turner (North-West Norfolk): The Minister will know that my constituents have good reason to take a keen interest in flooding and flood protection. I was pleased to hear him raise the prospect of proper simulation exercises, but will such exercises be evaluated independently so that people do not end up patting themselves on the back for how well they have done?

My hon. Friend also referred to the many bodies that are involved at times of flood. The media have a key role to play, but I have learnt over the past year that they often feel unsatisfied about the flow of information to them. Will the Minister assure me that the role of the media will be among the matters considered as we look to the future?

Mr. Morley: Emergency exercises must be properly evaluated. The lead responsibility for doing so lies with the Home Office, and I know that the matter is under consideration. The Bye report flagged up the important role of the media in ensuring that flood warnings are disseminated as widely as possible. I am sure that media organisations will have taken that on board.

Dr. Evan Harris (Oxford, West and Abingdon): The village of Kidlington in my constituency was badly affected and was one of five areas specially examined by the report. I pay tribute to Mr. Carl Smith, the parish clerk for Gosford and Water Eaton, who contributed a great

deal to the report and is mentioned in it. There was great trauma in Kidlington, for the simple reason that it was not raining there, and the Cherwell valley was merely draining water from an area where there was rain. The sad fact is that there was little in the way of failure of flood defence there: little flood defence was undertaken as it was not felt that the area would be affected.

The Environment Agency should avoid using terms such as "100-year floods" to describe events that may become more frequent as a result of global climate change. Much work should be done to consider new areas for defence, and to improve warning systems. There was no warning in Kidlington, and that made the problems much worse. Will the Minister join me in regretting the Environment Agency's statement in the report that it is merely considering improvements to the flood warning system in the Kidlington area? The Minister has hinted strongly that contingency funds will be available. Does he agree that the agency should lift its horizons on the work that could be done? Will he consider instructing the agency to consider new methods of flood warning, using future developments in digital television to complement any automatic telephone warning system for those people who could take advantage of it? Perhaps in 10 or 20 years that practice will be more prevalent than is currently envisaged.

Mr. Morley: I certainly appreciate that the residents of Kidlington were affected, and their experiences have helped us to reach the response that we have formulated. It must be borne in mind that the flooding was exceptional, and it did overtop defences designed for a much lower level of flooding. As the Bye report points out, however, some of the flooding was caused by rapid increases in water courses with water arriving from unexpected sources, and that should be recognised in seeking improvements in telemetry for advanced warnings.

On improving flood warning, the Environment Agency proposes a new national centre to integrate the information from weather forecasting and telemetry readings across the country to improve flood warnings so that people get the required information. I accept my hon. Friend's point about the role of new technology. Where there are opportunities for using new technology for flood warning, they should be taken.

Mr. James Plaskitt (Warwick and Leamington): I welcome the Minister's statement and the Government's response to the Bye report. In my constituency, Warwick district council appreciates the swift response of the Bellwin scheme. The Minister's comments on compensation for the county council under that scheme were welcome news.

Royal Leamington Spa was badly affected by flooding and was the subject of a special report within the Bye report: 400 homes were badly affected, as were many small businesses in the town centre. Some people are still not back in their homes, and some of the small businesses closed as a result of the flooding will not reopen. The Bye report's section on Royal Leamington Spa details a long list of failures by the Environment Agency, particularly its failure to issue alerts through the automatic telephone system because it had omitted to include the numbers of the district council on the system. That is a serious failure. I am still interested in the issue of compensation, which was raised by the hon. Member for Daventry (Mr. Boswell). Would not a useful starting point be acceptance of liability by the Environment Agency for many of the failures?

Mr. Morley: It is true that the Bye report identified the failure to issue alerts. Those failings have been acknowledged by the agency in improvements and in learning the lessons. On compensation, there is an issue about people who feel aggrieved by their losses but in principle, it is not the policy of the Government—the Environment Agency is a Government agency—to compensate for insurable risk. On the flooding, it is impossible to plan and protect against every eventuality, particularly when the circumstances are so extreme. That factor needs to be borne in mind.

Mr. Ian Bruce (South Dorset): I congratulate the Minister on defending the Environment Agency, because many things are improving, especially the local flood defence committees. In my constituency, with the work of the agency and everyone else, this year we had the least floods. Anyone who has visited a flooded family will know how traumatic the experience is.

The Minister should consider carefully what local authorities are allowed to do under planning legislation. They often know that someone is building on a flood plain but do not feel able to stop the planning application going ahead. Often, additional properties on a flood plain mean that there is nowhere for the flood water to go, so that other properties flood that would not otherwise have done so.

Will the Minister consider putting flood warnings in the Land Registry for properties built in that way? That would put pressure on people not to build in such places. Will he carefully consider the suggestion of the hon. Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon (Dr. Harris) on the use of new technology? I imagine that people's telephones could be rung simultaneously, perhaps with a special tone, using current technology. Rather than merely warning a local authority that must then try to warn other people, we could use the telephone system to warn everyone.

Mr. Morley: Planning authorities have the power to turn down inappropriate applications if there is a risk from flooding. If there is a need to issue further clarification or guidance, we will consider it. The issue of Land Registry warnings is much more complicated, and careful thought will have to be given to whether such a procedure is appropriate, and to the practicalities. The technology already exists to ensure that a large number of households are given the warning at the same time. It is offered to those that are considered to be at risk from flooding in certain parts of the country. That is one of the matters that the Environment Agency review will consider.

Mr. Patrick Hall (Bedford): I would like my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary to be aware that people in Bedford and Kempston are following this issue carefully, because that area was also affected by the flooding. The Minister for the Environment visited part of the flooded area last April. My hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary referred to the Environment Agency's action plan, to be published this November. Will that include—if it does not, will the Government look at it—the important question of the agency's powers

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to comment on planning applications for development on flood plains? At present, the agency's role is only advisory. It is fair to say that its advice has largely been ignored over the years. We have seen considerable development on flood plains. That issue, including the agency's powers in that respect, needs to be looked into.

Mr. Morley: The action plan certainly includes warnings and appropriate planning guidance on flood plains. I must repeat the point that was made in the Bye report, which acknowledged that, in recent years, the planning policies of authorities around the country had improved considerably bearing in mind the risks of development on flood plains. Whether there is a need for statutory powers is something which will be considered by my colleagues in the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions.

Mr. Brian White (Milton Keynes, North-East): I have read the report. The older parts of my constituency were flooded and I have met many of the people who were affected in Newport Pagnell. The newer parts in the city of Milton Keynes, where balancing lakes were built into the design of the flood defence system, did not flood, yet they had the same rainfall and the same river flowed through them. Many of the people who were flooded are not satisfied with the Bye report because it does not adequately address the suggestions that members of the Environment Agency opened the sluice gates and thereby flooded areas downstream. It may have dealt with some of the issues in the five areas that were detailed, but many other aspects were not fully covered.

In my constituency, the fire authorities decided to reaffirm their charge of 300 quid to pump out flooded houses. They pumped out houses without asking whether people were prepared to pay the money; they simply added the charge at the end. That was a scandalous misuse of their authority and shows that combined fire authorities do not work.

The floods at Easter have shown that the work of loss adjusters, and the way in which insurance claims are processed, is long winded. It has caused a number of my constituents who have businesses at home to lose out. They are in danger of losing their businesses as a result of the protracted nature of the loss adjusters system and the way in which insurance claims are dealt with. Does my hon. Friend agree that there is a case for reviewing the system following the floods last Easter?

Mr. Morley: The Bye report dealt with the point about sacrificing areas, and was clear and specific in its conclusions that no areas were sacrificed to save others. I am not aware of the point about charges by the Environment Agency for pumping, but I will take it up with the agency and write to my hon. Friend about why what he described happened and the justification for it.

My hon. Friend's comments about insurance claims go wider than the brief that I hold, but it is clear to me, from talking to affected residents, that there is a disparity in the performance of insurance companies. That is something which insurance companies need to address.

Ms Joan Walley (Stoke-on-Trent, North): I thank my hon. Friend for his statement. It is important that the whole country learns the lesson of this incident. It should underpin the work that my right hon. Friend the Minister for the Environment will do when he goes to Buenos Aires to negotiate improved reductions in greenhouse emissions, which is crucial.

Irrespective of the issue of new planning guidance for houses built on green-field and brown-field sites, I urge my hon. Friend to look again and give us an assurance that the Environment Agency has the resources to act as a consultee in respect of planning applications on brown-field and green-field sites on a flood plain.

Mr. Morley: It is certainly the case that the Government will hold debates with other Governments and internationally, involving the Minister for the Environment. The issue of CO_2 emissions is linked to climate change which, in turn, is linked to the tragedies and implications that we are discussing now. It brings home the need to tackle those issues seriously and in a practical way.

The examinations carried out for the Bye report and the deliberations of the Agriculture Committee have not produced any evidence so far that the Environment Agency has not been able to fulfil its duties in relation to providing advice for flood plain development. The agency has been able to do that and it is important that the planning authorities take notice of that advice. As I have said, the Bye report acknowledges that more attention has been paid to that matter in recent years.

Mr. Huw Edwards (Monmouth): I welcome my hon. Friend's statement and assure him that I believe that the investigation by the independent inquiry into the floods in Skenfrith in my constituency has been particularly thorough. However, that area was not as badly affected as others mentioned by hon. Members today. Does my hon. Friend agree that Welsh Office planning guidelines need to be revised so that there is a presumption against new housing development on flood plains? Does my hon. Friend agree that there should be consistency between the Welsh Office planning guidelines and the Environment Agency's report on giving guidelines to local authorities?

Mr. Morley: The Welsh Office has received copies of the Bye report and our response to the Agriculture Committee. I am sure that it will take into account the recommendations and considerations of those reports when considering its planning policy.

Statutory Instruments

4.21 pm

Mr. Ian Bruce (South Dorset): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. I seek your guidance on two related matters.

First, I want to mention the number of statutory instruments that are published and come into force during the summer recess. Is there any way in which you can get the Government to ensure that, when statutory instruments are laid in that way, the House has an opportunity to debate them in a timely fashion, not allowing them to come into force while the House is not sitting?

To put this matter into context, I shall point out that a statutory instrument on the working time directive was laid on virtually the last day before the summer recess. It dealt specifically with people employed in this place. I told you some time ago, Madam Speaker, that I thought that the regulations would apply to the way in which you are employed by the House, because you are required to be on duty for greatly more than 48 hours a week. If I am seen as one of your employers—I say that in a respectful way—my colleagues and I do not want to break the law.

I hope that we have written to you asking you whether you are prepared to work more than 48 hours a week and that you have responded in writing to say that you are; if not, we will not be able to employ you in the way that we are doing now. Under that directive, the House may have to look again at the way in which we employ our Speaker, including the requirement for that Speaker to be on duty for such hours. I think that we are breaking the law by requiring you to do the wonderful job that you do for us.

Madam Speaker: Hear, hear.

I have had no communication with anybody about the number of hours that I work in the House. The hon. Gentleman gave me no notice of his first comments in the point of order, and I understand that there are probably good reasons for that. However, if he wants me to look at that matter, I will do so when I have looked at the *Official Report* tomorrow to see precisely what he has said. It is rather complicated and I cannot give him a ruling immediately. I will look at the matter as soon as possible.

Countryside Protection (Landfill and Opencast Mining)

4.23 pm

Mr. David Taylor (North-West Leicestershire): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to make provision for a presumption against landfill sites and opencast mines in open countryside; and for related purposes.

There was a time when the mention in the House of the word "environment" was regarded as a sign of soft politics. Green things were for green people—those whose naivety led them to conclude that there could be a better way. Those who bleated about industry's cost to the environment were costing the country jobs and, moreover, did not understand the world. However, in our last spell in opposition, the Labour party pledged to put an end to all that. We said that the quality of people's lives was too often sacrificed on the altar of profit. Those who might have been wavering about their green politics wavered no more and supported us in great numbers.

I am calling on the House to support a Bill that aims to see off two scourges that rot our landscape as completely as a skin cancer drains life from the body that it takes over—opencasting and landfill sites in open countryside. Both are immensely damaging to our countryside, its economy and the communities who live near them. Although they are closely related, I shall deal with them separately.

Last Friday, the Government announced a tighter planning framework for opencast applications, which I welcome as a major step towards delivering our election promises, but that does not yet restrict opencasting to derelict sites. The Bill would do so. There would be an absolute presumption against granting planning permission for an opencast mine in open green countryside.

Why should the House support the Bill? Hon. Members may think that opencast mines provide us with much-needed inexpensive quality coal that helps to keep open our last remaining deep mines. For those who never have cause to visit a site or have one as a neighbour, the narrow, shallow economic arguments may be attractive—if only they were always true.

The trouble with all economic analysis is that decisions depend on the costs excluded. If one excludes from the equation the social, environmental and community costs of opencast mines, it is not difficult to show that they make a profit. However, if one adds into the sum the cost of housing blight suffered by those who live nearby, the pollution as heavy vehicles daily truck in and out and the deep-mine coal reserves that have been closed down, one has a different story altogether. Opencast comes out of that wider analysis in a negative light, not a green one. We rarely hear those facts. The likes of R. J. Budge and Hepworth in the east midlands are happy when such debates are muted or muddied.

We need secure, sustainable and clean energy in this country. The demands on our national resources are increasing monthly. We need to provide for the future, but an energy policy for a sound future must be built on firm foundations. The opencast vulture is gorging itself on the carcase of the late-lamented deep-mining industry. Plundering green-field sites for the sake of that coal is

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neither sane nor sustainable. It may be convenient for the landowners; it is possibly easy for them; it is probably very profitable for them, but it is certainly a lousy deal for those who live in the blighted communities.

The Bill would end green-field opencast sites for ever. Some hon. Members may be concerned by that, but it is not yet a ban on all opencasting. We are all hoist by the petard of dreadful energy provision planning by the previous Government. That difficulty is at last being dealt with, but a welcome new role for deep mining must not usher in renewed calls for more opencasting. Opencast mining may still proceed, but only in exceptional circumstances where it is environmentally beneficial, not just environmentally acceptable. As one who lives in a community that is constantly under threat, I know that would-be opencasters will have to work hard to demonstrate any such benefits to us.

The second provision of the Bill widens the Chancellor's proposed aggregate tax to include both operational opencast sites and the few given permission in future. For too long, in my view, those who have run our opencast mines have been allowed to print their own profits. When opencasting is looked at in narrow terms, there appears to be a case for extraction. However, a widened aggregate tax—a mineral tax levied to balance the social, economic and environmental books—would change that. A mineral tax would help to focus the mining companies' minds—and that can be a hard job. Talk about the environment, and the mining companies barely listen; talk about social impact, and they turn a deaf ear; but talk about money—especially if it is their money—and one gets their full attention.

The final provision in the Bill will please many people—indeed, it illustrates why opencasting is such a bad idea. Opencast mines have an even uglier and more dangerous sibling: landfill sites. Those of us who still read *The Guardian* will no doubt have seen during the recess a report of a study in *The Lancet* about a possible link between birth defects and certain types of landfill sites. The report stated:

"Women who live within three kilometres of hazardous waste landfill sites have a 33 percent higher risk of having babies with birth defects."

Must the unborn child pay for our own bad planning? We, and we alone, create the need for landfill sites. They are filled with our waste. Taking account of commerce and industry, we all produce enough annual national waste for landfill to generate a 30,000 km line of dumper trucks trundling through our countryside. They would fill a four-lane highway from London to Beijing—some takeaway! The annual national volume of all types of waste would bury North-West Leicestershire—110 square miles—up to our necks. It sometimes feels like that.

Yes, we must change our ways; but our ways are changing too slowly for those with landfill sites as neighbours. We allow industry to pour into landfill sites goodness knows what cocktails of chemicals and pollutants. "Skip and tip" and "dig and dump" are not new millennium disposal methods. We need new remediation technology to treat and use contaminated land.

It is said that not one of our seven seas has not been polluted by man. The situation is no less unsavoury on dry land. Should we be surprised? No, we should not. We all want easy answers to our problems; people do not really want to change their behaviour. Every household in this country creates a tonne of waste a year. Industry, too, wants to get on with the job of making money. Until that becomes more difficult, nobody, but nobody, is going to change.

Tax is a great persuader. The increase in landfill tax to £10 per tonne on certain wastes from next April is very welcome—so long as the environmental projects that it funds are in the immediate area and not just in the home communities of the decision takers. If, in addition, we were to define landfill sites as "public works" under the Town and Country Planning (Compensation) Act 1985, we could force those who create such places to compensate others whose homes and lives are blighted by them.

Two of my constituents whose house is right by a proposed landfill site recently wrote to me:

"We have already suffered severe blight and stress. Our lives have been ruined in recent months by the excavations at the site and (that) can only get worse when the landfill begins".

However, my constituents cannot move: they have been pinned down by poor environmental planning. They continued:

"Our property is unsaleable. So we have lost our rights to enjoy our home, most of the value of our property and the major part of our pension provision".

I am certain that what is happening to those people living in the Leicestershire hamlet of Boothorpe is a fundamental breach of their human rights, and that that injustice is echoed in many other parts of our country. That this should happen at the heart of our new national forest is not just astonishing, but daft. If we must continue to open landfill sites despite the much tougher planning regime that I propose, operators must meet the wider social costs incurred.

The Bill would ensure proper compensation to those communities and individuals who suffer. A compensation regime will make business and industry think twice about creating landfill sites. Money talks and business listens.

There is a political cost. Labour Members have made promises such as our 10-point plan on opencast mining. Unfulfilled promises are like determined dogs; they chase one around—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Lord): Order.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Mr. David Taylor, Mr. Joe Ashton, Mr. Tony Benn, Liz Blackman, Mr. Peter Bradley, Mr. Phil Hope, Dr. Lynne Jones, Judy Mallaber, Dr. Nick Palmer, Mr. Alan Simpson, Mr. Dennis Skinner and Mr. Mark Todd.

Countryside Protection (Landfill and Opencast Mining)

Mr. David Taylor accordingly presented a Bill to make provision for a presumption against landfill sites and opencast mines in open countryside; and for related purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on Friday 13 November, and to be printed [Bill 245].

Orders of the Day

Strategic Defence Review

[SECOND DAY]

[Relevant documents: Fifth report, on the Reserves Call-Out Order 1998, Etc. (HC 868); sixth report, on the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency (HC 621); seventh report (also the eighth report from the Trade and Industry Committee), on Aspects of Defence Procurement and Industrial Policy (HC 675); and eighth report, on the Strategic Defence Review (HC 138-I).]

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on Question [19 October],

That this House approves the conclusions of the Government's Strategic Defence Review (Cm 3999).—*[Mr. George Robertson.]*

To which an amendment was proposed—

To leave out from "House" to the end of the Question, and to add instead thereof:

"welcomes those aspects of the Strategic Defence Review which build on Conservative policy and which take forward jointery and rapid reaction capability; but deplores the proposed cuts in money, men, ships and planes; notes that, far from being foreign policy led, there are no clear foreign policy objectives, that defence spending between 1996–97 and 2001–2 will fall by £2,166 million in real terms with inevitable consequences for capability, that the Territorial Army is to be cut by almost one third, that the RAF is to have fewer planes and the Royal Navy fewer submarines and surface ships; seriously doubts that the planned replacements for aircraft carriers will ever be built by a Labour Government; believes that the problems of over-stretch and morale have not been adequately addressed; and deplores the fact that the armed forces will be asked to do more in a dangerous world with fewer men and less equipment."—*[Mr. Maples.]*

Question again proposed, That the amendment be made.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Lord): Before I call the first speaker, may I tell the House that Madam Speaker has decided that today the 10-minute rule for speeches will apply for all Back-Bench speeches?

4.35 pm

The Minister for the Armed Forces (Mr. Doug Henderson): I thank my hon. Friends for their kind remarks in yesterday's debate. I also thank the hon. and learned Member for North-East Fife (Mr. Campbell) for his kind remarks. He said that it was a taxing job being Minister for the Armed Forces, and that I had more athletic prowess than my predecessors. I believe that that gives me the edge over my right hon. Friend the Member for Hamilton, North and Bellshill (Dr. Reid)—my immediate predecessor—and perhaps a slightly greater edge over the hon. Member for Mid-Sussex (Mr. Soames). I pay tribute to my immediate predecessor for his hard work in the strategic defence review, for his clear thinking, and for his high standing among our armed forces.

Today I shall make a principled point about people in the armed forces. During my contribution, I shall take up specifically two points that were made in yesterday's debate—a point raised by my hon. Friend the Member for City of York (Mr. Bayley) on land reorganisation, and a point made by the hon. Member for Gosport (Mr. Viggers) on medical provision.

Yesterday, the Secretary of State told the House of our long-term vision for Britain's defence. It is the first time since the end of the cold war that this country has a coherent, radical and long-term vision.

It is a great honour to account to the House for the operational effectiveness and commitment of our armed forces. I am conscious that our armed forces have risen to the task of defending our nation throughout history. Their determination, their commitment, their dedication and their service have defended and preserved our freedoms and traditions and the nation's freedom. Today our armed services have the same determination, the same commitment and the same dedication, and can be called upon to make the same sacrifice—a fact that the rest of us should never forget.

I have seen those qualities as I have met our service personnel in the months since I took over my new position, in August—their extraordinary skills, their motivation, their professionalism. Those qualities and capacities make our armed forces second to none among those who defend the freedoms of the democratic world.

I have been proud to see those qualities and capacities displayed by the soldiers that I have met in Northern Ireland and Germany, by the sailors on board HMS Westminster, by the ground crew of the Tornado squadron at Bruggen, and by our tanker fleet based at Brize Norton but serving world wide.

I also know that the commitment of our front-line personnel is matched by those who provide essential support, by the logistics personnel who provide crucial back-up, whom I have met at Devonport, in Northern Ireland and in Germany, and by the Ministry of Defence Police, whom I have met at many locations and only last Friday at Faslane on the Clyde. I am also conscious of the personal sacrifice often made by our service veterans. We owe all those people, past and present, a huge debt. I am sure that the House will share with me that sense of gratitude.

Before I speak about the role of people in the strategic defence review, I want to deal with concerns raised by Gulf war veterans. I have made it a priority to see representatives of Gulf war veterans. I met them nationally, but in Newcastle some weeks ago. They have told me of the illness and disability suffered by many of their colleagues who served in the Gulf.

I believe that, in honouring our debt to those who have served, we must do everything we can to try to find out whether it can be established that there is a specific illness or set of illnesses uniquely associated with Gulf service. What were the circumstances in which such illnesses were contracted? Can the cause or causes be identified? Can they be prevented in any future scenario? What kind of treatment is appropriate for those who suffer?

We are committed to doing all we can to get to the core of those questions. That is why we have committed substantial resources to research. The issue is difficult and complex. Important new medical and scientific information is emerging all the time. I am particularly keen to see the first results from the epidemiological studies on Gulf veterans, which should start to become available at around the turn of the year. Results from other research programmes can be expected to start appearing from next year onwards. I believe that the Government have already demonstrated their clear commitment to

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addressing properly the concerns of Gulf veterans. I can assure the House that that work will continue, because we take the welfare of our people seriously.

My hon. Friend the Member for City of York spoke yesterday about proposed restructuring of the Army's land command. I know that he has been diligent in arguing his constituency's case. I listened carefully to the points he made in arguing that York should be the headquarters of the proposed northern region. However, I have emphasised that the purpose of the land command restructuring is to make the Army more effective and more efficient, so that it can meet the challenges of the 21st century. That is, after all, what the strategic defence review is all about. That is at the forefront of my mind as I make my final deliberations on the future district structure of the Army. I can assure my hon. Friend that I shall be able to make an announcement shortly.

People are the key to Britain's future. That is true for the economic and social life of our country, and equally true for the defence of our country. People are the deciding factor in military operations. The talents and commitment of our people are the main reason for our extraordinary record of operational success. We asked our personnel what reforms they believed were a priority, and we listened to what they said. I am confident that our "policy for people" responds to those demands.

The Government believe that we owe it to our military personnel and the civilians who support them to put their interests at the heart of defence planning. We need them; we must have their support. We owe it to them to have a policy that deals effectively with their problems, and which is not a quick fix.

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): The Minister knows Northumberland and the Borders, and he knows how keen people there are to serve in the Territorial Army and to support it. I hope he will bring a fresh mind to bear on whether there will be a TA presence in Berwick, Alnwick and on the other side of the border. It will not be a practical possibility for the successors of people who have served the forces over the years to have that level of participation in defence of our country if there is no TA presence in that area.

Mr. Henderson: The right hon. Gentleman will understand that I shall deal with that issue. I am happy to give him a taster of what I shall say later. We have a strong commitment to the Territorial Army, and to modernising it. There has traditionally been a strong recruitment drive and capacity in the north-east of England. I am determined that, with a fresh mind, that will be the case in the future.

In response to the needs and demands of people in our armed forces, we must deliver them a coherent long-term strategy that allows them to develop their talents. I am pleased to confirm to the House that I agree with the Select Committee that the success of the entire review may depend ultimately on getting this area of policy right.

Tackling the problem of under-strength is another typical issue. It cannot be solved in the short term, but I am pleased to tell the House that recruitment is already improving. In 1997, the Army could recruit only 88 per cent. of its target. This year, it is confident of recruiting more than 95 per cent. There is, of course, still a long way to go. Our aims are to achieve full staffing in the Royal Air Force from 2000, in the Royal Navy from 2002 and in the Army by about 2004. Full staffing will largely solve the problems of overstretch, but it is a long time until we achieve that in 2004.

Mr. Mike Hancock (Portsmouth, South): The problem that the armed forces, particularly the RAF, are facing in some areas is the retention of qualified staff. What are the Government's proposals to ensure that we retain people in whose training we have invested tens of thousands, if not millions, of pounds?

Mr. Henderson: I can assure the hon. Gentleman that recruitment and retention in the armed forces is a top priority for the Government. That is true of the service to which he referred. There are no easy answers. A combination of approaches is needed, to allow us to communicate better to potential recruits what the armed services are about, and to enable us to treat people better when they are in the armed services, to persuade them to stay. Later, I shall outline some of the measures that I propose.

As I said, 2004 is a long way away. The services are looking hard at how to reduce overstretch by better management of people. They will carry through significant changes as part of the SDR implementation. Some changes in telephone allowances and in rest and recuperation flights introduced in July have been welcomed by personnel. Only a combination of reforms in the longer term will help to make the necessary impact on recruitment and retention.

Mr. Ian Bruce (South Dorset): Is the Minister confident that the armed forces will be able to recruit 95 per cent. of their target figure? Year after year, we have heard confident predictions that they would achieve their projected recruiting level, but they have failed. In my constituency, we are keen for more and more people to join so that they can be trained at Bovington, but that is not happening. Does the Minister believe that cutting the Territorial Army will help in future years to attain even the present level of recruitment?

Mr. Henderson: It shows what a change in Government does. I would not say that I was confident of attaining a target if I did not believe that. I am confident that we shall do so. I shall deal later with the hon. Gentleman's question about the TA.

Mr. Andrew Robathan (Blaby): The new Army concept of operations for infantry battalions will involve a fourth manoeuvre company. That is what is being spoken about. Given that many battalions are one company under strength, how does the Minister see battalions being able to man four rifle companies per battalion, when they cannot man three at present?

Mr. Henderson: It is the good news from a change of Government that we are beginning to get numbers up to strength. We intend to continue to work on that. We are confident that our proposals in the strategic defence review will be met. Otherwise, we would not be saying that we believe that that will be the case.

I shall move on to the welfare of our personnel and their families, as well as the welfare of veterans. I believe that their welfare is crucial in building a better atmosphere within the armed services. I opened a veterans advice unit on 5 October. It is a single point of contact for veterans and their dependants, who may seek advice on the widest range of subjects, from advice that is important to individuals on how to obtain a medal to which they are entitled, to other questions about very important issues such as pensions. A special Gulf veterans' advice unit and medical assessment programme have already been established.

We shall also establish a service families task force to co-ordinate our response to service families across Government. I will lead on that task force, and Ministers from a number of Departments will serve on it. Service families will also be represented. Together we shall address the problems that service families face. We are already making progress.

Like all parents, a major concern for service personnel is their children's education; but the service way of life adds complications with which most families do not have to contend. The Government recognise this, so the Department for Education and Employment has issued guidance to schools and admission authorities on being sensitive to the needs of service families. Education is just one example of the problems that service families experience and which we are taking action to address.

We want to do more for those for whom the services are only a first career. Our learning forces initiative aims to ensure that service personnel have many more opportunities to acquire recognised academic and vocational qualifications. We want those opportunities to be available both while personnel are in the services and after they leave. We are doing this not only because we want to get the best out of our people but because we want them to return to the civilian employment market with transferable skills and qualifications. I am especially pleased that the Select Committee on Defence welcomed our plans in that area.

Mrs. Margaret Ewing (Moray): This is an important point relating to the families of those who are involved in the services. The Minister will recognise that, because their children are often moved around, given the nature of deployment, among various countries, they sometimes return to a United Kingdom base where they may be excellent at numbers but perhaps restricted in language. That places extra burdens on local authorities. Is any analysis being undertaken by the Ministry of Defence to ascertain how it can best assist in these situations to help youngsters who have a topsy-turvy sort of education?

Mr. Henderson: I am grateful to the hon. Lady for making that very real point, which was made to me also by the wives of serving personnel in Northern Ireland when I visited them recently. They wanted all troop movements to take place in August every year. I could not quite guarantee them that that would be possible. However, the families' task force is to deal with that sort of issue—to ascertain what additional assistance the families of armed service personnel need to allow them to move from one location to another with the minimum disruption. The hon. Lady makes a valid point.

I turn to attitudes in the services. We and our armed forces have faced the fact that some racism and sexism exists in the forces, and that some think that the armed forces are not interested in tackling those problems. That perception has not helped our ability to find the right people and to hold on to them. These are issues that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, the chiefs of staff and I are determined to tackle.

Over the past few years, the services have worked hard to remove the stigma of being seen sometimes as organisations which fall short of modern standards on race. Much effort has gone into building bridges with ethnic communities, and real progress is now being made. I say to the House, lest anyone has any misapprehension, that we have a zero tolerance policy on racism. I can tell the House that the Government mean that. We seek exemplary behaviour from modern forces, and we want the best people to join the armed forces. That means getting the best people from all the communities in our country.

When we say that we want to reflect the multicultural nature of Britain today, it is our responsibility to deliver change: change in values, in attitude and in recruitment patterns. I am pleased to tell the House that, such has been the progress made, that Sir Herman Ouseley, chairman of the Commission for Racial Equality, described it as model leadership in action. However, that achievement must be consolidated.

The momentum and the improvements must not be allowed to wither. It therefore gave me great pleasure in September to open the tri-service equal opportunities training centre at Shrivenham. The centre will educate those with key responsibilities for removing any racist or sexist behaviour from our organisations. When I see one or two Conservative Members smirking at that, I have to tell them that, when we are involved in dialogue with the armed forces, they take it very seriously and they want to see change. I believe that it will help to guarantee that our armed forces truly reflect the rich diversity of our country.

Mr. Peter Brooke (Cities of London and Westminster): What moral has the Ministry of Defence derived from the fact that, in two Territorial Army units in my constituency, the ethnic minorities comprise one in five and one in four respectively? What is working well there which is not working as well elsewhere?

Mr. Henderson: The right hon. Gentleman makes a good point, which I want to support. Clearly, there has been a modern and radical approach in those units. We want to see that approach replicated in other units throughout our armed services.

We attach the highest priority also to recruiting women to the services. We have increased the opportunities available to them in the Army. Those opportunities are greater than those available, for instance, in the United States army. The Select Committee on Defence is right to say that changes in attitudes within the armed forces are still needed. That does not mean a reduction in combat effectiveness, for that would be unacceptable. It is not about political correctness, for that would be inept. It is about being a good modern employer, and that is what we should be.

It makes sense that we should make best use of talents in all parts of society. It is morally right that we ensure that all personnel, irrespective of gender, ethnic grouping

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or social background, are treated decently. People matter in the regular forces, in the civil service and in the reserves.

Mr. James Gray (North Wiltshire): Does that apply to homosexuals?

Mr. Henderson: I am not giving way. I want to move on, because I have a great deal to cover.

One aspect of the review that has received much attention—I know that it is of great interest to many hon. Members—is the future role of the reserve forces, and of the Territorial Army in particular. As it was in the past, so it is today: we rely heavily on our reserves. Quite simply, we could not fight a war at any significant level without them. They also have a vital role in the spectrum of crises that increasingly faces us in today's world. Indeed, the reserves have provided 10 per cent. of British forces in Bosnia since December 1995.

I want to place on record my appreciation of the contribution and commitment, often at personal sacrifice, of our reserves and others. They have an admirable record of essential support for their regular counterparts.

Against that background, many have asked, "Why change?" The fact is that we want to use our reserves in a wider and more flexible way. The Royal Navy Reserve has an important and valued role in supporting the Royal Navy in meeting its operational commitments. That will continue. Indeed, under the strategic defence review, we are increasing the number of people and resources available to the Royal Navy Reserve to enable it better to undertake this work. We need an extra 385 people in that area.

The Royal Air Force reserve is equally important. The number of air force reservists will also increase by 270, and we have new roles for them to undertake. In particular, there will be new roles for them in establishing communication links, and in ensuring the security of those communications.

I come now to the Territorial Army, a matter of concern to many hon. Members. The TA's current structure is based on the cold war scenario of a massive Warsaw pact invasion of western Europe and a major threat to the British Isles. Hon. Members have already recognised that that is the case. But today that is no longer a principal threat to Britain, and it is wasteful and demoralising to maintain forces in anticipation of non-existent tasks.

We are not prepared to allow the TA to decline in the absence of a clear formal task. The strategic defence review made hard rational decisions on the basis of sound analysis. That is what modernisation is about, and that is what we have done for the reserves. There is a coherent vision and plan for the future of the TA.

Mr. Chris Mullin (Sunderland, South): No one is against modernisation, but there is a feeling in the north-east, about which, as a north-east Member of Parliament, my hon. Friend will know, that the area has been hit disproportionately by what is proposed, and that is the point we want him to address. Will he look carefully at what is proposed for the north-east, and see whether it will be possible to make some concessions?

Mr. Henderson: I shall be receiving proposals in the near future, and in examining those in relation to the north-east, I shall bear in mind the heavy commitment to the TA there. The reason why there are so many units there is that many people there want to serve in the TA. That will continue under our plans for modernisation. Where people in the north-east want to serve, and where they bring the skills that are required, we want to ensure that they have the chance to do so. That will be an important factor in my mind when I come to consider the matter.

Mrs. Ewing: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Henderson: I have already given way to the hon. Lady.

One of the guiding principles of the restructuring is that the TA should be properly integrated with the Regular Army. The TA should be relevant, fully resourced and trained for real tasks in the real world today. Above all, it should be usable. The restructuring is not about change for change's sake; it is about giving talented men and women in the TA a vital role, the training to do it and the opportunity to serve. It is about giving the TA a key place in our defence planning for the modern world.

Mr. Julian Brazier (Canterbury): Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Henderson: I have to give way to the hon. Gentleman, who I know has a deep interest in the matter.

Mr. Brazier: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for saying that the TA needs a real role. Will he explain for once and for all why our English-speaking cousins in America, Australia, Canada and New Zealand all see a role for reserve combat units as formed units, yet we in Britain do not? I remind him that attached to our regular division in the Gulf was a brigade of national guard artillery from America who were commended by our commanders on their performance. Why, if American reservists can do it in reserve combat units, do the Government believe that British reservists cannot?

Mr. Henderson: The hon. Gentleman's knowledge of and commitment to the TA are respected on both sides of the House, and I am pleased to receive representations from him. In reforming the TA, we are giving the hon. Gentleman what he seeks. We want to make our reserve forces more relevant, so that, when they are called up, they are ready to go. That is what the TA said it wanted in the review, and that is what we will be giving it.

Many hon. Members have received strong representations on the matter from their constituents, and I understand their concerns. I assure hon. Members that the consultation is still under way, and no decisions have been taken on the future of individual units or TA centres. That is why I have asked the Army and officials to consult as widely as possible on the implementation of change. The Territorial, Auxiliary and Volunteer Reserve Association, which has deep local knowledge, has been particularly important in that consultation process.

Ms Joan Walley (Stoke-on-Trent, North): We have heard about the concerns of the north-east, but there are similar concerns in north Staffordshire, particularly in Cobridge in my constituency. When my hon. Friend

considers the representations, will he take account not just of the TA but of the cadet force, which operates from there.

Mr. Henderson: I will deal briefly with the cadet forces later.

Mr. Menzies Campbell (North-East Fife): The hon. Gentleman will have recognised the mathematical anomaly whereby each hon. Member who intervenes alleges that his or her constituency is taking a disproportionate cut, but he has not so far mentioned an important element—the link between the military community and the civilian community. In the north of Scotland, no matter how enthusiastic a person may be to be a member of the TA, if the leaked proposals are implemented, owing to geographical considerations and the absence of public transport, that will be impossible. Surely the Government will look in an overtly political way at the advantage which is to be derived from ensuring that there is adequate access to TA service throughout the United Kingdom?

Mr. Henderson: I understand clearly the hon. and learned Gentleman's point. I met the Group Officer Commanding, Scotland last week, and received from him a briefing on the possible implications in Scotland. I am well aware of the geography of Scotland, and that will be an important factor in our considerations.

Mr. Ronnie Campbell (Blyth Valley): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Henderson: I shall give way for the last time.

Mr. Campbell: How many TA units will be closed in the future under the review?

Mr. Henderson: I cannot give my hon. Friend that information. The Government's policy is that the TA should be reduced to around 40,000 people, and that it should have a good geographical spread throughout the United Kingdom. We should bear in mind areas where we have the strength to recruit people that we need. Those factors will be borne in mind strongly in relation to all areas of the country, including the north-east of England. I cannot at the moment refer to any specific location, because proposals have not been put to me, and decisions have not been reached.

We ask a lot of those who volunteer to serve in the TA, and we want to repay their commitment by offering better training opportunities. We are seeking ways to reinforce that added value by examining greater links to national vocational qualifications, which should also benefit day employers who gain from a more highly skilled employee. We also want to improve the management of the TA, and we have a number of proposals on that to which I shall refer in the House shortly.

We want to minimise the effect of the review on individuals. Where, under the review, individuals have to move because their skill is no longer required in a particular location, we want to give them every opportunity to move to another location or to reskill so that they can still make a commitment to the TA. That will be another principal point that we bear in mind during the review.

The Government firmly support the cadet movement. Although not part of the armed forces, cadets are an important voluntary national youth movement providing vital activity among our young people which is good for the fabric of our communities and for the character of the cadets. I was particularly proud to take the salute at the sea cadets' commemoration ceremony in Trafalgar square last Sunday, when sea cadets from all over Britain met to commemorate the battle of Trafalgar.

Some sea cadets use TA centres. I give an assurance to all cadets—whether combined, sea, Army or air—that, where our changes affect their activities, we will relocate their activities. We will do everything to minimise disruption; indeed, we seek to give further financial support to cadet organisations.

Mr. Crispin Blunt (Reigate): Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Henderson: I shall press on, because I have taken a lot of the House's time.

Mr. Frank Cook (Stockton, North): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Henderson: I am sorry; I am not going to give way any more.

Many hon. Members have asked about their constituencies. I make it clear again that I will receive a proposal shortly, and the Government will return to the House with a statement when a decision has been reached.

I want to refer briefly to a further matter in relation to our reserves. I reassure the hon. Member for Gosport (Mr. Viggers) on the points that he made in yesterday's debate: the value of the hospital in his constituency is much appreciated. There is a need for a review of medical facilities generally. An implementation team is considering what needs to be done, and the House will know of the responsibilities when a decision has been reached on that.

The strategic defence review highlighted the great importance of medical reserves. It recommended an increase of 2,000 reservists, bringing the total reserves required to nearly 7,400. Hon. Members will recall that we inherited a difficult situation in defence medical services. We found, as the Defence Committee said in its response to the SDR, that there were too few people, too few resources and, I would add, too little encouragement to those who deliver the service. We have recognised the imbalance, and are considering how we can best implement change to address those shortcomings.

The SDR was, from the outset, an open and thorough process. In the short time that I have been Minister for the Armed Forces, people have told me time and again that the review is welcomed, for it addresses the real issues about effective defence at this time of change. Nowhere has it avoided or ducked a difficult choice or an awkward decision. Throughout, we have faced up squarely to difficulties, and have sought and, I believe found practical ways forward.

I agree with the Defence Committee that the result is a finely balanced package, but it is an efficient and an effective package. We should not lose sight of what it contains: forces that are genuinely capable, deployable and sustainable; real ability to project force, should we

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need to; major improvements in procurement that will pay enormous dividends in the long term; and a policy for the people who make defence work.

History is littered with armies that were prepared to fight the previous war. It is my belief that, in contrast, the strategic defence review provides a clear and sensible vision for the future and for the long term. Implementation will, of course, be a challenge—we should expect nothing less from such a significant exercise—but the result will be the delivery of capability to protect this country and its people and a force for good in the world. I believe absolutely that that is right, and I am proud to commend it to the House.

5.12 pm

Mr. Robert Key (Salisbury): I warmly welcome the Minister for the Armed Forces to the Dispatch Box. He will find that, although the number of hon. Members involved in defence may be modest, the quality of debate is high and everyone who takes part in these debates is totally committed to the military. Indeed, it is important to stress that we all understand that military personnel and civil servants hold all political views and none. It is easier to agree with the Minister's party now that it has abandoned unilateralism and embraced the nuclear deterrent and all parties support our military. That must not prevent the Opposition, however, from fulfilling our constitutional role—nor will it.

I congratulate the Minister on his speech. I wish that he had said something about budgets or procurement, but he cannot say it all, and nor can I, so we shall return to many of these points.

The Minister has the most precious resource to nurture—all our people who serve the Crown, in or out of uniform. I welcome the decision announced yesterday by the Secretary of State to bring uniforms back on to our streets. They have been sorely missed for many years. When I was a child, Army and all service uniforms were part of the scenery in Salisbury, and it was regrettable that that had to cease for security reasons. I have spoken about that many times in the House, but mean it none the less now. There will be a beneficial effect on recruitment, increased respect for the military among the civilian community, and a new sense of responsibility on the part of the military.

I pay tribute to the Minister's predecessor, the right hon. Member for Hamilton, North and Bellshill (Dr. Reid). The defence community holds him in affection as well as respect. Many have said that we have not seen the last of him in defence matters, but I am sure that it will be a long time before the Secretary of State is replaced by his right hon. Friend.

Speaker after speaker yesterday, and intervention after intervention today, touched a raw nerve in respect of the reserves and the Territorial Army—a very raw nerve indeed, especially in Scotland. Special pleading is entirely justified, and I commend the patient way in which the Minister listened to several special cases. I make a special case for my TA centre at Old Sarum, which is the home of B squadron, Royal Wessex Yeomanry—all that is left of the old Wiltshire regiment.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: The rotten borough.

Mr. Key: No, not the rotten borough—I hear the hon. and learned Gentleman. If he insists upon it, I can go into the fact that my constituency had eight Members of Parliament at one time in our history, but let us quickly draw a veil over that. The Wiltshire regiment was a unique institution, and I am the only hon. Member who, at noon on the day after polling, has to ascend the balcony of the White Hart in Salisbury and sing the marching song of the regiment, "The Vly be on the Turnap"—but we shall spare the hon. and learned Gentleman that as well.

Spin-doctoring the Government's cuts in the TA simply will not wash. The cold war ended. In line with our allies, we reduced our forces substantially. It was a painful business. Those actions cannot be used as either a reason or an excuse for the current cuts in the TA. These cuts stand alone as a monument to the power of the Treasury and the weakness of the Ministry of Defence.

The Secretary of State got the closest yet to revealing a hidden agenda, when he said yesterday that he wanted the TA to be

"better integrated into the British Army."

If that is a euphemism for abolishing it as we know it, that is an argument that we should hear; but Ministers should not try to spin all this away.

The Minister for the Armed Forces knows that a lot of questions have been asked, and we cannot possibly expect the Under-Secretary to answer them all tonight, but I courteously ask the Minister to ensure that serious questions are answered in correspondence. I am sure that his officials will be taking note. As he knows, there is knockabout politics, and serious politics and accountability to the House. Generally, defence debates are about serious politics and accountability, so I hope that we will have answers.

In September, I had the privilege of attending a number of defence-oriented activities, and I emphasise how grateful the Opposition are to the Government for providing access to a wide range of the MOD's activities. That is important if the military is to understand that we are all on side. I visited the Farnborough air show and was immensely proud of our aerospace companies. I visited HMS Invincible for a sea day; and while on the subject of aircraft carriers, I should like to return briefly to yesterday's exchanges.

The hon. Member for Barrow and Furness (Mr. Hutton) asked for a specific commitment to the time scale. He said that

"the in-service date was expected to be 2012"

and hoped that

"the Minister will be able to say that the Government remain committed to that time scale".—[*Official Report*, 19 October 1998; Vol. 317, c. 971-1025.]

The Minister replied that there was no change in the Government's commitment—we were pleased with that, because we want the aircraft carriers—but he did not specifically mention the in-service date. That is important, and I ask the Minister to confirm that date in his winding-up speech. I hope that he will be able to do so.

Mr. John Smith (Vale of Glamorgan): Does that mean that the hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon

(Mr. Maples) will now withdraw what he said yesterday? By implying that the building of the aircraft carriers would not go ahead, he has caused much consternation among service personnel in the Royal Navy. It is outrageous.

Mr. Key: My hon. Friend will speak for himself, but the importance of the matter that he raised is not in doubt. I support my hon. Friend entirely in pursuing this matter today.

It was not the previous Government's policy to announce a major procurement programme—such programmes do not get much bigger than the building of two new aircraft carriers—and afterwards advertise in the contracts journal to see whether further special refits would do instead. When those studies are completed, what will happen if the answer is that refits will do nicely for years to come? The Treasury will say that the new carriers must be postponed. Thus the Government's position needs tidying up, and I hope that we can support what the Minister says tonight.

I also visited Barrow and Furness. I pay tribute to the remarks that the hon. Member for Barrow and Furness made last night. He was absolutely spot on in commending the virtues of his work force. I was immensely impressed not only with the company that I visited but with the quality of the work force—its adaptability, the lack of restrictive practices and the fact that it was multi-skilled. It was an object lesson. It is hard to understand why anyone in the world thinks that they can beat companies in this country that are making such a huge impression.

HMS Vengeance was a treat. It was a real surprise to discover just how fine that ship is. The work force should be extremely proud. The work force on the two amphibious assault ships and on the tanker can similarly be extremely proud of their work. That is cutting-edge technology, and we all have much to learn from it.

I also visited British Aerospace at Warton, where the Eurofighter 2000 export known as Typhoon is being built. I happened to be there when the two last-ever new Tornado aircraft took off. That was quite a sight, with thousands of the work force out on the tarmac to see it. However, the mid-life update of the Tornados continues, as does the construction of Hawks. The design technology there is world beating.

I went on to Broughton to visit British Aerospace making Airbus wings, and many other wings. It is another success story, with new apprentices being taken on. I also visited the Territorial Army at Old Sarum and witnessed eight nights' training there. Obviously, given my constituency, I am constantly aware of the Army's activity on the Salisbury Plain training area, and of the Defence Testing and Evaluation Organisation at Boscombe Down, where daily the C130J Hercules circle over my constituency.

It might be helpful to clear up one or two misconceptions about the C130J Hercules. It is true to say that it is late, which is not acceptable, but it has flown a total of some 5,000 hours and the first C130J has been delivered to Boscombe Down for military aircraft release. Work is now well under way, as my constituents keep telling me. We should be cautious about dismissing the industrial importance of the C130J to the United Kingdom. There are 47 British companies in the C130J industrial support group. They have generated £475 million in C130J earnings thus far and accounted for 20,000 man years of work.

The Conservative Government were justifiably proud of their record on defence procurement under a series of distinguished Secretaries of State. The Labour Government should not be surprised that we guard their reputations as we observe the fruits of their decisions in the hands of current Ministers. My hon. Friend the shadow Secretary of State has said that we welcome much in the strategic defence review. The Secretary of State is keen to point out that the chiefs of staff have given public and private support to the SDR.

The chiefs of staff have my public and private support for their professional judgment. They and all their staff have done a magnificent job. Nothing will convince us that the SDR's fate was ultimately not in the hands of the Treasury, but I am confident that all three services have used the SDR to undertake a genuine root-and-branch review. I pay tribute to them for that.

Many, but not all, of the questions have been asked; many, but not all, of the conclusions have been reached. The SDR's publication last July was the beginning, not the end, of the process, and time is not standing still.

The SDR has developed a comprehensive list of broad missions and military tasks to form a basis for defence planning. Clearly, the strategic environment is different today—there is no cold war threat to the United Kingdom and we do not foresee the re-emergence of such a threat. However, we cannot take that for granted, and the review proposes to put the forces in the front line. It says that we are not to

"stand idly by and watch humanitarian disasters or the aggression of dictators go unchecked. We want to give a lead, we want to be a force for good."

Rightly so, but before we go abroad to do good we must acknowledge that bad can come to us. Before we embark on the "force for good" adventure, we must understand when determining our defence policy that our vital interests are to protect British territory, borders and air space, and British citizens and interests around the world.

Did the SDR do enough to deal with the asymmetric threat, for example? I see little evidence that it did. I am aware of the new threats that we face—the exploitation of cyber-weapons, for example, could be used to bring the war home by attacking the national strategic infrastructure, which is rapidly exploiting information technology in the name of economic efficiency.

Why even think about biological and chemical warfare—the "poor man's nuclear bomb"? We must do so because it is unlikely that our possible opponents will confront us directly. CB weapons are inexpensive and accessible, and can be delivered by warheads on missiles or by covert agents, terrorists or even madmen. Like our allies who are dealing with the issue, we are vulnerable to such attacks. That is why I warmly welcome the Secretary of State's announcement yesterday that he will shortly report fully to the House on the conclusions of his review on the risk that biological and chemical weapons pose to our troops overseas. His next step should be to encourage a more open and focused debate on the nuclear, chemical and biological threat at home in the civilian community.

Civil defence is entering a new era of significance. I pay tribute to the unsung work of our county emergency planning officers. What progress are the Ministry of

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Defence and other agencies making in assessing, testing and fixing the year 2000 problem? The MOD has been assiduously addressing the problem since 1995, and in 1996 the Central Computer and Telecommunications Agency drew up a programme that set specific targets for all Departments. I should be grateful if the House could have answers—all in good time—to four specific questions.

We all know that there is a problem with recruiting and retaining specialist staff. What is the extent of the shortage of skilled, in-house staff in the Ministry of Defence? Is it true that there is evidence of staff wastage from the Ministry of Defence to industry? We know that that is true of front-line pilots, but is it equally true of those staff?

Can the Minister assure us that all the critical systems will be compliant by the end of 1999? Can he identify non-critical systems that will not be? Last month, in the quarterly return of the departmental year 2000 plans, the permanent under-secretary emphasised that the MOD might need to delay or stop important activities or projects while attention or resources were focused on the year 2000 issue. What activities or projects have been identified as frozen or cancelled? It is important not just for the Opposition but for those outside in industry to have specific information.

We are certainly not short of missions. For four years, our troops have made a major contribution to NATO in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Incidentally, their contribution has been to the peace implementation force, not to the intervention force as page 15 of the SDR says. In order to deploy our men and women, we need to keep them well trained and to retain them in the services. Let us take for example the fast-jet pilots in the RAF. Experienced flight lieutenants and squadron leaders approaching the age of 38 are constant prey for the civil airlines.

Our pilots always do what we ask of them, as they should. They proved their record in the Gulf and in Bosnia. In Kosovo they are part of the verification force. However, our ability to continue to meet the challenge of Bosnias to come rests on recruiting and retaining those pilots. We can help to do so through access to affordable and adequate housing, improving support for their families, providing access to high-quality health care, and introducing retirement benefits. Issuing short-term contracts might help to keep pilots who are unwilling to make a long-term commitment.

I am sure that, like our allies, the Government are getting to grips with the problems. We should like them to share their progress with us.

Front-line pilots continue to feel bruised by the injustice of the Ministry of Defence line on the crash of Chinook ZD576 on the Mull of Kintyre. Members of Parliament from all parties who have taken up this cause were not surprised by the latest stonewalling by the Minister for the Armed Forces at the end of September. Nothing has changed, and I shall continue to seek to redress this injustice. Ministers should know that loyal, serving and retired RAF personnel remain as unhappy as I am.

The Minister's arguments have led to technical and professional counter-arguments. It is not possible to say that there can be no doubt about the cause of that crash. Of course there is doubt. The RAF should think again. I am grateful to the Secretary of State for his offer of a further meeting, which we shall no doubt accept.

Earlier this year we had a debate on the Royal Air Force, and I look forward to the other single service debates. I spoke of the loyalty of wives and families of RAF personnel. During the summer, the Association of RAF Wives was put under increasing pressure. Its head office had to close over the summer months owing to lack of funding.

There also seems to be an attitude problem. Something is wrong if, at an RAF station, the officer commanding the personnel management services—the appropriate contact—refuses to meet or speak to representatives of the Association of RAF Wives. Do Ministers have a problem with the association, or is it that its patron is our independent colleague, the hon. Member for Tatton (Mr. Bell)? Only this morning, I heard from the association that the publishers of its magazine had called to say that they had been warned of closure. Ministers refused to include the association in the website that they so proudly announced because of those rumours. I invite them to address that issue urgently.

Military families warmly welcome the SDR proposal for a families task force, especially as they have now heard about the proposal for a families forum with access to the Minister. I too warmly welcome that measure.

This time last year, prompted by the excellent Army Families Federation, I raised the issue of the problems affecting Army families which can be resolved only by interdepartmental co-operation. I regret to report that, almost a year later, there is still no progress on four important areas. First, there is the problem thrown up by the jobseeker's allowance, which puts the working wives of service personnel at a disadvantage. It is no good the Government crowing about the new deal if service families are excluded.

Secondly, a significant number of children of service families are excluded from university grants if their families have followed the flag for many years. I was pleased to note what the Minister said about that. I am glad that the Department for Education and Employment will be sensitive, but I respectfully suggest that being sensitive is not enough if the problem is not resolved for the dependants of service men and women.

Thirdly, it remains impossible for military personnel to maintain their NHS dental registration when they are posted overseas. On their return, they must start all over again. Surely that is a straightforward administrative matter, and an item for the agenda of the first meeting of the new families forum.

Fourthly, back in the spring, the Army Families Federation went to Leeds to meet the NHS executive, which promised to deal with the problem of forces families who are posted after they have seen a consultant: they lose their place on NHS waiting lists and have to start all over again. Will Ministers please address that problem urgently? I know that it is a matter of detail for Ministers, but for service men and their families it is of very great importance.

Mr. Ian Davidson (Glasgow, Pollok): Why were these serious matters not resolved by the previous Government?

Mr. Key: They did not arise under the previous Government. These matters were first put to me last year.

I dare say that these problems existed under the previous Government, but that is not a good reason for the present Government to ignore them.

The adjutant-general's standards and discipline paper has now been under revision for some two years. The last expected date for publication was March. Some high profile and unpleasant cases of courts martial have done nothing to enhance the reputation of the forces, and some of those cases are still outstanding. Meanwhile, paragraph 133 of chapter 6 of the strategic defence review promises the development of a common personnel strategy, led by the centre but implemented by the individual services. Enigmatically, the SDR says that the Government will examine the need for a single, tri-service discipline Act.

The previous Select Committee on Defence and the previous Special Select Committee on the Armed Forces Bill were highly critical of the Ministry of Defence under the previous Government for its failure to consolidate the existing three service Acts. The Ministry of Defence has always—until now—implied that, given the different ethos and functions of the three separate services, it would be impossible to encapsulate service discipline in a single Act. What has happened to change that?

We are all aware of the pressures, particularly sexual pressures, implicit in more and more joint activity—perhaps appropriately termed "purple activity"—but Ministers must explain to the House and to the Navy, the Army and the Air Force just what is going on. The beginning of chapter 6 of the SDR makes much of the need to retain highly motivated people and to maintain that motivation. Just so.

The Secretary of State has said often enough that he believes that service men and women should reflect or be representative of British society at large. I am not sure that the three services would accept that. Traditionally, our services have demanded more of their personnel and have demanded higher standards than prevail in the rest of society. Do the Government intend to drop those traditional standards? Is that why they are able to promise a single discipline Act?

Paragraph 132 of chapter 6 of the SDR announces the establishment of a cell to provide a focal point for veterans seeking guidance, and that has been welcomed by many ex-service organisations. The British Limbless Ex-Servicemen's Association, in its summer 1998 magazine, expressed the scepticism about the cell. It hopes that the MOD appreciates the likely implications for the equipment and staff that will be needed. It said that, at one point, the war pensions helpline dealt with 22,000 calls in a week. Like us, the association is watching with interest to see what happens.

On Monday 5 October, the Minister for the Armed Forces launched the veterans advice unit. Is that the much-heralded cell? If so, the staff of just five warrant officers—however well trained and highly motivated—will be hard put to it to cope. My hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Norfolk (Mr. Simpson) will return to policies for people when he winds up the debate.

Faster, cheaper and better procurement has become the MOD motto.

> "We must capitalise on the lessons we have learned from successful commercial restructuring to adopt modern business practices; consolidate and streamline; embrace competitive market strategies; and eliminate or reduce support strategies . . . all this in order to do the job better, faster and cheaper."

Those are the words of Jacques Gansler, Under Secretary of Defence Acquisition and Technology in the United States. That is what our allies are doing, and it seems that we are to follow suit. Will the smart procurement initiative fulfil that mission?

In this country we had the Downey cycle in the 1960s, the Levine reforms of the 1980s and the defence cost studies in 1994. We welcome smart procurement, following as it does the US models of defence acquisition reform and the revolution in business affairs. The reaction of the British defence procurement industry to the smart procurement initiative has been very positive, at least on the surface. Indeed, it would be surprising if the response of the providers to the major customer were anything else. Privately, the truth is less flattering. I was recently told that if smart procurement is all about selecting a partner early, what is going on is driving in the opposite direction.

I was told that many of the ideas within the Ministry of Defence are seen in the commercial world as naive or underdeveloped. British industry, competing in world markets, is at the cutting edge of technologies and financial systems for modelling and costing. Why should companies spread their international competitiveness? The leaching of ideas would be inevitable.

There is much concern, too, about rainbow teams, whereby the MOD puts together all the potential partners in a project, including foreign prime companies. Some major British companies have declined to take part in that process, and who can blame them?

Even if there is a funding inducement for prime contractors to collaborate, the length of the various processes—even under the smart procurement regime—means that in four or five years, and by the time one of the primes becomes a winner, the capability of each company will have been exposed and shared. That is not very smart. Chinese walls are not good enough, and raise massive problems of intellectual property rights.

We warmly welcome the commitment in the SDR to the formation of a broad acquisition stream encompassing military and civilian staff. Integrated project teams and through-life accountability are concepts warmly welcomed by the private sector. There is still a fear that the acquisition cycle is too long, and some scepticism that there will be single-team accountability on the MOD and private sector sides.

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip-Northwood): Will my hon. Friend comment on the significant delays in collaborative programmes that have been induced by the defence review, in typical socialist style, being initiated by Gerhard Schröder's red-green coalition in Germany? What does my hon. Friend think about the delay in the multi-role armoured vehicle programme? That is a joint programme, but we could perfectly well have achieved it ourselves using the overcapacity in our armoured fighting vehicle industry. What does he think about the delay in the proposed collaborative, beyond visual range, air-to-air weapon? Are such delays tolerable for our armed forces?

Mr. Key: That is the finest possible example of why we should not go in for proportional representation and coalition Governments. The instability that is being caused by the lack of a German Government week after week hits hard when it comes to the procurement industry and our military defence alike. The MRAV contract was

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worth millions to our economy and to the German economy. Battlefield taxis are a concept which has been around for a very long time.

My hon. Friend is right to put his finger on that contract but, although significant, it is not the only one. A stack of such contracts is building up. It is astonishing to see the way in which the new German Administration—who may one day eventually form a Government—are wheeling and dealing with the Greens, whose agenda is absolutely anti-NATO and all that it stands for, in order to cobble together some sort of Government. It is very worrying—even more worrying, I suppose, than the former German Chancellor's proposal for a future large Antonov.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: Am I to understand from what he has said before that the hon. Gentleman would have opposed British participation in the Eurofighter project, that he would now withdraw from the Horizon frigate project and that the United Kingdom would build its own successor to the type 42?

Mr. Key: There are, of course, plenty of people who say that it would be a very good thing if we built our own successor to the type 42; but the answer to the hon. and learned Gentleman's question is no.

I must make progress. No doubt we shall return ad nauseam to debates on proportional representation in the future.

The defence procurement industry's supporting essay 6 was at the heart of the strategic defence review. The scientific and technological superiority available to the fighting forces of a handful of western nations gives us a hugely important asymmetrical advantage over enemies, but we cannot rest on our laurels because the catching-up process is speeding up as well. That is why, when I visited the north-west of England, I was so pleased to see the progress being made by British industry on, for example, the future offensive aircraft, about which my right hon. Friend the Member for Fylde (Mr. Jack) spoke so well last night.

Product data modelling now allows the most senior technicians to talk through design concepts with the fastest pilots and the most senior military officers, in terms of real time but virtual reality, on the premises of our procurement companies, without even making the journey to Abbey Wood. One of the many reasons why product data modeling is so important is that it reduces abortive expenditure that results from late design changes and the reworking of manufacture, which add to costs and time overruns. Concurrent engineering processes and systems being developed by private-sector defence procurement companies can reach their full potential only if they are matched by a determination in the Ministry of Defence to break down some of the old barriers and restrictive practices.

May I ask a specific procurement question? Has the MOD a clear vision of the total lift capability required for the SDR concept of operations? I wrote to the Minister about that in July, but I have still not received an answer. The SDR equipment acquisition appears to envisage a maximum of four C17s, the 25 C130Js already on order and some amount of additional tactical support. How will the MOD calculate the final balance of lift assets to be acquired through the short and long-term airlift competitions?

MOD witnesses told the Defence Committee that the MOD's operational analysts had suggested that four was the required number of C17s. Why, then, is Boeing under the impression that eight, 10 or even 12 C17s will be considered? Can Ministers explain the contradiction, or is this just something else for the contracts journal? If the real intention is to procure more than four C17s, how will the MOD pay for the additional aircraft, given that they cost £125 million each? What is the intellectual basis for a number greater than four?

We know that RAF pilots are already training on C17s. On what basis would the MOD lease them? What work is in hand to investigate the leasing mechanisms? How will the MOD ensure value for money? C17s cannot be refuelled in flight by British tanker aircraft; will the MOD overcome that problem through technical changes to the C17, or through cover by United States planes for extended missions?

The Government are schizophrenic about our relationships with Europe and the United States as allies. That is reflected in their attitude to procurement. Most important military research is being undertaken in the United States. The Pentagon's research and development budget is $37 billion; the combined research and development budgets of France, Germany and ourselves is $10 billion. If we are to have access to the latest technology on anything other than American terms, we must own some of it ourselves, and must be able to use that as an entry ticket to joint projects with the Americans.

There is a huge and welcome variety of joint venture projects within Europe, and between European and American companies, and that should be encouraged; but if all our defence manufacturers were subsumed into one European corporation, would the option remain open? A very serious question is whether the United States would be prepared to enter into joint projects involving the latest technologies with a monolithic European competitor embracing countries in Europe which, it must be said, the Americans mistrust.

Finally, let me ask about the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency. What is the state of the public-private partnership option? I was grateful to the Minister for Defence Procurement, who wrote to me in August ruling out the privatisation of DERA in its entirety. We note that he has decided that highly sensitive parts of the agency, and those that ensure that the United Kingdom can continue to operate effectively with our allies, will need to be retained wholly within the Ministry of Defence. Of course, I have a constituency interest, as my constituency contains the two Porton Down establishments and Boscombe Down; but more than 12,000 staff work for DERA across the country, and the Government owe it to them to end the uncertainty that surrounds their future as quickly as possible.

After last year's general election, DERA put proposals to Ministers on defence diversification. Well, that was a damp squib. In autumn 1997, DERA provided a corporate plan with options for its future. Silence! Last November, 11 months ago, the MOD announced that the SDR would examine future options for DERA. In spring this year, the Chancellor of the Exchequer advanced proposals for privatisations and partnerships. Mysteriously, DERA unexpectedly slipped from the list.

In July, the SDR had just one sentence on DERA tucked away in paragraph 164. It told us nothing. Later in July, DERA's chief executive briefed media analysts on

the situation; Parliament was kept in the dark. The former Minister for the Armed Forces visited Porton Down, and told my constituents that he was not in favour of privatisation. It became clear that the MOD, the Treasury and No. 10 were all players before the recess. Informed opinion now believes that a new MOD team has been told to go back to square one and complete its review in a further six months. So by July 1999, Ministers might make a decision to be implemented by July 2000; but if primary legislation were needed, that would slip by a year, to the summer of 2001.

These are tough choices indeed. The delay is bad for DERA, and bad for our whole defence procurement industry. It is a dismal record of bad government, and it will not do.

Mr. Nick Hawkins (Surrey Heath): Does my hon. Friend share my concern, and that of other hon. Members in whose constituencies DERA operates, about the fact that, while the uncertainty to which he has referred continues, different arrangements are being made in different constituencies for the release of DERA property? There is great concern in my constituency about decisions being announced while DERA's whole future is uncertain—decisions about the release of land for DERA test tracks on which houses might be built, for instance. That may completely alter the housing structure in different constituencies.

Mr. Key: Yes, I share my hon. Friend's concern. Indeed, in my constituency DERA has been involved in seeking to use land and assets for commercial activities. We must press the Government to come clean on the issue, and to do so quickly.

Was it wise of the Government, in retrospect, to promise to deliver the SDR within six months? Was it wise to claim that it would be foreign policy led? Was it wise to keep secret the foreign policy baselines, while claiming that this was the most open policy review ever? Was it credible of the Secretary of State to launch his "mother of all reviews" on the basis that funding might at best stay level, but would probably be cut, and to offer as his opening gambit to the Treasury guaranteed cash back of at least £500 million a year? That already looks pretty old-fashioned in view of the recent United States decision to increase its defence budget by 10 per cent., to $280 billion: an increase greater than our entire defence budget, which we are cutting.

The Secretary of State told us that he is developing a strategic planning process that will keep defence planning up to date; that there are no plans to hold defence reviews at regular intervals; but that there may be further reviews if the need arises. It will.

The Labour party manifesto in 1997 promised a

"strategic defence and security review",

but that is not what we got. True, the review included threats posed to the UK and UK interests by drugs, international crime and environmental degradation, but the Government failed to produce a cross-departmental military and security review involving the Ministry of Defence and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, with input from the Department for International Development; the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions; the Department of Trade and Industry; Customs and Excise; the Home Office; and the intelligence services.

Responses to threats to the UK homeland were not given sufficient consideration. We got a reorganised—and, yes, improved—military posture, but we have no new central Government mechanisms or initiatives, in stark contrast to our friends in the United States of America. The review scarcely addresses our future relationship with the USA or with other European countries. It reduces the defence budget without reducing our defence commitments: do more with less.

We should not be surprised, as that sounds exactly the same answer as the Government would get from a focus group of taxpayers; indeed, the Government spent £50,000 on such groups last summer, claiming that they wanted

"to explore the public's attitudes, feelings and knowledge regarding the key issues covered in the SDR."

That was in keeping with the Government's declared objective of achieving a national consensus on the defence of the country. It is consensus first, tough decisions later—perhaps.

That is no way to win this nation's battles, be they for freedom, justice and democracy around the world; for our homeland and people; for our United Kingdom; for our national and international interest; or for the British way of doing things. Ministers can spin to their heart's content, but, as my hon. Friend the shadow Secretary of State said last night, it will fall to the next Conservative Government to put our defences and security back on a sound footing.

5.52 pm

Dr. Lynda Clark (Edinburgh, Pentlands): I enter this debate with some trepidation. I know that many of those who have spoken have considerable expertise on the subject. I cannot claim that expertise. I cannot claim, as my hon. Friend the Member for Portsmouth, North (Mr. Rapson) did, to have lived and worked with Marines—some people have all the luck—but I have the expertise to recognise a well-founded argument when I hear it. The constituents who beat a path to my door with their worries about the TA proposals have had good arguments—so good that I felt that, despite my lack of expertise on the subject, I should try to do my best for them in this debate.

We have already heard many powerful arguments in favour of retaining the strength, organisation and local connections of the TA. In order not to weary the House with repetition, I will adopt the brevitatis causa, as we say in court in Scotland when we mean that we do not want to waste time.

I am sure that the Minister will take into account the views expressed in the wide consultation process, which I understand to be similar to those expressed by many hon. Members and by the Select Committee. My constituency is home to TA units of the Royal Armoured Corps, the Royal Artillery and the Royal Engineers. My hon. Friend will be well aware of the pride that the volunteers have in their units, and of their proud history.

My plea is not that the TA should be preserved in aspic as an historical institution with little relevance for today—that would be a poor memorial for all those who have served in the TA; nor do I support the position of those who want to preserve the existing TA because they have a narrow, nationalistic view of defence strategy based on the perceived need to defend internal national borders.

[Dr. Lynda Clark]

The Government's vision is, I believe, the correct one—we need a new role for the armed forces and the reserve forces in the post-cold war era—but I believe that, in that vision, my right hon. and hon. Friends should attach more importance to the critical defence role that can be played by volunteers. The wider implications go beyond defence, and they may not have taken that sufficiently into account.

There are economic considerations: the TA's contribution to local community employment is extremely valuable, and there is military aid to the civilian population, which is especially important in isolated communities. It is important to realise that the TA's role fits well into the Government's wider programme of training for work. TA training is valuable not only to those who receive it but to the wider community, which benefits from the skills that have been acquired.

In the cost calculations, we should remember that what is spent in the defence budget spreads out into other budgets. In my constituency, as in many others, the TA also gives considerable support to the veterans who have served us all so well. The TA has a host of roles that go beyond its important defence role, which we should not evaluate in isolation.

I am concerned about the allegations made by the hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Mr. Maples), who said yesterday that TA staff had been forbidden to talk to their Member of Parliament and that a TA officer had been reprimanded. I regard raising concerns with one's Member of Parliament as a fundamental right of any TA member. I understand that there may be some restrictions on persons serving in the military talking to their Member of Parliament—if that is the case, it should be investigated—but that there are no such restrictions for TA members. If any of my constituents have been threatened in that way, I hope that they will tell me about it, because I will certainly make strong representations on their behalf.

I am here because of my constituents, but, having sat through this interesting debate, I am pleased, unlike some Opposition Members, to be able to congratulate my right hon. and hon. Friends on the excellent developments that are giving opportunities to all our people regardless of sex or race. We are looking for talent in our armed forces, and we will find that in a wide range of people.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Minister, but ask him to pay close attention to the many representations that have been made about the TA.

5.57 pm

Mr. Tom King (Bridgwater): Having had some responsibility in this area, I start with a word of congratulation to the Government on the presentation, certainly, if not on all the content, of the strategic defence review. We know the Government pretty well by now, and when I started hearing about "smart procurement" and "rainbow teams" I realised that the spin doctors had been through all the presentations.

I was enthusiastic to hear about smart procurement, so I read what was proposed. I saw that almost all the ideas, on the need continually to improve the procurement process—which, with the scale of the procurement programme, is far from satisfactory and will be a continuing challenge to Governments long after the present Government have gone—were around in my time in the Ministry of Defence, so I wish the Government luck with them.

I admire many aspects of the review. Although one cannot call it comprehensive because it excluded from its purview the two largest defence expenditure programmes, Eurofighter and Trident, there is much in it that commands respect.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. John Spellar) *rose—*

Mr. King: I am afraid that I cannot give way because I have only 10 minutes in which to speak, and I have several things to say arising from my previous experience in these matters.

Many areas of the review command respect, including the development of jointery, rapid reaction and equipment systems, and work on those areas must be carried forward. The Defence Committee's report was excellent and I agree with its wish that this should be the last review. That was my hope of "Options for Change", although necessary work continued on the logistic follow-up. I understand why the Government had to have a review—they said that they would do so because that was the only defence policy that they could think of in opposition—and, in many areas, the review has been carried out without too much damage.

Although I hope that no more reviews will be conducted, I hope that the Government will remain flexible. I have the need for flexibility burned into my soul: in a statement on "Options for Change" one 25 July, I said that we must be ready for the unexpected; seven days later, Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait, and the wisdom of my remarks was revealed rather earlier than I had expected.

My hon. Friend the Member for Ruislip–Northwood (Mr. Wilkinson) referred to the changes in Germany that have taken place since the review was published. We now face the prospect of a Green Foreign Minister in the German Government and a new Chancellor who, earlier in his career, was opposed to NATO. The Chancellor has changed his attitude, but fundamentalist elements in the new German coalition are anti-military and strongly against defence expenditure. That will have implications for German attitudes to defence. Völker Ruhe was very supportive of air strike activities in Kosovo, but the new German Government's attitude may be very different. Attitudes to defence alliances and industrial restructuring will change. Indeed, I have seen some reports that German defence companies are thinking of moving their headquarters out of Germany, because the new Government's attitude to arms exports may be different from that of the previous Government.

Drawing on my other responsibilities connected to intelligence, I recognise the importance of what is called asymmetric warfare, or the weapons of the dispossessed. I refer to the need in any defence strategy to be ready to combat the type of threats that we may now face. Given the time I have available, I shall not rehearse those threats, but they include the possible utilisation by terrorists of chemical, nuclear or biological weapons. Any defence strategy that purports to care for the security of this

country must keep in mind the threats posed by such unconventional warfare. Intelligence is important to enhancing the defence role. If we put unarmed observers into Kosovo, their first defence will be good intelligence so that they know whether any elements mean them harm.

The Defence Committee and the strategic defence review recognise that defence is about people. I became Secretary of State for Defence having been Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, and I learned in that job about nights out of bed and unaccompanied tours. Those phrases stick firmly in my mind and I know the challenges, strains and stresses imposed on those who serve us so magnificently in difficult circumstances. I also know the challenges that are posed for Governments and all those involved in defence—for example, in maintaining recruitment and adequate manning to reduce unfairness in the arrangements for unaccompanied tours.

When we consider the challenges posed by manning levels, we should remember MARILYN—manning and recruitment in the lean years of the '90s. Everybody has forgotten about it, but it identified the problems in the 1980s; and it has been with us through the 1990s. Those are the problems that beset the Government now.

When I was Secretary of State and we undertook the "Options for Change" review, people proposed reductions in the TA as a way to save costs. I regard the TA decision in some ways as the most political of the decisions that I took in the "Options for Change" review. I am perhaps the last Secretary of State to have served in the TA. I was about to say that everybody knows that, if someone did national service, he also served for four years in the TA, but that is probably not true because there are now fewer people around with that experience. I am a deep believer in the wider role of the TA. The Government have identified specific roles and problems for which the TA can be targeted to provide an immediate response, but the hon. and learned Member for North-East Fife (Mr. Campbell) described the wider role of the TA very well. It includes contact with the community and interaction with the public, such as work in civil emergencies such as flooding. God help us if we should ever have to mobilise again, but if we had to face a critical emergency—and the defence of the country has to be ready for the unexpected—such a mobilisation would be achieved through the TA. It is profoundly necessary that the TA's role of identification with the community, and the inclusion of many people who cannot serve in the regular forces but who enrich the calibre of our services, continues.

I hope that no one will object if I say that, in my experience, the TA is not represented in the Ministry of Defence at the same level as the senior services. In any argument, the reserves and the TA need another spokesman, and if the Minister for the Armed Forces does not perform that role, no one else will.

We reduced the TA and I make no apology for that. We had an establishment of 91,000 that was under-manned and unachievable, and I reduced that to the minimum level possible of 60,000. Minor adjustments have been made since, but the review now proposes a further cut of more than a third. I reached my judgment on numbers after careful study, and I believe that this new cut will take the TA significantly below the level at which it will be viable. Large areas will no longer feel any identification with the Army such as that achieved in the past through a relationship with the TA. The cut is the most profound and grievous mistake in the review, and I believe that hon. Members from all parties recognise that. I hope that the Minister will not just listen to constituency representations, as the Secretary of State promised in his speech yesterday, but recognise that the overall level proposed is far too low.

6.7 pm

Mr. Alan Keen (Feltham and Heston): I congratulate Ministers on the review, which has received praise from almost every quarter, and I, too, welcome the new Minister for the Armed Forces. It is worth reflecting that, not so many years ago, my hon. Friend's previous responsibilities for Europe would have been combined with his current job, in the post of War Minister. It is good that we have moved on from those days.

I wish also to praise the Minister's predecessor, my right hon. Friend the Member for Hamilton, North and Bellshill (Dr. Reid), who contributed so greatly, both in opposition and in government. When I made my maiden speech in 1992, from the Opposition Benches, my right hon. Friend sat with me to give his support. In that speech, I said that it was a nostalgic return for me, because my first Army posting after infantry and trade training was to headquarters, London district, in Horseguard buildings in Whitehall. I cannot work out whether my career, in which I started as a sergeant and ended as a corporal after two and a half years, matches beginning as a Back Bencher and ending as one.

I was lucky not to have to fight in any war. In case anyone wonders whether I served on special missions with the SAS, I did not. The closest I came to conflict was when I was seconded to the Egyptian army that fought the Ethiopians, but that was none too dangerous because it happened in the Royal Opera house, and we seemed to win every night, which was lucky for the opera goers because it would have been awful if they had to miss the triumphal march in "Aida".

Two weeks on Sunday, I will march from Heston Territorial Army depot to the local church with people who did fight in the second world war. They gave the best part of their lives to winning us the freedom that we enjoy today. For those who do not know where Heston is, incidentally, the two top restaurants in west London are the Heston North and Heston South motorway services on the M4. I should make that clear, because my accent can be misleading. I am proud of the multicultural society of west London. Marching with me will be members of the Sikh community who fought at Monte Casino and in other crucial combats during the second world war. It is sometimes too easy to forget them. As one born in 1937, I shall never forget the war years and the period after them, when the prisoners of war came home only to suffer the deprivations that the whole people suffered at that time. Memories of the second world war could slip away quite easily if it were not for those who will march in a couple of weeks' time.

I am continually reminded at my surgeries that conflicts happen all the time, and that is what the defence review is about. People from all parts of the world come to see me, having had to leave their own countries and possibly some of their families as a result of conflicts. It is important to address their problems in our defence review.

I cannot accept the statement made yesterday by the shadow Defence spokesman, the hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Mr. Maples), that we do not want to

[Mr. Alan Keen]

be part of a world police force. We may not want to be, but our duty as a democratic nation is to look after people all over the world. We have learnt many lessons recently on that. I accept that the United States has more than once had to withdraw from some areas, and those defeats have been bitter. However, the USA was not really supported by all the democratic world, and we must learn from that. It is vital to revise the United Nations so that consensus can be achieved before action is taken.

My major concern is not financial aspects but our moral duty to all human beings, wherever they happen to live. However, there is no doubt that the financial cost of inaction is greater than the cost of firm and decisive action, especially when the impact on potential aggressors of the deterrent effect is taken into account. The defence review takes full account of that.

I have paid tribute to the soldiers of the second world war, and I extend that tribute to those who have suffered in conflicts since then, and to those who serve now in our armed forces. My brief, compulsory, experience of the armed forces helped me to understand the culture of the armed forces, and 30 or more visits to the Royal Air Force as a member of the parliamentary armed forces scheme has taught me a great deal about the impact of high-technology equipment and the need for high-level training. I have learnt of the dedication of personnel at all levels, and I realise that everyone understands the international responsibilities of the armed forces. They are no longer defending Britain against an aggressor, but playing a part in establishing a secure world.

It was clear to me after days of questioning and listening that there was a high level of dissatisfaction in the services. Personnel knew that although it was necessary and beneficial for the United Kingdom to reduce its armed forces after the end of the cold war, the cuts imposed by the previous Government were completely Treasury led. People were angry about that, and the present Front-Bench team has learnt from the mistakes made then.

Personnel want to know what role the nation wants them to play in defence of our country and in the furtherance of peace in the world for our children and our grandchildren. They want to know that future commitments will be fully financially supported, both for human resources and equipment. They deserve more than the treatment they had from the previous Government, when military commitments were extended way beyond the scope of financial and logistical support.

I listen frequently to men and women whose family lives have been stretched beyond the limits of acceptability. The armed forces and their families have always benefited from medical resources, not given as a reward but because it was essential for those in the front line to know that their families had access to health care whenever they needed it. I hope that Ministers will take that into account. That policy represents common sense and good management, as is recognised by many commercial companies. The armed forces should not change the culture that has existed for many years.

The closure of many high street recruitment centres has meant that the burden of promoting awareness of the armed forces has fallen increasingly to other parts of the military. Museums play a part. They may seem to be soft targets for cost cutting, but I hope that the Government understand the opportunity that they give to many people to understand our military history, which is inspirational and helps with recruiting.

I do not have time to elaborate on problems caused by cost cutting, but I am sure that the contractorisation of much RAF engineering, while it may save money in the short term, will result in higher costs in future, because the contractors are unable to recruit from retiring RAF technical personnel.

There are proposals to market-test, or sell off, the military survey in my constituency. Military survey plays a crucial role in providing vital information for the Army and the RAF, and there has been no indication that the sell-off proposals will save any money. They can only decrease the security of the operation. If an attempt is made to follow the previous Government's dogma, the staff at Feltham will have faced nearly five years of uncertainty by the time a decision is made. On my first visit to them, four or five years ago, I was told that I should not publicise the visit for security reasons. Yet the survey is now a target for transfer to the private sector. That does not seem quite right.

A handful of us visited the NATO in 1993 because we were concerned about inaction in Bosnia. I was told by the then chairman of the NATO defence staff Field Marshall Sir Richard Vincent—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I am afraid that the hon. Gentleman has had his 10 minutes.

6.17 pm

Mr. Mike Hancock (Portsmouth, South): I welcome the new Minister for the Armed Forces to his post, although I was disappointed that the first letter I received from him brought bad news for Portsmouth. It announced 200 job losses and 105 compulsory redundancies. I hope that that is not the shape of things to come, and it was a depressing start from the new Minister. From now on, I hope everything will be on the way up rather than down.

I want to address some local issues, the first of which is those 200 jobs. I understand why the Minister of State has to leave the Chamber as I am speaking, and I am sure that the Under–Secretary will be able to cover his back. I hope that the Minister of State will take seriously my suggestion that he tries to work with the men and women who have been told that their jobs must go, and to try to assimilate them into other defence establishments in the Portsmouth area.

The second local issue is the need for the MOD to start to make decisions about long-term procurement projects. The hon. Member for Portsmouth, North (Mr. Rapson) spoke yesterday of his commitment to the work force of Lockheed Martin who are working on ASTOR, the airborne stand-off radar programme. What that programme needs is a decision. We must safeguard the 2,000 jobs, so the right decision for us would be support for the Lockheed Martin scheme. A decision is needed; many people's hopes and future depend on it.

The third local issue concerns the two aircraft carriers. The hon. Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key) asked a pertinent question about their in-service date. It is not good enough for the people whom I represent, many of whom serve or have served in the Royal Navy or work for the MOD. They have banked an awful lot on the two

carriers. Uncertainty has been percolating through the area since the local newspaper suggested a week or so ago that there could be delay. When asked, I said that I thought that a delay would be nonsense. It would be a serious setback for the Government and the defence review if there were any truth in it. The people whom I represent, and the rest of the country, are owed an explanation. We need a commitment about whether the in-service date of 2012 is firm.

I am not much concerned about the naming of ships, but, if there is confusion, as one who has watched the Royal Navy leave Portsmouth harbour over the past 50 years, I believe that the names Victorious and Eagle should not go amiss.

The last local issue is the future of the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency. I represent hundreds of people who work in DERA establishments in and around Portsmouth and some who work in the Aldershot area and travel up to the Farnborough site daily. Indecision has hung over them for some time and they deserve to be told exactly what has happened. They should not have to go through the frustration of continually being told that further studies are needed before a decision.

Hon. Members must have been disappointed when the Minister for the Armed Forces spoke. Did not the Secretary of State suggest yesterday that we would hear some news about the Territorial Army? Were we not led to believe that we would get an announcement that would nail some of the rumours that have been flying around? We got nothing.

Mr. Richard Livsey (Brecon and Radnorshire): My hon. Friend will have noted my early-day motion 1534 about the future of the Territorial Army in Wales, where we may lose our two remaining TA regiments: the 2nd battalion, Royal Regiment of Wales and the 3rd battalion, Royal Welch Fusiliers. Would not that be a tragedy? The Minister has told me in the past week of the closure of Cwrt y Gollen training camp in my constituency with 36 job losses.

Mr. Hancock: I thank my hon. Friend the Minister for Brecon and Radnorshire (Mr. Livsey). I was pleased to sign the early-day motion. I am delighted that he is leading the fight for the TA in Wales but the story does not end with Wales, Scotland or the north-east. The TA is affected in my area as well, as I said in an intervention yesterday.

If we are to believe the reports that are circulating, there is to be nothing in Aldershot, the home of the British Army. Southampton's TA commitment is to be halved. The Winchester unit, which was praised all round the House as the one that had adapted its role to suit the MOD's on-going commitment, is to be done away with. Two units are to be scrapped or decimated in the Portsmouth area. That is sad.

Other hon. Members have commented to me. My right hon. Friend the Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross (Mr. Maclennan) and my hon. Friend the Member for Argyll and Bute (Mrs. Michie) made points about the islands. My right hon. Friend the Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) noted that cuts in the Royal Regiment of Fusiliers would leave a gap in the TA between Newcastle and Edinburgh. Answers are needed. My hon. Friend the hon. Member for Torbay (Mr. Sanders) mentioned that Paignton has a brand-new TA centre but has been led to believe that the unit must move to Exeter. My hon. Friend the Member for Brecon and Radnorshire intervened to make his point. Many hon. Members have said that if TA coverage stops being UK-wide, we will have a serious problem.

It is no good the MOD saying that it wants the TA to supply supporting specialists when it is closing off that supply. If it needs a specialist doctor in Bosnia and that person exists in Galashiels, it will not be able to get him or her because that person will find it difficult to belong to a TA unit in the area. The man and woman power will not be available. The Government must reconsider.

The Minister for the Armed Forces spent the best part of 10 minutes talking about personnel issues but he was 10 minutes into his speech before he mentioned the civilians who work for the MOD, which was disappointing. There are several issues relating to the way in which we have treated people in the armed forces. I welcome the chapters in the defence review that say that personnel matters will be dealt with more sympathetically.

There is the continuing saga of those suffering from asbestos-related illnesses caught while working as MOD personnel. There is no progress on their campaign. There is also the despicable treatment of the Chinese laundrymen, the retired Gurkhas and the veterans of nuclear test and the Gulf war. What about the civilians in the Gulf, whom the MOD virtually disowns? I represent two such people whose lives have dramatically changed, yet the MOD says nothing about them.

What about RAF morale? I talked in an intervention about young pilots leaving. One reason is that their kit is unserviceable. My hon. and learned Friend the Member for North–East Fife (Mr. Campbell) was told in answers this year that 58 per cent. of the Tornado GR1 and GR4 fleet was less than fully serviceable, and 70 per cent. of the Nimrod fleet is not fully functional. In a written answer yesterday, the Minister for the Armed Forces said that there was 5 per cent. gapping—what a word—on major ships in the Royal Navy. A 5 per cent. gapping policy on a major carrier means 50 or 60 men. Can such a ship operate properly with such stress on the crew?

The hon. Member for Portsmouth, North spoke of the high morale he had found in the Royal Marines on his many visits under the parliamentary armed forces programme. When the hon. Member for Thurrock (Mr. Mackinlay) and I were with the Royal Marines, the story was not the same. There was a problem with young non-commissioned officers with the promotion logjam and the difficulty in getting the right rate for the jobs that they were asked to do. It was the same for young officers. Many were making terribly difficult decisions at the age of 25 or 26 after recently training to a high standard. We need to consider morale seriously.

I draw attention to the in-built cut that the MOD has inflicted on itself through efficiency savings. The hon. Member for Portsmouth, North said yesterday that he thought there was still fat there. I would be interested to know where. We cannot service all our aircraft. It is suggested that filling the fat gap would need 40,000 personnel. Where will the economies be found?

The hon. Member for Walsall, South (Mr. George), who chairs the Defence Committee, said that he scored the defence review eight out of 10. He was overgenerous. The Committee members who went into great detail to

[Mr. Hancock]

produce long reports cannot have shared his enthusiasm. There are so many unanswered questions on procurement, cost savings, the priority of the foreign commitments on which we are embarking and personnel issues. The men and women who serve in our armed forces and who work for the MOD are entitled to straight answers from the Government. They were promised them, and many hundreds, if not thousands, of them have taken part in the review. They have welcomed that opportunity, but, for goodness sake, do not pay lip service to their commitment and the part that they have played in producing the report. Give them the answers and stability for their future in the armed forces.

6.29 pm

Mr. Lindsay Hoyle (Chorley): My turn to speak has seemed to take a long time coming round. It has been a long debate over two days. At least I have heard many interesting comments, with some of which one can agree and with some of which one may disagree. Here I am, at last, to speak about the strategic defence review.

I welcome most of the strategic defence review and its implications for defence in the United Kingdom. It is a well-considered White Paper, which has reassessed our essential security interests and defence needs. It considers how the roles and capabilities of our armed forces need to be adjusted to meet the realities of today.

We are still investing in our defence capabilities. It is there that we have to begin to judge ourselves. I know that many people have views about what will happen in the future. It is important that we begin to look at what we shall get. It is great that we are cutting defence spending by only 3 per cent. over three years in comparison to cuts of 20 per cent. by the Conservative Government since 1990, but questions have to be answered about what happens from the fourth year onwards.

When the review was announced, it was thought by some that it would mean simply a cut in defence spending. That was wrong. Instead, the review has signalled a clear commitment that the Government are looking at defence from a foreign policy perspective and assessing the needs of our armed forces in a truly global way. The emphasis has shifted from what the Treasury can get out of the review to what is really needed in defence. The review has restored confidence within our armed forces and it has been widely welcomed. I congratulate the Minister and the team who have worked hard on the review.

The great buzz word of new smart procurement is something that the world will look to, but what does it mean? It means that we are cutting out only the waste in procurement. That is a positive step, which will enhance the quality of the defence industry and rid us of its outdated aspects. However, our targets are based on a three-year time span. I hope that we can look beyond that, and that the Treasury will realise that we have to look further, and that when we spend £1 on defence, the return will be much greater in terms of exports and jobs created. All that must be taken into account.

In four years' time, it will be essential that we maintain investment. I hope that we do not see the vast reduction that Opposition Members expect, as once again they spread rumours and create discontent within the armed forces. I believe that exports will be generated and I hope that everyone will realise that British troops have the best of what British industry can supply. We are still investing in, and improving, our defence capabilities and technologies. That is important if Britain is to maintain its leading edge in defence capabilities.

We all talk about the big expenditure—the aircraft carriers. I welcome the announcement that the two aircraft carriers will be built in Britain. I hope that they will be capable of operating Typhoon, as we have invested so heavily in the European fighter aircraft programme that it would be a shame to waste its potential. The building of aircraft carriers will present us with new avenues in foreign policy.

The argument for the aircraft carriers was proven not just by the Falklands but by the Gulf and Bosnia. They will allow us to police hotspots around the world from offshore. That is especially appropriate, as we have few land bases and few countries wish to see jets operating from their territory.

I hope that the Government will reaffirm their commitment to produce the two aircraft carriers in 2012, if not before, as that would secure many jobs. We have heard a great deal of speculation about the carriers. I am sure that my hon. Friend the Minister will reaffirm tonight that the carriers are part of the SDR and part of the package; that they are important not only to the armed forces but for the jobs that they will create.

While I am on the subject of aircraft carriers, it is appropriate to mention the aircraft carrier that was loaded in Gibraltar, not in the United Kingdom, during the Gulf war. The jets flew out to Gibraltar and were loaded there when they went off to the Gulf before Christmas. It is important that we recognise the importance of Gibraltar and Gibraltar's assistance to the United Kingdom. Will my hon. Friend take this opportunity to comment on the future of Gibraltar and on the merits of having a base more than 2,000 miles away on the cornerstone of the Mediterranean and Africa? Gibraltar has paid the price over many years and it is only right that there is a commitment to its future. It plays an important and integral part in meeting our defence needs.

I am pleased that Eurofighter—or, under its new name, Typhoon 2—has been confirmed. It will be an integral part of the Royal Air Force, and it is good news for the defence manufacturers, British Aerospace at Warton and Salmesbury. The production of advanced military airframes and components such as those for Typhoon 2 will give them the leading edge in technology. I have heard that the Airbus 320 project is being transferred to Scotland to free resources for that development. I hope that, as well as there being training opportunities for existing employees, jobs will be protected and Eurofighter will be the source of many new jobs at those sites. I hope that the Minister will comment on the German Government's policy on Eurofighter.

There is a lot of speculation about C17. We hear that four C17s or the equivalent are to be leased. If there is to be an equivalent, what will we do to ensure that there is a real competition and that we get value for money? There are alternatives. Let us look at all of them before we jump into bed with the American C17. To do so would place a question mark over what I wish to see, which is a future

large aircraft developed in Europe that will be as successful as Airbus and create as many jobs. That is important.

Will my hon. Friend confirm that there is no need for a battle tank now to be carried on the outsize aircraft? I move on quickly, as time is rushing on.

I welcome the introduction of the Merlin for the Royal Navy and the Air Corps. It will be a welcome boost to the services. The EH101 will also secure jobs at Westland and among subcontractors throughout the United Kingdom. We shall all benefit.

I look forward to an early decision on ASTOR. I hope that Global Express will win the contract, thereby creating and securing jobs in the north-west. Not only will we benefit from the additional jobs, but the project will improve our technology base and will be cheaper to operate than the alternatives that are being suggested. It will put us at the cutting edge of surveillance and monitoring systems and allow us to lead a battlefield attack instead of being reliant on the Americans.

The main subject tonight, and the one that we all wish to talk about, is the Territorial Army. The review has regional implications. I should like to raise some points on behalf of my constituents and others in the north-west. I have received many letters expressing people's concern about the effects of the SDR on the TA. It was made clear in the SDR that there was a need to restructure the TA, and that this would result in an adjustment in its size and location. I fully understand the need for some reduction, although I am doubtful that such a drastic cut is necessary. Ideally, I should like to see the Minister reduce his estimates and signal a clear commitment to listen to the concerns of TA centres throughout Britain.

The north-west TA has expressed its concern to me about the decision. Chorley TA centre wonders what role it will play. The 101 Battalion headquarters is based in Chorley, and there is a cadet base there too. I hope that their number will not be reduced. Colonel Jones and his staff have done an excellent job and their commitment and dedication should be matched by a commitment from the Government to support the troops based there. As yet, the Government have been unable to say how the north-west will be affected and I should be grateful for any light that can be shed on that, as well as for any assurances that there will not be a dramatic reduction in the north-west and that the TA centre in Chorley will survive.

It has been particularly unhelpful for Opposition Members—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael J. Martin): Order.

6.39 pm

Mr. Nicholas Soames (Mid-Sussex): I shall start by welcoming many of the changes in the strategic defence review. They take place against a sombre backdrop, with weapons of a highly sophisticated and extremely dangerous nature in the hands of unstable regimes and terrorist groups. The range of options for military action has increased greatly.

I welcome the expeditionary force changes. There will be considerable difficulties in shaping the policy, not least with the carriers. I hope that the Minister will give us a straightforward answer, not just some weasel words, to the questions asked by the hon. Member for Portsmouth, South (Mr. Hancock) and my hon. Friend the Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key). I am glad to see that the son of the joint rapid deployment force—the joint rapid reaction force—will give the United Kingdom a wider and broader golf bag of capabilities. I strongly welcome that. I consider that to be a good solid Conservative policy being built on in a sensible way.

It is important to place on record the fact that the changes to our armed forces are not taking place against a background of British military defeats and disasters. For the past 50 years, our armed forces have scarcely put a foot wrong. In the past few years alone, in the Falkland Islands, the Gulf, Northern Ireland and Bosnia, they have, literally, covered themselves with glory. The House might care to pause to remember that, during the Falklands campaign, regardless of the risks that it was running, the Royal Navy put ashore, on a hostile coast, during a difficult winter's night, a fighting force of about 5,000 men together with all auxiliary arms. That was an astonishing feat of arms. We truly have some of the best armed forces in the world and certainly, in my judgment, the best people. I urge the Government not to ruin that.

We welcome the equal opportunities initiatives. Anything that can improve recruiting and all the sideshow business is very important. However, I remind the Minister that, for the young service man and woman of today, the fundamental character of war will remain unchanged. Those highly trained young people will have to take part in a terrifying contest of wills for which they will need to be extremely highly trained and in which they will have to cope with extreme danger, in rapidly changing circumstances and conditions of great chaos and uncertainty. Their skills and the quality of their leadership, weapons and equipment will be severely tested. Such operations are sustainable only by men and women who are highly motivated by tremendous pride and confidence in their regiment, their corps, their service and their traditions.

I do not believe that the equal opportunities training centre at Shrivenham will have a great deal to contribute to the success of British military arms. I beg the Labour party to understand that the service ethos is worth defending to the very end. It does not mean that we should not try to improve the services as employers. The services have always been good employers and always look after their people. Of course, they can be criticised at the margins, but the Government must not ruin what is a priceless and golden asset in this country to accomplish a feat of social engineering and political correctness of the worst sort.

Changes are to be made and, in the strategic defence review, many of them are sensible changes. The services have a reputation, rightly, for intelligent, positive and humane leadership. It is clear from their success on operations that they have been supremely successfully prepared for the task. Any fundamental changes must be weighed carefully against the advantages that they will bring to that training.

Having already welcomed the joint rapid reaction forces and the added responsibilities of the permanent joint headquarters, I am glad to see that there is to be a reorganisation of the training cycle for the Army. That is an excellent move, but great care will need to be taken to ensure that those units not at high readiness or in the training part of the cycle are sensibly and carefully

[Mr. Nicholas Soames]

employed and are thoroughly well briefed about where they are going and what they are doing. There must never be a feeling that there is a two-tier Army in operation—one in training for high readiness and high-intensity conflict, in high-readiness mode, ready to go anywhere in the world—one consisting of those dealing with the more mundane jobs.

I am delighted to see that 5 Airborne brigade and 24 Airmobile brigade are to be put together to form the air manoeuvre brigade. That is an excellent move and both brigades will benefit. It will create a versatile and extremely powerful entity. I want the Minister to assure the House that the unique fighting ethos of the Parachute Regiment and all that that has meant for this country will be retained.

I must tell the Secretary of State that I am afraid that it will not be possible for the Navy to live up to the concurrency arrangements set out in the SDR. I doubt whether the new so-called flexible deployment will be able to cope with all tasks asked of the fleet. Having been Minister of State for the Armed Forces, I know what all those terms mean. The term "flexible deployment" means doing more with less kit. The proposals in the SDR will lead to greater overstretch and I hope that the Minister of Defence will watch that with great care.

On the Royal Air Force, I warmly welcome the joint Harrier force. It is a disgrace that it was not done before and I partially blame myself for its not happening earlier. The pursuit of jointery should continue to be a high priority—I am sure that it will be. We bang on about jointery here, but it has been a fact of life in the services for generations. It takes very little to keep pushing it forward. It is now deeply established and deeply ingrained, particularly in the vestiges of the joint services staff college, but it must be pushed forward in force formation. I am pleased to see the new force appear. I am certain that the new joint helicopter command arrangements are a further step in the right direction.

An important change is the creation of the post of the Chief of Defence Logistics. I hope that the Minister knows how lucky he is that, in the personage of General Sam Cowan, he has the right man for the job. I am sure that the Minister knows that there are some heroic efficiencies to be found in logistics. I hope that, in the future, the Secretary of State will consider extending the principle that he is applying to the Chief of Defence Logistics to the adjutants-general and personnel departments across the three services where, again, there are many efficiency savings to be made.

Given all the noise that the Secretary of State has made about defence diplomacy, one would think that the fellow invented the task, when it has been a major part of the defence business of this country for many years. Any Minister who has served in the Ministry of Defence, particularly in the job that I held, will know that a great deal of time and effort goes towards trying to put the right people in the right places and assessing the balance of what we need to achieve and why we need to achieve it.

Defence diplomacy is extremely important to this country, not just to promote defence sales, which is the reason that always used to be given by the Labour party, but to promote the interests of the United Kingdom and, from time to time—this may affront some of the more tender souls on the Government Benches—to promote defence sales. The respect felt overseas for the British armed forces is a great prize for the interests of this country. Many foreign countries want their young men and women to train here with British armed forces because they want them to be trained alongside British troops and in the British environment. There are many other reasons for pursuing British interests abroad.

I want the Secretary of State also to be aware that there will shortly be difficulty between the Foreign Office and the Ministry of Defence because the Foreign Office is now running out of officials who did national service—there are fewer and fewer of them. The perfect understanding that has existed between the two Departments will therefore begin to be eroded. I should like the Minister to assure me that he will make sure that there are more exchanges between the Foreign Office and the Ministry of Defence than there have been.

I shall not say anything about the TA, but I want to make one point to the Minister. The Government talk about how much they value our service personnel, and I am sure that they do, but I beg the Minister again to consider with great care the new nostrums that are creeping into defence management. The preservation of service ethos is vital for us all.

6.49 pm

Ms Dari Taylor (Stockton, South): The Minister for the Armed Forces is not in the Chamber, but I warmly congratulate him. He will be vigorous in his role.

I also congratulate my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State on producing a highly acclaimed strategic defence review, which has listened to the concerns and hopes for development of 7,000 people and organisations. That is a feat, but it is not the only one to be celebrated, because the review will also widen equal opportunities. I found the comments of the hon. Member for Mid-Sussex (Mr. Soames) contemptuous and others will also find them so. He talked about social engineering, but we are defining talent as the prerequisite for choosing people in the armed forces. Ministers must be congratulated also on strengthening the naval and air force reserves. Those are fine and timely moves.

Unfortunately, like others, I have serious concerns about the defence review which inevitably relate to the Territorial Army. I also have hopes because, when the Secretary of State came to the Select Committee on Defence, he said:

"The SDR will not downgrade the TA."

I thought those words were important. Later in the summer, after the SDR had been published, the Secretary of State came to the House and said:

"Although its numbers will be trimmed . . . it—

the TA—

"will be given a real heavyweight role"—[*Official Report*, 8 July 1998; Vol. 315, c. 1075.]

I read those statements again and again because I wanted to understand exactly what they meant. Like other hon. Members, I looked forward to the announcement in the House.

I am confused and concerned about what the statements mean. My concern relates not to the Secretary of State but to the advisory backdrop of officials and experts who represent the TA's interests. I am sad to say that my

concern extends to some who claim to be the friends and representatives of the TA. Their comments and the feeble value that they place on the TA undermine its important role. However, I believe the Secretary of State when he says that the TA will in future develop a heavyweight role, because the various talents of the volunteer body have great scope.

I visited many TA units in the north-east and asked them whether they had had an audit of the qualities, skills and talent that they offered. They had not, so I told them that I would conduct an audit because I wanted to know what the people did. I was astounded—perhaps others will not be—by the vast range of skills. There were chartered surveyors, linguists, pathologists, telecommunications engineers, chefs, computer operators, builders, bankers, and so on. That is a wealth of talent. The House knows that we could not afford to pay for that range of talent out of the public purse. Of course, we do not pay for it out of the public purse, yet we all benefit from it. We should not reduce that force, because it has a potential that is often under-used. Reconfiguration and restructuring of the force can only acknowledge the value of the people who make up the Territorial Army.

There are many who argue that the TA is not relevant to high-intensity warfare. That is not so. Hon. Members have spoken about Bosnia, where our TA reservists served alongside our regulars, rebuilding countries, rebuilding hope, being an adaptable force and showing their value. Surely when cases such as Bosnia arise, that is not the moment to start cherry picking and deciding who is relevant and who is not. The territorials are a force where all volunteers are welcome. That should be the stance for the future. We do not have sufficient numbers of regular soldiers or volunteers. We want more of both.

I am not an expert, unlike many hon. Members, but I have read the words of Colonel Puttnam, who said:

"Cutting those units that are the most usable and most versatile of all the volunteers, who have shown that they can adapt to different roles and learn new skills extremely quickly"—

means that we could

"end up with units . . . with little opportunity to form operational roles as formed units . . . short of a general war."

Surely we do not want that. I hope that the territorials will not be defined in such a limited way that the force of 7,000 once spoken of becomes the reality. The Secretary of State promised that the TA would have a heavyweight role. We know that it has a diversity of talent; I want that to be used.

I referred to my audit of the north-east TA units. My postbag tells me that there are many concerned people—families, men and women, youngsters and cadets—who all know that a cut of 12,000 could mean not only a cut in operations but a closure. I ask the Minister to reconsider that. There is a whisper in the corridor to the effect that he will add to the TA and thus cut less. Let us hear that in a statement—we are all waiting.

The men and women of the TA are proud to serve, and many would not question the fact that in doing so they could die. I hope that, when outlining the TA's heavyweight role and reconfiguration, the Minister will acknowledge that many have talents that we cannot afford and commitment that we cannot buy. When we conduct a risk assessment and talk of high-intensity warfare, we accept that today's concerns are not necessarily those that will instigate conflict in the many tomorrows to come. If we take those words as salutary statements about what the future may bring, I am sure that the heavyweight role that the Minister promised the TA will, in the 21st century, be a permanent and growing strategic role.

6.59 pm

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip-Northwood): Was I alone in detecting a certain bipartisanship across the Front Benches earlier this evening? The Minister for the Armed Forces prided himself on his athleticism and my hon. Friend the Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key) outdid him in gravitas, but they were united on one point—the subject is serious and merits at least 45 minutes. I shall try to be briefer and deal with only three central issues which are vital to the defence of this country.

One theme running through the review's many pages is the paramount importance of our armed forces personnel. As our armed forces get smaller, it is critical that our personnel be better trained. Earlier today, I had the privilege of visiting Royal Air Force Halton, formerly the apprentice training school of the service, which was founded by Lord Trenchard, who was the father of the Royal Air Force 80 years ago. It is now the school for recruit training. I shall quote some of Lord Trenchard's words which I am sure the House will find apposite. He said:

"When we originally formed the Air Force in those days we were told—and I want to emphasise this because of its bearing on the future—that we were spending all our money on bricks and mortar, and on ground staff and ground personnel. In fact, some of you . . . will remember that it was called 'the Ground Force' and I believe I was myself once described as 'GOC Ground Force'. That was because we put all the pressure we could on getting a sound foundation for training, in spite of the expense. Has this policy not justified itself? Is it not one of the main reasons why the Luftwaffe has been defeated? The whole work of the Air Force has shown what training is doing. But there is no getting away from the fact that it is expensive. There is nothing to show for it in peacetime, but in war-time there is just this difference to show for it—the difference between defeat and victory."

We are training our armed forces to fight and to win. There should be no diminution in the training budget or the length of training courses. Indeed, the training of our armed forces should intensify as they diminish in size. The reserves should be augmented rather than reduced.

I am sure that sustainability will be the key in future operations. Our armed forces have been drawn down below the minimum safe level, and this is not something of which the Government should be proud. Although I am pleased that the Royal Auxiliary Air Force is to be expanded, I believe that it should comprise more flying personnel. There should be no question of putting at risk stations such as Royal Air Force Northolt in my constituency where 1 Maritime Headquarters Unit is based.

Equipment is also crucial: if our armed forces are small, they must be equipped with the very best. "Smart procurement" is the buzz phrase, but the practice is very different. The danger is that our drive towards European autarchy in defence procurement will lead to a protectionist procurement policy—a sort of fortress Europe. We see this in the agglomeration of European military industrial power, which has occurred to offset the challenge posed by the major American suppliers. Nevertheless, once that agglomeration has taken root, there will be a tendency to feed it—even though the products created may come into service later and may

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be more expensive than their American counterparts. We should be eclectic in defence procurement, with industry choosing the best partners for the job.

The late entry into service of the common new generation frigate, the potential problems that German policies have created for the Meteor consortium in respect of the RAF's beyond visual range air-to-air missile, and the hiatus regarding the multi-role armoured vehicle to which I alluded earlier are just three examples of problems experienced by our armed forces. For that reason, I think that the Royal Air Force was correct to choose an existing heavy-lift aircraft—the C17 from the United States—as the right one for the job.

Looking to the future, we must invest much more in research and development. If our armed forces are small, our research programme must ensure that there is no technology gap between ourselves and the major countries with which we might have to engage in combat. The technology gap between Europe and the United States is growing, and the defence review does nothing to offset it.

I shall address just one area: ballistic missile defence. This activity is virtually totally ignored in the strategic defence review, yet missiles could pose the most major threat to our country. Let us suppose that Russia had a rogue regime which was as bankrupt as the current regime. A rogue dictator could say, "Give us your money, or else". The threat comes not only from Russia. Although the Prime Minister visited China and found everything most agreeable, there is a rogue regime in that country. I do not think that the Prime Minister discussed Tibet when he was in Beijing. I do not think that he addressed the offensive military programme that exists in the People's Republic. China is developing ballistic missiles of intercontinental capability, and it tests its nuclear weapons.

The North Koreans test ballistic missiles weapons over Japan. The Chinese conducted missile tests when Taiwan was holding crucial elections. Iran is acquiring missile technology from China and from Russia. Iraq's nuclear and launcher programme is continuing, notwithstanding the efforts of the United Nations. Now that we have backed down in our confrontation with Iraq, Saddam Hussein will be even more confident. The awesome arms race on the subcontinent between India and Pakistan—both of which are clearly nuclear equipped and have nuclear delivery systems—is continuing. Pakistan gets the technology that it needs from China, and India acquires its technology from Russia. It is a most alarming situation.

Although we may not be concerned now, we face the danger of blackmail by proxy. For example, Libya might acquire from Iraq nuclear weapons and ballistic missile systems which could be targeted at our cities. Could we live happily with the prospect? Mr. Rumsfeld, the former United States Defence Secretary, submitted an excellent report to the United States Congress assessing the ballistic missile threat to his country. The report stated clearly that the threat exists not just for the United States, which is a continental power and perhaps further removed than most European countries from the potential launcher nations. The report pointed out that Europe is on the front line of the potential ballistic missile threat.

A theatre defence capability will be a step in the right direction. I know that technology programmes are progressing to some degree within the Ministry of Defence, but we need more than research. We must begin to develop systems that work, or we will face blackmail or intimidation. Deterrence as we knew it during the cold war no longer exists. There is no question of mutual assured destruction; no one wants to risk the incineration of our cities because of the actions of a rogue regime. We must put the protection in place now.

7.8 pm

Mr. Jamie Cann (Ipswich): As a member of the Defence Committee, I welcome both the review and its findings. I believe that it is incumbent on any incoming Government to review all policy areas and expenditure of moneys for which they are responsible.

Mr. Soames: Take your hands out of your pockets.

Mr. Cann: I shall take my hands out of my pockets if the hon. Member for Mid-Sussex (Mr. Soames) wants—or perhaps I shall just put one in. I shall compromise, because that is what the Committee tried to do, in a bipartisan manner, throughout our discussions.

To continue what I was saying, it seems to me that, essentially, the Government got it right in the view that they reached and the way in which they reached that view. As a member of the Committee, I was impressed by the fact that the chief of every service obviously believed that they had been listened to, that their views had been taken into account and that a collegiate decision had been taken at the end of the process. If the hon. Member for Mid-Sussex permits me, I shall put one hand back in my pocket.

I was impressed by the fact that, for the first time since I became involved in national politics—although that was not long ago—a review of defence policy has been conducted whose sole purpose was not to take money from defence. The previous Government brought us "Options for Change", which was about stripping front-line units without reducing their liabilities, and "Front Line First", which stripped money from the support services without reducing the responsibilities that continued to be imposed on them. For the first time, we have a defence review that is actually about defence, not about grabbing money from the defence budget.

It has been suggested from the Opposition Benches that the carriers will not be part and parcel of what is proposed for the future—that the Government will renege on that commitment. *[Interruption.]* Goodbye, Mr. Soames. *[Interruption.]* I repeat, it has been put about that the Government might renege on the commitment on the carriers. In Committee, the First Sea Lord and others accepted that the carriers were central to the strategy. It is nonsense to say that those carriers will not be produced, because if they were not to be produced the strategy would be nonsense.

Mr. Keith Simpson (Mid-Norfolk): Exactly.

Mr. Cann: Exactly. Therefore, even Opposition Members should accept what the review has produced. It has produced two big new carriers; the updating of existing carriers to cover until 2012; the production of the assault ships HMS Ocean, HMS Bulwark and HMS Albion; the ability to place people on shore; and the ability to provide heavy lift to keep them supplied for as

long as we wish. It will give us the ability to project power second only to that of the United States of America in the present-day world. I think that is wonderful, and I cannot understand why Opposition Members cavil at the strategic defence review, which has been supported on a bipartisan basis by our Committee.

I believe that the Government have done a tremendous job on the review, as have the services. I am only sorry that, at the last stage of preparing what should have been a bipartisan defence policy capable of lasting for the next 20 years, a few Opposition Members—presumably for political purposes only—have chosen to cavil at it.

7.13 pm

Mr. Crispin Blunt (Reigate): It gives me pleasure to follow my fellow member of the Select Committee on Defence, the hon. Member for Ipswich (Mr. Cann), and to recall that, yesterday, the Secretary of State commented that he regarded our report as admirable.

As the hon. Member for Ipswich said—and as the Chairman of the Committee, the hon. Member for Walsall, South (Mr. George), said yesterday—the report was unanimous. I remind the hon. Member for Ipswich what the Committee Chairman meant by unanimity. To achieve unanimity, it was sufficient to put a nice paragraph at the start and a nice paragraph at the end—but, in the 436 pages in between, put the boot in. I believe that careful reading of our Committee's report will show that it contains very serious criticisms of the strategic defence review. I hope that, if the Secretary of State regards the report as admirable, he will pay careful attention to what it says.

I was especially disturbed by comments made by the hon. and learned Member for North-East Fife (Mr. Campbell) yesterday—and by the Committee Chairman when we took evidence from the Secretary of State after the review—congratulating the Secretary of State on his victory over the Treasury. If that is a victory, I hate to think what a defeat would look like. Under this defence review, £900 million has been taken from the defence budget. In addition, two weeks before the defence review was announced, the Secretary of State for Defence was mugged by the Chancellor when, in a meeting, he conceded an extra percentage point by increasing the efficiency savings target from 2 to 3 per cent. It sounds innocuous enough, but hon. Members should be aware that that amounts to removing £1.5 billion from the defence budget over the four years of the rolling efficiency programme. If I have time, I shall return to the subject of efficiency savings.

In general, however, the Committee welcomed the changes and proposals for the regular force structure, which build on the qualities of jointery and deployability mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Sussex (Mr. Soames). I sincerely hope that the commitment to the two aircraft carriers is honoured, and I disagree with my hon. Friend the Member for Canterbury (Mr. Brazier), who cast doubt on the proposal to buy six ro-ro ferries. I believe that that is a very important part of ensuring that we have the ability to deploy our forces overseas. With two landing platform docks, I hope that the Minister will consider producing a second helicopter carrier, because it would give the future force of the Navy far greater sustainability to have two of each major platform.

There are, however, problems in the Navy. There was overstretch in the frigate and destroyer force with 35 frigates and destroyers; it escapes me how the problem of overstretch has diminished with 32. Despite the evidence that the Committee considered, I remain to be convinced that the Navy will not suffer greater overstretch and pressure on its people as a result of the cuts that it has suffered. We should not ignore the grievous cut to defence capability in the removal of two further nuclear-powered fleet submarines from the naval order of battle. They are very significant weapons platforms, and the reduction of 20 per cent.—from 12 to 10—is much to be regretted.

I shall talk for a short time about the Army, and especially about the proposals for the Royal Armoured Corps, of which I have some little experience. In his evidence to the Committee, the Chief of the General Staff said that the unsquaring of the brigades in Germany was the most difficult decision that he had had to take. We must watch carefully to ensure that the benefits that will come from that process through the training cycle—which my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Sussex mentioned—are realised, and that their readiness is sustained.

The lesson was learned that type 38 small armoured regiments were not sustainable as units, did not work well and were militarily and administratively unviable. Therefore, I especially welcome the return to six type 58 tank regiments. As we have learnt all those lessons in armoured regiments, the reason escapes me for our failure to translate those lessons with regard to armoured reconnaissance. I served as an armoured reconnaissance officer for more than 11 years. Hardly surprisingly, armoured reconnaissance has proved ideal for the operations in which our forces are deployed. It is light. It is armoured. It has sufficient firepower to make a difference in almost any operation in which it is likely to be deployed now. It also has the vital asset of being able to gather information on the ground wherever it goes. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that by June my regiment, the Light Dragoons, will have supported 11 squadron tours in Bosnia since 1992. I beg the Minister to listen to some of the consequences of that.

The regiment has an establishment of about 400. In the past four years, with some soldiers having completed five tours in Bosnia—most of the soldiers who have been in the regiment all of that time will have completed at least three—there have been 82 divorces in my regiment. Given the number of soldiers who are not married, that figure is staggering. That is the impact of not having enough armoured reconnaissance to deploy on such operations.

I was distressed to learn that the apparent good news that there would be four armoured reconnaissance regiments turned out to mean that, instead of three armoured reconnaissance regiments of four squadrons, we would have four armoured reconnaissance regiments of three squadrons, which leaves the operational output of the armoured reconnaissance squadrons unchanged at 12. I hope that the Minister will reconsider. That arm has fabulous utility for today's operations.

The Select Committee heard about the Royal Air Force's problems of overstretch when we went to visit RAF Bruggen. Supporting operational deployments in the Gulf and in Turkey has taken its toll on the fighting squadrons of the RAF, which must constantly roll pilots through a four-month deployment programme to the Gulf. Given the length of time that we will probably have to be

[Mr. Crispin Blunt]

deployed in the Gulf, it may be time for the Minister to consider permanent deployment—two-year tours—for pilots and support staff in the Gulf on accompanied tours, as we did in the 1950s and 1960s when we had a permanent presence in the Gulf. That would address many of the problems of instability and overstretch that the RAF is suffering.

On the reserve forces, the Government are making a strategic, political and administrative mistake in their proposals for the Territorial Army. The regular forces are focused on the day-to-day task of maintaining global stability. We are entering a period of strategic uncertainty. If we recall that 16 years ago, we had just recovered the Falkland Islands, it is clear that we can have no idea what the world will look like 16 years from now. By 2013, if the Government carry out their proposals for the TA, there will be 100,000 fewer mobilisable men and women who have military experience for us to call on. Given the size of the regular forces, it is a substantial cut to the strategic capability of the United Kingdom.

The hon. Member for Paisley, South (Mr. Alexander) spoke yesterday about the cut to the engineer squadron in his constituency. In my constituency, Reigate, the second troop of 127 field squadron of the Royal Engineers is also, I understand, scheduled to be lost—one of five engineer regiments, which are enormously useful for civilian and military work and which are to be lost from the order of battle of the Territorial Army.

I understand that the TA centre in Reigate is to be closed. With it goes an Army cadet force hut in my constituency. I hope the Minister realises that it will cost him £100,000 to replace each ACF hut. That is the evidence that we took from the south-east area Territorial Auxiliary and Volunteer Reserve Association, and it represents a total of £15 million that the Minister will have to find for capital expenditure to keep the cadets in being. That does not allow for the fact that all the talent and enthusiasm of the volunteers who run the cadets will be lost.

Finally, I shall deal with efficiency savings and their consequences for people. The Minister should understand that what the Government are trying to do over the next four years in efficiency savings alone is "Front Line First" twice over. That was a huge programme of change inside the Ministry of Defence. The task set for the MOD is enormous. We are already hearing rumours of the LTC being £800 million short. The effect of those efficiency savings will impact on people and their quality of life and they have the potential to destroy the Minister's strategy for people, which he placed at the centre of his remarks today.

7.23 pm

Mr. Frank Cook (Stockton, North): It is a privilege to follow the hon. Member for Reigate (Mr. Blunt), who has such an illustrious track record in defence studies. I did not have the pleasure of serving with him on the Defence Committee—I had to relinquish that post some 12 months ago. For the record and for the information of newer Members, perhaps I should record my positions.

I represent the House in the parliamentary assembly of the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe, and have done ever since being appointed in 1991, at its outset. I also represent the House as an elected delegate to the North Atlantic Assembly, on which I am the vice-chairman of the defence and security committee and the assembly's special rapporteur on the reform of the Russian armed services. My second interim report on that topic will be presented in Edinburgh. I therefore have some knowledge of defence matters.

The strategic defence review is a huge topic, to which one cannot do justice in 10 minutes. I must be selective, so I shall start with the reserve forces. Seven years ago, I was the author of the report on reserve forces to the North Atlantic Assembly. Much has been said about them already, which I shall not repeat. We know about the military needs and the social needs. In the north-east, many young men and, indeed, young women have been saved from anti-social behaviour by the opportunities presented by the programme of training, annual camp and so on. That would be a sorry loss to society, not only to military resource. Those young people are a source of recruitment and support for the cadet force.

I have to agree in part with the right hon. Member for Bridgwater (Mr. King) about levels. I do not want to descend into pointless argument setting region against region—north-east against north-west—about the imbalance in cuts. That does not make sense to me. The right hon. Gentleman is right to speak about levels.

The Minister of State today was kind enough to give us a pitch of 40,000 reservists. That is about 35 per cent. of the size of the regular force. I remain to be convinced that a 35 per cent. reserve force will be adequate, bearing in mind the demands that will be made of our forces by crisis management, peacekeeping, peace enforcement and so on, especially when nations have in their armouries weapons of mass destruction that can have an enormous impact on regular forces with very little warning.

I urge the Minister to think again. He has given us the idea that there is still some way to go, and that decisions have yet to be made. I say to him, "Please, for God's sake, think clearly when you do this, and do not saddle us with only a 35 per cent. reserve force."

The reserves are good at supporting the cadet forces. The Minister mentioned sea cadets. The sea cadets in Stockton are based on HMS Kellington, a counter-mines warfare vessel that is somewhat redundant and has been in the River Tees for well over 10 years—it is grounded on the bottom. It is kept in good order. A large sum of money has been spent over those 10 years. The vessel is in good nick, unlike other vessels that were lent out to sea cadet forces elsewhere in the country, which were not maintained to suitable standard.

Since the vessel was placed in its present position, well sited right in the centre of town, a source of pride in the community, we have built a bridge down river, the Princess Diana bridge. If the counter-mines vessel were moved, all the superstructure and probably the top half of the hull would have to be taken off it. Worse than that, further down is the Tees barrage, whose existence I successfully negotiated through the House, the first moves having been made by Lord Dormand in the other place. Even if it were possible to get the vessel under the bridge, it could not go through the lock because it is too broad in the beam. However, the Ministry of Defence wants it back. It says, "If you won't give us it back you will have to pay for it." We are willing to pay for it and we have

offered the MOD 5,000 quid. If it does not get 5,000 quid, what will it do about it? It is mind boggling that is the sort of thing that Michael Bentine made his reputation on.

I am appealing to the Minister of State—*[Interruption.]* Joking aside, this is serious. I am appealing to my hon. Friend to come to my constituency. I am president of the sea cadet corps and I would love to take my hon. Friend up the gangplank to the tune of the bosun's pipe to visit the ship to see how well it is maintained. That is a serious request.

Time is limited and I am on five minutes, which means that I must move on. I agree with the plea for northern command made by my hon. Friend the Member for City of York (Mr. Bayley). It seems crazy that, with force strength of 10,500 in northern England and 2,500 in Scotland, we should want to move a two-star general up to Scotland. If 80 per cent. of the force is in northern England, that does not seem sensible to me, despite all the arguments about modern communications and the like, which cut both ways.

When I was in the Army, I liked nothing better than to see my top brass walking in my camp, giving me pride that they had an interest in me. That is a damned sight easier for a general to do at Catterick and the like than in Edinburgh. Let Scotland have its kilt-wearing colonel or whatever up there, but we want York.

The Minister was kind enough today to mention the Gulf veterans. That was a source of great reassurance to me. I commend him for his commitment, because it is long overdue. However, I must talk about another commitment which is also long overdue, and that is to the British Nuclear Test Veterans Association. For years, the association has been patted on the head by successive Governments and told by the National Radiological Protection Board that there was no link between the veterans' incredibly high incidence of disability in their offspring, as well as death, and the role that they performed in serving the Crown. I do not accept that. I think that the evidence is damning. It is about time that there was a proper review of it. I am asking my hon. Friend, not for the first time: "Let us have a review of the British nuclear test veterans' circumstances in the same way that there is to be a further review of the Gulf veterans."

My role in the North Atlantic Assembly demands that I mix with people from central Europe, eastern Europe and the Russian Federation in what we call Rose-Roth seminars. The purpose of these seminars is to acquaint officials, military people and politicians with the way in which western democracy works, with our procedures and with the form that they take. We seek to acquaint them with how to maintain civil control over a military establishment.

A form of multinational North Atlantic-NATO team conducts these inquiries, so the Brits are only part of the process. Our allies and the learners—the students—find it incredible that we have so little control over defence matters. We have five days of debate under the normal set-up in the House, if we are lucky. There are two days on the defence estimates, a debate that is taking place now under the strategic review. We have three single-force debates, if we are lucky. There is no comment about joint operations or joint services. Why we are treating the services singly when we are trying to put them together is another question in my head.

My appeal is that we approach our defence debates more sensibly in future and allow ourselves in the Chamber a measure of democracy that allows us to take a foot in decision making so that it is not a matter, at the end of tonight's debate, of taking the strategic review lock, stock and barrel. I ask that we be allowed to examine separate sections of it and make decisions.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Mrs. Ewing.

7.34 pm

Mrs. Margaret Ewing (Moray): It is a great pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Stockton, North (Mr. Cook), whose passion and knowledge on defence subjects is highly regarded throughout the House. I endorse everything that he has said, particularly about the nuclear test veterans. The campaign on their behalf has been going on for a long time and deserves recognition at this stage. It will be interesting to see whether there is a response.

I am conscious that I have only a short time to speak in the debate. I welcome the concept of a strategic review. Many people have told me, as a Member with many interests in defence matters, that it was all so much easier when there was an iron curtain, when we knew where the enemy was and where we were pointing our weapons. What was needed then was to work out a strategy. I agree with that. I am talking of people who may not be able to speak out publicly on these issues, but perhaps want Members such as me to make their view clear.

It is important that in this debate, which I have listened to and participated in yesterday and today, we remember that we are talking about a strategic review. It seems that many points have been directed to practical issues rather than strategic ones.

We must look towards the next century, and I believe that the points of conflict that will arise will be new. We can look back over the 20th century and analyse the history of that period, but it seems that in future the points of conflict will be new. Unfortunately, however as in the Balkans, some are redolent with history. There is uncertainty.

Having listened to some of the contributions to the debate, I find it worrying that many Members seem to feel that defence policy must be written in tablets of stone, never ever to be changed. It is important that we focus on rapid reaction and jointery, an awkward new word which has crept into the vocabulary of defence debates.

The interest stimulated by the review is in itself interesting. Not only defence personnel have written or spoken to me; people have contacted me from voluntary organisations and medical associations, for example. Various interest groups in employment, exporting and training have been involved. All those people have made links with us as Members to ensure that decisions made as a result of the review take full cognisance of society's attitude to it.

It is important that some people have argued against the development of, for example, the Western European Union and the common foreign and security policy. They are looking back as if all the maps of the world are still painted pink. This is where strategy comes in because I believe that all negotiations must be discussed with our partners within NATO, the European Union and other organisations. We should try to work forward into an area where we shall be talking about strategic peace reviews rather than strategic defence reviews.

[Mrs. Margaret Ewing]

It is rather sad that antagonistic comments were made about the European Union yesterday and, indeed, today. It seemed to many people that we were talking of a deadly plague that had to be avoided at all costs.

Like the hon. Member for Stockton, North, I do not believe that strategy is dependent on a few stylised debates in the House. The hon. and learned Member for North-East Fife (Mr. Campbell) made a rather sad jibe that was below his normal standard. My party mentioned to him yesterday that I would refer to him. Apart from the gross inaccuracy of what he said, I do not think it is right that we measure our concern for our defence personnel by always sitting on the green Benches.

Concern for our defence personnel and how our defence policy develops goes far beyond stylised debates in the House during which votes are rare and not all aspects of policy are investigated. As a constituency Member representing many defence personnel, I know that the issues involve the Benefits Agency, the Defence Housing Executive, education for children—a point I raised during the Minister's opening speech—war veterans, war widows, the voting rights of those posted abroad and the salaries of, for example, MAEops—major aeronautical engineer operators—who are critical in the maintenance of the RAF. All that fits into a general pattern of involvement. If we are to have committed men and women in our forces, we need not only occasional speeches but consistent communication with them and advocacy on their behalf in peace as well as when they are on alert or on duty.

Like other hon. Members, I want to talk about the Territorial Army, and I make no apology for doing so. The hon. Member for Stockton, North referred to kilts—and here am I, a woman wearing trousers. Perhaps I should have worn my kilt to keep him happy. But as a Member of Parliament from the highlands and the Grampian area, I am concerned about what is happening to the TA in Scotland.

Little reference has been made to the Royal Engineers, an important aspect of the TA, certainly in the north of Scotland. In my constituency, 236 Squadron is based at Kinloss, and 237 Squadron at Lossiemouth. During last year's flooding in my constituency, those squadrons did invaluable work. In my discussions with them, I met young unemployed people who had found a dignity in participating in the work of the Royal Engineers. Others who were employed found that being out and about with the TA one day a week with the acceptance of their employers was important in giving them a different attitude to life. Such activities have an important effect on the psyche of people involved with those organisations.

The Regular Army appears to want to increase the capability of the Royal Engineers, but that may take until 2002, so why on earth scrap two organisations with the best training capability north of the border? There will be no Royal Engineers north of the M62. Given the nature of our area and the sparsity of its population, communication between those organisations and civilians is vital, particularly at times of crisis but also when they are assisting generally within the community.

Great play has been made of the word "footprint", but it may be difficult for people to understand what that means. A footprint in an area of high population density is quite different from a footprint in an area of low population density. In the highlands and islands and the northern part of Scotland, it is important that the footprint should not become a paw print in the context of the arguments propounded by the strategic defence review.

We all accept that changes are necessary, but it is important to consider the geographical requirements. The Territorial, Auxiliary and Volunteer Reserve Association has said that the recommendations would take the TA in the north of Scotland back to the 1960s, dominated by the central belt, with little communication and few facilities for people to work within the TA and to travel to those organisations. I am conscious of the time. Those elements have already been made clear to the--

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

7.44 pm

Mr. Harry Cohen (Leyton and Wanstead): I am pleased to follow the hon. Member for Moray (Mrs. Ewing), for whom I have a great deal of respect. I say that genuinely, not just because she has some fine distilleries in her constituency to which I hope to receive an invite one day.

I start by congratulating the Government on one of the most thorough examinations of defence policy carried out by any British Government. Ministers are right to say that other Governments have been impressed by its process, analysis and, I suspect, outcome.

The outcome gives rise to my first criticism. There has not been much saving in defence expenditure. With the cold war over, we could have expected more. The consensus was achieved by keeping defence spending at roughly the same level at which it was at before the review. As Professor Paul Rogers of Bradford university's school of peace studies told the Select Committee on Defence, of which I am a member:

"Some further modest cuts are envisaged, but the bottom line is that Britain will still be a major military player on the world stage, a role which is believed to give it international clout, but at the cost of maintaining a pretty hefty defence budget at least by post-Cold War standards."

We have the largest defence budget in Europe. Defence is an insurance policy, but the British taxpayer is paying the high cost premium.

The strategic defence review was thorough, but it was not comprehensive. Some areas of defence policy were not covered thoroughly enough. An example is nuclear weapons policy. I welcome whole-heartedly the announced reduction in warheads carried on Trident, but, as the Select Committee pointed out, the United Kingdom's strategic and sub-strategic nuclear policy needs clarification. That policy remains at best unconvincing, and at worst dangerous. We are prepared to use a nuclear bomb, not just on a non-nuclear country but on a nuclear one, in order, allegedly, to prevent a nuclear exchange. That is not a reassuring policy.

My hon. Friend the Minister referred to Labour's manifesto commitment to retain Trident; but there was also a manifesto commitment, supported by 90 per cent. of the Labour party, to enter into international nuclear weapon disarmament negotiations. There is no sign of when that will be fulfilled. It is far too early to talk of the betrayal of that manifesto pledge, but Labour's policy makers should be aware that insistence upon maintaining

nuclear weapons should not be in the next election manifesto if future international nuclear weapon disarmament negotiations are to be meaningful.

Another example of relatively closed thinking is the defence of the dependent territories. Are we to go to war on their behalf as if any challenge to them were an invasion of the United Kingdom itself? Is not that unwise as an indefinite future commitment? Long ago, the United Nations passed a resolution saying that all colonial powers should relinquish control over their foreign territories by 2000. All the dependent territories should go, in accordance with the UN resolution. That does not prohibit close relationships and security agreements freely entered into, but those should not be taken for granted on our part and the principle of completely ending colonialisation should be adhered to.

Another issue not properly covered by the review is the United Kingdom's place as one of the select five on the United Nations Security Council. The obvious sensible solution is for a joint European Union seat to replace ours and that of France. Instead of being viewed as a loss of prestige, that should be grasped as more realistic, and evidence of our co-operation in Europe, and may lessen the onus on our military.

The Defence Committee, notwithstanding its members' diversity of views, carried out an intensive inquiry into the SDR, and produced a report that is both extensive and constructive. I should like to highlight a few aspects. It does not welcome nuclear weapons, including those of the United Kingdom—I regard that as significant in comparison with previous Defence Committee reports—and recognises that appropriately targeted development aid improves security, and that there should be more of it. Good overseas aid is good for our security.

The report notes that, if the dependent territories are used as havens for gangsters or for money laundering, they should risk forfeiting their security guarantee from this country. It notes that there may be a peace dividend from Northern Ireland, should the peace agreement hold, and recognises that the United Kingdom—in the distant past, I should note—has not supported the United States in every military action that it has undertaken, and that it should not be presumed that it would do so in the future.

The report takes a strong position against racism and gender inequality in the armed forces. I hear rumours that there are to be new codes of conduct on racial and sexual harassment; I would welcome that, and, if those rumours are true, I ask that they be published.

Professor Paul Rogers, whom I quoted earlier, talked to the Defence Committee of moving away from "lidism"—keeping the lid on present circumstances—to plans for a more co-operative world which would ensure sustainable economic growth based on economic justice. That would give defence a much more inclusive aid and peacekeeping role. The real decision for security today is whether to fight to keep the present international status quo or to move to a changed world which would be more just and equal, and would have effective international institutions to prevent and resolve conflict fairly.

The status quo argument is highlighted in the SDR:

> "The first requirement of our foreign and defence policy is to maintain and reinforce the present favourable security environment."

But the reality is that we do not know for how long that environment will exist. Following recent turmoil, we cannot even be sure what the world economy will look like in the first few years of the new millennium.

The millennium is a good focus. To think that we will fight over the next 100 years for the present unsatisfactory state of the world is not enticing. Unless we act to make the world a fairer place, injustice, backed by arms profiteering, will make for a future world which bristles even more with mass destruction weaponry. That will inevitably price us out of effective security. International disarmament measures are better than arms races for our security. A hefty defence budget does not automatically make a country more secure.

The SDR also considered the changed world option, however. It states:

> "The challenge is now to move from stability based on fear to stability based on the active management of these risks, seeking to prevent conflicts rather than suppress them."

That is a security policy based on foreign policy. Although the SDR was supposed to have been foreign policy led, I am not sure that that was the case. The foreign policy baseline was never published, and its terms were discussed only vaguely.

In the context of justice, however, the ethical element of our foreign policy is vital. I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary on bringing that to the fore. It must be protected, enhanced and enshrined at the forefront of our defence policy. Although I suspect that a number of powerful figures in the Government, the Department of Trade and Industry, the Ministry of Defence—even in Downing Street and the Foreign Office itself—and certainly in the arms trade, do not like the ethical dimension, have doubts about it, or are just plain cynical, it points us in the right direction to improve our future security. The ethical dimension needs to be built upon, in this country and internationally.

In many respects, the defence review is worthy, but it is certainly not the end of consideration of these issues if we are to achieve a more secure world.

7.54 pm

Mr. Gerald Howarth (Aldershot): It is a great pleasure to speak after the hon. Member for Leyton and Wanstead (Mr. Cohen). It is wonderful that old Labour is still preserved, if somewhat muted, and I have no doubt that the hon. Gentleman's speech was not cleared by the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry. Nevertheless, it was a sincere speech—let us have more of them in the House.

The Secretary of State, who has just left the Chamber, said yesterday:

> "Let me make it clear: we were building on success, not on failure."—[*Official Report*, 19 October 1998; Vol. 317, c. 970.]

Conservative Members agree entirely. He was building on a policy of 18 years of Conservative Governments who were committed to strong defence in this country and who had to manage a difficult period of change following the end of the cold war—an end which was brought about, in part, by a determined Conservative stance on defence. It is important to recognise that.

One of the features of that success was the European fighter aircraft, which has, I am delighted to say, been renamed the Typhoon. A very fetching tie has been issued to mark the renaming, and I am proud to sport it tonight.

Dr. Julian Lewis (New Forest, East): It looks lethal.

Mr. Howarth: The tie is pretty hideous, it has to be said.

[Mr. Howarth]

I shall address a number of issues. First, I thank the Defence Committee—which, we all agree, has done a splendid job—for its comments on the future of 5 Airborne Brigade and the Aldershot garrison. The Minister will not be surprised that I refer him to paragraph 248 of the report, which relates to 5 Airborne Brigade and whether the new airmobile brigade will be located in Aldershot or Colchester. It states:

"We would urge the Government to weigh very carefully the balance between military and other factors in reaching its decision on where to base the Brigade, and to make the balance of these factors explicit when announcing its decision."

Although my principal concern is for the implications for my constituency, I have also argued that the proposal to establish a new airmobile brigade based in East Anglia carries risks with it.

As currently organised, we have a highly deployable airborne capability, which is able to move at short notice and encompasses full airborne logistics support. According to the Defence Committee, the airmobile brigade's Apache attack helicopters will require a long logistics trail to support them. The Committee suggests that the first-line supporting establishment for a regiment including 16 attack helicopters is likely to consist of 220 vehicles, which would severely impair its ability to move at short notice.

The ability to move at speed provides the Government with a means to reinforce their political message to a potential enemy—the option of making a credible threat of action. That valuable benefit will be removed if rapid deployment is no longer possible.

Secondly, I, like many other hon. Members, wish to raise the issue of the Territorial Army. I had the pleasure of visiting 10 Battalion, Parachute Regiment, recently in the Aldershot constituency, and I was greatly impressed. The paras have a special appeal, not only for regulars, but for reservists. Hon. Members will not be surprised to learn that the regiment is over-subscribed—men travel to Aldershot from the far side of Essex, from Andover and from Portsmouth to take part in training.

That training provides not only fitness sessions or mortar training, but the essential link with the Regular Army. Above all, it provides men who are frequently called upon, even now, to fill gaps alongside the regulars, especially in Northern Ireland and in Bosnia, where they are deployed on S-type engagements, which are specifically designed to recruit TA personnel to fill front-line vacancies.

The TA para units are highly valued by 5 Airborne Brigade. They are the only reservists to train to the same standards as their regular colleagues. Those men made it clear to me that they fulfil an important function in today's Army, but they are concerned that in future the reserves will be limited to those with specialist skills. In times of emergency, a reserve force without infantry will not be sufficient to replace any casualties. Accordingly, the Government's policy threatens to expose the Army to a gaping hole left by the absence of infantry reserves.

As the hon. and learned Member for North-East Fife (Mr. Campbell) and others said yesterday, in many parts of the country the territorials are the only military manifestation. They provide the only contact between the civilian community and those responsible, in the final analysis, for defending our freedoms.

Thirdly, I remain deeply concerned about the Government's relentless chipping away at the special ethos of the services. Ten days ago, my wife and I had the pleasure of attending a marvellous concert given by the Cannock Chase Orpheus male voice choir in my previous constituency. It was accompanied by the central band of the Royal Air Force.

I understand that the band's membership is being reduced from 220 to 175. Regimental and service bands provide an important contribution to creating that essential ethos—an esprit de corps of pride in service and country—as well as representing the armed forces before a wider audience. How long will it be before the services have only token bands, or, dare I say, bands are replaced by jukeboxes? It is a serious matter, which has not been raised as much as it should have been in this debate.

The hon. Member for Feltham and Heston (Mr. Keen) mentioned museums. Military museums are an important link between the civil community and the armed forces, and provide a link with our history. They are vital, and I hope that the Army and other services will always find space to accommodate them.

On the question of ethos, I am delighted that the Government have announced that, from 1 November, serving personnel can walk about town in their military uniforms. Men in Aldershot have for a long time regretted losing that right. I would have mentioned the matter anyway, but the Government beat me to it.

My hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Sussex (Mr. Soames) mentioned the pursuit of politically correct policies in the armed forces. The men to whom I have spoken are not homophobic, but they are generally worried that a policy of open acceptance of homosexuality will damage service morale. Some ask me why their senior officers do not reflect their concerns. Although they have no doubt that their generals would lay down their lives for their country, they believe that they may be unwilling to imperil their pensions for their principles by speaking out.

Mr. Spellar: What a scandalous suggestion.

Mr. Howarth: Perhaps the men the Minister sees are afraid to tell him. If we cannot discuss these matters openly in the House, it is a great shame. It is one of the men's concerns, and it should be taken into account.

My final point is on the future of the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency, which is based in my constituency and which my hon. Friend the Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key) mentioned. Indeed, many hon. Members have DERA facilities in their constituencies. It is clear from this debate that there is a serious problem of morale throughout DERA, and that it arises from the Government's failure to decide about DERA's future. The Government are reducing the money for DERA year by year—I understand that this year it will be reduced by a further £56 million.

DERA feels that, if it is to keep ahead of the game, it must have the resources to enable it to invest in the future. If that money does not come from the Government, it must come from elsewhere, particularly industry. That presents DERA with a quandary. DERA at Farnborough has a relationship with the United States Government which it would not have if the United States Government felt that information would seep across to France and other parts of the continent.

We must retain DERA's central business of providing impartial advice to the Government. I urge the Government to fund it. If they privatise it, they must bring in private capital in a way that will not damage our relationship with the USA.

8.4 pm

Mr. Malcolm Savidge (Aberdeen, North): I welcome the report. It is appropriate that we should have a strategic reappraisal based on foreign policy objectives in the light of the ending of the cold war. By contrast with the shadow Secretary of State's churlish remarks yesterday, I think that it is significant that intelligent, independent and well-informed people have welcomed the review. I refer to defence correspondents, academics and most of the military establishment.

I want to concentrate on one specific aspect of the report. A chapter is devoted to it, but, as the hon. and learned Member for North-East Fife (Mr. Campbell) said yesterday, it was decided that the matter should not be subjected to as rigorous a scrutiny as others. I am talking about the subject of weapons of mass destruction, particularly nuclear weapons. Obviously, the subject cannot be looked at in isolation but must be seen in a broad context, including foreign and defence policy and the Government's manifesto objectives.

Nuclear weapons in Britain are regarded as being for deterrent purposes. Because of our agreements under the nuclear non-proliferation treaty, that specifically means the deterrence of nuclear threats. I wish to discuss some of the possible nuclear threats that this country could face. They probably fall into four broad categories: first, global or large-scale nuclear war; secondly, a direct attack on us by another country; thirdly, nuclear terrorism; and, fourthly, our suffering from fallout from a nuclear conflict in which we were not directly involved. I shall discuss each of those threats in terms of the level of risk, the relevance of a deterrent and how we might reduce the risk. I shall take them in reverse order, recognising in all humility that many wars have been unpredicted and unpredictable.

First, let us look at the possibility of our being a third-party sufferer from a nuclear conflict in which we were not involved. Obviously, that risk becomes much greater if nuclear proliferation continues. We must seek to reduce that risk. It is particularly important to reduce the proliferation of fissile materials and of delivery systems. That may become increasingly difficult if the line between civil and military uses becomes blurred with, for example, the spreading of the civil nuclear industry and satellite rocket technology.

The sort of threat that we could face ranges from radiation and fallout to severe, large-scale climate change. Clearly, a nuclear deterrent can provide no protection from such a threat. Our best protection must be to seek to halt proliferation and, as a nuclear power, to play our part in that by participating seriously in multilateral nuclear disarmament negotiations.

On the threat of nuclear terrorism, I remember more than a decade ago, during a general election, seeing Margaret Thatcher interviewed by Robin Day. She said that even if every other country gave up nuclear weapons, we would need to keep them in case a terrorist organisation got hold of them. We could then use our nuclear weapons as a deterrent. Her argument made no sense to me at the time, and it has made no sense to me since. The whole nature of terrorist organisations is that they do not have a sufficiently defined geographical location to enable us to use a nuclear deterrent to threaten some form of retaliation. The only way to reduce the terrible threat of nuclear terrorism is to try to control both the spread of fissile materials and delivery systems.

The third threat I mentioned was the threat of a direct national attack. That threat has changed massively in the past 50 years. With the growth of the European Union, it is inconceivable that we could be involved in direct conflict with any of our immediate European neighbours. Given our withdrawal from empire, the danger of direct conflict between Britain and other countries not involving our allies has been reduced.

It may be thought that the most likely reason for a country to attack us would be our perceived closeness to the United States—as a surrogate way of attacking that country. I suspect that the greatest deterrent to a country seeking to do that would be our membership of NATO and the likelihood that the United States would become involved either with its conventional or with its nuclear forces. However, this is the circumstance in which a nuclear deterrent could be relevant.

It would be difficult to sustain the view that our present levels or the proposed reduced levels provide a minimum credible deterrent relative to the likely strengths of most of the countries we are talking about, or to the possible level of damage that could be caused. Our best chances of reducing that threat must be to stop proliferation, and to ensure that a multilateral nuclear disarmament process takes place.

The final threat to which I referred was the possibility of global nuclear war. I am sure that we would all agree that that threat has greatly reduced since the ending of the cold war and the halting of the nuclear arms race, which was largely as a result of the initiatives of Mikhail Gorbachev—*[Interruption.]*—as was recognised by the award to him of the Nobel peace prize and by intelligent members of the Conservative party. Unfortunately, that process seems to have lost impetus since Mr. Gorbachev fell from power. We cannot afford to be complacent.

If there were to be another arms race, the threat of global war could increase. Whether British nuclear weapons would significantly add to the deterrence against that threat is questionable. What is certain is that if the time comes when we get back into an arms race between super-powers or between groups of countries, the prospects for the survival of human civilisation could be gravely endangered. As we approach the new millennium, I contend that the greatest threat to the survival of our species for another full millennium is the use of weapons of mass destruction. For that very reason, our supreme moral imperative must be to try to reduce that threat.

The Prime Minister has recently spoken about a third way to solve problems. I suggest that there is a third way to deal with this particular problem, apart from the sterile talk about unilateralism and multilateralism. It is not a new third way: it was propounded by Mr. Gorbachev five years ago. We could take unilateral initiatives to achieve multilateral disarmament. This report provides a basis for doing that.

I am running out of time, so I shall not quote again the statement of the Secretary General of the United Nations that the Secretary of State quoted when he introduced the

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debate. The Secretary General thought that the cuts in nuclear weapons that we were making contributed significantly to the fulfilment of the nuclear non-proliferation treaty. We should take that path, and through a new initiative we should try to involve the smaller countries—India, Pakistan, Israel and others—and the larger countries, although that may be difficult given the present reactionary nature of Congress and the Duma. I am optimistic, because just last week the Russian Deputy Prime Minister said that he believed that, to solve its economic problems, Russia would have to endorse START 2 and START 3. As he is part of the communist group that has blocked such a move, his remarks are hopeful.

There may be a window of opportunity that will enable Britain to take a lead. Such an approach, together with test bans, verification, attempts to halt proliferation, the spread of nuclear weapon-free zones and the strengthening of the United Nations, will provide a basis for preventing wars and the causes of wars. The imagination that we used to bring peace to Northern Ireland could be used to try to bring peace to the world. As that amounts to nothing less than trying to ensure the survival of our species, there can be no greater cause to which to commit ourselves as we enter the new millennium.

8.14 pm

Mr. Martin Bell (Tatton): I shall be extremely brief. I have made it my business to stay close to the military, especially the other ranks from which I came a long time ago. I have seen our armed services, especially the British Army, in action these past years in some dangerous places—war zones and elsewhere. I know that they are second to none, just as I am second to none in my admiration for them. I know the risks and the realities, and I know the insecurity that they have felt through successive defence reviews. I very much hope that we can resolve that this will be the last defence review in this Parliament and the next, because our serving men and women are due a period of stability in which to practise their dangerous craft.

This review is wide ranging and well thought out, and I welcome it. A few matters trouble me. I am troubled by the extent of the cuts in the Territorial Army. I am troubled by the effect on certain regions, including the north-west. I am troubled by the numbers. We were given a figure of 40,000, but that includes the 3,500 members of the Officers Training Corps, who are not deployable abroad.

Something else troubles me, too. Over 18 months, the finest minds in the Ministry of Defence—both civilian and military—have been concentrating on this review. I am beginning to think that something may have been slightly disregarded that is more important than any procurement programme, weapons system or order of battle, and that is the duty of care.

Where is the duty of care if the Association of RAF Wives, which helps to bind the RAF together, is wrapped up? Where is the duty of care in the high profile court martial cases, in which officers are held to a moral code that is more appropriate to the priesthood than to an officer corps? Where is the duty of care if a brave soldier commanding an Army Air Corps unit returns to an airfield in this country and is arrested by the RAF police in the most humiliating circumstances? Above all, where is the duty of care in a case now before the Ministry of Defence police—the Minister will know about it—in which a brave major in the Parachute regiment was arrested by that police service more than a year ago but has not been charged, while his career lies in ruins?

We are not living in a Kafkaesque totalitarian state: we are living in a free democracy. When I heard the Minister pay his compliments to the Ministry of Defence police, I wished that he would summon the chief constable and make him answerable for the actions and unjust procedures of his force.

As I understand it, senior soldiers have lately being going round the military academies outlining the doctrine of soldiers first. That is fine, and we applaud it, but let them practise what they preach. Let them and Ministers pay absolute attention to their duty of care and their obligation to the men and women who keep us free.

8.17 pm

Mr. John Smith (Vale of Glamorgan): It is an honour to be called after the hon. Member for Tatton (Mr. Bell), who speaks with great authority. I remember his memorable statement that we have the best little army in the world. I agree with that statement, and I would extend it slightly and say that we also have the best little air force and the best navy in the world.

I am perhaps one of the few hon. Members who owe a great personal debt of gratitude to our armed forces. I am one of the many thousands of young people who benefited at an early age from the opportunity of joining our fine services, and who were able to build a future. We were able to gain discipline, self-respect and self-confidence, which is hard for many young men and women to achieve. We should recognise more often that vital role that our armed services play.

It is also a pleasure to speak, albeit briefly, on the strategic defence review. It is a tribute to the defence team, and to the review itself, that the speeches have been curtailed: the fact that so many hon. Members on both sides of the House have wanted to participate must constitute a record in itself.

The Government should be congratulated on the review, which I consider to be one of the few genuine defence reviews that we have had since the war. I do not doubt that Ministers have wanted to conduct strategic defence reviews, but the fact is that, by and large, they have failed, and many of their good intentions have resulted in the worst possible outcomes. This, however, has been a genuine review: it has been bipartisan from day one.

I remind the House that Opposition Members—members of all parties, indeed—were invited to take part in genuine consultation last year. That consultation included not only all Members of Parliament but members of the armed forces, members of the public, trade unions and industrialists, on an open and transparent basis. That, I think, provided the review with a firm foundation.

That, incidentally, is why I think that there has been so much unnecessary hoo-hah about the absence of a foreign policy baseline. All hon. Members are fully aware of the policy baseline on which the review has been conducted.

That is largely because it was set up by the Secretary of State last September, but it is also because, if truth be known, we all agree on the fundamentals of that baseline. They are our commitment to defend this country; our commitment to defend our dependent territories; our commitment to NATO; and our commitment to our leading role internationally. We do indeed have the best forces in the world, and that allows us to have a role in the world that is perhaps greater than the role to which we would otherwise be entitled. That, surely, is a valuable asset, to which we should cling. We have other commitments: our commitment to the United Nations and our role in it, our membership of the Security Council and our commitment to a minimum nuclear deterrent.

I do not think that many hon. Members would disagree with what I have said. What we have is a genuine review, based on consensus and bipartisan in nature, which sets out to reconfigure the country's forces to enable it to meet its defence commitments.

It is a mistake to think that the present Government inherited circumstances in which we merely required a review. We did not merely require a review; we had to inherit the mess created by earlier Governments—the gaps in our forces that created the overstretch and lack of morale in our forces. During that period, there were real cuts of 30 per cent. The proportion of gross domestic product spent on defence was cut from 5.3 per cent. to 2.8 per cent., and there was a manpower cut from nearly 750,000 to 400,000. Gaps were created in our ability to meet our defence commitments in the world, which put unacceptable pressure on our brave service men and women.

Hon. Members have mentioned the virtual collapse of the medical support services, the absence of an acceptable ability for heavy lift to reach the front line, shortages in second-line logistics and support, and gaps of 5,000 in service establishments in the Army—gaps that were unacceptable and which put pressure on our service men and women. The strategic defence review has addressed those issues, and addressed them clearly.

I considered yesterday's speech by the hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Mr. Maples) completely unacceptable. Unlike most Opposition speakers, he, in his desperation, uttered not a word of support for, or in recognition of, the value of the review to our service men and women and to the country. The review has, however, received the unanimous support of the Defence Council, private and public support from the Chiefs of Staff, widespread support from the public and—perhaps most important—support from the international community. I have the honour of representing the House on the NATO parliamentary assembly. I assure hon. Members that colleagues throughout the other NATO states have given due respect and recognition to the review, and have asked us how we managed to achieve what we did.

We have heard about the statements that have come from one end of the world: Russia. When an all-party delegation from the British-American parliamentary group visited the Pentagon recently, everyone asked how the British had managed to produce such a welcome document as the review. It was something that they had failed to do. I think that we should recognise that achievement. I do not think that Opposition Members should be so churlish; I think that they, too, should recognise the value of the review.

The review has been particularly valuable for the people of Wales. Confirmation of the Eurofighter project did not come from the previous Government, or, indeed, from the current Opposition. They were very slow in accepting that confirmation. The news will be welcome in Wales—especially at RAF St. Athan, which provides one of the most professional and expert on-site support services, and off-site aircraft engineering services, not just in this country but in the world. I consider that a real asset.

I welcome the announcement by my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State—at column 727 of the *Official Report* for 31 July 1998—about the future of the Defence Aviation Repair Agency as it relates to RAF St. Athan. Not only are the 4,000 military and civilian jobs on the camp secure for the future; the creation of DARA may well mean an expansion of activity in the area. That is good news not just for the military and for my constituency, but for the whole economy of south Wales.

My hon. Friend the Member for Barrow and Furness (Mr. Hutton) spoke of the value of the defence diversification agency, and the role that it could play, in partnership with private industry, in developing regional economies and a synergy between the private and public sectors. That already takes place at RAF St. Athan. It is a critical asset to the south Wales economy, which already enjoys the synergy provided by the British Airways maintenance plant at Cardiff international airport, the GEC engine plant and the avionics industry. In fact, it plays a critical role in the economy of south Wales.

The review is welcome, and hon. Members should appreciate it. As a Member—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael J. Martin): Order. The hon. Gentleman's time is up.

8.27 pm

Mr. Andrew Robathan (Blaby): I agreed with what the hon. Member for Vale of Glamorgan (Mr. Smith) said at the beginning of his speech about the value of service in the armed forces. As for the rest, I must tell the House that I served under both Labour and Conservative Governments when I was in the Army, and, for all sorts of reasons, much preferred serving under a Conservative Government.

Julius Caesar wrote: "A soldier is not as other men, and when he thinks he is, he ceases to be their guardian." Not many people read Julius Caesar nowadays, and, regrettably, not many even know who he was. Sadly, not many people understand what he was talking about. Fifty-three years after the end of the second world war, it is obvious that there is a lack of experience and understanding of the armed forces.

The most worrying fact is that too many people, including some hon. Members, have forgotten the purpose of the armed forces: they are here for our defence. The first duty of government has always been the defence of the realm, and I submit that it remains so. As my hon. Friend the Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Mr. Maples) said yesterday, that includes our vital interests elsewhere.

Twice this century, in the lifetime of one Member of Parliament, and of my own father, who I am glad to say is still alive, this country has been grievously threatened. How are we treating our guardians? In every defence debate, Ministers praise the calibre of our soldiers, sailors and airmen. The Minister for the Armed Forces has just

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done so. I agree: I personally believe that they are indeed the best, or among the best, in the world. That usually gets a "Hear, hear". [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."]

Why is new Labour so keen on undermining what it says is so good? This debate gives us the opportunity to review a wide range of defence issues. I could have talked about the very real threats to this country, which are dismissed in the SDR; about the totally incredible aircraft carriers that are so crucial to future naval policy; about when our soldiers are to be brought home from Bosnia; or about the pressure from the Treasury on budgets.

Instead, I shall concentrate on the most important element of our defence. In its recent report on the review, the Select Committee said:

"The quality of the people is perhaps *the* defining characteristic of the UK's armed forces."

The armed forces continue to attract people of very high calibre at all ranks, and parents continue to believe, as do their children, that service in the armed forces is an honourable profession.

The old-fashioned ethos of service is admired throughout the country. It is built on patriotism, common endeavour, shared experience and camaraderie, and it is often inexplicable to those who have not experienced it. If this country wants its guardians to be effective, it should not try to destroy what works so well.

I am not saying that the armed forces will not or should not change: they have evolved over centuries and will continue so to do. Technological changes are one reason why evolution has been essential. The cavalry now fit remarkably well into tanks and, as air cavalry, into helicopters.

As society has changed, the armed forces must inevitably change, because the personnel do not live in a vacuum but are a part of society; but that does not mean that they should slavishly reflect society, as that is not their purpose and I doubt whether there are many people who would want their soldiers to reflect some of the worst attributes of modern life. People want soldiers, sailors and airmen to defend them.

It is my very real fear that the Government's determination that the armed forces should "reflect society" and "modernise" will undermine our services and destroy their efficiency. The outstanding qualities of what are possibly the best armed forces in the world may be sacrificed on the altar of political correctness.

The armed forces are accused of being elitist. That should not be an accusation but a source of pride, and I believe that it is true in many ways. I was proud to be part of two elite regiments. I am delighted if regiments, fast jet pilots, the Royal Marines and the Navy are considered elites. Sadly, it appears that there is something wrong with being an elite in new Labour Britain. Anything that is elite must be brought down to the lowest common denominator, until perhaps our armed forces will resemble nothing so much as a particularly unpleasant bunch of football hooligans.

Mr. Bob Russell (Colchester): Who wrote this speech?

Mr. Robathan: We will have a chance to hear the hon. Gentleman's pearls of wisdom later. If they are up to his normal standard, I do not expect that many of us will stay awake.

The armed forces are accused of being a bastion of privilege. I spent 15 years in the armed forces, and I can assure hon. Members that it was not a privilege to be paid as I was. Last year, the Secretary of State attacked the fact that there was a disproportionate number of public school officers in the Army. That may be true; I have no idea, because I have not counted them. The Under-Secretary of State, or perhaps the Prime Minister, could have been such a public school officer. I suspect, too, that there may be a disproportionate number of Oxbridge officers in the armed forces: again, the Under-Secretary of State, or the Prime Minister, could have been such officers.

It should not be a matter of shame that people of quality, in open competition, join the armed forces. There is a wide variety of all types of people at all ranks in the armed forces, and there always has been. We want quality, and currently we get it. If we discriminate, as the Secretary of State suggested, against public school education, it will reveal more about envy and the nature of new Labour than about anything else. I believe that H. Jones was an Etonian. Would he have been awarded the Victoria Cross by this Government for dying in battle? I have no idea.

Mr. Mike Gapes (Ilford, South): Oh, come on.

Mr. Robathan: It was the Secretary of State, not I, who raised the question.

Mr. Hilton Dawson (Lancaster and Wyre): Disgraceful.

Mr. Robathan: Perhaps, when he gets the chance to speak, the hon. Gentleman will illuminate me about what was disgraceful about that.

There are excellent service men and women, and indeed senior officers, of all backgrounds, and we recruit throughout society, but the armed forces demand certain standards. Those standards, which have been praised to the rooftops today, include not only education but old-fashioned values that are perhaps more evident in some schools than in others—not solely public schools, I hasten to add.

The Minister for the Armed Forces spoke about the employment of women in the armed forces, and the question exercises many Labour Members. I would have thought that it was self-evident that women are physiologically different from men, and usually less strong. That is not in any way damning, but it is true. I am glad to say that women are generally temperamentally different from men, and less aggressive, but in some parts of the armed forces physical strength and aggression are of the utmost importance, and it is ludicrous to deny it.

I welcome women in many parts of the armed forces. In the second world war, and all other recent wars, women have filled many roles extremely well and have been of the utmost importance in the war effort, but I and many others do not want women to be in fighting units with bayonets fixed. Killing and being killed—that is why one fixes a bayonet—is, I consider, an unsuitable role for women.

The Government have opened up the artillery to women. Anyone who has ever carried artillery ammunition will know what a grave error that may prove

to be. A few years ago, a warrant officer in charge of a workshop in Bosnia said that he was happy to have women in his team, but that, unfortunately, whenever it came to taking a power pack—an engine—out of a Warrior, the men had to do it because the women were simply not strong enough. I similarly recall a naval officer saying that women were very good at reading radar but that when it came to realistic exercises and dragging injured comrades out of damaged areas they were generally simply not strong enough.

A female Tornado pilot has recently gone on maternity leave. I am absolutely delighted for her and her husband, and I am sure that she is an excellent pilot, but perhaps the Minister can explain what happens if we go to war—which is what we have Tornados for—and several pilots are on maternity leave? Other leave gets cancelled, but the imminent arrival of a baby is not quite the same.

Much of the politically correct assault on the ethos of the armed forces is motivated by dislike of the old-fashioned, traditional nature of the services and is not welcomed by armed forces personnel. Those old-fashioned values are admired by people in other countries and are partly responsible for the effectiveness of our armed forces.

The Government talk of modern forces for the modern world, and nobody wants antiquated forces—do we have them in Bosnia; did we have them in the Falklands?—but modernisation is desirable only where it is necessary. Many of the personnel policies may harm—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman must resume his seat.

8.38 pm

Mr. Hilton Dawson (Lancaster and Wyre): It is a real pleasure to take part in this debate, which has been interesting and important. I say with real sadness that I am sorry to follow the hon. Member for Blaby (Mr. Robathan), who did his best to give us a caricature of the armed forces that could only play into the hands of those who are opposed to them. He used this precious opportunity to debate one of the most important aspects of the Government's and the country's policy to parade a host of simple prejudices. Having said that, I think that the contributions from hon. Members from both sides of the House have been excellent, thoughtful and knowledgeable. The House clearly contains hon. Members with tremendous direct experience of the armed forces as well as those with long experience of Committees that have made important decisions on the armed forces.

I have to confess that I have never had any desire whatever to join the armed forces or any uniformed organisation. I do not believe that that is a matter for shame: it is perfectly acceptable. I am aware that I, in common with many other people, am a member of the first generation this century which has not had to fight in France. I am grateful to the women and the men of our armed forces who have kept me safe, and I assure the House that I have an extreme personal interest in maintaining that situation.

I welcome the strategic defence review. It is an excellent document which seems to line defence policy up, albeit implicitly, with foreign policy, and to make some important points about the future and set a clear direction. I am also prompted to say that by the views of constituents, many of whom have great experience of the armed forces, including serving personnel. Many of those people, I would guess, are not inveterate Labour supporters, but they have told me in recent weeks that they regard the SDR as a serious piece of work that sets out a coherent vision for the armed forces of the future. I might say that they did not feel the same about other reviews in recent years. The review reflects a world situation that differs in many ways from that of the recent past, and is perhaps now more threatening. The changed world situation will require a new approach.

My particular constituency interest is in the TA, which will need to develop new and special skills; to be highly responsive and extremely flexible; to integrate further with the Regular Army; to go into action at short notice; and to develop a capacity for joint operations. I am sure that the TA can do all that. Conservative Members have expressed qualms about the TA being set challenging efficiency targets, but they seem fine to me. All public services should be set challenging efficiency targets and be able to justify what they do.

Yesterday, Conservative Members expressed qualms about selective compulsory call-up. I welcome that, because it is important if we are to involve properly skilled people in the TA who are ready at the drop of a hat to serve in difficult situations. Business should support that and be willing to allow staff to serve, because the partnership with the TA gives much back to business. We have also heard qualms expressed about equal opportunities, but I profoundly believe that all people should have the opportunity to serve their country to the best of their ability.

I am hopelessly biased in favour of Lancaster, but I believe that what happens to the TA in Lancaster has important implications for defence policy. However, the fact that I think that Lancaster is the finest city in the land does not mean that I am so arrogant as to think that other areas do not have important links with the TA. In Lancaster, we have the headquarters of the 4th Battalion, King's Own Royal Border Regiment and a detachment of 208 Field Hospital. I do not want to get bogged down in history, because this debate is about the future, but it is important to say that the King's Own was formed in 1680 and has a proud and distinguished record. The regimental museum is in Lancaster and the people there have family traditions connected with the regiment. Commitments to the armed forces in Lancaster have been carried down through generations. The King's Own, the TA and the armed forces are respected and have a valued place in the city of Lancaster. That commitment is felt by business, by local authorities and by me.

I am disturbed by the prospect that UK Land Command may move to Scotland. Although it is based in York, which causes us problems in Lancaster, it has significance for the north of England. Indeed, I remind hon. Members that 39 per cent. of the armed forces are recruited from that area. We have an excellent recruiting ground in Lancaster. The King's Own has 175 part-time soldiers, but it is also good at recruiting to the Regular Army, especially to Signals and Engineers. The King's Own has excellent links with the Regular Army and 10 soldiers recently served with distinction in Bosnia as part of a peace support operation. Several more are now serving as regulars and I am proud that people from the city that I am privileged to represent have played an important role in peacekeeping in the dreadful situation in Bosnia.

[Mr. Hilton Dawson]

As I have said, we also have a detachment of 208 Field Hospital and we have heard that the Government are keen on more resources for Army medical facilities. We have modern facilities, an up-to-date barracks and an excellent Army cadet force, which trains and supports young people interested in a career in the Regular Army. We also have good links with the university Officer Training Corps. I would be perturbed if Lancaster did not have a big part to play in supporting the future defence objectives of the TA, because the community understands the role that it performs.

Lancaster is at the heart of the north-west region and we have excellent communication links. We work well together with other companies and the detachment of the King's Own in Cumbria. I do not make a plea for no change, because I am convinced that the exceptional people in Lancaster and in the armed forces will face up to change and deal well with whatever it brings. The armed forces based in Lancaster that I have mentioned have a positive role to play in the Army in the north-west and in the highly skilled, responsive Territorial Army of the future.

8.47 pm

Mr. Bob Russell (Colchester): The garrison in my constituency is one of the largest in Britain. The service personnel, their families and civilian employees total nearly 10,000 people. I therefore welcome the Government's commitment in the strategic defence review—and, in fairness, the commitment of the previous Government—to maintaining the importance of the Army in Colchester. I especially welcome the earlier decision to build three new barracks. While I remain opposed in principle to the use of the private finance initiative in funding the defence of the realm, I appreciate the capital development of several hundred million pounds in the coming years. I hope that the Minister can tell us tonight when he expects to make a further announcement about the new development at Colchester garrison, but an acknowledgement that it will proceed will suffice.

We have heard a great deal about the future of the Territorial Army. I urge the Government to think again on their TA proposals for the reasons that have been given on both sides of the House. In particular, will the Minister guarantee that the Colchester TA centre—a purpose-built complex within the garrison estate—will not be closed as part of TA restructuring?

When he considers the ramifications of the strategic review, and to provide a genuine value-for-money review, will the Minister reconsider the previous Government's proposal to transfer the internationally famous Defence Clothing and Textiles Agency from its established research and development premises in Colchester to a remote place in Oxfordshire? Does the Ministry of Defence consult other Departments before it makes decisions? Do the pronouncements of the Deputy Prime Minister about developing recycled land and buildings rather than green-field sites apply to MOD property?

The future of the cadets seems to be non-existent in the strategic defence review. I should welcome a statement on that from the Minister.

Mr. John M. Taylor (Solihull): It is humbug for the Government to say that they are sustaining the cadets while admitting that they are cutting the Territorial Army. In TA depots such as the one in Haslucks Green road in my constituency, the cadets are absolutely dependent on the TA for a place in which to parade and in which there is a secure armoury, a miniature range and transportation. If the TA centre goes, the cadets will have nowhere to meet.

Mr. Russell: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his intervention. The same point has been made by speakers on both sides of the House. TA and cadet premises are often one and the same, although that is not quite so in Colchester where there are three separate units for army, air and sea cadets. If the Government are committed to the future of the cadet forces, why have they cut the cadet budget, and how does that square with the wishes of the Home Secretary to tackle juvenile crime and of the Secretary of State for Education and Employment to see young people pursuing constructive activities?

The Minister will know that Colchester is home to 24 Airmobile brigade. The strategic defence review envisages a new and exciting role for that brigade and for the Parachute Regiment. Can the Minister assure us that operational reasons alone will determine whether the Paras move to Colchester? He should not be deflected by behind-the-scenes manoeuvres from those who, for supposedly sentimental reasons, want the Paras to remain at Aldershot.

8.51 pm

Mr. Mike Gapes (Ilford, South): I want to make two constituency points and one more general point. However, let me first welcome the strategic defence review, which is the culmination of a long process. I worked at Labour party headquarters during the 1980s on defence, disarmament and international policy. I am pleased to say that I was secretary of the policy review group when Labour changed its policy in 1989. Throughout the 1980s, we called for a defence diversification agency and it is good to have a Government committed to introducing something along those lines. We had a long-standing commitment to a comprehensive defence review that would be driven by foreign policy, but that would take account of the needs and capabilities required for effective security for our country. I am proud that a Labour Government are doing that, too. A look at the needs of the UK and of our allies in the modern world after the cold war was long overdue. We have greater commitments now to humanitarian work, to the United Nations and to a role in peacekeeping or even, if necessary, peace enforcement throughout the world. The review is very welcome.

It is clear from the debate that there is a continuing commitment to the Bowman programme for future radio communications for the British Army. I am disappointed by the decision to award that contract to the Racal Thomson consortium rather than to the British Aerospace consortium, in which I declare a constituency interest. If the Archer programme goes ahead, I hope that the Army can have the investment and communications system that it needs for the future. The former First Sea Lord was quoted in the *Financial Times* of 7 October warning of the potential dangers of the United States getting so far ahead with digitisation that its European NATO allies would be unable to compete technologically. I hope that the decision to place the Bowman local area system with

a French company will not mean that the UK does not receive full technology transfer. Britain must be at the forefront of the new technologies that will be essential to the future security of our country and of our European allies.

On my second constituency-related point, I was pleased to hear the Minister of State offer firm support for the cadet movement. There is a Territorial Army in Gordon Fields in the middle of my constituency. The hon. Member for Blaby (Mr. Robathan) is not here, but he will, I hope, read my remarks. Many black and Asian young men and women attend the cadets and take part in their activities. They are involved in the TA. I hope that those black and Asian men and women will feel able to go into our armed forces, and that some will achieve senior positions, including positions of command. The misogynists on the Conservative Benches may not like that, but the future requires armed forces that reflect our society.

Mr. Gray: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Gapes: No, I do not have time.

The review rightly says a lot about NATO and arms control. It includes a commitment that would not have come from the previous Government about the global importance of nuclear-free zones, along with a helpful map. It also gives helpful negative security assurances. The review mentions the importance of the work in Kosovo of the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe. Clearly, we must make an important distinction between hard security based on NATO and softer security organisations such as OSCE. NATO should not become like OSCE. We need a firm, hard defence and security organisation in Europe, and that is why NATO must continue without becoming some weaker, generalist organisation on the OSCE model.

I am disappointed that the review and the accompanying essays contain not much discussion about the Western European Union and the European security and defence identity. Those issues are relevant for the future because in 1999 NATO will be developing a new strategic concept. We shall have to consider them. It may be that it was felt that such discussion lies in the future because there are still discussions among the allies. I am prepared to accept that, but the issues will not go away.

There is a move from some European Union countries to change the EU into a defence organisation. That would be a profound mistake. We must ensure that NATO remains the firm defence organisation, that the European Union deals with non-military aspects of security, and that the Western European Union acts as a bridge to take on the Petersberg tasks, such as peacekeeping, in the European context. It is dangerous to weaken our firm security foundations in the interests of allowing enlargement to anyone who wishes to join. I know that my Front-Bench colleagues agree, but it is not spelled out in the document. I am sure that it will be in future.

Paragraph 13 in supporting essay 6 refers to coalitions of the willing. Until we have a stronger United Nations—something that is very necessary—we shall always be dependent on ad hoc coalitions within NATO, the WEU or another mechanism. That is not entirely satisfactory because it leaves us open to the difficulties that we had in the Balkans.

We need to think long term—20, 30 or 40 years ahead—and build a strong international security architecture. That means a stronger United Nations, and giving the commitment and resources to achieve it, otherwise we shall always be too late and too slow; it will be politically difficult to do what is necessary. Until then, it is essential to continue our commitment to work with our allies in NATO, the WEU, the EU and elsewhere.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): Order. It will not have escaped the attention of hon. Members that, if speeches were nearer five minutes than 10, more satisfaction could be afforded than would otherwise be the case.

9 pm

Mr. Jonathan Sayeed (Mid-Bedfordshire): I shall not seek to follow the hon. Member for Ilford, South (Mr. Gapes), except to say that I agree with many of his later remarks.

In their manifesto, the Government promised to undertake a foreign-policy-led review to reassess our security and defence needs. Like so many of their pre-election promises, I regret that this one appears not to have been kept. The failure to publish the foreign policy baselines means that it is impossible for the House to assess whether the Government are seeking to match our military capability to our foreign policy commitments or are being dictated to by the Treasury.

I do not believe that this can honestly be called a review. In a review, one determines whether too much or too little money is being spent and takes appropriate action. Again, the Government have misused the English language. Instead of reviewing defence expenditure, they made it clear at the outset that, at best, defence expenditure would not increase. The acronym SDR is a misnomer. I prefer my own: LEMON, or less money on the Navy. While not a penny piece has been allocated to the two new aircraft carriers, the cuts to escorts and mine counter-measure vessels are real.

I congratulate the Government on one thing: the brilliant smoke-and-mirrors exercise of their original presentation. When I visited the royal naval air station at Yeovilton on 18 July, I met several serving officers with whom I had joined the Navy many years ago. They were delighted with the SDR. They had been promised two large aircraft carriers. I must admit that I felt a little churlish for deflating their somewhat naive expectations. I pointed out that the in-service date was 2012 and that no money had been put aside in the MOD's long-term costings. I prophesied—I hope that I am proved wrong—that, under a Labour Government, we should be lucky if even one large carrier was built. If those officers had known, as we know now, that the Government were considering extending the life of the three small Invincible class carriers by putting them out to tender for extension-of-life refits to 2022, the Labour Government's potential for duplicity would have been clear to all.

It is clear from the SDR that frigate and destroyer numbers will be reduced by nearly 10 per cent. I believe that the previous Government's cuts went far too far, and I said so at the time.

[Mr. Jonathan Sayeed]

If one allows for the time spent in refits—although that has been reduced in latter years—the time spent on docking and essential defects, self-maintenance periods and the time spent on passage and other commitments, there will not be enough escorts to protect two aircraft carriers concurrently operating in different oceans. Yet that is one of the promises in the SDR. The Government should do what the previous Government would not do. Rather than paying ships off, they should put them into reserve and get industry to design command and control, propulsion and defence systems that are modular in nature so that the hulls can be recommissioned and the modern systems put into those hulls at short notice if a crisis looms.

The review heralds a change from open ocean warfare to near-coast or littoral operations. The SDR states that shallow water operations in United Kingdom waters are of declining importance. While I accept that there will be more near-coast operations, to neglect UK shallow water operations is a mistake.

The old Soviet Union—most people do not seem to know this—sold tens of thousands of ground and buoyed mines to nations run by dictators whose views are inimical to ours. Those mines are easily deployed by fishing or merchant vessels, by submarine or even by air. All the likely flashpoints around the world—the Arabian gulf, the Adriatic, and the Spratley islands—and most of the strategic maritime waypoints are in water that can be easily mined.

I am surprised that the blackmail of maritime mine warfare has not been used so far, but I think that that position is unlikely to continue. So to cut the number of mine counter-measure vessels is wrong. We should be building more. The Government should reverse the previous Government's mistaken policy of frittering away the Royal Naval Reserve by using it to make up the complement of major warships. Instead, they should continue to use it in its specialised mine counter-measure role and re-equip it with small mine-hunting vessels capable of being airlifted in the largest heavy-lift aircraft to potential trouble spots that would otherwise be weeks away by sea.

Still on the SDR but at a tangent to it, may I ask the Secretary of State when he comes to read *Hansard* to consider a suggestion of mine? What do we know about Russia? We know that it is in dire need of generous financial assistance. It is in our interest to provide such assistance. We fear that terrorists may get access to Russian nuclear, chemical and biological weapons. So why does not the international community negotiate to purchase as many of Russia's weapons of mass destruction as we can and arrange for them to be destroyed, possibly on Russian soil? I recognise that considerable work has been done on the strategic arms reduction talks and other treaty discussions, but the process is slow and fails to get to the heart of the problem, which is that, in an anarchic state, which Russia is today, everything is for sale and an unpaid Russian military may decide to sell weapons to the highest bidder.

I understand your request to be brief, Mr. Deputy Speaker, so with those remarks, I conclude my speech.

9.8 pm

Mr. David Chaytor (Bury, North): I shall be brief, as I know that other hon. Members wish to speak. I wish to raise two points, but first I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and his colleagues on the report. It is remarkable how universally the broad thrust of the recommendations has been welcomed.

I endorse the comments of the hon. Member for Tatton (Mr. Bell) about the impact of changes to the Territorial Army in the north-west, especially in my constituency. In Bury, North we have C company of the 4th Battalion of the Queen's Lancashire Regiment, which consists of 100 men and women. It has strong connections with the former Lancashire Fusiliers. If the unit were to go following the SDR, it would bring to an end a 100-year link between the Lancashire Fusiliers and Bury. The Fusiliers have a distinguished reputation and fought in most of the major battles at the end of the last century and throughout this century. I would fight strongly to retain that link and the present TA unit in Bury.

I endorse the comments of other hon. Members who have drawn attention to the importance of the TA not only for the skills that it develops in the men and women who join but for the wider benefits that it brings to the local community. The TA in Bury is strongly linked to wider community activities.

There are two particular reasons for wanting to make a special case for my TA unit. Although it is only one of 55 units in the north-west, within the Queen's Lancashire Regiment area the TA unit in Bury is responsible for 25 per cent. of recruitment. Its recruitment record is outstanding. As successive hon. Members have commented, recruitment will be a continuing issue for the armed forces.

The location of the TA is crucial. The TA in Bury meets in the drill hall, which is called the castle armoury. The castle armoury is an important listed building which is over 100 years old. It also houses the area headquarters of the Air Training Corps and the Army Cadet Force. I believe that the castle armoury is unique in that it is not owned by the MOD. The argument that there are capital receipts to be obtained by closing down some TA centres does not apply in this case. It is owned by a board of trustees which is bound to manage the building on behalf of the people of Bury. If the MOD revenue funds were pulled out, it would be in dire straits.

The castle armoury is the subject of an exciting development plan that would involve moving the current Fusiliers' regimental museum from its present inadequate headquarters into the castle armoury. It is located in the centre of the town, which makes it strategically important in developing the attraction of the museum for local schools and visitors. I hope that the Minister will look carefully at the impact that the changes to the TA will have on the unit of the Queen's Lancashire Regiment in Bury.

My next point follows the comments of my hon. Friend the Member for Aberdeen, North (Mr. Savidge) about weapons of mass destruction. I welcome the fact that the SDR makes changes to the deployment of Trident. It reduces the number of warheads and brings about a new transparency in our policy towards fissile material, but there are other beneficial changes which could be made to the deployment of Trident. We have not quite adjusted to the post-cold war era. It was interesting that,

in his opening remarks, my hon. Friend the Minister justified the reduction in TA numbers by saying that we had to move away from the cold war era and that the present numbers of the TA, representing 50 per cent. of the total armed forces, were excessive. However, I am not sure that we have extended that analogy to the deployment of Trident.

Weapons of mass destruction are sensitive, and things cannot move too quickly. The Government have supported important changes including the non-proliferation treaty and the comprehensive test ban treaty, which are steps in the right direction. We desperately need a fissile material cut-off treaty and I hope that the Government will direct their attention to that in the near future.

The most important point is this: our dilemma over weapons of mass destruction is that we must view them as either an unfortunate legacy or a necessary evil. The logic of seeing them as a necessary evil is that every other nation in the European Union and, arguably, every other nation in the world, would be more secure with them. I challenge every Opposition Member to argue that the world is a safer place because India and Pakistan now have nuclear weapons. My constituents who have friends and family in Kashmir do not feel safer because of the nuclear weapons in India and Pakistan.

We have to think through the logic of the argument and accept that, if we were designing from scratch a strategic defence policy for Britain, at this point in history it is highly unlikely that we would choose Trident as the main plank of our defence because it does not match up to the defence commitments that we are likely to face. The thrust of the SDR points to the importance of rapid deployment forces in small-scale regional conflicts in different parts of the world where Trident is useless. It was of no use in the Falklands, the Gulf war or Bosnia, and it is certainly of no use in Kosovo.

I strongly congratulate the Government on the progress achieved, but I hope that they will remember the second part of the Labour manifesto commitment, which was not simply to maintain Trident but continuously to work for a world free of nuclear weapons.

9.15 pm

Mr. James Gray (North Wiltshire): How refreshing it is to follow someone like the hon. Member for Bury, North (Mr. Chaytor). At the end of his remarks we saw a glimpse of good old Labour, behind which lies a Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament history. An hon. Friend made the comment that the hon. Gentleman's local Territorial Army regiment, the QLR, is known in the Army as "the Queen's last resort" or even "Quick let's run".

There are two curious aspects to the debate. First, every Member who has spoken has given a passionate defence of his local Territorial Army regiment. One could almost argue that the two-day debate has primarily been about the Territorial Army. Each hon. Member has then said how fine is the SDR overall, ignoring the fact that it includes a reduction in the TA from 59,000 soldiers to 49,000, or 37,000 if we remove the Officer Training Corps, whose members cannot serve overseas. Those two points do not add up. One cannot preserve one's home Territorial Army regiment while saying broadly that the SDR has got it right.

The second conundrum about the debate is that almost every Labour Member has gone to great lengths to say that the defence chiefs have supported the SDR throughout. They would, wouldn't they? It would be surprising if Ministers said, "We hereby present the SDR, and the defence chiefs don't agree with us." Defence chiefs are unlikely to want to disagree with a new Labour Government. They will be nice to their bosses in ministerial offices and are unlikely to voice their criticisms in public or in private. However, I have heard one or two defence chiefs mumbling into their drink at service dinners. [HON. MEMBERS: "Into their drink?"] Into their non-alcoholic drink, of course.

I take those remarks by Labour Members with a pinch of salt. The defence chiefs who have said that they are most in favour of the SDR are those from the Regular Army. Again, they would, wouldn't they? The Regular Army has done very well under the SDR. What have the bosses of the Territorial Army had to say about it? Have they been as fulsome in their praise of the SDR? I suspect that they have not, not least because the senior Territorial Army officer in the MOD is a brigadier, who is badly outranked by all the Regular Army officers who have been arguing their case. That is the second puzzle of the SDR.

There are good parts of the SDR, and most of my hon. Friends have gone to great lengths to point out that there is much to be said in its favour. The only strange point is that most of the good parts are built solidly on the principles laid down by the previous Government. The Government are building on Conservative principles.

It may be instructive to consider one little town in my constituency that encapsulates the good and bad parts of the SDR. Forty-two per cent. of Corsham is dependent on defence and almost every aspect of defence is represented there. It is the home of 2 (Signals) Brigade, 66 per cent. of which is made up of Territorial Army soldiers. I suspect that they will probably survive under the SDR because they are specialist signallers.

Corsham is the home of the Defence Communications Services Agency, which was set up to handle communications and information technology for all three services. Jointery is one of the best points to come out of the SDR, and the DCSA is one of the best examples of that. I challenge the Government to go one step further. The DCSA is housed in 1944 underground bunkers, which are not proof against nuclear war or any other major attack. If we are to give all service communications to one organisation in Corsham—I welcome the fact that we are—the Government must finance the rebuilding which is needed urgently. Corsham is also the home of Leafield Engineering, which makes one of the components essential to the construction of the Raytheon short air-to-air missile for the Eurofighter. I challenge the Government to put their money where their mouth is and stick with the best product available at the best price available—which I understand comes from Corsham.

Corsham is odd in that it is the location of Army, Navy and RAF bases. It is probably unique in having all three services based in one small town. I think that Royal Navy Copenacre is situated further inland than any other naval base. A significant number of sites are about to be made redundant and the Army and the MOD have taken some time deciding whether to sell those sites—I am thinking particularly of RAF bases Kemble, Rudloe Manor and Spring Quarry. Those three bases are now redundant and

[Mr. James Gray]

I ask the Minister to progress those sales as quickly as possible. He might also consider the redundant hangars at RAF Hullavington. They would be an ideal site for the Chippenham livestock market, which will be looking for a new home in 2000.

I would prefer the Minister to press ahead with the sale of redundant sites such as that under the SDR rather than looking with greedy eyes at the Territorial Army halls and depots up and down the land. That real estate—some 150 bases and depots around the country—lies behind the Government's proposed cuts in the Territorial Army. It has nothing to do with tactics or the TA: it is about the Government getting their hands on those bases. That is the most damaging thing that the Government could do.

There has been constant comment throughout the debate about the uncertainty in foreign policy and how we do not know where the next threat will come from and how we shall see it off. The Government say such things on the one hand, while, on the other, they cut the only real support for the Regular Army—the Territorial Army. One of the Government's most worrying comments in the SDR is that the Territorial Army supplies only specialist services. They refer convincingly to medics, signallers, gunners and one or two drivers. The Government are correct in that many worthwhile skills are embodied in the Territorial Army, and it is right that they should praise and preserve that aspect of the TA.

However, the Territorial Army infantry is equally important. It is too easy for the Government to say that the infantry is finished, that it is yesterday's thing and belongs in the cold war era, and to see the Territorial Army only as a source of specialist services. Look at what is happening in Bosnia, where every single battalion comprises 15 or 20 Territorial Army soldiers who are serving as infantry soldiers, not as drivers or doctors. Look at what is happening in Northern Ireland, where the 1st Battalion of the Royal Gloucestershire, Berkshire and Wiltshire Regiment has just finished a tour of duty. It was supported significantly by the 2nd Battalion of the Royal Gloucestershire, Berkshire and Wiltshire Regiment based in my constituency, which comprises Territorial Army soldiers.

The 1st RGBW would not have been able to do its job in Northern Ireland with the same effectiveness and efficiency without the support of the 2nd RGBW, whose colours parade I attended recently in Windsor. If the Government do away with those colours and reduce 2nd RGBW to a company or even worse—as I believe they propose—the 1st RGBW will not be able to perform its designated tasks.

The Territorial Army is being reduced from 56,000 to 40,000—or by about 29 per cent. However, it is said on the wires and behind closed doors that the infantry will be cut from 16,000 to 7,100. That is a 55 per cent. cut—a wildly disproportionate cut—in the infantry. The truth is that, in any operation, wherever it might be, it is the poor bloody infantry that does the work. The infantry holds the ground, and it can do that only if it is supported by the Territorial Army infantry.

If the cuts proceed, large areas of the countryside will be entirely devoid of Territorial Army infantry regiments, including the whole of Gloucestershire and Wiltshire. The title of the Royal Gloucestershire, Berkshire and Wiltshire Regiment will ring a little hollow—to say the least.

In a positive spirit, I suggest to the Government a simple alternative approach to the question of the Territorial Army infantry: to have one infantry company per county, throughout the country. By putting that approach into action, the Government would increase the force of Territorial Army infantry soldiers from 7,100 to only 9,000. That could be easily done. It would cost the Government almost nothing in terms of the cuts that they propose, and it would be welcomed throughout the nation, not only because of the contribution that those soldiers make to the defence of the nation, but because, as a result, many depots throughout the country could not be cut.

I welcome so much about the excellent Select Committee report on the SDR—especially what the Committee says about the Territorial Army. I say to the Government, "If you believe in the Select Committee system, if you believe in the Select Committee on Defence, listen to what it says, especially about the Territorial Army, and think carefully about the easy solution—to have one infantry company per county."

9.24 pm

Mr. Robert Walter (North Dorset): I shall make three brief, simple constituency points. I shall be totally even-handed and start with a very positive point. The largest single employer in my constituency is the British Army at Blandford, headquarters of the Royal Corps of Signals and the Royal School of Signals. In this and previous reviews, the Signals have done rather well. Building on the previous Government's investment, there is continued expansion in Signals in both manpower and equipment.

Signals, of course, is a euphemism for information technology, which is all about the modern Army. Paragraphs 81, 148 and 149 of the report on the strategic defence review deal with what is happening in my constituency. They deal with the Bowman communication system, which was mentioned earlier in the debate, and also with training in electronic warfare, command and battlefield planning, some of which will now be part of a public-private partnership.

The largest private sector employer in my constituency is also involved in the defence industries, as an aerospace contractor. That is Cobham, sometimes known as "Flight Refuelling" or "FR Aviation", which also did well in previous reviews, rebuilding the airframe for the VC10 tankers. It is now rebuilding the airframe for the Nimrod aircraft under contract to British Aerospace, and the fuel systems that go in the Airbus in the commercial sector and will go in the Eurofighter.

However, there is some disappointment at Cobham that its aircraft, the Firefly, was not chosen as the new trainer aircraft for the RAF. The Grob from Germany was chosen—a decision which, I believe, was largely due to the high level of sterling when the deal was concluded. That is a cause for some regret.

My final point, which is the one of greatest concern to my constituents, and which will not surprise the Government, relates to the demise of the Territorial Army. The current consultative exercise, which was mentioned, and the consultative document "TA Restructuring" is all secret. None of us has seen that document. We can only surmise from what is written in the strategic defence review and what we have read in the *Sunday Telegraph*, but I understand that the 4th Battalion of the Devonshire

and Dorset Regiment, which is very much part of the local scene, is to be merged into something called the "South-West Battalion".

Mr. Soames: No. It is not possible.

Mr. Walter: Someone says that it is not possible. One wonders whether the "South-West Battalion" will be administered by the south-west regional development agency; it may well form the "guard of honour" when the south-west regional assembly is opened. However, I view the matter with concern. The five companies of the 4th Battalion Devonshire and Dorset Regiment and the affiliated combined cadet forces—12 are affiliated to that regiment, and there are six companies of the Army cadet force in 58 detachments throughout the two counties—mean that there is a very strong local presence, and a very strong local link with the Army.

I heard what the Minister for the Armed Forces said about integrating the TA with the Regular Army. The 4th Battalion of the Devons and Dorsets operates alongside the 1st Battalion, which is the regular battalion of the regiment. If we break that local link, the territorials will no longer operate alongside the regulars; they will be a separate body, with a totally meaningless local identity.

I would emphasise to the Minister that destroying the Devon and Dorset family would destroy the historic links between soldiers and their community. Some 2,200 TA members and cadets are proud to wear the cap badge of the Devons and Dorsets. It may not be particularly cool in new Labour's new Britain to serve in one's local regiment, but I must tell Ministers that in my constituency there is great pride in the fact that we have a county regiment and a strong TA battalion in our county regiment. It is a matter of great regret to me and my constituents that that link is to be broken, not only through the TA, but through the Army cadet force and combined cadet forces, between the Regular Army and the volunteers. I appeal to Ministers to retain the county regiments of the TA.

9.30 pm

Mr. Keith Simpson (Mid-Norfolk): With the leave of the House, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The second day of the debate on the strategic defence review has been extremely good. More than 25 hon. Members have spoken, and it is hardly surprising that 18 of them spoke about the Territorial Army. That sends a strong message to the Minister, whom I welcome to his new job as Minister for the Armed Forces. I pass on my best wishes to his predecessor, who did an extremely good job.

I welcome the Minister's commitment that, when the final decision is made on the future of the TA, it will be announced on the Floor of the House in the form of a statement, so that all hon. Members may comment on it. He will have got the message from all hon. Members about the importance that they attach to the TA, and I am sure that he will pass that message on to the Commander-in-Chief, Land Command, General Sir Michael Walker, and to the Director of Reserve Forces and Cadets, Brigadier Richard Holmes, who will no doubt take note of it.

My hon. Friend the Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key) spoke at length about the defence industry. I need not remind hon. Members of the crucial importance of the defence industry to our British defence effort. We must remember that the Ministry of Defence is the largest single customer of the UK defence industry. Some 400,000 of our constituents are employed in the defence industry, and their products are worth £5 billion per annum in defence exports. That means that the MOD and the Government have a powerful influence on the survival of that industry.

I shall make three points about the defence industry and the role of the Government. First, if we are eventually to follow the United States model, that will mean fewer and larger companies, with the possible consequence of job losses and factory closures. The Government must bear in mind their influence on the British defence industry.

Secondly, the SDR makes several references to greater co-operation and harmonisation in the European defence industry, but it has little to say about the close links between the UK and US defence industries. Those of us who have been involved in defence know that people engaged in the British defence industry are only too aware of the challenges and the dangers of co-operation with our European or American colleagues. Once again, the Government may have an important role in deciding the future of the British defence industry.

My third point relates not only to Ministers who are present, although the new Minister of State, having come from the Foreign Office, knows the issue only too well. There is at times muddle, inconsistency and an element of hypocrisy in the Government's so-called ethical foreign policy, especially in relation to arms exports. There is no doubt that the majority of the British defence industry has attempted to follow over many years a code of conduct, but, at present, many people in the industry are telling many hon. Members that there appears to be muddle and delay in giving export licences: sometimes, when eventually an export licence is awarded, it is too late and someone else has secured the contract. That means loss of money and loss of jobs here in Britain.

Given the reduction in the defence budget of £2.1 billion by the year 2001 and the economic recession that we may be teetering into—I suspect that there will be further Treasury raids on the defence budget, which is now basically the Government's contingency reserve—Ministers will have to explain to the defence industry how they intend managing within the 10-year long-term costing the major equipments planned. I think that the Select Committee on Defence touched on this, and many hon. Members have touched on individual aspects of the matter. We are talking of carriers, large aircraft, sealift, Tomahawk missiles, landing ships and submarines, the vast and expensive area of IT command and control.

Many hon. Members believe that, given the budget outlined by the Government over the next decade, it will be impossible to purchase all those items of equipment. We need to have some understanding of what the long-term costings will be over the next decade. I know that Ministers will say that it has never been Government policy, either under Conservatives or under previous Labour Governments, to publish the long-term costings. I think that that must change. The Government must now publish their LTCs.

Perhaps the Minister would be prepared to comment on our understanding that there is a £1 billion overspend in the air equipment budget alone, and that there are likely to be large overspends for the Army and the Navy,

[Mr. Keith Simpson]

and say how the Government square that with the sort of commitments that they have entered into. I challenge the Government to make known their long-term costings, either here in the Chamber or perhaps in evidence to the Select Committee.

My hon. Friend the Member for Salisbury and the Minister concentrated, like many other hon. Members, on what the Government refer to as a "policy for people", which has been built on work undertaken by the previous Government. That was a combination of the Bett report of 1995 and "The Armed Forces of the Future—A Personnel Strategy" of 1997. In their strategic defence review, the Government have rightly emphasised a "policy for people" and have linked the issues of recruitment and retention by emphasising education and training opportunities for service personnel, improving conditions of service and making additional welfare provision at an estimated cost of £30 million per annum.

I hope that all hon. Members would recognise that that was money well spent. However, my colleagues and I have emphasised that the strategic defence review is asking our service men and women to do more with less. There will be further overstretch, particularly in configuring armed forces for the expeditionary force role. I suspect that the £30 million and all the things that the Government are putting in to deal with overstretch will possibly meet past overstretch but will not be able to cope with future overstretch. The Government will have to do more, and probably will have to find more money to meet this need.

In the words of the House of Commons research paper on the strategic defence review on page 59,

"There is also the danger that the Government has raised expectations that quantifiable improvements will be made to Service life."

The MOD's own strategic defence review liaison team was apparently surprised a year ago by the extent of discontent in the armed forces. Morale was described as between "good and adequate", and although personnel were

"keen to get on with their work",

the liaison team found

"a more deep seated pessimism about the long term future of the defence of the United Kingdom".

In particular, it found considerable scepticism—*[Interruption.]* In particular, it found considerable scepticism—I want Ministers to listen to this instead of gobbling—about the then continuing Labour review—this is from the liaison team's own study—and

"cynicism about the message delivered from on high"

by Ministers.

The strategic defence review has been careful to state that its proposals for people are modest. But if the Government fail to deliver their modest proposals, that may lead to considerable disillusionment, and exacerbate retention problems even further.

The Opposition welcome the strategic defence review's endorsement of the Armed Forces Pay Review Body's view that there is a need for a new pay system reflecting civil society. However, in view of the Chancellor's statement on 14 July on the comprehensive spending review, when he said that the chairmen of the public review bodies will have to take into account departmental spending limits, the Government's inflation target of 2.5 per cent. and the need to achieve Government targets for output and efficiency, I suspect, to use the words of the Chief of the Defence Staff, that that will be "very challenging for Ministers", and that the pay of the armed forces will once again affect retention and recruitment.

The British armed forces are facing up to cultural and institutional changes, political and legal challenges concerning authority, the chain of command, equal opportunities, racial and sexual equality, ethics and tradition, and rightly so. The armed forces are not a mirror of society, but they must reflect many aspects of society.

The armed forces do not have a right to be different, but, given the specific job that they have to do, they have a need to be different. Others in the public service—the fire brigades, the police, the ambulance service and many voluntary organisations—at one stage or another may have to risk their lives. Only those in our armed forces have a totally open-ended commitment, literally on an order, not just to risk their lives but to take other people's lives for the protection of Britain and of society. That makes them unique.

The Opposition fully stand by the attitude of the previous Government and this Government, which is that we should ensure that, there are equal opportunities for everybody within the armed forces, and that racism and bullying will not be tolerated. As much as anything else, that is a command responsibility by all ranks in responsible positions. People who break those rules and regulations will receive no sympathy from us.

However, at times the Secretary of State has seemed to send a complex message. The case of Major Eric Joyce is still unresolved. He is a serving officer who wrote a pamphlet some 18 months ago criticising the British Army, saying that it had many things wrong with it, that it was class-ridden and full of public schoolboys. That has not stopped the Secretary of State having a good relationship with the Chief of the Defence Staff, or with the Prime Minister or with his Under-Secretary—I understand that Dulwich is a public school. There is something hypocritical there.

The Secretary of State has failed to answer the questions that I, and other hon. Members, have put about how it is possible for a serving officer to continue to serve in the British Army having made such statements, and, more recently, having participated in the selection for the Scottish Parliament as a Labour party candidate. Had he stood for any other political party, I suspect that that officer would now be out. Had he written an article criticising Eurofighter, I suspect that he would have been asked to resign. I call that double standards.

There are a number of unanswered questions which I hope the Minister will answer either this evening or, if he does not have time, in writing. First, will he publish the foreign policy baseline of the strategic defence review? Secondly, will he publish the long-term costings and confirm the in-service date for both the so-called planned carriers? Will he undertake to provide the House, especially the Defence Committee, with a comprehensive document on the defence budget and its resources? We got one page in the defence review. Will he undertake to hold single-service debates on the Royal Navy and the Army?

The previous Government provided funding, equipment and the manning for the current operations of the armed forces—Northern Ireland, Bosnia and the Gulf. Now, with the SDR published and as we begin the long and difficult task of implementation, there can be no more ministerial excuses. The public will judge Labour's defence policy by action, results and implementation, not by rhetoric or soundbites of one kind or another. I therefore urge all hon. Members to support the Opposition amendment and urge Labour Members, "Be brave, throw away your pagers, show that you have minds of your own"—I know that one or two of them have—"and come into the Lobby with us. Speak for Britain."

9.45 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. John Spellar): This has been an interesting debate. The hon. Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key) advised us that his constituency was previously represented by eight Members of Parliament, which is obviously an example of efficiency measures. I was accused by the hon. Members for Blaby (Mr. Robathan) and for Mid-Sussex (Mr. Soames) of political correctness. Colleagues will find that slightly difficult to take. It is also absolutely absurd—we are talking not about political correctness, but about good, old-fashioned British virtues of fair play and decency. In that context, the contribution of the hon. Member for Mid-Norfolk (Mr. Simpson) was welcome.

In closing what has been a good debate, I should like to address two areas of defence business which may not catch the headlines in the way that operations do, but which are none the less extremely important: the defence estate and the smart procurement initiative. Ministry of Defence land holdings in the United Kingdom currently extend to almost half a million acres. We are thus a major landowner and a major customer of the United Kingdom construction industry, to the tune of £1.7 billion a year.

Our management of the wider defence estate was considered carefully during the strategic defence review. We had to ensure that our estate is not only utilised to the maximum possible extent, but is the right size to meet our changing operational requirements. We have concluded that there should be more effective central strategic management of the estate. As a result of a thorough review of our estate holdings during the SDR, we have put in place an ambitious, but achievable, land disposal programme which will shape our estate better to reflect the new structure and priorities of the armed forces. It is also part of our contribution to brown-field development, which was mentioned by the hon. Member for Colchester (Mr. Russell).

Mr. Ian Bruce: The Minister knows from our many conversations that I am concerned, as are my constituents, that an air station that is to close and be sold off, for which we had customers, has been frozen from that sale. I am told that we will not even be able to start negotiating until March 1999. That is not acceptable. What is he going to do about it?

Mr. Spellar: As the hon. Gentleman knows, I was down in Weymouth and Portland last week. I met the local council and a number of the companies involved, and I fully understand the frustration at delays. There are genuine issues that we have to deal with in terms of alternative use; indeed, we aim to progress that as soon as possible. I will write to the hon. Gentleman as soon as we are able to make further progress.

Last week I also announced major changes in our construction programme. We are a major, £1.7 billion a year public client. As such, we must not only secure value for money for front-line defence, but play our part in reform of the construction industry following the Lathan and Egan reports. That, I have to admit, is challenging, in the best Sir Humphrey use of the word, but it is vital for our defence infrastructure and for our national economy.

Our smart procurement initiative on defence equipment was mentioned by a number of hon. Members and is, as the hon. Member for Mid-Norfolk rightly said, enormously important for our vital defence industry. The initiative is a key element of a reform programme that will lead to clear improvements in defence procurement in terms of time, cost and performance.

A full-time smart procurement implementation team has been established. The team started work in earnest in September and has made brisk progress. It is required to produce, by March 1999, a detailed implementation plan for transition activities during 1999–2000. The approach adopted by the team, which is working under the overall direction of a steering group, which I chair, will be to test the smart procurement principles and concepts in a series of pilot projects. A number of projects are now being selected as potential pilots, such as the future offensive air system, the attack helicopter and the future attack submarine.

Those pilot projects will provide a challenging test of the smart procurement principles in a live environment. They will not involve parallel running, nor will they shadow existing project activity. They will do it for real. They will draw from projects relating to all environments and range across the spectrum of our procurement activity by value, technology, their position in the procurement cycle, and the degree of industry involvement.

I accept that that is all being driven forward at great speed. Momentum has been generated and we intend to maintain it for two reasons. First, the Ministry of Defence has been set a number of performance and savings targets as part of its funding allocation and we need to ensure that the improvements promised by smart procurement are delivered as soon as possible. Secondly, the reorganisation of projects into integrated project teams creates uncertainty for staff, both civilian and military, which we are keen to resolve at the earliest opportunity. We understand that this is a time of anxiety and opportunity for our staff. Many are looking to the changes with eager anticipation to improve the job that they do for the Department. Some are concerned and will want to move, and others will want to be sure that it works. Like the Select Committee, we recognise that we will need to manage change with care to preserve staff morale and working efficiency.

Mr. Peter Bradley (The Wrekin): My hon. Friend will know of the defence sector's importance to my constituency and how welcome the Secretary of State's announcement was in April that GKN Defence was to be part of the German, French and British consortium that has won the contract for a multi-role armoured vehicle. We are also pleased to see a reference to that in the SDR. Since then, however, we have had the German elections.

[Mr. Peter Bradley]

Can my hon. Friend confirm that Ministers have discussed the issue with their German counterparts, and that the contract remains on track, the consortium remains in place and the timetable is secure?

Mr. Spellar: That issue was also mentioned by the hon. Member for Salisbury in the introduction to his speech. The position has not changed. We are continuing to discuss with France and Germany the terms of the contract with the winning consortium. We have had no indications from the Germans of an intention to freeze the programme. Not only are we continuing to work actively with them on it, but my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will go to Germany this week and discuss that matter. I give my hon. Friend those assurances.

Industry support for, and involvement in, the smart procurement initiative is vital. The creation of new partnering arrangements with industry, established through competition wherever possible, will be an important enabler for a number of the smart procurement principles. I am pleased to tell the House that new guidelines, agreed between the Ministry of Defence and the Confederation of British Industry, will shortly be issued.

Smart procurement is but one area where we are demonstrating our determination to make the very most from defence resources. Another area where we are considering ways to maximise the return on our investment is that of defence diversification, mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Ilford, South (Mr. Gapes). Our Green Paper has been generally well received and I am pleased to announce that we intend shortly to publish a White Paper on defence diversification.

I shall now deal with some of the matters raised in the debate, though regrettably not all. There was a new and welcome element, particularly in the speeches by the hon. Members for Mid–Sussex and for Salisbury. It might almost be described as "constructive opposition"—they were prepared to say where they agreed and focused on the arguments where they differed. I hope that that does not damage their careers. I say genuinely that it is a welcome development. The real consensus on defence is when we get national agreement on principles, and argue about implementation.

Hon. Members, including my hon. Friend the Member for Chorley (Mr. Hoyle) and the hon. Members for Portsmouth, South (Mr. Hancock), who has unfortunately had to leave, and for Salisbury, have, again today, asked about carriers. I dealt with most of the points yesterday in columns 1051 and 1052 of Hansard. I reaffirm what we said in paragraph 115 of the SDR, which is that

"we plan to replace our current carriers from around 2012 by two larger, more versatile carriers".

That is what we said, that is what we are going to do, and that is what the Navy wants.

Mr. John Maples (Stratford-on-Avon): I am glad to hear that commitment. If that is the case, what will the Ministry do if the feasibility studies on the existing carriers conclude that it can be done, and they can land the joint strike fighter? Will he throw that out?

Mr. Spellar: Having misread the advertisement yesterday, and having carefully omitted the word "study", the hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon should have kept quiet. We answered that question.

Yesterday, the right hon. Member for Wealden (Sir G. Johnson Smith) and the hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon referred to NATO, as did my hon. Friend the Member for Ilford, South today. In our manifesto, we said:

"Our security will continue to be based on NATO."

In the strategic defence review, we said:

"NATO will continue as the cornerstone of our defence planning".

That is why it was sad to see the outbreak of Euro-scepticism among Conservative Members. There is no sharp choice between Europe and America in today's strategic environment. They are but two sides of the same coin: both are essential to our security.

Britain is playing a key role in developing NATO's new strategic concept—the alliance's own SDR—to give it an equally clear vision into the next century. We are also playing a central role in developing an effective European security and defence identity in NATO. I stress the word "effective", because at present European rhetoric is not matched by the reality of Europe's military capability. Our priority must be to ensure that European allies can make an effective military contribution to operations, including when the Americans choose not to participate.

The Western European Union is an integral part of that approach. Progress on the practical relationships between WEU and NATO on the one hand, and WEU and the European Community on the other, are important to avoid unnecessary and damaging duplication of the work of all three organisations.

The hon. Members for Salisbury and for Tatton (Mr. Bell) referred to the Association of RAF Wives. I am pleased to tell them that the chairman and executive of that organisation met the air member for personnel earlier this month. They have agreed to produce in the next month or so a memorandum of understanding and an acceptable business plan for the association. I am sure that that is welcome, and I shall write to the two hon. Gentlemen to inform them of the outcome.

My hon. Friends the Members for Leyton and Wanstead (Mr. Cohen), for Aberdeen, North (Mr. Savidge) and for Bury, North (Mr. Chaytor) referred to nuclear disarmament. On many occasions, we have made clear our commitment to the goal of global elimination of nuclear weapons. When we are satisfied with verified progress towards that goal, we shall ensure that British nuclear weapons are included in multilateral negotiations. We are working to take forward our commitment in the light of the conclusions of the SDR.

I remind colleagues that the United Kingdom was the first nuclear weapon state to introduce legislation to implement the comprehensive test ban treaty. We also welcome the agreement made this year at the conference on disarmament to begin negotiations on a convention verifiably ending production of fissile material for use in nuclear weapons.

The hon. Member for Mid-Sussex referred to the movement of staff between the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the Ministry of Defence. I presume that, as the new permanent secretary at the MOD has come from the Foreign Office, we may be instigating that policy.

My colleagues and I are justifiably proud of the outcome of the strategic defence review. We have developed a package of measures that will provide a clear and sensible direction for the armed forces and all those who support them. That package has been welcomed on all sides: it has been praised by politicians, journalists and academics here and around the world and, most important, by the men and women whose lives are most affected. That should not surprise us. The structure that will emerge from the review will provide modern and relevant forces that will be more effective and more capable of furthering Britain's interests as a force for good in the world.

We are keenly aware that the success of our proposals depends on implementation, and we know that that is no easy task, but the rewards will be great, and we are determined to achieve them. As we have made clear in the past two days, we are making good progress.

The strategic defence review has been a remarkable success. Its implementation promises much, and will deliver it. I have pleasure in commending it to the House.

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 134, Noes 366.

Division No. 362] **[9.59 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Amess, David
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Arbuthnot, James
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Beggs, Roy
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Body, Sir Richard
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Brady, Graham
Brazier, Julian
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Burns, Simon
Butterfill, John
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clark, Rt Hon Alan *(Kensington)*
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rayleigh)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Clifton–Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Colvin, Michael
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cran, James
Curry, Rt Hon David
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham)*
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice)*
Day, Stephen
Duncan, Alan
Duncan Smith, Iain
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, Nigel
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Flight, Howard
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Fox, Dr Liam
Fraser, Christopher
Gale, Roger
Garnier, Edward
Gibb, Nick
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gray, James
Green, Damian
Greenway, John
Gummer, Rt Hon John
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archie
Hammond, Philip
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat–Amory, Rt Hon David
Horam, John
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson Smith, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lansley, Andrew
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, Oliver
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Mates, Michael
May, Mrs Theresa
Moss, Malcolm
Nicholls, Patrick
Norman, Archie
Page, Richard
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Prior, David
Randall, John
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Faversham)*
Ruffley, David
St Aubyn, Nick
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Simpson, Keith *(Mid–Norfolk)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spring, Richard
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Swayne, Desmond
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher & Walton)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Thompson, William
Townend, John
Trend, Michael
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Walter, Robert
Whitney, Sir Raymond
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Wilkinson, John
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Woodward, Shaun
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Sir David Madel and
Mrs. Caroline Spelman.

NOES

Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Alexander, Douglas
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Armstrong, Ms Hilary
Ashton, Joe
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, Rt Hon Mrs Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne
Bell, Martin *(Tatton)*
Bell, Stuart *(Middlesbrough)*
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blair, Rt Hon Tony
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Blunkett, Rt Hon David
Boateng, Paul
Borrow, David
Bradley, Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brinton, Mrs Helen
Brown, Rt Hon Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Butler, Mrs Christine
Byers, Stephen
Cabom, Richard
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell–Savours, Dale
Canavan, Dennis
Cann, Jamie
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Chisholm, Malcolm
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Rt Hon Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Iain
Colman, Tony
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cooper, Yvette
Corbett, Robin
Corston, Ms Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Curtis–Thomas, Mrs Claire
Dafis, Cynog
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Rt Hon Alistair
Darvill, Keith
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Davies, Rt Hon Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet

Denham, John
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Drew, David
Drown, Ms Julia
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Etherington, Bill
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Fatchett, Derek
Field, Rt Hon Frank
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foster, Michael J *(Worcester)*
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry
George, Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Mrs Linda
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mrs Eileen
Graham, Thomas
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Grogan, John
Gunnell, John
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hanson, David
Harman, Rt Hon Ms Harriet
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Healey, John
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Hewitt, Ms Patricia
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Ms Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Ms Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Jackson, Ms Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Mrs Fiona *(Newark)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Dr Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Jowell, Ms Tessa
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Kelly, Ms Ruth
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Kingham, Ms Tess
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lawrence, Ms Jackie
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Lock, David
Love, Andrew
McAllion, John
McCabe, Steve
McCafferty, Ms Chris
McCartney, Ian *(Makerfield)*
McDonagh, Siobhain
Macdonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
McIsaac, Shona
McKenna, Mrs Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Merron, Gillian
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheff'd Heeley)*
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin
Moffatt, Laura
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moran, Ms Margaret
Morgan, Ms Julie *(Cardiff N)*
Morgan, Rhodri *(Cardiff W)*
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Ms Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon John *(Aberavon)*
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
Norris, Dan
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Hara, Eddie
Organ, Mrs Diana
Osborne, Ms Sandra
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Pendry, Tom
Perham, Ms Linda
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Pound, Stephen
Powell, Sir Raymond
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Radice, Giles
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd
Raynsford, Nick
Reed, Andrew *(Loughborough)*
Reid, Dr John *(Hamilton N)*
Robertson, Rt Hon George *(Hamilton S)*
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Ms Joan
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Ms Joan
Salmond, Alex
Salter, Martin
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shipley, Ms Debra
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Miss Geraldine *(Morecambe & Lunesdale)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Ms Helen
Spellar, John
Squire, Ms Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Stott, Roger
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Straw, Rt Hon Jack
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Rt Hon Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Dr George *(NW Norfolk)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Vaz, Keith
Vis, Dr Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watts, David
Welsh, Andrew
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Alan W *(E Carmarthen)*
Wills, Michael
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wise, Audrey
Wood, Mike
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wray, James
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, Dr Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Jim Dowd and
Mrs. Anne McGuire.

Question accordingly negatived.

Main Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House approves the conclusions of the Government's Strategic Defence Review (Cm 3999)

PETITION

Midwifery Service

10.15 pm

Audrey Wise (Preston): I am honoured to present a petition signed by nearly 70,000 people from all parts of the United Kingdom. It concerns maternity services, and while many of the signatories are midwives, many are not. There are only 32,000 practising midwives, and many other people have signed to show their support. Maternity services are fundamental: we are all born and many of us are parents. We value our midwives.

The petition states:

The Petition of midwives and others concerned

Declares that the midwifery service is at breaking point, due to midwives leaving the profession because of low pay and because midwifery is no longer an attractive career option.

The Petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Government to prevent increased risk to mothers and babies caused by midwife retention and recruitment problems and to ensure that midwives are paid appropriately and the minimum grade of F or equivalent is paid in accordance with NHS guidance.

And the Petitioners remain your humble servants.

To lie upon the Table.

M8 Motorway (Upgrading)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Hanson.]*

10.17 pm

Mr. Tom Clarke (Coatbridge and Chryston): I thank the Minister for the courtesies of his telephone call about the M8 announcement, and of his letter of 6 August informing me of the decision not to proceed with proposals to extend the motorway. Many people in Lanarkshire, not least in Coatbridge and Chryston, regard that as a serious blow. I need not remind my hon. Friend of what I can only describe as the economic devastation that has decimated Lanarkshire over the past 15 years or more. Solving the problems of Lanarkshire's economy is crucial if the area is to replace jobs lost in the closures at Ravenscraig, Caterpillar, Gartcosh and many other places. Only then can we restore hope to thousands of people's lives. Improved road networks are an essential part of that.

In December 1990, in response to local and national concern about the impact of these job losses, the then Secretary of State for Scotland announced the setting up of a Lanarkshire working group headed by Allan Stewart, then the Minister responsible for industry at the Scottish Office, bringing together the main agencies active in economic development in the area. The group's broad remit was to identify the main physical, economic and environmental constraints on revitalising the local economy. Its study found that physical problems were the most significant obstacles to the resolution of the problems that afflicted, and still afflict, Lanarkshire. One of the group's most important points was that it

"regards the upgrading of the final section of the A8 between Newhouse and Baillieston as being the first priority."

That is what this debate is all about.

I remind the Minister that that recommendation was made way back in 1990. It met with unanimous support in my constituency and was endorsed by the then Strathclyde regional council, the Lanarkshire development agency and the former districts of Monklands, Motherwell, Strathkelvin and Cumbernauld and Kilsyth, which make up the present North Lanarkshire council area.

It was recognised then, not least by the Scottish Office, that the M8-A8 route between Glasgow and Edinburgh is one of the Scotland's most important internal and strategic routes. It is a primary link with major arterial ties, serving Scotland north of the central belt, southern Scotland and the whole of England. The decisions this August imply that the Baillieston-Newhouse sector—the one area that needs an improved infrastructure, having been denied it for too long—may well deteriorate rather than be improved. The situation could be with us for many more years.

People travelling on that section of the motorway cannot help but notice the significant amount of patching and repair. Scottish Office research has shown that it has carried the highest volumes of business trips of any road in Scotland. It is badly dilapidated and the geometry is substandard. Freight traffic is being blatantly disadvantaged. Allan Blackley of the local chamber of commerce spoke for many when he said that

"there is a general reluctance by business people to visit the area or, indeed, travel from one part to the other at certain times of the day."

[Mr. Tom Clarke]

A significant cause of the A8's problems, where traffic has grown at twice the national average, stems from its dual role as a strategic route carrying long distance traffic and as a local route serving the communities and industries located around my constituency. The congestion and state of disrepair that are the natural consequence of the inadequacy of the present A8 mean that lorries are being diverted through the already overcrowded roads of my constituency. As a film buff, there are times when I wonder whether I am on the set of the film "Convoy" rather than on my own patch: lorries, lorries and more lorries.

Poor infrastructure affects the whole of Lanarkshire and, indeed, Scotland. We have known for years that the A8 is approaching the end of its working capacity and is increasingly in need of costly and disruptive maintenance. Minor incidents, poor weather and road works cause substantial delays, affect safety and have adverse environmental impacts on noise and air pollution.

The 1990 recommendations by the Lanarkshire working group that the A8 should be upgraded are even more relevant given the sheer chaos of today. Economically, the A8 has simply failed local enterprise. For far too long, we have lacked the infrastructure necessary to attract vital inward investment. Local businesses can do without roads that are constantly in a state of disrepair, with endless bottlenecks and tailbacks.

Moreover, the A8 is no friend of the environment. Its perpetual state of disrepair has undoubtedly increased noise and air pollution. Those are the very things that my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister, in his excellent White Paper, has said he wishes to eradicate.

The road also has a terrible safety record. Since 1986 on the A8 between Newhouse and Baillieston there have been almost 400 accidents, of which 87 were serious and 21 were fatal. Last year alone, there were eight serious accidents in which three people died.

When we consider the inadequacy of the A8 and its manifest dangers, it is no surprise that as far back as 1990 the Lanarkshire working group supported the upgrading first mooted in 1965—33 years ago. The Scottish Office also saw the need for change. At a national, regional and district level, the recommendations for the upgrading of the A8 were endorsed by the Scottish Office. It warmly embraced the proposal, described by it as a 10-lane superhighway—in parts 14-lane—as compared with the existing four lanes.

In a letter written by W. H. Valentine from the Scottish Office to the Lanarkshire Development Agency in 1996, the position was reaffirmed. On the development of EuroCentral, he stated:

"it is but one of many priorities for the Scottish Office, the main one being to improve the access along the A8/M8 corridor and to aid economic development in Lanarkshire as a whole."

When the then Secretary of State for Scotland announced in December 1996 that private finance would be used to complete the upgrading of the M8, he reiterated what people in Lanarkshire had been saying for years:

"The upgrading will not only provide a new upgraded motorway but also an improved local road network which will allow distribution access to existing businesses and new economic initiatives along the road corridor, such as Chungwa . . . at EuroCentral."

He touched on an important point for EuroCentral, which is just one example of an enterprise that had based many of its vital business decisions on the assumption that the M8 upgrading would take place—in this case, the decision to invest £12.1 million to connect EuroCentral to the new M8 superhighway. Moreover, the M8 was enthusiastically supported at a public inquiry that required less than one day. There is now extensive congestion during peak flows at Shawhead, EuroCentral, Chapelhall and Newhouse.

I regret to have to say, but I do so in all candour, that the decision to abandon plans has greatly concerned inward investors who had been advised that the upgrade was imminent. The decision has reduced business confidence. Some people fear long-term damage to the local and national economy. How does the Scottish Office expect to encourage inward investment in an area in which the main arteries to the key markets in Scotland, the rest of the United Kingdom and abroad fail to meet modern standards?

I must ask my hon. Friend for an important reassurance for my constituents on road pricing. Will the resources gained from pricing be in addition to current transport spending? Will the money be ploughed back into those communities that are paying the charges?

I should like my hon. Friend to clarify the contents of a serious letter from David Hart at the Scottish Office to the acting chief executive at North Lanarkshire council. On 13 October Mr. Hart said that

"options for a more limited enhancement of the A8 in Lanarkshire will now be considered within the strategic roads review, which is expected to be completed by the end of this year or early in 1999."

Frankly, "a limited enhancement" of the A8 will do little to meet the needs of all who depend on the regeneration of Lanarkshire. Too much time has already been lost. We know, after endless rounds of consultation, what local and national enterprises see as the way forward. They have told us time and again, I think rightly, of the crucial nature of the project.

If I were putting a question to the Minister's advisers it would be quite simple. What else do we need to know? Why go over old ground? Heavens! If the Romans had approached road building in this way, we would never have heard of Hadrian's wall, and the Antonine wall would no doubt still be under review.

What on earth is the point of another delay costing a lot more private and public money? The west of Scotland accounts for over 60 per cent. of Scottish manufactured exports, 42 per cent. of Scottish employment and 50 per cent. of employment in electronics and electrical engineering. That is very important. Electronics-based companies engage in just-in-time processes. In common with most sectors now, freight movements have become an integral part of the production process. Roads are critical to that sector. Some 85 per cent. of electronic products are circulated through and exported from Scotland by road; and even after all the reviews, there is no obvious alternative. I shudder to think how many orders have gone up in smoke, along with unacceptable amounts of pollution, while lorries have been held up in congestion on the A8 day after day. We just do not have the rail infrastructure to cope with that volume of business.

In the economy generally, about 80 per cent. of the freight lifted in Scotland is delivered by road. It is extremely difficult to imagine how the volume of traffic

could be transferred and absorbed by other modes of transport. The M8 upgrading would complete the motorway link between Scotland's principal cities which is critical to the Scottish economy in general and to the regeneration of west central Scotland in particular.

Like my hon. Friends, I do not find that my arguments are inconsistent with the sort of Lanarkshire that I want to see. Of course it would be wrong to see Lanarkshire only in terms of closure, despair and unemployment. I want to see Lanarkshire utilise its potential—a well-educated and young work force and a healthy diversity of companies—and move forward to develop a strong local and modern economy served by the sort of viable transport infrastructure that I believe our people deserve.

10.33 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr. Calum Macdonald): I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Member for Coatbridge and Chryston (Mr. Clarke) on securing the opportunity to debate a subject that is clearly vital for his constituency and the whole of central Scotland. I hope that I can respond to all the points that he made in his eloquent and forceful speech on behalf of his constituents and, in particular, I shall say something about the enhancement of the A8 that we are considering.

I accept fully that the A8 and the M8 are critical parts of Scotland's transport infrastructure—there is no dispute about that. Although the great majority of the road between Glasgow and Edinburgh is of motorway standard, the 10 km section between Baillieston at the outskirts of Glasgow and Newhouse in Lanarkshire, which passes through my right hon. Friend's constituency, remains all-purpose, two-lane dual carriageway. That section is particularly important because it serves key development areas including Tannochside, Strathclyde business park, Newhouse industrial estate and the EuroCentral site and its rail freight terminal.

My right hon. Friend emphasised the congestion problems. It is a sign of the success of efforts to attract new jobs to Lanarkshire that traffic on the route has increased rapidly in recent years. I am aware of the congestion problems that can arise, particularly during the morning and evening peak periods, and the difficulties that motorists experience in joining the route at some key junctions.

I acknowledge the safety benefits that upgrading would bring about, which was another key point emphasised by my right hon. Friend. I am aware that that section of road is in poor structural condition so I have no difficulty in agreeing with him that something needs to be done to deal with the problems on the A8.

My right hon. Friend also mentioned the Lanarkshire working group set up in 1990. I am aware of the various plans over the years to upgrade the Baillieston to Newhouse section, going further back even than the Lanarkshire working group. I understand the local frustration at the fact that none of those plans has been implemented.

The previous Government had plans to deal with the problem through a private finance initiative design, build, finance and operate scheme. That would have involved the construction of a new section of motorway between Baillieston and Newhouse for through traffic, the upgrading of the existing route to service local traffic and the addition of a third lane to each of the existing motorway carriageways between Newhouse and Shotts. Between Baillieston and Newhouse, the scheme would have involved an increase in capacity from the present four lanes to 10 lanes. With various interconnecting links that would have increased to 13 lanes at the western end of the scheme approaching Baillieston.

In their last years in office the previous Government slashed the trunk roads budget from £248 million in 1994–95 to £171 million in 1997–98—a reduction of over 30 per cent. Perhaps even more significant is a shift in the pattern of spending within those overall totals. The previous Government maintained a new build programme only by squeezing expenditure on repair and maintenance and using the private finance initiative as a means of deferring expenditure. They had raised expectations of future schemes, including the M8, well beyond what was affordable given the resources that they had allocated. Put simply, they had willed the ends but not the means. More crucially, the squeeze on repair and maintenance was irresponsible and unsustainable. The road network was being allowed to deteriorate to a condition that now demands remedial action.

In place of that short-termism we were determined to develop an integrated approach to transport that would balance public and private transport needs and the demands of economic growth with our responsibility to the environment. The development of that strategy reached an important stage in July when we published our White Paper, "Travel Choices for Scotland". That aims to offer those using transport services and infrastructure in Scotland a genuine choice by promoting a high-quality integrated transport system that is sustainable.

Our White Paper signalled the end of the old predict and provide approach to trunk road construction, which is self-defeating, environmentally damaging and unaffordable because new road capacity generates extra traffic, extra pollution and extra demands for further increases in capacity.

That does not mean that the Government are anti-roads or anti-cars; on the contrary, we firmly believe that the road system will continue to provide vital links for private users and industry. That is why, even within the comprehensive spending review, which increased resources for priorities such as education and health, we have allocated an additional £58 million over the next three years to the trunk roads programme. We have stated clearly that, after meeting our legal commitments, our first priority must be to tackle that massive backlog of essential repair and maintenance that we inherited from the previous Government.

It is against that background that we concluded that the private finance initiative scheme for the M8 proposed by the previous Government was simply incompatible with our policy direction. As I said, the scheme involved a massive increase in capacity when our policies aim to constrain traffic growth. In addition, the shadow tolls required to pay for the construction and maintenance would have amounted to about £20 million per annum over 30 years. This and the annual commitment to the M74-M6 would have taken about 25 per cent. of the entire trunk roads budget and was simply unaffordable, given the comprehensive spending review outcome and our justifiable decision to give priority to repair and maintenance over the next three years.

[Mr. Calum Macdonald]

I said at the outset that there was no dispute between my right hon. Friend and the Government about the need to do something to address conditions on the A8 in Lanarkshire. That is why we have announced that options for a more limited enhancement of the A8 will be considered within our main trunk roads review. Hence, we are currently developing two options for improving the Baillieston to Newhouse section, both of which I can assure my right hon. Friend would improve the road to motorway standards.

I shall explain what those options entail. A broad choice will need to be made between an alignment that partially bypasses the existing A8 and an alignment that widens the road along its present route. Understandably, both options are at a very early stage in their development and there are a number of combinations of junction layouts to be considered and of consultations to be undertaken before a final decision can be made as to whether either option should be taken forward. However, both options would result in significant improvements.

The first option would follow an alignment close to the previous Government's proposal, but would be more modest in scale and environmentally more sustainable. This option would bypass the existing A8 in the Shawhead area between Drumpark junction and the EuroCentral junction in order to avoid the disruption associated with altering the complex existing junction of the A8 with the A725 at Shawhead. It would also provide a better connection between the motorway and the A725 Bellshill bypass.

This option would allow two lanes in each direction for through traffic, but would be widened at critical points to three lanes in each direction to allow traffic joining or leaving the motorway to weave safely with other traffic. Between the junctions at EuroCentral and Chapelhall, two-lane local link roads would also be provided either side of, and parallel to, the proposed motorway to handle the local traffic movements.

The second option would be to widen the existing A8 along its full length on its present alignment. That would involve building one carriageway of the future motorway alongside and to the south of the existing road, and then converting the existing road into the other carriageway of the motorway and, where appropriate, into a parallel all-purpose local road to cater for access to the few adjoining premises and to permit cycle use. The second option would also allow two lanes in each direction for longer-distance traffic, and, again, would require a selective widening to three lanes in each direction to allow safe access to the motorway. Between EuroCentral and Chapelhall, parallel two-lane local link roads would also be needed in order fully to connect those two junctions to the motorway.

Those layouts are now being considered as part of the strategic review. They have been chosen to reflect a balance between providing some additional capacity, in recognition of the existing and future pressures on the road, while avoiding the dangers of environmental intrusion and the attraction of traffic from other modes. The additional capacity that either of the two options would provide varies between junctions, but would be approximately 70 per cent. compared with the present road capacity. That figure compares with the 200 per cent. increase in capacity that the previous Government's proposals would have involved.

Clearly, I cannot predict now the priority rankings that will emerge from the trunk roads review. The review is assessing priorities against the Government's five criteria, which include the two aspects that my right hon. Friend emphasised: economy or congestion and safety. It would be wrong of me to prejudge the outcome of that exercise. Should the A8 be accorded priority, the detailed process of developing and implementing the scheme could begin. As my right hon. Friend will be aware, there are fairly long lead times involved in building a new road, given the statutory and other procedures that must be undertaken before construction can begin.

Affordability will continue to be an issue. That is one of the reasons why our White Paper announced our intention to move ahead as speedily as possible to introduce the legislation necessary to allow road user charging on sections of the Scottish motorway and trunk road network and to implement early schemes. The White Paper contained a commitment to recycle an appropriate proportion of the proceeds into transport improvements in those areas, including key trunk road improvements as assessed in our trunk roads review. Therefore I can definitely give my right hon. Friend the Member for Coatbridge and Chryston the full assurance that he seeks on that matter. Indeed, the White Paper specifically mentioned the upgrading of the A8 in Lanarkshire as an example of one road that might benefit from that new source of funding.

The implementation of charging is still some way off, but the Scottish Office and the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions are co-operating in a major programme of research and development work, designed to establish the capability of a complete electronic road-user charging system. An important element of that will be a demonstration project, including a Scottish site, which will test, in a real-world situation, the full range of equipment and back-up services needed to operate a free-flowing electronic charging system.

This week, sections of the media have been speculating that a Scottish pilot will go ahead next spring on the M8. That is not the case. The precise timetable and location of that project have still to be determined, but the lead times involved in launching a project of that scale—which involves, for example, compliance with European procurement procedures—means that it may possibly be the year 2000 before a demonstration project could be in place.

We shall also seek ways—possibly using the private finance initiative—in which infrastructure improvements can be made before, or at the same time as, charging is introduced. We are certainly aware that road users will look much more favourably on the prospect of charges if they can see, at the same time, some tangible improvements in the service provided to them.

I therefore regret that I am unable, tonight, to give my right hon. Friend the Member for Coatbridge and Chryston a definite timetable for implementing improvements on the A8 in Lanarkshire. He will

appreciate that some uncertainties remain to be resolved. However, I can say that, in the meantime, we shall undertake significant and necessary maintenance work on the A8-M8, which we shall ensure is compatible with the longer-term improvement strategy. I hope that my right hon. Friend will take it from my remarks tonight—especially my comments about our specific proposals for the improvement of the A8-M8—that the Government acknowledge that there is a problem to be addressed, and have taken steps, consistent with our transport policies and the White Paper, and with our wider commitment to control public expenditure, to address that real problem.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at fourteen minutes to Eleven o'clock.

House of Commons

Wednesday 21 October 1998

The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Motion made and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn—[*Mr. Clelland.*]

Steel Industry

9.34 am

Mr. Denis MacShane (Rotherham): Thank you, Madam Speaker, for granting me this debate. It is the first debate on steel since I was elected Member of Parliament for Rotherham four years ago to represent that great steel-producing centre in Europe. May I quickly declare an interest? I have 25 shares in British Steel, the dividends from which hardly pay for a "happy meal" for one of my children. I also have a close continuing relationship with the Iron and Steel Trades Confederation, both locally and nationally, which I value.

Before I begin, I wish to make a point that is relevant to the debate. An extraordinary report appears in today's *Yorkshire Post*, which says:

"The Governor of the Bank of England, Eddie George, said that northern job cuts may be necessary. 'I suppose', he said,'that unemployment in the north was an acceptable price to pay for curbing inflation in the south.'"

That statement exposes the fallacy of having our economy controlled and determined by the values of the City. Mr. George may have been misquoted. If so, he must clarify what he said, but if he sticks by that statement, he should apologise. If he continues to say that the people of the north of England are ready to be sacrificed to guard his interests, he should join them and resign.

Let me return to the subject of this debate. I am pleased to see so many hon. Members in their seats. I am delighted that, when the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, my right hon. Friend the Member for Hartlepool (Mr. Mandelson), was named to head that great Department, he said that he wanted to be known as the Secretary of State for Industry. Today he will get the chance to prove that he is a friend of industry, because I am sure that my very good friend the Minister for Science, Energy and Industry, will respond positively to the propositions that I and others will put to him in this debate.

Steel is now asking for the same interdepartmental attention that coal has received in the past 18 months. Despite its problems, the UK steel industry is a success. It earns £4 billion a year in exports, which have risen fivefold in the past 15 years. It earns far more than the film or music industries. Much as I welcome the new jobs in culture and leisure, we ignore the mega-money made by steel at our peril. The industry's record of industrial relations is second to none—except at the unhappy Co Steel plant in Sheerness, where the treatment of workers is a disgrace by international, let alone British, standards. The giant mastodon of British Steel, which controls more than four fifths of UK output, operates alongside relative newcomers like Ispat and Caparo, which work fruitfully with the union.

Times are hard now, but since 19[illegible] British Steel has made nearly £2 billion in profit. Thus, if, as the Secretary of State said in America last week, he wants to invest in clusters of economic success, and wants to back British-based and British-managed companies, and the entrepreneurship that we see in newcomers on the scene, which together earn far more for the UK than the "Full Monty" or the Spice Girls, I appeal to him to give the UK steel industry his full backing. It needs it, because it faces problems that are not, for the most part, of its OWN making. The problems at Longbridge announced today will exacerbate those difficulties. A rod mill has just closed in my constituency, and the highly successful, flexible and profitable Avesta stainless steel mill faces closure next door in Sheffield.

In the first eight months of this year, crude steel production rose by 5 per cent. in Germany and France, 4 per cent. in Italy, and 15 per cent. in Spain, but went down by 2 per cent. in Britain. Blast furnaces are being shut down; rotas are being changed; and men are being asked to work family-destroying hours and shifts to avoid employing new people. Not a steel worker in Britain, from chief executive to newly appointed apprentice, can feel 100 per cent. secure for his future.

Nearly all those problems are directly inherited from the previous Government. The Conservative party left time bombs ticking in the manufacturing economy, and it is Labour's job to seek to defuse them before long-lasting damage is done. The first time bomb is the anti-manufacturing culture, which permeated Britain throughout the 1980s and this decade. The second is the yo-yoing pound sterling—high under Lords Lawson and Lamont; low for a while under the former Chancellor, the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe (Mr. Clarke). It went up again in 1996 and 1997, steadily rising higher and higher to cause the damage that is now being wrought on the steel industry, as he refused to take action to control his pointless pre-election boom. Now the pound is coming down again, but who knows what the value of yo-yo sterling will be in three, six, 12 or 24 months?

The third time bomb is Conservative isolationist hostility to Europe at the cost of any influence that the United Kingdom needs to have over decisions taken jointly with our European partners which impact on our steel industry. The fourth is an anti-manufacturing system of electricity pricing so perverse that Conservative Ministers could not have done a better job had they deliberately designed it to damage the steel industry. The fifth time bomb is the blind worship of unmanaged trade flows, whether in capital or goods, which has led to the present crisis of the world economy.

The sixth time bomb is the view that privatisation plus deregulation plus globalisation was a new magic formula that would solve all economic problems. If someone called a firm a plc and had it quote on Wall street or the stock exchange in London, that alone was thought to be sufficient to ensure success.

Let us take these Tory follies one by one, and consider what needs to be done. The most important change is to put into reverse the anti-manufacturing culture of the Conservative era. Steel has been, is and always will be

[Mr. Denis MacShane]

cyclical. It requires long lead times for investment and production and for securing markets and sales. The chronic instability of the pound sterling is one root cause of the industry's problems.

The United States, Germany, the Netherlands and other European countries with successful steel industries all operate with interest rates set by independent central banks. The pound yo-yoed even more violently before May 1997 than it does today. Steel will continue to suffer until we form a linkage with the euro.

Mr. Alan Clark (Kensington and Chelsea): I am listening with great interest and considerable sympathy to the case that the hon. Gentleman is making, but much of his argument in fraudulent. He refers to the fluctuating rate of sterling and compares the industry's performance with that of the United States and of Germany. Over that period, the deutschmark and the US dollar had even higher levels of fluctuation than the pound sterling.

Mr. MacShane: If the right hon. Gentleman examines the flows of the dollar, up and down, since the 1986 Plaza accord, he will find that it has been relatively stable. The deutschmark, certainly in the past 10 years, has been a well-managed currency. I do not want to enter into pro and anti-economic and monetary union arguments, but simply want to place on record my view that, until we have currency stability, and until we are a full economic player in Europe, we should not expect steel to do well.

I appeal to the industry to use its resources to give a kick up the pants of British business, so that it drops its vestal virgin blushes and campaigns publicly, loudly, forcefully and cheerfully for the view that our isolation from EMU cannot last much longer if manufacturing is to survive and thrive. On that point, I must give way to my hon. Friend the Member for Blaenau Gwent (Mr. Smith).

Mr. Llew Smith (Blaenau Gwent): Although I obviously support my hon. Friend's demand for the sacking of Eddie George, what is far more important is the fact that, on almost our first day in power, we handed power over interest rates to a group of unelected and unaccountable bankers. All this morning's rhetoric and all the words of the Chancellor cannot alter the level of interest rates. If we learn something from this, surely it must be that interest rates must go back under political control. Democratically elected Governments could then take decisions affecting the industry and the community, which depend on them.

Mr. MacShane: My hon. Friend makes his point forcibly. There is no suggestion that deciding interest rates politically in the Treasury, before May 1997, was of any help to the United Kingdom economy. Interest rates do not become a political football in the countries where steel operates successfully.

I welcome the new Labour Government extending the hand of friendship to our European partners, which is paying off in terms of the directive on end-of-life vehicles. That is not a reference to former Conservative Members of Parliament. Concerted efforts by the Minister, to whom I pay tribute, his officials, Members of the European Parliament such as David Bowe and Linda McAvan, and the industry's experts are producing a good result for Britain's engineering steel makers. What a contrast that is to the anti-European antics of the main opposition party, which ensured that the United Kingdom steel industry had no voice or friends in Europe.

The Minister has been helpful on Europe, but I want him to be helpful on the cost of energy, which is so loaded against steel makers in Britain.

Helen Jackson (Sheffield, Hillsborough): Before my hon. Friend moves on to energy prices, and while he is praising the special engineering steel sector, does he recognise what is not often said in the Chamber and elsewhere—that that sector is one of the most environmentally pure of all manufacturing sectors? Recycling is total: without the special engineering steel sector, this country would have to dispose of all its scrap elsewhere. That must be balanced when we talk about the energy and environmental costs of the steel industry.

Mr. MacShane: I very much agree with my hon. Friend, who is a great expert on these matters. I sometimes wish that Britain's steel factories were painted bright green to send out a message that, despite the smokestack image, they constitute one of the most eco-friendly industries in our economy.

I ask the Minister to be helpful on energy. It is often said that electricity prices in Britain are a bit like the 19th century Schleswig-Holstein question, of which, hon. Members will recall, Lord Palmerston said only three people in the world understood it: one was dead, one was mad, and he himself had forgotten. I do not think that my hon. Friend the Minister is dead, he has not yet been driven mad by the burden of office, and I hope that he has not forgotten the importance of the problem, but understands that the corrupt, fixed, rigged electricity market that we inherited from the Tories does such damage to steel, and why it needs reform.

The facts are hardly known to the general public. Although it now takes 40 per cent. less energy to produce a tonne of steel than in 1970, which backs up the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Hillsborough (Helen Jackson), British steel firms pay far more for electricity—often 25 to 30 per cent. more—than their competitors in mainland Europe.

Remember: although the United Kingdom has more natural energy resources than any other European Union country, our prices are the highest. In 1997-98, the price of electricity charged to the industry rose by 20 per cent., despite fuel costs falling on the world and local markets. That meant that the revenues of the dominant generators—National Power, PowerGen and Eastern—rose by about £590 million, which is more than the £576 million that they paid in windfall tax.

I cannot believe that the Chancellor intended that, in effect, steel and other industrial customers would pay for his windfall tax because of the excessively high prices that the regulator lets the generators charge. I stress that this is not a free-market operation; nor do the rules of competition come into play. This is another anti-manufacturing racket inherited from the previous Government.

The Minister has announced a review, but its outcome is unlikely to be known much before the millennium, by which time steel will have suffered further cuts and job

losses. If the regulator continues to allow the electricity generators their profiteering on the backs of steel, there will be a much smaller customer base when the review is finished.

I urge the Minister to take steps to institute a temporary cap on the electricity oligopoly's price racket.

Mr. Tim Boswell (Daventry): I do not want to disturb the flow of the hon. Gentleman's argument, but does he think that the current moratorium on gas-fired power station consent is contributing to a rise in, or the sustaining of, the electricity price level, or helping to reduce it in the way that he wants?

Mr. MacShane: I firmly believe that the Government can take action to institute a temporary cap. Rather than waiting for the millennium dome to open its doors and the electricity price review to be published, I urge the Minister to respond to that. To refer and defer to the regulator is not enough. The Deputy Prime Minister has shown leadership on the matter of the rail regulator, and on rail travel prices. The Secretary of State for Trade and Industry should this week do no less to ensure fair play for the steel industry.

The Department could also take steps to prevent the unfair dumping of steel products in the United Kingdom and other European Union countries. At the moment, we have the absurd sight of a significant surge in steel imports—which are up by 81 per cent. this year—into the UK and the EU from Serbia. In the morning, Slobodan Milosevic's steel factories produce steel for his tanks and guns to oppress the people of Kosovo; in the afternoon, they produce steel to put British steel workers out of their jobs, and earn hard currency in this country.

That is an EU-wide problem. Steel imports from third countries into the European Union have gone up from 40,000 tonnes a month in the first half of 1997 to almost 300,000 tonnes a month so far this year. We cannot have a 700 per cent. increase in steel imports in under 12 months and call that fair or free trade.

Hon. Members with whom I have debated will know that I am, by conviction, a free trader. I have stood my ground on that policy against many in my party whose first instincts are more protectionist. Such a surge is not due to the temporary flow of a newly fashionable toy—yo-yos from China, garments or electronic games—but will permanently damage the United Kingdom. We must join our partners in Europe and insist that dumping and unfair trade practices are swiftly investigated, and that quick action is taken.

The United States has already shown a lead. We should not increase our dole queues for the sake of an ideology that only the UK believes in, while the rest of the world moves on, or the dumpers move in and take over our markets.

Mr. Barry Jones (Alyn and Deeside): There are problems in the steel industry in Wales. My constituents at Shotton steel works face redundancies. They have asked me to emphasise that they want help on energy prices and on the dumping of steel in Britain.

Mr. MacShane: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, whose work on behalf of steel workers not just in Wales but throughout the United Kingdom is well known. His points are well made, and I hope that the Minister will take them on board.

We need action on dumping. If we are tough enough to say "no entry" to a score or so of Slovakian gipsies fleeing hard and cruel times in their own country, we should be manly enough to say "whoa" or "slow down" to the scores of thousands of tonnes of steel that are causing hard and cruel times for steel workers in South Yorkshire.

That leads me to what is, in some ways, the worst of the Conservative inheritance: the slavish view that the only model is that based on shareholder value, in which consumers, employees and communities take second, third or no place at all. The tyranny of quarterly outturns and half-yearly dividend payments is a straitjacket from which British Steel should liberate itself. When the company can spend—as it did last year—£140 million buying its own shares in a fruitless stock market manoeuvre, something is wrong with its priorities. That is almost half as much as the entire UK steel industry invests in a good year.

Investment in Indonesia has melted away, as anyone who knew about the lack of democracy and the corruption in that country could have told British Steel. All that money would have been better spent on investment in the United Kingdom, or on securing a footprint in Euroland, because the proposed investment in Katowice in Poland cannot replace a serious engagement with the main markets in Europe.

Perhaps some in the steel industry believe that privatisation plus share options has meant the end of a relationship with Government. However, every day, every hour and every minute, we receive briefings from British Steel and other companies and the UK Steel Association—for which we are grateful, because we work as a team with the industry—requesting us to knock on the door of Government to ask for help on trade, energy prices, sterling, dumping and the other factors that no steel company can control but which control steel's fate. The steel industry is asking for a new partnership with Government, and I hope that they, through the Minister, will respond positively.

That requires a new approach to partnership right throughout the industry. Partnership means the full and timely sharing of information, which was not the case in Avesta in Sheffield, where the employees and their unions of the British Steel subsidiary company in Sweden were treated more equally, in the Orwellian sense, than those in South Yorkshire.

I hear too many stories in the industry of agreements not being fully honoured and of threats rather than co-operation. I do not believe that they are merely grumpy anecdotes of the dissatisfied. I urge all in the UK steel industry, and British Steel in particular, to ask themselves whether the time has not come to place trust and full information sharing from top to bottom as a priority in the industry in the hard times ahead.

Mr. Phil Hope (Corby): Unfortunately, Corby no longer makes steel, thanks to the efforts of the Conservative party. We still manufacture high-quality tubes in Corby, for home and export. Does my hon. Friend agree with me that British Steel owes much of its success to the skills and motivation of the work force, despite the travails of the Conservative Government? Given the

[Mr. Phil Hope]

partnership between the Iron and Steel Trades Confederation, employers and the Government, we should look forward to investment in the industry, in people and in training as the key to the success of the steel industry in the future.

Mr. MacShane: My hon. Friend makes an important point, and I hope that it is taken on board.

The steel industry faces a rocky period. Orders are down, and prices are 20 per cent. lower than a year ago and falling. Jobs will go. I appeal to the Minister to release funds under his control, or under his guidance through the RESIDER programme, to Steel Partnership, one of the training bodies in Rotherham, which seeks to ensure that, when people lose their jobs, they do not lose their skills, their aptitude for work and their self-confidence.

I do not want to be over-gloomy. Since the days of Vulcan, steel making has involved the more awesome alchemy of transforming raw materials through the crafts and skills of the men to which my hon. Friend the Member for Corby (Mr. Hope) referred.

Mr. Owen Paterson (North Shropshire): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. MacShane: The hon. Gentleman will have a chance to make his own points. I am taking up quite a lot of time.

In any steel plant today, the heat, light and raw power are the same as they were 2,000 years ago. Steel is a continuing part of the manufacturing base of any civilised country. We allow our steel industry to decline further at our peril. The managers, technologists and workers of Britain's steel industry can and will survive. I have outlined how Government can help, but both sides of industry and the steel communities have a part to play.

I suggest that the time is right for a national round table on steel, to allow all those with a stake in the industry to meet and to put their cards on the table. I am not talking about negotiations, corporatist encounters, tripartism or any of the ancient formulas. Instead, I propose a new way—my hon. Friends may call it a third way, and Opposition Members may call it the British way if they have read the Chancellor's recent speeches. It is a new way that allows us all to see what needs to be done, what needs to be changed, what needs to be offered and what needs to be conceded to secure a bright future for an industry that I firmly believe is part of tomorrow's Britain.

9.57 am

Mr. Richard Allan (Sheffield, Hallam): I am grateful to the hon. Member for Rotherham (Mr. MacShane) for raising this subject. I firmly agree with his initial comments. Jobs in the north are vital, and if we tilt the economy any further towards the south-east, we shall be heading for disaster. That will affect people not only in the north, but in the south-east as the pressures there become unbearable.

Sheffield now produces more steel than it has ever produced. We have had great success in projecting a new image through entertainment and the service industry. "The Full Monty" and other forms of entertainment have been tremendously successful—so much so that, when I make an after-dinner speech, rather than expecting me to talk about industry, people want me to take my clothes off, as they think that that is what men from Sheffield do these days. This august Chamber is safe from any such Sheffield-like behaviour.

With our friends in Rotherham, we remain a world-class centre of excellence in the manufacturing and processing of steel, despite our shiny new image as a city of fun. It is essential that we get the European context right, particularly the impact of European monetary union. From next year, the euro will propagate through the supply chain. Businesses such as steel, which trade heavily in other European countries, will, whether they like it or not, find that the euro is an essential fact of their business life. The Government's attitude to the euro, and to economic and monetary union, will be vital in securing the interests of all businesses that trade heavily with Europe. Whatever the politics involved, there is a strong business case for close engagement with Europe in this context.

That is particularly relevant in areas such as mine, where many companies are Anglo-Swedish. We are likely to have one component of a company in the Euro-zone, and another outside it. That will mean some complex economics, and, again, the Government's attitude will give the management of those Swedish companies a strong signal as to how Britain intends to proceed. It will make a significant difference to their investment decisions, determining whether they buy new plant in Sweden or—as I hope—in Sheffield and other British cities.

The second issue that I want to raise is that of electricity prices, which the hon. Member for Rotherham rightly mentioned. As he pointed out, the pool system is an oligopoly for three large generators. The signs are not good for reform. The gas market has moved on—gas prices at the wholesale level have fallen—but legislative time is not being given for the establishment of a new electricity structure that would allow the abolition of the pool system.

The Minister for Trade (Mr. John Battle): Having dedicated about a third of my life to reforming the pool system, I must point out that we said in opposition that we would challenge it, when others said that it was too arcane even to be looked at. One of the first tasks that I undertook in government was that of asking the regulator to present proposals, which he did. Only two weeks ago, we announced that we would take the regulator's recommendations as the basis for a full and radical overhaul of the pool.

We are talking about the wholesale market for electricity. We cannot simply abolish the system, as some have suggested; if we did, no power stations would operate, and there would be no electricity at all. The project is well under way—there is no holding back—but there is no doubt that it is complex.

Mr. Allan: I am pleased to note the Minister's passion, which suggests that we may see changes in the near future. I hear voices saying that the pool system urgently needs reform, and I am glad to learn that reform is on its way.

A third issue is investment in research and technology. Sheffield contains two fine universities, the university of Sheffield and Sheffield Hallam university. Both are able

to supply our industry, including the steel industry, with a competitive edge by providing the skills and research that are needed for the development of new products that will set us ahead of our competitors. I hope that the Minister will tell us that the Government are committed, on a cross-departmental level, to ensuring that our educational institutions can link with industry and provide it with the support it needs.

I believe that I heard on the radio this morning—it may have been a fantasy, as I was lying in bed at the time—confirmation that the university for industry would be in Sheffield. I know that it is not the Minister's departmental responsibility, but if that is so, it is very encouraging. The university for industry and similar initiatives are vital to the achievement of a competitive steel industry, without which—however much we invest—we are unlikely to succeed.

I hope that the Minister can assure us that the Government are committed to investing in excellence in manufacturing, because that is what we have in Sheffield and Rotherham. I hope that my constituents, and all the people of Sheffield, will be able to feel some confidence that progress is being made, and that the importance of the issues that we have discussed today has been recognised. I know that the Minister feels passionately about those issues, and I look forward to hearing him announce initiatives similar to the university for industry, such as the reform of pool prices that we so desperately need.

10.3 am

Mr. Derek Wyatt (Sittingbourne and Sheppey): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Rotherham (Mr. MacShane) on his excellent speech, and thank him for the opportunity to speak—especially as I, too, had made a bid for an Adjournment debate.

I want to talk about Co Steel, a Canadian-owned company in Sheerness, in my constituency, and to describe the way in which decent men are being bullied and harassed by its management. I want to know from the Minister, and from the Department of Trade and Industry, about the current thinking in relation to our fairness at work strategies, and whether any of those proposals will alter the scenario that I am about to relate.

First, let me make a confession. My mother, Peggy, is a proud Canadian, as is my sister, and as was my late brother. They would not be best pleased by the tale that I am about to tell. The Canadian high commissioner took it on himself to visit the plant last week, and gave all the wrong signals. He let his country down.

Co Steel in Sheerness is for sale. The Toronto-based company is having problems of its own, stretching back to a bond issue that was withdrawn a couple of years ago, and a joint venture in a new mill whose price has escalated. Some 550 jobs are at risk: the community will be devastated.

Two years ago, Joe Davey, who had worked at Co Steel for 25 years, was sacked a few days before Christmas. Joe had been an active trade unionist for all his time at the company. In 1992, Co Steel became a union-free shop. Although substantial union work is being undertaken at Co Steel through the Amalgamated Engineering and Electrical Union and the Iron and Steel Trades Confederation, unions are banned.

Joe Davey—with the admirable support of his union, the ISTC—took Co Steel to the industrial tribunal at Ashford. Here are some of its findings. On senior management at Co Steel, it stated:

"We find some witnesses we regarded as essentially unreliable."

On the personnel manager, Dr. Hugh Billot, it stated.

"Having heard the lengthy evidence in this case, it seems to us that Dr. Billot is being disingenuous. The company may not have been collectively hostile to trade unions, but there is no doubt that Dr. Billot himself was hostile, and that his view of the unions informed the company's approach."

To make the sale of Co Steel more attractive, over the last month there have been 45 so-called voluntary redundancies and—surprise, surprise—19 wholesale redundancies. Let me read some of the letters that are being sent to me over the past few weeks. One correspondent wrote:

"I had an industrial accident at Co Steel. I used holidays so as not to penalise on the existing points scheme that is enforced at Co Steel. I eventually had an operation on my back. I was made redundant."

I have had other letters, from decent citizens in my constituency. One reads:

"I am one of those made redundant. Co Steel has given the excuse of work behaviour and performance for my redundancy. What I should like to know is, after 20 or so years of loyal service, why they have decided that my behaviour and performance is not up to standard. It is possible that it is because I am a union member. If it is so that Co Steel needed to lose 60 members of staff, why were only 21 accepted for early retirement, and of those why were so many union members?"

Another letter reads:

"As you know, the company derecognised the unions in April 1992, so why is it that we have been made redundant? Why have we been refused union recognition?"

Another reads:

"You may already be aware of the despicable treatment of a number of men made redundant by the personnel director at Co Steel. As an active trade unionist, it is no surprise to find myself on the list."

And so on, and so on.

My concerns are these. Some of the Co Steel management is a disgrace. Two of its senior staff were economical with the truth at a tribunal, but they were neither fined nor fired. Good working practices are important for all staff, not just the men and women on the shop floor. How will "fairness at work" ensure that, when management misbehaves, it is fined? I await the Minister's comments with interest.

Co Steel may find a new owner. I am reliably informed by one of the potential buyers that the sale document has more holes than the average colander. We need a buyer, but they are thin on the ground. I hope that, when the white knight arrives, he will make a charge against Co Steel's senior management.

10.8 am

Mr. David Prior (North Norfolk): The hon. Member for Rotherham (Mr. MacShane) will know that I worked for British Steel during much of the 1980s. I must say that I found many of his comments utterly misleading.

Mr. MacShane: Will the hon. Gentleman tell the House in what capacity he worked at British Steel? I do not recall meeting him on the shop floor.

Mr. Prior: My last job at British Steel was that of commercial director.

[Mr. Prior]

In 1979, British Steel was completely uncompetitive. It had rotten industrial relations, and its products were of poor quality. By the end of the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s, it had been transformed into the most competitive steel company in the world. The hon. Gentleman ought to pay tribute to those who worked at British Steel, and to remember that that success was achieved under three successive Conservative Governments.

I am going to be brief, because I know that other hon. Members want to speak. There are three areas where the Government could do something tangible to help British Steel. The first is interest rates. I heard the hon. Member for Rotherham talking about the damage that exchange rate volatility can do to a company such as British Steel. I share some of those concerns, but, by pursuing high interest rates and giving independence to the Bank of England, his Government have increased the value of our currency above it should be. I agree with the hon. Gentleman that it is not good enough for his Government to disclaim responsibility for interest rates.

The second area where the Government can help is in a review of the pool. The pool works quite well for individual consumers, but clearly does not give the benefits it should to high energy users. British Steel is paying 15 or 20 per cent. more for its energy than its competitors in Europe. I hope that the Minister will introduce more competition into the pool. His policy of having a moratorium on gas-fired stations is wrong. We need more competition in energy generation.

The third way in which the Government can do something tangible is anti-dumping. As the hon. Member for Rotherham pointed out, imports into Europe as a whole are some seven times what they were last year. That is having a damaging impact not just on British Steel, but on other European users. I hope that the Minister will take urgent, quick action to bring in anti-dumping measures.

There was a period during the 1980s when it became fashionable to say that manufacturing did not matter. That was a very short period, but it did become fashionable. It is particularly sad that, under this Government, that attitude seems to be getting out again—that services matter, that somehow manufacturing does not matter, and to hell with British manufacturing.

Mr. Battle: The hon. Gentleman might check how many times we have campaigned for, mentioned and highlighted the importance and vitality of manufacturing, compared with Lord Young, who said that manufacturing did not matter: let people in the manufacturing city of Leeds, my city, eat out, he suggested. We have changed that culture already.

Mr. Prior: It is wrong for a Minister to say that, when manufacturing industry faces a severe recession. This is a recession that we cannot blame just on world markets and overseas events. This is largely a recession that has been manufactured by economic incompetence in your Government.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Lord): Order. It is not my Government. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will use correct parliamentary language.

Mr. Prior: Yes.

Mr. Frank Roy (Motherwell and Wishaw): Like the hon. Gentleman, I worked for British Steel in the 1970s and 1980s. In fact, I was still there in 1991, and I have to say that I never met him on the shop floor when I was in the melting shop working on the ladles. However, I am glad to hear him say that the Government were saying, "To hell with manufacturing." What would he have told my constituents when they were told in the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s by his Government, "To hell with manufacturing and the steel industry in the Motherwell area"?

Mr. Prior: I should like to conclude by saying that British Steel is a fine business. It is very competitive. It can hold its head up high throughout the world. It depends totally on a successful manufacturing base in this country, with a strong customer base. Manufacturing needs some help, and the Government are not giving it.

10.12 am

Ms Joan Walley (Stoke-on-Trent, North): We have had a colourful, powerful, upbeat and far-ranging speech from my hon. Friend the Member for Rotherham (Mr. MacShane). I congratulate him on securing the debate, but it is important that all of us who have steel capacity in our localities be part of the new deal that he is now asking the Government to enter with British Steel. I speak just to put the case that, in north Staffordshire, we want to be part of that new deal for steel.

I think it was four years ago—time flies so quickly in this place—that we had a real problem about increased capacity in Ireland, which had an extra subsidy. That issue was fought over in the House. It was crucial at that stage that we did everything we could to safeguard the capacity of British Steel to carry on manufacturing.

Members of Parliament in north Staffordshire played a leading role in that. We got the overall capacity from elsewhere reduced. In that process, we maintained a part of British capacity. That was crucial. My reason for speaking now is to say that there have been huge improvements in British Steel manufacturing since then, but we do not want to lose it.

In relation to the global economy, we are in a particularly vulnerable position. That is why it is so important that all of us here who care about steel in our constituencies give that message to the Minister with responsibility for industry, my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, West (Mr. Battle), so that he knows that he has the support of all of us in the new deal that I hope he will be able to secure for steel.

This is not just about the economy or industry, but about the environment, the negotiations that are about to start post-Kyoto, the changes that are taking place to utility regulation and the price of energy for intensive

users of energy; therefore, through this debate, I want us to put all those issues on the table, so that we can continue to make the case for manufacturing in our constituencies.

We have heard from my hon. Friend the Member for Rotherham about job losses at the Templeborough rolling mills. Every time we hear about job losses in British Steel, or are told that there are going to be more job losses because of the particular stage of the cycle that we are in, I get worried about potential job losses in north Staffordshire.

I want the Government and British Steel to know that, between us, we will do everything to safeguard one of the best producing sites we have. I am talking, of course, about the British Steel Shelton site. It is producing 400,000 tonnes of steel per year. It has been doing that for the past five years, and is on target to produce the same amount this year.

British Steel contributes 39,000 jobs throughout the United Kingdom. Obviously, the Shelton site is crucial to that. We have had investment from British Steel in Shelton. We have a new operating pulpit investment of £600,000. We are commissioning new marking and labelling machines to give the edge on customer service and control systems. There is also in progress an overall refurbishment of £1 million.

Five years ago, we had a work force of around 400. Two years ago, we had a work force of 350, and currently we have a work force of 330. We want to keep that work force on that site.

I pay tribute to the huge effort by the work force at Shelton in terms of team working, multi-skilling and work flexibility, all done with trade union agreement. The output in Shelton is second to none. As I hear hon. Members warning about the chill winds of the global recession and everything else, I want to safeguard those jobs in north Staffordshire, so that we can reward the enormous efforts by the team of dedicated workers there, bearing it in mind that we are an island site and, as a result, are particularly vulnerable to any additional pressures; such as the extra costs of transport are so great.

I use this debate to remind British Steel and the Government of all that. People in north Staffordshire are important. I use it to remind them of the part that we played in the last battle, if you like, to maintain British Steel capacity.

I touch on what my hon. Friend the Member for Rotherham said about the Governor of the Bank of England. The Minister will know, because he came to north Staffordshire only last month, how much the pottery industry in north Staffordshire relies on exports, and how important it is that we are innovative and make an upbeat contribution, but the same applies to steel production.

If we bear it in mind that about 50 per cent. of British Steel production is exported and, of the remaining 50 per cent., a further 50 per cent. is exported, and we see what has happened to the Asian market and the collapse there, it is clear that there are difficulties and bumpy rides ahead. For that reason, I say to Eddie George, Governor of the Bank of England, "You cannot sacrifice manufacturing industry just for the service economy." Manufacturing is important. We make things in north Staffordshire, and we are proud of those things. The crucial point is that we do not want to be sacrificed for the wider economy.

We are now at a critical stage, and I wanted to emphasise the importance of our manufactured goods, and of developing the partnership necessary to deal not only with environmental issues but with the international economy, so that we can ensure that British Steel workers in north Staffordshire, at the Shelton site, have a real future.

10.19 am

Mr. Alan Clark (Kensington and Chelsea): This debate has provided a very good demonstration of the importance of our Wednesday morning Adjournment debates—which allow hon. Members, such as the hon. Member for Sittingbourne and Sheppey (Mr. Wyatt), to cite and bring to the House's attention monstrous cases of victimisation. It is an excellent thing that such issues should be raised in the Chamber.

Today's debate has also allowed the hon. Member for Rotherham (Mr. MacShane) to deal with an absolutely fundamental dilemma of economic policy that we find ourselves at liberty to digress upon all too seldom. In much of what he said, powerful argument was heavily interspersed with obligatory party political points and a good deal of confusion and hot air.

Mr. MacShane: The right hon. Gentleman speaks with some expertise on that.

Mr. Clark: Although many of us pride ourselves on that gift, hon. Members—Labour Members, too—have to try to cut through it.

The hon. Member for Rotherham rightly drew attention to the scandal of the Governor of the Bank of England saying that we must tolerate unemployment in the manufacturing sector in order to control or moderate overheating in the service sector. I have foreshortened the Governor's argument, which is a familiar one—he was not the first person to articulate it. Greatly to the shame of the Conservative party, Conservative Members have in the past made the same case. The hon. Gentleman mentioned Lord Young, under whom I worked as a junior Minister. I drove that Department's officials mad by arguing the unfashionable case of protectionism, against the views of my own Secretary of State.

The hon. Member for Rotherham also drew the House's attention to the fact that, although the Government have been in power for more than 18 months, they are, if anything, more in thrall now to the multinationals, the supranationals and the supermarkets, and to their friends in industry who are buying titles and subscribing to funds, than they were at the outset. They are certainly far more in thrall to them now than they were when they published the Labour party manifesto before the general election.

It is no good saying that many of the seeds of damage were sown by the previous Government. The Labour party has been in power for more than 18 months, and it has intensified the close allegiance between the rip-off corporations and the Government, whose paymasters they are slowly becoming.

The hon. Member for Rotherham dodged the main point. Although he made his case, which sounded fine, he would not arrive at his conclusion. He would not admit that no economy, least of all ours, is strong enough to pay both unemployment benefit to its own workers and the wages of manufacturing work forces in other countries that are dumping their products in the United Kingdom. Although he said that we have to be strong enough to resist dumping, he dodged the matters of the general

[Mr. Clark]

agreement on tariffs and trade and our associations within the Community. Although he argues—his argument was veiled, but not very closely veiled—that some of our steel industry's problems would be cured if we were in the euro and worked closer with Europe, he knows perfectly well that that argument is utterly fraudulent. If anything, such actions would intensify the problems.

The hon. Gentleman cited the example of Serbian steel being dumped in the United Kingdom. Such dumping provides the House with a classic example of the fact that, because of the damage that they have suffered, many sectors of our manufacturing industry need to be protected. I am one of the few hon. Members on either side of the House who is still not ashamed to argue the archaic but traditional Tory case that we should protect our manufacturing industry by using the various devices of Government—such as subsidy, taxation and import control—that we have used traditionally, and that many of our competitors still use. For some reason, we have had to discard such devices.

I tell Labour Members that we must now realise what is at stake in the argument. Hon. Members, especially Labour Members—with their roots in constituencies that contain what is left of our manufacturing industry—must realise that a major choice will have to be made if, as all judges believe will happen, there is a major contraction in the world economy. The choice will be between the welfare of our constituents as producers and their welfare as consumers.

For too long—for reasons of loyalty, doctrine or laziness—the House has swallowed arguments from Front Benchers on both sides of the House that we must now subscribe to the consumerist ethic, and that the service industries and the ephemeral earnings of show business, with all its shallowness and triviality, will support a major economy of 55 million people. How can such industries support our economy? Although we know that it is impossible for them to support our economy, we allow ourselves time and again to be sold the doctrine that they can.

The choice will have to be made, and the impulse to make it will have to come from within the party in government. I tell Labour Members that I came into the Chamber to hear the speech of the hon. Member for Rotherham, whom I respect, and that my speech is entirely unprepared and extempore. Nevertheless, I hope very much that, in the course of time, within the next two years, there will be a real debate on the subject, and that hon. Members on both sides of the House will be able to give it their attention with proper and fully prepared speeches.

10.26 am

Mr. Andrew Miller (Ellesmere Port and Neston): Before I speak to the subject of this debate, I should like briefly to mention one example of the steel industry's success in my constituency. Vauxhall Motors has not only just taken on 1,000 new employees but is producing the best selling car in Britain—the new Astra. Vauxhall's success is a credit to the partnership between industry and Government. The situation is therefore not entirely one of doom and gloom, as has been suggested by some hon. Members in this debate.

Like my hon. Friend the Member for Sittingbourne and Sheppey (Mr. Wyatt), I should like to deal with one specific point. I also realise that I shall receive support from various Departments in dealing with some specific problems facing H. H. Robertsons, which closed just before the general election. I am grateful to the hon. Member for Solihull (Mr. Taylor), who was then the Department of Trade and Industry Minister with responsibility for competition, under whom an investigation was started by the Department's insolvency service, which subsequently involved the serious fraud squad and police.

The background to the investigation was a £5 million deficit in the work force pension fund and a series of business actions resulting in moneys dripping out of the company, to the detriment of all creditors, especially the pension fund. Regrettably, because of the complexities of the matter and the way in which the Companies Acts are structured, the Serious Fraud Office has been unable to produce a case that it believes would stand up in a fraud trial. I believe that a case has not been made, not because the SFO is happy with events, but because of the very clever way in which the money was used.

The matter is currently being dealt with by the pensions ombudsman. Earlier this week, I had an exchange with the Secretary of State for Social Security on that point.

I should put in context the closure of H. H. Robertsons, which was a very important steel works. Ellesmere Port was a steel manufacturing town, and subsequently has become a petrochemical town. It began producing steel at the turn the century, when the work force of the then Wolverhampton Iron Works walked up the canals to gain jobs at the new plant. The plant survived for the best part of 100 years, but then, after some very interesting financial manoeuvres, it disappeared. That was a tragedy, not only for the town and the people who worked at the plant, but for the credibility of an important part of British industry.

I want to put three points to the Government in the context of the inquiries that must continue. I appreciate that the first is not within the remit of my hon. Friend the Minister for Science, Energy and Industry, but I make a general plea to the Government to work with me and with all the parties involved to find a rescue package for the pension fund of the plant. The state is paying a significant sum in benefits, so it would be helpful if we could find a way to rescue the fund.

Secondly, I should like the Government to examine carefully the way in which the Companies Acts have been used in this particular case, and the effects of their structure on the ability of the work force to get a clear picture of what has happened. Even the Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, my hon. Friend the Member for Pontypridd (Dr. Howells), cannot get hold of the full report from the Serious Fraud Office, which is a bizarre state of affairs.

Finally, when the company was taken over—something on which the pension fund members were not consulted—the pension fund was in deficit. Because of the refinancing of the company, pension fund members automatically became lower-ranking creditors than the people who allegedly invested in the company. The exposure of the pension fund increased as a result of the vehicle that was used to refinance the company. That is a ludicrous state of affairs, which can no longer be allowed to occur under British law.

There needs to be a great deal of close co-operation between the Department of Trade and Industry, the Department of Social Security and the Treasury. I should be extremely grateful if the Minister would reaffirm the Government's commitment to work with me and the ex-employees of the company in an attempt to get justice for them.

10.31 am

Mr. John Healey (Wentworth): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Rotherham (Mr. MacShane) on securing the debate, and on arguing his case so powerfully. He brings a worldwide view to the subject. I cannot compete with that, so I shall not try. Instead, I want to examine the local scene and make a plea to the Minister for practical help in dealing with some of the fallout of the problems that my hon. Friend outlined.

The British Steel Engineering Steels plant in Alwarke is in my constituency, as is the Thrybergh rolling mill. Many constituents also work at Kvaerner and Avesta and in other small steel plants throughout Rotherham and Sheffield. They feel a growing sense of dismay and desperation. They are doing all they can, often led by their union, to help their companies succeed and to become internationally competitive, but the firms are then hit by forces well beyond their control.

Steve Shaw is typical. He lives in Rawmarsh in my constituency, and works at Avesta in Sheffield. He, the Iron and Steel Trades Confederation branch secretary and other colleagues have been heavily involved in work force and management partnerships in the past five years to introduce new shift patterns, new working teams and new levels of productivity and profitability. However, in the summer, as my hon. Friend the Member for Rotherham said, the firm announced plans to close the mill and move the Sheffield order book to Sweden with the loss of 100 jobs and 100 family incomes.

I regret to say that Avesta is only one of a string of steel companies instituting closures and cuts. Even BSES, a world-class and internationally competitive company, is reducing capacity. However, it is still holding on to its work force, still investing and still looking to the upturn, but the danger lies with downstream companies in South Yorkshire. It lies with the damage that is already in the system but which is still to work through. Supply chains are long, especially in engineering steels.

The local challenge is to do what we can to help people living with the threat of redundancy. In Rotherham, we have pragmatism and resilience, and a proud track record of partnership involving organisations responding to such problems. That has been the root of our recent regeneration efforts, and it is the reason that we want pathfinder area status for Rotherham and the pilot scheme for the new deal for the over-25s.

Although I welcome the efforts of the Minister and his colleagues to set up a rapid response team in the Department of Trade and Industry, and while I applaud the efforts of similar rapid response teams in the borders and in the north-east to deal with large-scale company closures, Rotherham already has such an operation in place. It has an effective partnership to tackle the immediate problems of retraining and resettlement for steel workers who are losing their jobs. It is called Steel Partnership Training, and is based on co-operation nationally between the ISTC, SteelAction and Most Training. With support from the Rotherham ChamberTec and Rotherham council and, crucially, the Employment Service, it has secured RESIDER funding to pay for training for 100 redundant steel workers and those threatened with redundancy.

We are now looking for a further £45,000 to double the number of people with whom we can deal. That money lies in the RESIDER programme funds, and I urge the Minister to help to fast track our bid to secure that cash because we can then match it from other sources. If we can fast release these funds, action can be taken while workers are still on notice rather than on the dole. If we can secure the funds, in the midst of the maelstrom that is today's global economy, the Government can help individuals whose lives have been overturned by events that are well beyond their control and that of their company.

10.36 am

Mr. Owen Paterson (North Shropshire): I heartily congratulate the hon. Member for Rotherham (Mr. MacShane) on bringing this subject to the House on a Wednesday morning, but, having spent my whole life in manufacturing, I must deplore some of his comments about the previous Government.

After I left university and before I entered the House, I spent my time in industry, making things and selling them abroad. There was a revolution in Britain during that time, led by British Steel in particular. It was sad that, when my hon. Friend the Member for North Norfolk (Mr. Prior) said that he had worked for British Steel, he was laughed at. It was a team effort; surely the old class warfare has gone. We need people with skills on the shop floor, and we need people with my hon. Friend's skills in management—that was why the privatised British Steel was such a success.

The revolution liberated the country from the burdens of a rigged labour market that had the law behind it. Corporate taxation was dramatically reduced, which is a lesson that this Government should not forget, to levels that made it worth while staying in this country and investing here, and which brought the extraordinary tide of inward investment that has led to an extra 1 million firms being created. However, I have only three minutes left, so I shall be brief.

It was extraordinary that the hon. Member for Rotherham (Mr. MacShane) led an attack on Eddie George, who is in charge of the Bank of England, when he wants to join the euro. If the Chancellor wants to get rid of Eddie George, it is at least in his power to do so. If we joined the euro, we could never get rid of Mr. Duisenberg. We should be just one little voice, one of a dozen.

I find it extraordinary that, after the disaster of the exchange rate mechanism, for which our party has apologised but for which the Labour and Liberal parties have not, the Labour party wishes to put itself in a concrete box when it comes to exchange rates, so that a small, unelected group of people whom we can never remove will decide interest rates and exchange rates that will hit the work force of Rotherham.

The hon. Member for Rotherham cast some aspersions on the framework of shareholder capitalism which has proved successful in the western world, but he did not come up with an alternative.

[Mr. Owen Paterson]

The hon. Gentleman referred to a Government partnership, but, as far as I could tell, that boiled down to an exchange of information and a plea for funds to help with redundancies. Was he hinting that the Government should take back shareholdings in companies such as British Steel, or that a Government bank should be set up to provide soft loans? What is the Government partnership that the hon. Gentleman was talking about? There was also some knockabout stuff criticising shareholder capitalism, which brought so much prosperity to the western world and whose absence caused so much catastrophe in eastern Europe.

The hon. Member for Rotherham also mentioned unmanaged trade flows, and made some dangerous comments about dumping. Having spent much of my career exporting and importing, I am extremely alarmed by some of the noises being made here today. I include in that the remarks by my right hon. Friend the Member for Kensington and Chelsea (Mr. Clark), who I know believes in trade blocs.

In the 1920s and 1930s, there was a catastrophic shrinking of world trade by the raising of import barriers. I have spent much of my life battling to open up foreign markets to goods in my industry, with the help of European partners. Will the Minister give an assurance that he will be looking to open up another GATT round? The previous Government played a heroic role in getting important duties reduced around the world, and the Uruguay round was crowned by the establishment of the World Trade Organisation.

The hon. Member for Rotherham was absolutely right to mention Serbian steel, which I expect receives huge Government subsidies. Will the Minister tell us today that Britain will be leading the way in demanding another GATT round?

Finally, on energy, in the relaxed atmosphere of today's Adjournment debate, will the Minister answer the question that I have asked him twice before at Question Time? What leads Government energy policy? Is it the cheapest possible energy which will give the workers of Rotherham a chance to compete in the world, is it his own old commitment to the producer interests and protecting jobs, or is it Kyoto and keeping the world clean? Will the Minister think carefully, and give me a straight answer?

10.41 am

Mr. Tim Boswell (Daventry): I, too, congratulate the hon. Member for Rotherham (Mr. MacShane) on securing today's Adjournment debate. We have had a serious and sombre discussion of an important topic, in which hon. Members have brought their particular concerns about the current position of the steel industry to the attention of the House. Behind it, however, stalks the wider agenda of what the Victorians would have called political economy, and those points were interestingly rehearsed by my right hon. Friend the Member for Kensington and Chelsea (Mr. Clark), who takes a very clear view, which I do not share, but which we should consider.

The steel industry is an excellent industry, which has reformed itself out of all recognition, but it is in real difficulties. Despite those difficulties, there is a positive undertow, and a wish on all sides that it should succeed. Although nobody talks now about the commanding heights of the economy, steel remains extremely important. British Steel alone employs nearly 40,000 people, and, as the hon. Member for Wentworth (Mr. Healey) said, there is a huge downstream, which reaches even into constituencies such as mine, in fabrication, processing and stockholding. So there is a very large multiplier, and the industry remains central to our economy, just as—as I have always believed—manufacturing is a vital part of our economy.

The investment programme is exemplary, representing some £350 million a year for the industry as a whole. It has enabled us to move from commodity steel to specialist steel, while supplying across the range. It has resulted in a much better productivity record than the British average on manufacturing industry. It shows, for example, that the cost of making steel in 1998 is the same as it was in 1990, which is pretty good considering the lapse of time. It shows that exports have increased from 20 per cent. to 50 per cent. of output and that we are a world player. British Steel is arguably second, third or fourth in the world, depending on the particular year.

Yet, despite what I readily acknowledge has been achieved by the industry, its employees and its unions, there is a problem. As my hon. Friend the Member for North Norfolk (Mr. Prior), with his direct experience of the industry, said, had we not privatised the industry, its circumstances would not have enabled it to put its house in order. It continues to do that, as it cannot be a one-off but requires a continuing programme, yet the breakthrough to continuing success eludes it for some other reason embedded in what we have been saying about political economy.

I would quarrel with one or two remarks by the hon. Member for Rotherham. In particular, for new Labour he took an uncharacteristically churlish view of the role of profits and the importance of the share price. Despite the market operation to which he referred, the share price of British Steel has reduced by something like 80 per cent. reducing market capitalisation. If the share price is not buoyant, it will be more difficult to raise capital in future.

So there is an underlying problem, to which a number of hon. Members have referred. I have a fellow feeling with one or two hon. Members on both sides in relation to exchange rate policies, particularly monetary policy. As the hon. Member for Rotherham was speaking—and I did not have the facility to check—I wondered whether he had voted against the Bank of England Act 1998, as I did. I know that the right hon. Member for Llanelli (Mr. Davies) and the hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent (Mr. Smith), who are in their places, also voted against it.

Frankly, Labour Members have wished the problem on themselves. They opted for a strict monetary policy, possibly to restrain themselves from the temptations of inflation. That has had direct effects on the exchange rate, which in turn have had direct effects on manufacturing industry, particularly the steel sector. British Steel's briefing, prepared some months ago, said rather eloquently:

"No-one disputes that the control of UK inflation by the blunt instrument of six interest rate increases since May 1997"—

one of those has since been rescinded—

"has continued to impact with disproportionate severity on Britain's manufacturing sector (where inflationary pressures are, in contrast to much of the services sector, negligible)."

There we have it. It has made a huge difference, and has been accompanied by the Chancellor's increases in taxation, his attacks on savings and the impact on

company pension plans that has yet to be fully realised. British Steel spends about £60 million a year on its pension fund. It will not have its new actuarial valuation until next year, but that will impact directly on what has to be provided.

Although the industry is doing well, the exchange rate is fighting and frustrating improvement, making it difficult for the steel industry to trade. When Labour Members say, sometimes from the Front Bench, that some of the exchange rate appreciation took place under the previous Conservative Government, one has to make the point that the bid at the margin has run back in the past couple of months, yet the prospect for manufacturing industry continues to deteriorate. For example, three mills shut recently.

It may not all be the fault of the Government. They cannot be held to blame for the problems in the Korean economy and the flood of steel from Asia. Whether or not it is dumped is a matter for the European authorities to examine. However, we can blame the Government not only for their failures in macroeconomic policy, but for their determination to ratchet up the cost of British industry at a difficult time, making it even less competitive, despite the problems that hon. Members have identified.

Let me single out two issues within my remit and responsibility. The first relates to employment costs, where there is a whole package of measures, including the working time directive, the minimum wage and the fairness at work proposals. One could fairly say that the Government used the engineering industry almost as a template for the introduction of the minimum wage. As they said, not many people pay that little in engineering, but, as we now know, with outsourcing, many other industries feed into the steel sector, both as customers and as suppliers and sources of services to the industry.

The costs that will come through such packages will have an impact not just on the service industries—once memorably called, in another forgotten phrase, the "candy-floss economy"—but on the real world of manufacturing industry.

Mr. Paterson: Does my hon. Friend agree that none of the measures introduced by the Government has made the customers of British Steel in this country more competitive, and that there should be a ban on any further moves that would increase the costs of small businesses?

Mr. Boswell: I strongly agree with my hon. Friend.

The energy sector is important. It is no good saying, "We have got to do Kyoto," without considering the gas industry. The Government have shown that they are not prepared to encourage gas-fired power to help us to meet the Kyoto targets, so further strain will be put on the rest of manufacturing industry, which will be required to cut its emissions. There is a cost and an environmental impact.

As shown by this morning's news about Rover—a major steel user—the alarm bells in manufacturing industry are ringing. The Minister must reassure us that he is not heading straight for the iceberg.

10.50 am

The Minister for Trade (Mr. John Battle): I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Rotherham (Mr. MacShane) for introducing the debate. For anyone who says that economic debate has left the Chamber, today's example of the use of parliamentary time has been superlative. We have started a debate here. I am delighted that manufacturing is again being debated in the Chamber. I say "again", because I led a debate on manufacturing. One of the commentators on "Question Time" the other night said that my town of Leeds was an old textile town. It is not. Leeds has been in engineering for the whole of the 20th century. That is the key to my constituency and my city.

The Government are committed to manufacturing, engineering and technology. I was asked whether we were committed to investing in excellence in manufacturing. For most of my life, I have been fed up with hearing manufacturing referred to as if it were a 19th-century practice. The technology, innovation, imagination and creativity in British manufacturing belong in the 21st century. We will champion those industries.

I should like to say a positive word about the importance of steel as an economic force in its own right. We have to confront economic pressures and issues related to skills, training, unfair dumping and the reform of the pool to deal with artificially high electricity prices. I want to respond as positively as I can to my hon. Friend the Member for Rotherham's proposal for a round table.

I do not have time to respond to all the points that have been raised. My hon. Friend the Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Mr. Miller) referred to H. H. Robertsons. I know that he has had meetings with Ministers. I shall take that forward in the light of his comments this morning. I shall also look into the comments of my hon. Friend the Member for Sittingbourne and Sheppey (Mr. Wyatt) about "Fairness at Work".

In the past year, I have attended meetings of the group of steel Members of Parliament, under the chairmanship of my hon. Friend the Member for Rotherham, and visited steel companies. Those meetings, in which the ISTC and Steel Action are often involved, have been positive and helpful in difficult circumstances, and serve as a model of how to proceed.

I should like to keep emphasising that we attach great importance to our manufacturing industry. Some 4 million people work in manufacturing. It is important also because of its innovation, its generation of new technologies and the fact that its output is still one fifth of gross domestic product. Manufacturing is how we will make our future.

I do not want the north to be set against the south—manufacturing against services. We should be looking for integration, accepting that both sectors are vital. I recognise the major role of the steel industry and its products in underpinning almost all manufacturing. Steel is not just a material—it is an economic force.

I should like to mention briefly the development of world-class, lightweight, stronger materials for the automotive industry, including new products such as the ultra-light steel auto body project. Later today, I shall be at the motor show in Birmingham, where I shall visit the British Steel stand to see its contribution to technology, industry and the economy.

My hon. Friend the Member for Rotherham talked about clusters of economic success. We should focus on them more readily. My hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent, North (Ms Walley) and others praised those who work in the industry, who are the reason why

[Mr. John Battle]

it is one of the cleanest, most innovative and efficient steel industries in the world. In the past 20 years, productivity has risen more than fourfold, while the amount of energy needed to produce a tonne of steel has been reduced by about one third. Our productivity compares favourably with that of Japan and the United States. The steel industry's export performance is still remarkable by any standards.

However, as has rightly been stressed during the debate, we must face economic realities, and recognise that current economic conditions are difficult. The current difficulties in the world economy show the importance of pursuing policies that help us to steer a course of domestic economic stability. The Government are taking action to build a stable economy capable of sustained and steady growth, allowing businesses to move ahead with confidence, in contrast to the boom-and-bust, stop-go economics of the 1980s and early 1990s, when interest rates reached 15 per cent. and more than 1 million manufacturing jobs were lost. It is worth reminding ourselves of that occasionally. We are working hard to sort out the mess that we inherited.

I recognise that the strength of sterling and the financial difficulties in Asia and Russia are causing particular difficulties for manufacturers and exporters, particularly the steel industries. We have to take the long-term view, not let short-term pressures lead us back to the policies that produced the boom and bust of the past. The short-term fixes of the previous Administration did not work. We are laying the foundations for economic growth by putting economic management on to a more stable, long-term footing. We are encouraging investment and productivity growth and helping people from welfare to work, as my hon. Friend the Member for Wentworth (Mr. Healey) said.

Global forecasts are being revised down across the world. One quarter of the world, including Japan, is in recession, and no country is immune from the current instability in the world economy. We must ensure that we do not go back to protectionism, and that world markets are kept open. We need openness and transparency in financial transactions, with proper supervision and regulation.

More positively, we are also addressing the fundamental structural weaknesses that have held the economy back. It is appropriate that the university for industry, which focuses on re-skilling during a person's working life, is to be located in Sheffield. I think that that was announced this morning, and I can confirm it.

I also praise the steel industry's excellent training record. One of the keys to competitiveness is skills training. Intensive investment in training has played a major part in the success of the steel industry. British Steel continues to invest heavily, providing significant amounts of training to ensure that all staff have the necessary skills. The industry was one of the first to have its national training organisation recognised by the Department for Education and Employment when NTOs were introduced in 1997.

British Steel has understood the need for training in a way that other industries have not. It is a model of how to proceed. British Steel has also understood that exporting is not simply a matter of selling products cheaply. Success requires investment in innovation, efficiency and training.

We have to get the framework right. We are working on building partnerships with the steel industry, as with other manufacturers. The agenda includes science, engineering and technology, the spread of innovation, new processes and new ways of doing things, the availability of finance for investment in research and development and the creation of a culture that builds on and uses the new knowledge-driven economies, integrating new technologies and telecommunications as a means of revitalising our manufacturing base.

Our commitment to that partnership includes taking an active part in defending the steel industry from illegal trade practices, unfair competition and illegal subsidies to its competitors. Where such practices are shown to exist, we shall campaign rigorously on behalf of the industry, and will represent it.

As I said in an intervention, we are tackling the wholesale market, which is a complex business. Electricity prices are determined by a pool. We have got on with tackling the matter; we asked the regulator to look at it. He has reported and we have accepted the broad shape of his response. We are pressing the regulator and a team of people on the issue. The regulator has appointed a person radically to overhaul the pool mechanism, to ensure that electricity prices for industry are brought down and it is not priced out by artificially high prices. The industry is, of course, regulated, so capping is a matter for the regulator, whom the Government do not tell directly what to do.

I assure my hon. Friend the Member for Rotherham that the regulator—the director general—is closely monitoring developments. If it appears that prices are rising without good reason, arrangements can be reconsidered. We shall keep an eye on that. On average—I know that it is not fair on the steel industry to say this—price pressure will be downwards.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. We must turn to the next debate.

Parliament and Politics (BBC Coverage)

11 am

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall): I am delighted to have the opportunity to speak on this subject. I recall that the hon. Member for Rotherham (Mr. MacShane), who opened the previous debate, secured a debate on the BBC's obligations to Parliament on 11 March. It is largely in that context that I shall draw attention to yet another development in the relationship between the BBC and the House.

I suspect that, regardless of whatever else appears on BBC television and radio reports this evening, there will be no report of this debate. The corporation is extremely embarrassed by its failure to fulfil its public service broadcasting commitments to give proper emphasis to Parliament's role in the political life of the nation. In the past few days, I have been subjected to a stream of letters and memoranda—I suspect that other hon. Members have, too—which betray the BBC's embarrassment and defensive posture.

Hon. Members will recall the dumbing down of Radio 4, including the exile of "Today in Parliament", "Yesterday in Parliament" and "The Week in Westminster" to relatively inaccessible times and wavelengths. That was the theme of the debate secured by the hon. Member for Rotherham on 11 March.

Mr. Denis MacShane (Rotherham): I feel that I cannot take part in a second Adjournment debate today, so I beg hon. Members to excuse my absence from a debate on an issue that is dear to me. I support the thrust of the hon. Gentleman's argument. Has he seen the remarkable quotation from Miss Polly Toynbee, who said when "Yesterday in Parliament" was booted off "Today" that it was a jolly good thing because everyone was fed up with hearing Members of Parliament on that programme? Now she has recanted and said that "Today" after 8.30 am has become incredibly boring and that please could the voices of distinguished Back Benchers, such as those present—excluding myself—be heard once again. I wish the hon. Gentleman well in his debate.

Mr. Tyler: I am grateful for the hon. Gentleman's support. I am also grateful to the hon. Member for Ribble Valley (Mr. Evans), who is present. I hope that hon. Members have seen his early-day motion on the subject.

The fears that were expressed in March about the treatment of parliamentary proceedings by Radio 4 have been entirely justified. We have already been forewarned that audience figures, which are coming out this week, will show that not only we, but much more importantly, the listeners, think that the BBC was wrong to replace a debate between parliamentarians with some insipid discussion in the studio. That has proved a disaster.

I note with interest that, in pointing out the hits and misses of Radio 4's changes, yesterday's edition of *The Independent* identified specifically such final-section debates on "Today" between 8.30 and 9 am—when we used to attract a very good audience. Those ratings appear to have collapsed. We shall no doubt hear from Mr. James Boyle later this week about how disastrous his changes have been. If they are as disastrous as has been widely forecast, I hope that, in the best traditions of the corporation, his resignation offer will shortly be on the director general's desk.

Since such events, there has been a further slaughter of the BBC's coverage of the House. At the very end of July, when there were but two days before the summer recess, it announced some further major cuts. Until July, in addition to the political teams located in each distinct part of the United Kingdom, a dedicated journalist worked full time at the Millbank studios to ensure that every relevance of Parliament to each region was identified, reported and explained. Members of all parties—Back Benchers and Front Benchers—benefited from their special knowledge, professionalism and close liaison with our work in this place. Most importantly, listeners and viewers received the service for which they were paying.

On 29 July—immediately before the summer recess—Members of Parliament received a letter from the BBC outlining the proposed changes. The letter stated that the BBC was recruiting

"ten political editors, one for each region in England . . . able to lead the way in person across all our outlets—regional television, local radio and regional text services.

Regional Political Editors will split their time between their regional centres and London, working out of the BBC offices in Millbank, when Parliament is sitting.

We will maintain a team of political journalists to back them up, based full time at Millbank as now, as well as our current local radio political staff in London."

Mrs. Ray Michie (Argyll and Bute): Since my hon. Friend is referring to regions in England, I should like to draw his attention to what is happening in Scotland—which is not, of course, a region. Does he agree that the BBC's reported reluctance to allow Scotland to carry its own 6 o'clock news is contrary to the spirit of devolution and the establishment of the Scottish Parliament next year? Does he agree that that will be seen as a slap in the face for BBC Scotland and its well-produced programmes and quality staff, and will paint the British Broadcasting Corporation as yet another London-based, domineering control machine?

Mr. Tyler: I strongly agree with my hon. Friend. I come from another Celtic country—although we in Cornwall do not aspire to nationhood in quite the same way—and can tell her that we feel exactly the same. The steps that have been taken not only cut costs but are an attempt to metropolitanise the BBC, which is completely contrary to its charter responsibilities.

I return to the explanation given to Members of Parliament in July and the letter that was sent to us. The letter purported to suggest that there would be an improvement in regional coverage of Parliament. It said, for example:

"This important development can only be for the good. It will put in place a more effective system of political coverage and one with which you . . . will find easier to liaise.

It will ensure major political regional developments are covered more comprehensively, with greater authority, and that the information reaches our regional and local centres quickly, and from there to our listeners and viewers".

That is wishful thinking. The new arrangements, as they have been set out, can only be to the detriment of the BBC's regional coverage and will not offer viewers and listeners the quality of output to which we have become accustomed.

The timing of the announcement was exceptionally reminiscent of the worst media management of successive Ministers. The BBC set out plans for parliamentary

[Mr. Tyler]

coverage just as the House was rising for the summer and, indeed, as its staff were leaving Millbank to do jobs in other parts of the country, or to go on holiday. In a letter to *Ariel*, the BBC's in-house magazine, members of the National Union of Journalists and the Broadcasting, Entertainment, Cinematograph and Theatre Union—BECTU—wrote:

"The announcement that the regional political editor's post and that of the regional Westminster correspondent were to be scrapped and replaced by a new post seems to have been timed deliberately to forestall discussion by both staff and MPs, coming as it did three days before the summer recess, just as all concerned were leaving for their summer holidays."

Those very astute political observers have spotted that their own bosses have been playing the games of media manipulation that we are used to from Ministers.

The claim that those cuts will strengthen political coverage is, in my view, deliberately misleading. I can imagine what Lord Reith would say about it. The 10 dedicated political correspondents based full-time at Westminster are to be replaced by four hard-pressed journalists trying to cover the whole United Kingdom. How does that strengthen the BBC's coverage of Parliament and politics?

Yesterday my hon. Friend the Member for St. Ives (Mr. George) went to Millbank for an interview, only to be confronted by utter chaos. If other hon. Members have been over there in the past two or three days, they will know that the place is rundown, and depressed and dispirited as a result. No one seemed to know what was going on, and no one had any knowledge of the area.

BBC journalists themselves—we must assume that they are of the highest possible calibre, because the BBC management keeps telling us that they are—have today issued Members with a National Union of Journalists brief from its chapel about the debate:

"The BBC is representing this change as an 'enhancement' of regional political coverage. This is not the case. What the BBC failed to point out, in its letter to MPs last July, is that the 10 existing posts of Westminster Correspondents, based at 4, Millbank have been abolished. They will be replaced, eventually, by a team of four journalists at Millbank, working in support of the Regional Editors. They will not represent any particular region, and therefore will not be able to maintain individual contact with the region's MPs.

The BBC sought to give the impression that the new Political Editors would be working from Westminster during Parliamentary term time. This is not the case. With their commitments in their regions, and taking into account travelling time, it is unlikely that they will be able to pay more than occasional visits to Westminster. Also, the facilities available to them at Westminster will be cut back. Coverage of Parliament is therefore bound to suffer.

The BBC says it wants to base coverage of politics in the regions themselves. We feel, with one person expected to cover politics from both ends of the country simultaneously, coverage will inevitably suffer. The NUJ believes this to be a cost-cutting exercise".

As a former member of the NUJ, I regard that as an accurate and level-headed account that in no way exaggerates the situation.

As for the claim that the appointment of political journalists in each region will offer us all a one-stop shop for contact—

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for allowing me to intervene now. I apologise for the fact that I have to be somewhere else shortly, but I am pleased to be here for his speech. Does he agree—the Minister for Film, Tourism and Broadcasting may or may not agree, but even if she does she is hardly likely to say so—that the chaos at the BBC has reached such a state that the director general and the chairman should consider their position?

Do not the developments in regional reporting that the hon. Gentleman is eloquently describing, stem largely from the way in which the BBC has done its best to undermine the national reporting of Parliament? "Yesterday in Parliament", which we have debated several times, provides an example. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the BBC is treating Parliament with utter contempt?

Mr. Tyler: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman, who has long experience of such matters, and I think that he will agree that the present situation is unprecedented. Indeed, the appearance of BBC representatives before the Select Committee on Culture, Media and Sport yesterday confirmed that there has been a major breakdown in Parliament's confidence in the way in which the corporation is run. I should add that I spoke to the Chairman of the Select Committee, the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman), yesterday, and he wished to be here for the debate but cannot attend. I think that he too would endorse our views.

I shall use my region, the south-west, to illustrate the way in which the rundown of our service is likely to affect the quality of the output of the BBC. We already have in the region an excellent and experienced political editor. There is no change in that respect, no improvement. How can that man be expected to be in Plymouth and Westminster at the same time, and to cover late-breaking stories—a familiar experience in both places? Indeed, late-breaking stories are an experience with which every hon. Member will be familiar, because they happen in all parts of the country. It is beyond me that such an arrangement should be even contemplated, let alone attempted.

It takes about four and a half hours for the political editor to travel from the studio in Plymouth to the studio in Westminster. Within that time, even with modern communications—especially as Great Western Trains seems to be conspiring to try to make the time even longer, and most of the line seems to be out of contact for mobile telephones—he cannot keep abreast of developments in this place day by day and hour by hour, let alone minute by minute.

Stories break suddenly, as we all know, and events take place that are of great significance to our constituents. Such is life in politics. I fear that all too often, when something is happening in the south-west, the editor will be on a train, or here, and that when something is happening here, he will be on a train, or in the region. That is inevitable. Even when he appears at Westminster, he will have to compete at the Millbank studios with nine other editors, and the resident journalists, for three or four desks and a limited number of camera crews.

The whole operation is being run down to danger point, and starved of the necessary resources. Even if we are lucky and the political editor is at Westminster and available for an interview, there is no guarantee that he will have the facilities and the support crew that he needs.

Such practical concerns have not been thoroughly thought through by management, despite the long time for which they have been gestated. No one has explained

convincingly to me or to anyone else in this place, or to the staff of the BBC, how the logistics of the new operation will work.

It is by no means clear what the four full-time journalists—the quartet who are left of the original 10—will do. So few people cannot be expected to keep in contact with all 659 Members of Parliament, let alone people in the other place, and their own regional political editors. There will be no specialisation, and no geographical or regional expertise available either to the regional editors or to ourselves.

Both radio and television coverage of Parliament will undoubtedly suffer as a result. I am especially concerned about the effects on Back Benchers. The parties, and certainly the Government, have access to a huge number of opportunities to ensure that their views are broadcast—and don't we all know it. For Back Benchers, however, making connections and forming a continuing professional relationship with a journalist who knows something about our constituencies and our regions is crucial.

I suspect that the BBC is once again, perhaps unconsciously, playing into the hands of the Government. It is the official view from Downing street and Whitehall that is most likely to be heard, rather than the views of Members, in all parts of the House, who may take a differing view.

Under the old regime, until the end of July, all Back Benchers had to do was contact somebody whom we already knew in Millbank to organise a discussion of the issues of the day. We could feel confident that he or she would know the background and something about our area, our constituencies and our special interests. He or she would also be aware of what was happening here, and its relevance to what was happening in the region. The connections would be made; one did not have to give a long explanation of where Cornwall is, or why Scotland is important. The journalist would already know; that would be part of the job. However, as my hon. Friend the Member for St. Ives discovered yesterday, if one goes to the studios now, there is no guarantee that there will be anyone there who knows anything about our activities either here or in the region.

When my hon. Friend the Member for Truro and St. Austell (Mr. Taylor) first heard about the proposals, independently of my own representations he wrote to the BBC as follows:

"We also have a dedicated political correspondent at Westminster . . . This person is the one that we would deal with on a daily basis. I regularly see him about the House of Commons, we exchange political information in that form, he is always available on the 'phone when stories are breaking, he can be relied on to see what is going on in The Gallery so I do not have to inform him every time I make an intervention or a speech, and most important he is well aware of the developing stories in the South West, their origin and the way in which they look like developing for the future."

Every hon. Member here will have a similar experience, and will be able to say that in the past the BBC has been able to take the temperature in the House in a reasonably effective way.

Most important of all, the BBC has failed to consult the House, either through individual Members of Parliament or through the House authorities. I know that Madam Speaker has made direct representations to the chairman of the BBC in the past about the lack of consultation, and I believe that the timing of the announcement at the end of July showed what the BBC thinks of her, of the House and of us as Members of it.

In my role shadowing the Leader of the House for my party, I have come across no one who shares the view that this move will—in the words of the BBC—

"put in place a more effective system of political coverage."

I find no one who thinks that Members of Parliament will find it easier to liaise. I find no one who thinks that it will ensure that major political and regional developments are covered more comprehensively. Quite the contrary; everyone to whom I have spoken, in all parties, regards the proposals—on top of the other earlier reductions in the quality and accessibility of our coverage this year—as yet more dumbing down of Parliament and politics.

This morning, a publication entitled "Our Commitment to You: The BBC's Statement of Promises to Viewers and Listeners" arrived on my desk. Other Members may have seen it. I have looked through it quickly, and the word "Parliament" does not appear in the publication's 24 pages. Indeed, I can find no reference to politics or political activity. It is as though the BBC is saying that this place does not matter, and it is an insult that it should send such material at this time.

Mr. Richard Spring (West Suffolk): If the hon. Gentleman were to look carefully in the section detailing the specific promises for this year, he would find that under No. 5—this may be the nearest we get to politics—the BBC promises to

"devise programmes which respond to devolution and political change in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland."

Mr. Tyler: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman, who has examined the document with even more care than me. However, I believe that I am right in saying that the word "Parliament" does not appear—not even in the context of the Scottish Parliament.

Quite apart from the BBC's intention, there is continuing confusion about the planned level of staffing. Since the original letter to which I have referred—sent on 28 July to Members of Parliament—the BBC has clearly panicked. Even after the limited response that the BBC received during the parliamentary recess from Members of Parliament, it panicked in the face of the immediate and unanimous concerns that were voiced. The latest briefing that I have been sent claims:

"there is the option—still the subject of negotiation—of having up to nine full-time regional correspondents, albeit on a lower grade."

That has just popped out of the air in the past few days. It may be that, for once, someone is listening to Members of Parliament. I hope so, because this is a serious issue.

We do not know whether this move is all part of a ratings war with ITV, satellite and cable, or just a cost-cutting exercise to feed the voracious appetite of the coming digital revolution. Journalists believe it is the latter; I believe it may be a combination of the two.

If the BBC does not take Parliament seriously, why should we support the continuation of the licence fee? If it does not take us seriously, why should we take it seriously? Whatever else may happen, the BBC will still look to us to support it when the charter and licence arrangements are reviewed in the next few months. The chairman, governors and top management should be

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warned that Parliament will not take seriously their efforts to persuade us to recognise their public service role if they continue to undervalue Parliament.

The BBC's war of attrition in terms of its coverage of our affairs must end if the corporation is to continue to enjoy special privileges. If it cannot guarantee effective parliamentary and political reportage at all levels, it cannot claim to remain Britain's national broadcaster, and it must give way to someone else.

I believe, as do Members of Parliament and most members of the public, that Parliament is still the heart of our democratic system. The Speaker has warned the BBC on a number of occasions that it is out of touch with opinion here and in the country if it fails to recognise that. I hope that it heeds that warning before it is too late.

11.23 am

Mr. Nigel Evans (Ribble Valley): I congratulate the hon. Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler) on gaining this Adjournment debate on an important subject. The hon. Gentleman referred to the early-day motion that I managed to table on the last day before the long summer recess. The subject of it was brought to my attention by someone who knew what was happening in the BBC; we were not privy to that.

I am sure that Members will understand how difficult it is on the last day before the recess—indeed, the last afternoon—to get six Members of Parliament together, explain to them what is going on, win their trust and get them to put their signatures to an early-day motion. I am delighted that I was able to do so on an all-party basis. It is important that Members of all parties in the House believe that regional input into what we do here is important.

In my view, the three most important words in terms of the BBC are "public service obligation". The hon. Member for North Cornwall mentioned the licence fee. We must justify why we tax every household in the land—I assume most have television sets—to the tune of £100 for the licence fee for the BBC, which will go up.

In her previous exalted position on the Opposition Back Benches, the Minister for Film, Tourism and Broadcasting said that the BBC ought to do a lot more to offer pensioners a reduced licence fee. Since she has got into a position to do something about it, she has changed her position somewhat. Perhaps we will hear something from her about that matter later. However, we thought that the licence fee bore heavily upon certain licence payers.

The Minister for Film, Tourism and Broadcasting (Janet Anderson): The hon. Gentleman will know that it is our intention to set up a panel next year to review the BBC licence fee. We have made it plain in correspondence with hon. Members from all parties that that review will include a detailed consideration of the current arrangements for licence fee concessions.

Mr. Evans: I am delighted to learn that—it may be breaking news. All Members of Parliament get constituents at our surgeries who find it difficult to understand why some obtain a concession down to being charged £5 for the licence fee while others in similar circumstances do not. The BBC will be listening carefully to what the Minister has said.

Since the early-day motion was tabled, we have been privy to information from the BBC. I have read carefully what the BBC's Michael Hastings has had to say. He is a great man but he is trying to justify the unjustifiable, although I am sure that the matter has just landed on his plate. I suspect that he had as little consultation on the re-arrangement of regional reporting as we had—which, of course, was little to none. However, his justification is pretty thin.

The BBC has already tried to marginalise the House of Commons through the changes to "Yesterday in Parliament". We were all told what a great thing that would be—we would have a much longer programme. However, the reality is that fewer people are able to listen to it. We were told that people did not want to listen because we were all boring and that they were switching off. I could imagine that some people may think us boring, but it could also have had something to do with the time of the programme. People were going to work and doing other things, and they were not able to sit and listen to it. Therefore, fewer people were able to our listen directly to our quotes on "Yesterday in Parliament."

People could argue that a wide choice is now available, with more channels and digital television. Yesterday saw the launch of BBC Parliament, the running channel made available on cable, satellite and digital on which people will be able to see non-stop coverage of the House of Commons. Few are able to see what is going on in the House of Commons currently, and the change is taking place now.

The suspicion might be that all the changes at the BBC—such as the enormous investment in the internet, which has produced some superb pages, and all the extra channels going on to digital—are costing a lot of money. The BBC is cash-limited by the licence fee, and it cannot take advertising. It is limited in terms of how it can raise revenue. One way it can do so is by chopping back and by saving money elsewhere. The BBC is saving money at the expense of the reporting of regional aspects of what is happening at Westminster.

As has been said, Front-Bench Members have enormous opportunities to be on the news at 1 o'clock and 9 o'clock and to be on various other radio stations throughout the day. They get a good hit at such broadcasting. Also, all our front players have the opportunity to appear on "On the Record". Regional reporting is completely different and it gives us an opportunity to air what we are doing here on behalf of our constituents back home. Sending journalists from London to our areas will not help us much.

The trust that is built up between regional journalists and Members of Parliament has been mentioned. In six years, I have got to know regional journalists from all the channels well, including the BBC. That trust cannot be fathomed or weighed. One cannot say, "This is what it is worth," but we know that it is worth a lot. One can pick up the telephone, talk to the regional journalist and know that what one is saying will be heard in confidence. Suggestions may be made and the journalist may be able to assist by getting a programme together or doing a piece on the issue concerned and on what the Member of Parliament is saying about it in the House. If the number

of regional journalists working in the House is reduced to a mere handful, with all the others working in the regions, it will be difficult to build up the same sort of rapport with such a small group. The journalists will be snowed under, given our extra work load and all the extra issues with which we seem to be involved. Members of Parliament are already snowed under and the case load seems to increase every Session. The same must apply to journalists.

I do not know whether hon. Members have had a chance to see "News 24", the new 24-hour rolling news programme from the BBC. It is good in parts, but not good enough. I have argued that the programme could use much of the regional reporting from here, so that all the United Kingdom has a better understanding of what is going on in our country. It is all very well having good-quality programming for the regions, but why not share it out more and put some of it on "News 24", thereby making the cost of some of the reports on it more economic. As we know, news reporting is expensive. I hope that the BBC will reconsider that suggestion.

The regions have already suffered. In my area, we receive BBC's "North Westminster", on which the Minister for Film, Tourism and Broadcasting has appeared from time to time, and very good she is, too. A few years ago her wonderful appearances on that programme used to be aired twice, on the Sunday edition, which went out live, and again on the mid-week repeat. The latter had more viewers than the Sunday edition, but it was chopped. There again, a smaller audience will be left to see what we are doing at Westminster and find out what issues we are fighting for.

The BBC has made a mistake. The hon. Member for North Cornwall said that it is now rushing about, trying to plug holes and to placate us, but we are not for placating on this issue. We are fighting not for ourselves but for our constituents, who watch regional programmes and who want to know what we are doing. They write to us and from time to time they want to see us on regional television to ensure that their voices are being heard at Westminster, where it is important.

Mr. John Burnett (Torridge and West Devon): The hon. Gentleman touches on a crucial issue. Does he agree that it is not merely that our constituents want to see what we are doing, but that they are incredibly interested in highlighting the issues that they hold so dear, especially in the regions?

Mr. Evans: I agree. These are not merely the issues that interest us but those that the people in the regions feed to us—the issues about which they write to us, campaign and form lobby groups. We use regional journalists at Westminster, with whom we have built up trust, to get our constituents' views aired on the BBC on a regional basis, according to the public service obligation for which all our constituents pay their licence fee.

We want some balance. We want the BBC to reconsider. A few years ago, if the BBC was famous for anything, it was for its repeats. Let it look again at its decisions. Where it has made mistakes, let it concede that it has done so. Let the BBC concede that it has rushed this decision through without any proper consultation, that it has made mistakes about "Yesterday in Parliament" and let it change its mind. Let it ensure that there is a real improvement in the regional slant of the reporting of Westminster, so that we can air the issues and campaigns that matter most to our constituents. The only way in which we can properly do so is by consulting with regional journalists based here, with whom we build up trust and whom we see daily—not merely fleetingly every two or three weeks in the Lobby, when so many other people want to see them—so that we can get our views across on the BBC.

The Minister talked about the review of the licence fee. I ask her to use pressure to remind the BBC of its public service obligation. That is the reason why home owners and the taxpayer have to pay the licence fee in the first place—so that the BBC can cover in detail areas that would not be appropriate for commercial stations. Today, we are saying that the BBC is wrong and should think again.

11.35 am

Mr. David Heath (Somerton and Frome): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler) on securing this debate, as it is vital that the matter be given a proper airing in the House, and I am grateful to him for giving us the opportunity to speak about it. I also congratulate the hon. Member for Ribble Valley (Mr. Evans), not only on his speech, with which I entirely agreed, but on his efforts and prompt action in the dark days at the end of July when any sensible person had gone back to his or her constituency to prepare for the holidays but some of us benighted souls were still here to sign the early-day motion that he pressed upon us in the corridors.

This has not been a good week for the BBC, what with the loss of the cricket coverage, the savaging by a Select Committee, the adventures of "Blue Peter" and the evidence that some presenters have an affection for more than sticky-backed plastic, and now this debate on the BBC's regional coverage. It is terribly easy for us to sound pompous on this subject and for it to be suggested that we feel passionately about it because we like hearing our own voices on the BBC. Let us be honest: there may be an element of that. We like to be able to project what we are saying to the people we represent.

However, there are far more important issues at stake for people in the regions—the service that the British Broadcasting Corporation provides for them. There are two main elements to their concern. The first is public service broadcasting, its ethos and what it means to have a BBC—something for which many of us have argued strongly and which we want protected and enhanced because it is such an important element of our national structure.

I do not like the term "dumbing down", which has been used this morning. It is an example of dumbing down to introduce that Americanism. However, we all share the feeling that the BBC is retreating from the intellectual and moral high ground that it was once able to occupy. There is a sense that it no longer aims any higher than catering for the lowest common denominator; that is not the role of the BBC, either under its charter or historically.

I also believe that the BBC has been deeply patronising in what it has suggested about parliamentary coverage and the public's interest in what happens in this place. It assumes that people are interested only in bread and circuses. I do not believe that that is so, but it is, of course,

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a self-fulfilling prophecy—if that is all that people are given access to, how can they develop an interest in politics and in the arguments in this House that will have a dramatic impact on their everyday lives?

One has only to look at other countries to see the great hunger for information about politics that is engendered where one may not expect it. Yesterday, I returned from the former Yugoslav republic of Macedonia, where I was monitoring the elections. There, where democracy is young and the public have had little opportunity to hold their politicians to account, people are remarkably well informed and understand the nuances of political argument, as their national broadcasting corporation carries daily the debates in their Parliament, the Sobranje.

People listen and want to know the arguments. One could say that that is inevitable in a young democracy in an area of the world that is not known for its stability, but it highlights how patronising it is to say that the British people cannot be interested in politics, or that they cannot understand anything but the most simplistic voting system—it is thought too difficult to put a tick or circle in a different place. The House should condemn such patronising attitudes.

As well as the public service ethos, we should consider the BBC's commitment to our localities and regions, about which, as someone from the west country and a Somerset lad through and through, I feel strongly. I know how far it is from London to the west country, a fact which seems to have eluded those who are based at Westminster. I know that what matters down in Somerset is not the same as what matters to the metropolitan elite in London. What we believe to be important is as valid as what people in London believe to be important—the issues that we want to raise are important.

I am sure that, like many of us, my hon. Friend the Member for North Cornwall has come across people who assume that the distance between Penzance and Swindon is about five miles, that places past Slough are only a short trip away from one another and that anywhere in Somerset cannot be far from a broadcasting studio in Bristol even though it may be an hour and a quarter away. People are not aware of the geography of the area.

As the hon. Member for Ribble Valley said, the BBC has a duty to inform people of what we, as Members of Parliament, are doing on their behalf. We are not sent to Westminster to disappear from the map, not to be seen until the next election. Many hon. Members spend a lot of time ensuring that they are in touch with their constituents so that they can express their views in the House—but where is the feedback if not through the media? How do our constituents know what we are doing, or trying to do, and achieving, or not achieving, on their behalf? That is an important element in the democratic process.

My concern is not only political coverage; there is also a shrinkage in general coverage within the localities. My example is parochial, although I make no apology for that. Somerset Sound, which is an opt-out from Radio Bristol—we never qualified for a radio station of our own—used to provide a number of hours of local broadcasting from Taunton each day. Recently, those hours have been substantially reduced. We no longer have an afternoon programme from Taunton; it now comes from Bristol. I do not believe that that is because there is no demand. People want local news and views, and Bristol news, Bristol views and even a Bristol accent are not the same as Somerset news, Somerset views and a Somerset accent.

The link-up was made with no consultation with me or my colleagues who represent the Somerset constituencies—there was no attempt to reconcile us to the change. When my right hon. Friend the Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown) took up the matter, he received a remarkably candid reply from the managing editor, for whom I have considerable respect—I know that she is strongly committed to our local services. She said that her problem was money; she had not been given the budget to provide the local services in Somerset to which the BBC is, in theory, committed and which it should provide as part of its public service.

The lack of regional coverage poses three threats. First—I do not want to be too pompous—there is a threat to democracy, as local people are being further distanced from the political process and will understand it less; they will not be able to know what we are doing on their behalf and so will find it more difficult to hold us to account. Moreover, it will be more difficult properly to discuss local issues, as what starts as a local campaign seems to evaporate into the ether, never to be mentioned again. Secondly, there is a threat to local identity, as local broadcasting—and the knowledge that people are intimately concerned with the area and want to represent its views—is at least part of that local identity.

Thirdly and most importantly, as my hon. Friend the Member for North Cornwall said, there is a threat to the BBC. If the BBC cannot provide local and regional coverage and does not live up to the public service ethos for which it was created, what is it doing and why should we impose a tax to pay for it? It has a duty to provide intelligent coverage and properly researched comment for all parts of the country, not only for London, and it forgets that at its peril.

11.47 am

Mr. Peter Atkinson (Hexham): I congratulate the hon. Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler) on securing this debate. This is an important issue, and it is right that it should be aired in the House. However, it is a pity that our debates on particular BBC issues turn into BBC-bashing sessions.

I profoundly disagree with the hon. Member for Somerton and Frome (Mr. Heath). The BBC's job is to satisfy its audience, who pay for it through the £100 licence fee. If the BBC broadcasts a version of Macedonian television, on which he seems to be so keen, people will not sit round their sets listening to our breathless prose; they will switch to the many hundreds of digital and other channels that they will shortly be able to receive.

Mr. David Heath: According to the hon. Gentleman's thesis—if I understand it correctly—the BBC should be subject to market forces and not receive the licence fee. He cannot have it both ways: either the BBC is a public resource or it is not.

Mr. Atkinson: The BBC has to have it both ways. If it fails to deliver substantial audiences, hon. Members and

others will say that it should not receive the licence fee, as it provides bad value to those who pay that fee. The BBC walks a tightrope, and we must allow it, in fulfilling its public service obligation—which it does very well—to make sensible editorial judgments.

I disagree with my hon. Friend the Member for Ribble Valley (Mr. Evans) about "Yesterday in Parliament". That programme can now be found on long wave, so that many more people can listen to it—his quality prose can be heard in Belgium, Holland, northern France and the Republic of Ireland as well as in this country.

Mr. Tyler: The hon. Gentleman may not be aware that while it is possible to listen to long wave in Belgium or wherever, that is not possible in some parts of London, let alone in Cornwall. Has the hon. Gentleman read that the BBC itself has already admitted that its listener figures have collapsed for "Yesterday in Parliament", "Today in Parliament" and "The Week in Westminster"? So on the hon. Gentleman's own definition—that all that matters is the number of people listening—the BBC has already made a major mistake.

Mr. Atkinson: It does not say much about our performance in the House that we are of such little interest to listeners that they cannot simply click a switch at 8.45. The fact that they cannot do that probably says more about the House than it does about the BBC. I assure the hon. Member that our constituents are not queueing up to see the hon. Member for Hexham (Mr. Atkinson) on the television. We kid ourselves if we think that the public are fighting to see us on television and to listen to us on the radio: they are not.

Having, I hope, slightly defended the BBC's right to make independent editorial judgments on what it transmits, I go on in part to agree with what the hon. Member for North Cornwall said about political coverage at Westminster. I am concerned not so much with what the BBC proposes to do as with how it has done it, how it has treated its staff, and to an extent, how it has misled the House in its correspondence. I agree with him entirely that, if the BBC wants to reduce political coverage, it should stand up and say why. It should come to the House and say, "You are all so boring that we don't want to cover you any more", or whatever. Let us have it in the open so that it can be properly debated.

Mr. Burnett: Does the hon. Gentleman believe that it is at least a paradox that commercial television is, as far as I know, retaining all its regional coverage? Can he explain that away?

Mr. Atkinson: I am trying to criticise the BBC not for its decision, but for the way in which it arrived at it. It is not my job to defend it. These are the kind of arguments that we should have had with the BBC, not this muddling and misleading correspondence that we had with it before the recess.

The BBC must stand accused of causing a tremendous amount of uncertainty and worry to its regional staff as a result of its decision. The letter that was sent just before the recess gave me the wrong impression that the political editors would be down here in Westminster during the parliamentary Session and travel back for the recess. That manifestly is not the case and not what was planned, but it is what I thought was intended. We will have four gofers in Westminster, and the political editors will have to travel down.

I represent a north-east seat. BBC staff from my area who want to come here will be faced with at least a three-and-a-half-hour train journey to get to London in order to cover a story and a three-and-a-half-hour train journey back, perhaps spending the night in London. The same would apply to the constituency of the hon. Member for North Cornwall. It is ludicrous that that should be so. We should ask the BBC—perhaps the Minister can put some pressure on it—to think again about this. If it proposes to do this—as I said, it is entitled to—it should make a proper and open case and explain its rationale. If it is done to save money in order to invest in digital television and new technology, so be it. The BBC has to compete in that world as well.

I have to tell my hon. Friend the Member for Ribble Valley that BBC news 24 hours a day would not be enhanced by long periods showing our debates in the House. Something more attractive will have to be sought. I criticise the BBC for its handling of the matter, but we should not use this debate to attack its integrity and editorial independence.

11.53 am

Mr. Richard Allan (Sheffield, Hallam): It is important not to launch into the BBC and also to say that we will have to work with the new structure whatever it is. But against that background I want to make the case strongly for a regional component of the BBC, and to mention in particular the issue of honesty about the changes to which the hon. Member for Hexham (Mr. Atkinson) referred.

There is a reality lag between large parts of the United Kingdom and Westminster. We all suffer from it when we return from the recess and the world of ordinary folk to the slightly odd world that we inhabit here. Regional correspondents had an important role to fill in bridging that reality gap between, in my case, my constituency in Sheffield and what happens in Westminster. It was that local component, that connection, which made Westminster understandable and intelligible. In some cases, correspondents are better able to explain what happens here than some of us practitioners, who often end up confused.

It is important that the people in the regions see us at work. They want to see all those whom they have elected and whose wages they pay at work, not just members of the Government and prominent parliamentarians, but the Back Benchers who represent them. That is the component most likely to suffer if we take the regional correspondents out, as the BBC has already done.

That connection is apparent when we bump into the correspondents in Central Lobby and refer to something that is happening the next day or next week and ask what is going on. That day-to-day contact is crucial. I can say that something is happening in Sheffield and know the correspondent will be aware of previous debates six months ago, or of the fact that the hon. Member for Rotherham (Mr. MacShane) had a debate 12 months ago. They can link those up and put together a package which is about Sheffield and Yorkshire rather than simply a hook on to a national news story.

My great fear is that, particularly with the media machine that the Government have skilfully put together, which means that its members get up earlier in the

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morning than anyone else to get the stories out, and are often dead by midday, an ordinary Back Bencher cannot get on to the back of a national story. We have been shut out and are left with our regional stories. Adjournment debates—there is one later this morning on a crucial issue concerning South Yorkshire—on local issues will always be covered by regional correspondents because they know that the matter is important and will be keeping their eyes open for it.

Mr. Steve Webb (Northavon): Does my hon. Friend accept that some talented and dedicated reporters have tragically been sacked—for example, Viv Robbins in the west country, who has given faithful service? As my hon. Friend said, such people are more expert than we are.

Mr. Allan: I agree. Our attachment to our regional correspondents is a testament to the skilful way in which they have done their jobs. I shall not mention any, because I did so in a previous debate and I understand that they currently do not have a contract, so I was obviously not helpful. However, that connection, and the warmth that we feel for them, reflect the fact that Adjournment debates and parliamentary questions on local issues will simply not receive coverage without someone being tuned into them, picking them up and putting them out. With the best will in the world, while we will all try to make the new arrangement work, it will not give staff adequate time to pick up on regional issues.

The way in which the proposals have been sold is shameful. Technology is moving on, but it is often used as an excuse for reducing coverage. Digital television is mentioned and we are told that there is coverage on the internet. I am a great technology fan, and I congratulate the members of staff who have managed to put my name up on the annunciator. There we see technology moving forward. But at the moment digital television and the internet do not have the coverage of terrestrial television. With the best will in the world, we cannot say that, just because we put a debate on the internet or on a digital or cable channel, it will achieve the same coverage as it would on mainstream terrestrial television.

Mr. Tyler: Even the best technology is still dependent on human input and, since my constituency came up wrong on the annunciator, I hope that my hon. Friend, as chairman of the Select Committee on Information, will take note and see that next time it appears as North Cornwall rather than Cornwall, North.

Mr. Allan: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for helping us with some of the teething troubles. I am sure that that will have been noted by those who are ever vigilant in the annunciator box.

Technology is moving on, but it should not be used as an excuse to take things off terrestrial television. There is an argument which, taken to its logical conclusion, would put all politics on marginal specialised channels within media such as the internet and digital television.

It could be argued that, in terms of the number of hours, coverage has increased, but in terms of real coverage to real people, that does not work. The point made by the hon. Member for Hexham (Mr. Atkinson) about long wave versus FM signals is another example of a reality lag. In the real world, people simply do not switch from one to the other. If they are like me, they turn on the radio in the morning and are too bleary-eyed to change a channel on a push-button radio, let alone one with a dial. Moreover, radios commonly do not have long wave. In reality, people turn on the radio and tune to FM because it has a better signal in most parts of the country. Long wave is a distraction; it is not a serious option for people to listen to FM, suddenly to switch over for "Yesterday in Parliament", and then to switch back.

Technology should not be used as an excuse. It would be much more honest to deal with things as I deal with the commercial or independent sector in my region. We have open and honest debates about the role of political coverage, the stories it likes to cover and what is interesting and what is not. It is a pity that the BBC has not been honest and said, "We think that politics is boring and we want to reduce coverage. We only want 'man bites dog' stories because 'dog bites man'—ordinary parliamentary coverage—is no longer attractive enough." If the BBC came to us and said that, we could have a debate on those terms.

Unfortunately, we have had a debate in which the BBC has been saying, "We are expanding coverage, we have many new technologies and everything will be wonderful." In fact, we all suspect that the BBC is making it much harder to achieve the coverage that we want.

We need honesty in the debate, and we need to deal with the mass market versus specialist market interests. We need to deal with the serious broadcasting role of the BBC and its relationship to the licence fee. In that way we would no longer be floundering around, all talking on different terms and pretending that everything is fine in the garden when it is not. Honesty here is essential.

I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for North Cornwall for initiating this debate. He has done us a service by communicating the views of a range of honourable Members to the BBC. Hopefully, the comments of the Minister will communicate an official viewpoint. If we can get an honest debate, we will be able to come up with the type of regional coverage that will work, rather than making life deliberately difficult for ourselves by having people shunting around on trains or just not coming here at all.

12.1 pm

Mr. Richard Spring (West Suffolk): I congratulate the hon. Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler) on securing this important debate. He put his argument extremely cogently. I thank all those who participated in the debate, particularly my hon. Friend the Member for Ribble Valley (Mr. Evans) who has been a champion of this cause for some time and who probably knows more about the media than anybody else in the House. I welcome the Minister for Film, Tourism and Broadcasting, the hon. Member for Rossendale and Darwen (Janet Anderson) to her new role and to the Chamber this morning.

This is a period of rapid change in the media, most notably in the BBC. We are seeing changes taking place in radio and television and we are seeing the move from terrestrial to digital. I am sure that I am not alone in having seen the new parliamentary channel in its digital form being presented by the BBC yesterday. It is impressive, but whether people will watch it in the numbers that parliamentarians may wish remains to be seen.

I welcome the Secretary of State's announcement of a BBC funding review. The Secretary of State is keen on reviews, not all of which are entirely relevant, but we welcome this review in principle. The Secretary of State has said—I think that the House will agree—that the BBC needs to adapt and survive and needs to fulfil its public service obligations. Those are sentiments that the House can endorse as the Secretary of State looks at the funding picture for the BBC in the future.

I shall deal now with the specific point raised by the hon. Member for North Cornwall. Some months ago—I am sure that I was not alone in this—BBC journalists based at Millbank approached me with great concern about their future. They had heard rumours about the changes, but nothing had been decided at that time. I made inquiries with the BBC at senior managerial level and was given assurances that the concerns were not accurate and, in fact, were misplaced. We now know that those concerns were entirely accurate and that, while those remarks were being refuted, changes were in the pipeline. I regret that.

To echo what the hon. Member for North Cornwall said about his hon. Friend the Member for St. Ives (Mr. George), last week, in view of an impending visit to my constituency by one of the members of the shadow Cabinet, I sought to establish contact with the BBC at Millbank before Parliament resumed. It was impossible to track anybody down. I discovered that the individual with whom I usually dealt had disappeared. What transpired in practice is what we are now going to have to face, which is a reduced staff. The link mentioned by other hon. Members this morning has gone, and I regret that.

We are told that the justification for the change is that it is based upon the successful practice of BBC coverage in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. There are to be 10 regional political editors, and seven are in place. As we have heard this morning, they will be located in places such as Newcastle, Norwich or wherever. I believe this to be a profound mistake. No part of England is comparable to Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland. Each of those places is evolving a different constitutional architecture and a different political structure. The entities that are the constituent parts of the United Kingdom are quite different from England. The justification for the establishment of the regional editors is the alleged success in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. I do not believe that a regional political editor coming to London from time to time will be enough. We know that there will be a reduced team.

As I and other hon. Members have said, we have built up strong relationships with the journalists based at Millbank. They know about our interests and our activities and they are on the spot to make judgments about who to approach if a story breaks quickly. That link to Parliament is now being challenged.

There is a clear message—we saw it with the changes to Radio 4—about the view that the BBC is taking of Parliament and parliamentarians. I am concerned about the effect of that in practice because a message has been sent yet again from the BBC about its view of Parliament. I do not believe that it is correct or that it is in the public's long-term interest.

We have already heard about the difficulties over Radio 4. When the changes were first mooted last year, we know that Madam Speaker complained vociferously about the scheduling changes, especially about "Yesterday in Parliament" moving to long wave. Many others echoed those sentiments. We were told that parliamentary coverage was being extended, and we were blinded by all sorts of statistics. When we sum up what happened and what is happening, we can see that there is greater width but an absence of depth. That is the crucial concern.

Tomorrow, RAJAR—Radio Joint Audience Research—will be telling us the latest Radio 4 listenership levels. I have spoken to RAJAR at length, but, quite properly, it did not reveal the figures although there have been leaks in the newspapers. We know already that the pattern that seems to be emerging is that, in absolute and relative terms, listenership is declining. That has come about in part because parliamentary coverage has been messed about and the widening of it has been at the expense of depth. As a result, people are switching off. With the proposals that we now have for television coverage, in addition to the Radio 4 coverage, Parliament will be seen to be even more irrelevant to people's lives. I look forward to the BBC's analysis of the RAJAR figures.

I want to use this opportunity to put things in context. We cannot look at the latest move in isolation. It is part of a pattern of the way in which the BBC projects itself in its public service interest. Undoubtedly, Radio 4 is the jewel in the crown of the BBC. Programmes such as "From Our Own Correspondent" are truly marvellous. However, we are increasingly seeing a downgrading of evidential and top-quality journalism in favour of quiz shows and chat shows, which are becoming ever more dominant.

I would not normally like to use the expression "dumbing down", but it fits in with many of the attitudes that now obtain, particularly in the Government, in respect of Parliament. When discussing Radio 4, the BBC's annual report and accounts for 1997-98 says:

> "The new schedule affirms the BBC's intent to place the listener at the heart of its thinking. The BBC will ensure that Radio 4 maintains the esteem and loyalty of its audience through the excellence of its programmes."

It goes on to talk about the independent advice panel and the fact that Radio 4 is a standard bearer for excellence.

We know in practice that that is simply not happening. As a result of the changes in Radio 4 and in regional coverage of Parliament, local BBC radio stations are now genuinely concerned about what will happen to them. My local radio station, BBC Radio Suffolk, is well valued by the local community. Local radio knows the issues, the problems and the Members of Parliament, and it does an extremely good job, not only in Suffolk, but throughout the country. It is naturally concerned that there will be some sort of regionalisation and a further loss of linkage between the local community, Members of Parliament and other movers and shakers in its area. I hope that the BBC will seek to give reassurance on that, because the obsession with regionalisation is wholly undesirable.

We have entrusted the BBC with a special status. It does not essentially have to refer to anybody. However, that places a special obligation on it. Although commercial stations also have public service obligations, the Independent Television Commission has a specific role to look at any possible changes in the coverage of ITV, Channels 4 and 5. That obligation via an independent body is not placed on the BBC, which has a special responsibility because it is substantially funded by licence payers.

[Mr. Richard Spring]

We have heard about the extended coverage of news, and we know about News 24 and the enormous increase in channels. However, am I alone in believing that there has been a decline in quality in, for example, the flagship presentation of the Nine O'Clock News? News presentation is being increasingly tabloidised and factual reporting supplemented in ever-larger chunks by BBC correspondents' interpretation of events.

We dismiss television in the United States as being of poor quality. On the main news channels—ABC and NBC—news reporting is factual and without a huge back-up of interpretative reporting by journalists. Tabloidisation and other changes within the BBC are not welcome. Ultimately, they do not serve the BBC's best interests.

We must all accept that we are in the digital age. It is an enormously costly exercise, and huge sums are being invested in the BBC. I have some sympathy for the BBC in that regard. However, although the core functions of terrestrial television, political coverage and the jewel in the crown, Radio 4, must compete with the BBC's other functions, they must not be starved of funds because of digitalisation. That is in the best interests of neither the BBC nor the nation.

To keep the licence fee at the end of the consultation process and the independent review announced by the Secretary of State, the BBC should improve its quality. That is how to assure survival on the present basis. Given the importance of Parliament in the life of the nation, the way in which the changes have been put in place gives considerable cause for concern. The BBC has a special role in the life of this country. It has a public service remit to the people of the United Kingdom and their Parliament.

12.14 pm

The Minister for Film, Tourism and Broadcasting (Janet Anderson): I thank the hon. Member for West Suffolk (Mr. Spring) for his kind congratulations. Most importantly, I congratulate the hon. Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler) on securing the debate. It is extremely important that we have an opportunity to discuss such issues in this place. The hon. Gentleman clearly takes his responsibility seriously in his capacity as a shadow leader of the House. He raised some interesting and important points, which I hope will be listened to carefully.

A number of hon. Members have contributed to the debate. The hon. Member for Argyll and Bute (Mrs. Michie) expressed concern about coverage in Scotland. The hon. Member for Sheffield, Hallam (Mr. Allan), the hon. Member for Torridge and West Devon (Mr. Burnett) and the hon. Member for Northavon (Mr. Webb) also spoke. The hon. Member for Ribble Valley (Mr. Evans), whom I almost referred to as my hon. Friend because he shares a region with me, often competes with me for regional coverage. He usually wins hands down. The hon. Member for Somerton and Frome (Mr. Heath) said that this had been a bad week for the BBC. May I repeat a popular slogan, which did the Labour party proud not too long ago—"Things can only get better"?

The hon. Member for Hexham (Mr. Atkinson) said that he hoped that this debate would not be an exercise in BBC bashing. I endorse that sentiment. In introducing the debate, the hon. Member for North Cornwall said that he bet that there would be no report of today's debate on his regional BBC station. I hope that he is proved wrong.

My hon. Friend the Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick), who has had to leave the Chamber—I suspect that he is listening to an address by the Prime Minister elsewhere in the House—expressed concern about a decline in the national reporting of Parliament. I am sorry that my right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman), the widely respected Chairman of the Select Committee, cannot be here, as we would all have welcomed his contribution to the debate.

The obligations placed on the BBC in respect of its broadcasting services are set out in its "Royal Charter and Agreement". They include broad obligations in terms of the number of television and radio services, objectives and programme content, standards and scheduling. The BBC must provide a properly balanced service to serve the tastes and needs of different audiences. The BBC agreement also contains a specific programming requirement, introduced in 1948, that the corporation must transmit an impartial account day by day, prepared by professional reporters, of the proceedings in both Houses of Parliament. Within that framework, decisions about programme content and scheduling are wholly a matter for the corporation.

Mr. Tyler: I welcome the Minister warmly to her new post and commiserate with her that she has to be with us rather than listening to the Prime Minister, although she has probably heard more wisdom from us than she would from him.

There is an important distinction between what the Minister has just said and the BBC's new approach. Reportage of our debates will in future be treated as a specialist interest like potholing or collecting stamps, to be put in an exclusive ghetto of broadcasting wavelengths. I hope that she, and the Secretary of State, will consider that scenario carefully when the future of the BBC comes up for review.

Janet Anderson: I recognise that the hon. Gentleman's concern is shared widely in the House, and I shall come to that later.

The position that I have set out reflects the independence of the BBC in all editorial and management matters. That was first enshrined in the 1996 agreement, but it is not a new concept. The need for editorial independence from political and commercial influences has been one of the fundamental principles governing the BBC since its establishment as a public corporation in 1927.

The Government fully support that principle, but the BBC's independence brings with it obligations, including the need to be, and to be seen to be, accountable to licence fee payers, as stakeholders and customers; to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, as the custodian of its charter and agreement; and to Parliament, as the public authority for the moneys paid through the licence fee. The BBC has a duty to keep in touch with its audiences and to be responsive to their concerns, and that includes Members of this House.

I shall quote from "BBC News: The Future", which is sub-titled "Public service news in the digital age". Hon. Members have referred to the concern that some of

the changes may be due to the digital revolution, which is fast approaching. I hope that hon. Members will be reassured by the booklet, which says:

"We will report and engage audiences in the proceedings of Parliament and the devolved assemblies of the United Kingdom. We will help people to understand the working of government and to hold to account those who take decisions."

On reporting politics, it says:

"The reporting of politics lies at the heart of our public purpose both to inform and facilitate democratic debate. The public recognise and confirm this as a central role for the BBC. Yet dissatisfaction with politicians, the political process and key aspects of political reporting present us with a challenge: how to continue providing proper coverage of politics but . . . make it more engaging and accessible to audiences. We want to ensure that political argument goes beyond the soundbite to enhance public understanding of the complexities that underlie political argument."

The pamphlet continues:

"We are committed to covering Parliament thoroughly. We have already launched the new BBC Parliament channel which offers full access to all the proceedings in the two main chambers, plus committee coverage, to enable viewers to assess their legislators at work. This new channel will maintain links to the political background material in News Online. It will become Britain's answer to C-Span in the US. We will also provide continuous audio coverage on digital radio.

"Our changes to parliamentary programming were approved by the Governors earlier this year."

I do not want to repeat what everyone has said about the changes that have taken place, because they have been given a full airing in this place.

The BBC believes that these new arrangements put in place a more effective system of political coverage for regional broadcasting in England at a time when regional politics is increasingly important. The key objective is to ensure that political coverage is at the heart of the BBC's main early-evening regional programmes and reaches as large an audience as possible.

The BBC also hopes that the new structure will make it easier for hon. Members to liaise with a senior figure in the editorial structure of each BBC region, and that major political developments in each region will be covered more comprehensively and with greater authority.

The BBC is aware that there is still some apprehension about the new structure, and that has certainly been reinforced by this morning's debate. I understand that Nigel Chapman, BBC Controller English Regions, has a meeting scheduled with the hon. Member for North Cornwall and his hon. Friends next week, which will provide an opportunity for these concerns to be aired. I hope that the hon. Gentleman finds the meeting useful.

The BBC's intention was to strengthen political and parliamentary coverage in the regions. I am sure that the hon. Member for North Cornwall, his hon. Friends and hon. Members on both sides of the House will keep a watching brief on the development of the new arrangements and whether they deliver the coverage of Parliament and politics that the BBC has undertaken to provide.

I do not believe that the BBC is out of touch with opinion in this country. It is important that it keeps in touch, and one of the best ways of doing that is to provide proper reporting of Parliament and politics. I thank the hon. Member for North Cornwall; I am sure that the BBC will be listening carefully to what he has to say.

Small and Medium Enterprises

12.25 pm

Ms Margaret Moran (Luton, South): I welcome the opportunity to raise some of the competitiveness issues that small and medium enterprises in my constituency have raised with me. As my hon. Friend the Minister for Small Firms, Trade and Industry has said many times, SMEs are essential to this country's competitive edge and to the Government's competitiveness agenda. I am pleased that the White Paper on competitiveness, which is to be published soon, will reflect that.

I whole-heartedly welcome the fact that competitiveness is at the heart of our industrial and economic policy. It is a key issue for us in Luton, a town that has suffered badly from the boom-and-bust economics of the previous Government and their desertion of manufacturing industry. The competitiveness and productivity of our local companies are recognised as priorities for the Luton and Dunstable partnership and Luton borough council's economic development strategy, yet we still have difficulty, certainly at local level, identifying and spreading the factors that will increase competitiveness for our SMEs.

I raised that question with local businesses, the chamber of commerce, the local branch of the Federation of Small Businesses and the university of Luton over the recess. My visits and discussions ranged across the SMEs of virtually every sector in Luton, from the traditional hat industry to the engineering and manufacturing sectors, and from the service sector to high-tech firms. I committed myself to feeding back some of the views of those involved in Luton's smaller businesses, with my own observations. As ever, this is a partnership approach, aimed at getting what is best for Luton.

Although the issues raised are not new in the competitiveness debate, I hope that they will make some small contribution to ensuring that our competitiveness agenda recognises the coal face issues for SMEs and assures them that the Government are determined to promote their competitiveness. That does not mean going cap in hand to the Government; indeed, the "more grants" approach from some SMEs that I visit always sets alarm bells ringing about their productivity and competitiveness. Nor is it the old Tory Government approach of "sink or swim". Our smaller businesses can compete and flourish only when the Government are creating the right climate—for example, through our focus on education to help to upskill our people.

What do people at the coal face think about competitiveness? First, although the impact of the strong pound was raised with reasonable frequency, there was widespread recognition that the single most important factor for the competitiveness of the sector is creating a stable, long-term economic framework for planning and investment, whether in production, people or productivity. A senior executive of a small engineering company in our area said:

"economic volatility is our greatest problem".

Secondly, although there is reasonable recognition of the work that we have already done to create the right climate for the sector, some businesses are concerned that, if our strategy to encourage investment is to be fulfilled, there is still a need further to extend the capital allowances.

[Ms Margaret Moran]

The extension in the last Budget of enhanced allowances to small and medium-sized enterprises for investment in plant and machinery at 40 per cent. for a further year is welcome, but a longer extension would have been even more welcome. Other measures in the Budget, such as the reduction in the level of corporation tax to 20 per cent.—the lowest in Europe—represent a major boost to profits and should encourage investment, as should the improvements to cash flow from the abolition of advance corporation tax.

The reform in the Budget of the tax and national insurance system, and the simplification of the system by the alignment of the national insurance contribution system with the Inland Revenue, by the abolition of the NIC entry fee and by the alignment of the lower earnings limit with income tax personal allowance are welcome. Those measures will mean that small and medium-sized enterprises will pay about £140 million less tax in the next financial year, which is significant for our smaller businesses.

The national insurance reforms will eliminate 1 million employers' NIC charges, and will make it easier for employers to create new jobs, thereby complementing our new deal initiatives. That is significant for Luton, where unemployment in some wards in my constituency is more than 18 per cent.

Therein lies a further issue for Luton's small businesses: the level of recognition of the benefits to them of the new deal. Despite a series of high profile events, some of which I initiated, including a conference on the new deal hosted by Vauxhall Motors and a launch involving almost all the major employers based at or around London Luton airport, and the Government's national television campaign, I constantly have to explain the benefits of the new deal to every small and medium business that I visit. As most jobs are likely to come from that sector, it is clear that we need to do more. Dare I say that we should have a joint promotion involving the Department of Trade and Industry and the Department for Education and Employment to focus attention on the advantages that the new deal can offer, particularly in reducing the training costs of new employees.

One of the barriers to the involvement of small and medium-sized enterprises in the new deal is the perceived lack of skills on offer. The skills gap problem is not new for any business, but for us in Luton it is crucial. From hat manufacturers, such as Marida Ltd., to high-tech manufacturers, the problems are the same. A Bedfordshire training and enterprise council survey found that, of 50 local companies, 16 said that skills shortages had limited growth in the past 12 months or would limit growth in the coming year. Stanbridge Precision Turned Parts, which has 100 workers, has had to turn down work. With the cost of training running at £50,000 per new recruit—they are often then poached by other companies—more incentives for smaller businesses to assist with in-house training would be valuable. That is just one example of the skills crisis locally and nationally in the engineering sector.

The recent engineering audit carried out in conjunction with the Engineering Employers Federation, which I recently met in Luton, is to be applauded. It showed a greater commitment to training by engineering SMEs than by their larger counterparts. However, it is clear that more incentives and a more targeted approach are needed.

Skills-based training is critical now, but to retain a competitive edge, training staff to embrace the new, more competitive ideas is crucial for the long term. Although SMEs in Luton recognise the immediate skills gap that needs to be tackled, they seem to be less certain about the need to maximise their skills base.

The ability to encourage innovation is an essential element of competitiveness. The level of innovation among small businesses in the Bedfordshire area is low compared with the level in the United Kingdom as a whole, according to a study undertaken by Luton university. That study concluded that, although there is some correlation between size of business and the level of innovation, that does not tell the whole story. Indeed, the factors that account for this focus on the macro level, and we still have little understanding of the processes at work. There is a clear need for more work in that area.

A further factor that the Government have recognised as a key to competitiveness in the small business sector is the ability to adapt to the information age. However, from my experience through my visits to businesses in Luton, it is clear that the importance and the opportunities of new technologies to the competitiveness of small and medium enterprises should be more widely known.

I am aware of the information society initiative programme for businesses that the Government have initiated, and its emphasis on this sector, but not many SMEs that I visited knew of it. That is borne out by research carried out recently by Bedfordshire chamber of commerce, which found that most small businesses in Luton and Bedfordshire use IT equipment, but feel that they are not making optimum use of what they have.

On my recent visit to a company with 80 employees, it was depressing to be told that the only technology in the company was an ancient computer used for the payroll, and that there was a director who was proud of knowing nothing about new technology. I hope that that is atypical, but I fear that for many, the information age is an issue only for the emerging technologies sector and the so-called "tech stars." The message I give to all small businesses is to "get wired."

Our SMEs have much to learn from their counterparts in Canada, which I recently visited. There, the new technologies are integrated into every aspect of business life, from the large to the micro, and from systems to new production methods. We could all learn from Industry Canada's strategy for creating a knowledge-based economy, which recognises that investment in knowledge contributes directly to competitiveness and growth in all sectors. It has set clear targets for working in partnership with all businesses to promote the recognition of knowledge as a fundamental factor in improving efficiency of production and distribution processes, and in improving the quality, variety and quantity of products.

The proof is that businesses that develop new ideas, manufacture new products and deliver new services succeed. Output in Canada is expanding fastest in knowledge-intensive firms, which are also creating the most jobs. Canarie and Tara in Halifax provide repayable loans to emerging and small companies. Their support for innovation in the application of new technologies is an example of the practical application of the strategy, and can enhance competitiveness for smaller firms.

In this country, the small business foresight programme and the university for industry will have a crucial role to play in helping SMEs to increase competitiveness in these areas. The university for industry cannot come soon enough for many small businesses in Luton. Given the concerns that I have expressed about the competitiveness of SMEs locally, I am delighted that Luton university is rising to the challenge right now. It has recognised that competitiveness is a priority for British business, and that a structured approach is required to tackle the impediments.

At the moment, there is no nationally recognised centre where organisations can seek advice on improving their competitiveness. That is why the national centre for competitiveness is being established. It will help to provide solutions to the new demands of the world's marketplace by working with business to define the key elements of competitiveness, by benchmarking, by drawing on best practice and, crucially, by focusing on practical application.

With a plethora of small businesses on the centre's doorstep, it has confirmed that it will play a key role in enhancing competitiveness among small businesses locally. I welcome its contribution to this task, and I look forward to working with the centre to the competitive benefit of Luton's small and medium-sized enterprises.

12.38 pm

The Minister for Small Firms, Trade and Industry (Mrs. Barbara Roche): I am delighted that my hon. Friend the Member for Luton, South (Ms Moran) has chosen this important topic for us to debate. I congratulate her on her work with local small businesses. She has done very well to use the recess period for that purpose, and to secure a debate so soon afterwards. She raised a number of important issues that directly affect businesses in her constituency, all other small businesses and, indeed, all who aspire to run their own enterprises.

The Government have said a number of times, here and elsewhere, that small businesses are the life blood of our economy. If they are not competitive, the country is not competitive. That is why the Government are so committed to helping to create an environment in which businesses have the confidence to grow and prosper, whatever their size and in whichever sector they operate. In doing that, we shall generate wealth, employment opportunities, and opportunities for firms to innovate and create.

Since the general election, the Government have been working to establish strong links with businesses at all levels, to ensure that they really understand the issues that concern them and what affects their ability to compete. We aim to be a listening as well as a doing Government, and what my hon. Friend has said is particularly welcome because it will enable us to perform such a role.

We know that gaining access to appropriate finance is a key issue for all businesses, but especially for smaller firms.

Mr. Colin Breed (South-East Cornwall): Does the Minister share my concern about the recent statement that, now that banks are ploughing hundreds of millions of pounds into black holes known as hedge funds, they may find it more difficult to support small and medium-sized enterprises? Will she seek confirmation from the chairmen of the clearing banks that any irresponsible lending in which they have engaged internationally in respect of hedge funds will not prevent them from supporting the small and medium business sector?

Mrs. Roche: I make it my business to have a good relationship will all the banks and to meet them regularly, not only on an individual basis, but collectively, through helpful organisations such as the British Bankers Association.

I think that the relationship between the clearing banks and small businesses is better now than it has been in the past. The message that I try to get across is that small businesses are operating in a climate in which they must be really competitive to win support. The banks seem to be increasingly aware of the importance of the SME market, but I shall convey the hon. Gentleman's remarks to them when I meet them again.

As finance is a key issue, we are working with the venture capital industry, and through the enterprise investment scheme and venture capital trusts, to get to grips with the problems involved in obtaining small amounts of investment capital. Finance is, of course, especially important to small technology-based companies.

Mr. Brian White (Milton Keynes, North-East): Many firms want to bring an idea to, as it were, the pre-development stage before venture capitalists have invested in it. Other countries have learnt the lesson, and invested at that stage. Are the British Government considering doing the same?

Mrs. Roche: We are examining the possibilities with interest. We do not think that there is any one solution to what is clearly a problem. This is a great country for ideas and innovation, but we have slipped up in the past, in that there has been a gap between creativity and bringing good ideas to commercial fruition. We are talking to the banks and to other financial institutions, and also considering what the Government can add to the contribution of our academic and scientific base.

Ms Moran: I gave the Canadian examples of Canarie and Tara. Have the Government considered adopting their approach? The setting up of an arm's-length private sector company has enhanced business confidence, leading to investment in micro-businesses that are doing innovative work and the provision of venture funds on a loan-share basis, to be repaid over a period.

Mrs. Roche: I believe that my hon. Friend visited Canada through PITCOM—the Parliamentary Information Technology Committee. A few days earlier, I was in Canada representing the United Kingdom at the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development ministerial meeting to discuss electronic commerce. I was interested to learn that my hon. Friend and other parliamentarians were to visit the country.

We are considering a number of options. We are considering ways in which we can encourage spin-offs, and our attitude to corporate ventures. I have written to some of our top companies about their experience of corporate venturing. There is probably no single solution, but the Government can make a number of contributions in partnership with finance and business.

Mr. Brian Cotter (Weston-super-Mare): I am sorry to intervene when there have already been so many

[Mr. Brian Cotter]

interventions, but does the Minister agree that there is an argument, in the case of small enterprises and enterprises that are trying to get going, for raising the VAT threshold?

Mrs. Roche: As the hon. Gentleman will know, the Chancellor announced in his March Budget that there would be consultation to invite views on the desirability of changing the registration thresholds. On 10 July, Customs and Excise published a consultation paper inviting comments on options, to be submitted by 12 October. The responses will help to inform any future Budget decisions on registration thresholds.

We are working with the financial sector to try to assist "new growth" firms. The long-standing small firms loan guarantee scheme continues to offer support to small businesses that lack security or a trading track record. As my hon. Friend the Member for Luton, South pointed out, we have also made tax changes to ensure that businesses keep more of their profits so that they can reinvest and expand. In April next year, for example, the small companies rate of corporation tax will be cut to 20 per cent., the lowest rate ever.

When we were in opposition, we listened a great deal to what small businesses said about what they described as a great barrier to growth—late payment of commercial debt. One of the first things that we did for small firms was to legislate for a statutory right to interest, which will be introduced on 1 November. Along with organisations representing businesses, we are working on a package of measures to tackle the problem of late payment.

Mr. Nick Hawkins (Surrey Heath): Does the Minister agree that the contribution of organisations such as the Small Business Bureau—whose conference she addressed last week, in my constituency—and the Federation of Small Businesses, among others, has helped Governments of both parties to adapt to the prevailing climate, and the need for legislation? Will she join me in paying tribute to the work of such organisations?

Mrs. Roche: I will do so with pleasure. The organisations that the hon. Gentleman has cited—along with the Forum of Private Business, the Institute of Directors, the British chamber of commerce and others—have made a tremendous contribution. They have given freely of their time to allow us to pursue and consult on our policies. As a Minister, I am personally grateful to them for that high-calibre contribution.

We listened to organisations such as those that I have mentioned when they told us that business was being strangled by red tape and the over-zealous enforcement of regulations. That is why we have created a one-stop shop on the internet—direct access Government—to provide businesses with guidance and the forms they need to comply with regulation.

In the last Budget, the Chancellor of the Exchequer announced a package of measures to simplify rules and to help business to comply, including a payroll assistance scheme to help new employers. That, combined with the merging of the Department of Social Security's Contributions Agency with the Inland Revenue in April 1999, should further ease the regulatory burden on business.

Where we have introduced new legislation to protect consumers or to ensure that employees are treated fairly, we have taken steps to ensure that the burdens on business are kept to a minimum. That is key—to get the balance absolutely right.

My hon. Friend the Member for Luton, South rightly spoke about the role of training and development. Business owners and managers know that their workers are their greatest resource. The more successful a firm, the more likely it is to invest in training. We are working with businesses to help them to develop their own and their employees' skills and potential. Small firms training loans help firms to provide training when it is needed—often at a crucial phase in expansion—without having to wait until they can afford further capital outlay. It is encouraging to note the number of smaller businesses participating in modern apprenticeships and national traineeships. That is why we have placed such emphasis on those particular sectors.

Rightly, my hon. Friend the Member for Luton, South mentioned the importance of the university for industry and the particular advantage that that can bring to small and medium enterprises. We have used communication and information technologies to develop a new sort of organisation—the university for industry—to stimulate the demand for learning among businesses and individuals, and to improve the availability of and access to high-quality education and training. That will enable the small firm that finds it difficult to allow its employees to go away from their place of work to take advantage of what is on offer. We are also seeing a realisation among employees and employers alike that, if we are to be truly competitive into the next century, the key is a highly skilled, highly motivated work force.

Businesses constantly tell us that, to grow, they need high-quality information and advice. That is where partnership is so important; indeed, that was something to which my hon. Friend the Member for Luton, South referred. As all hon. Members will know, Business Links is the network of national partnerships in England that provides a single access point to businesses of all sizes and in all sectors, offering them help and information at all stages of their growth.

Last October, I launched "Enhanced Business Links: A Vision for the 21st century." That is intended to ensure that all those involved in Business Links will raise the quality of business support to the best standard. That means focusing on the needs of customers to ensure that Business Links reaches its full potential, which in turn will enable its business customers to grow and to compete in the global market.

Rightly, in her speech, my hon. Friend the Member for Luton, South spoke about the importance of new technology for small and medium enterprises. I absolutely reassure her that the Government want small businesses, whatever sector they are involved in, to take advantage of the new technology. All the benchmarking that the Government have done recently, which compares our performance against that of our major competitors internationally, shows that the United Kingdom is doing pretty well in the use of new technology.

That does not mean that we cannot do better. We can and we will—we certainly aim to do so—but there is still too wide a gap between large firms and small and medium

enterprises. As we look at our competitiveness, a key aim of the Government is to bridge that gap, and we are working hard to do so.

My hon. Friend the Member for Luton, South mentioned the programme for business and local support centres; we have increased them. We know that giving small business the hands-on experience of using new technology can be beneficial. We also appreciate that, if people are running their own small business, they often do not have the time to use the technology that they have to its fullest extent. That is why we are committed to ensuring that we can give them the experience of doing so.

The key thing that we have to get across to those businesses is that the changes in the next few years, with electronic commerce coming on stream, will mean that all business, whatever its size, will have to embrace the new technology. That is a challenge to the industry as well: to make the technology as consumer and business friendly as possible.

Mr. Cotter: What specific training will there be for smaller businesses when it comes to the use of electronic communication such as the internet, as they are at some disadvantage against larger concerns?

Mrs. Roche: There is already the programme for business, which looks at the use of information technology. As I have said, just a couple of weeks ago, I represented the UK at the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development ministerial conference in Ottawa. We are looking to see how we can help small business in that regard, but the key thing is that, in future—I will probably put myself out of a job—we shall probably not define firms any more in terms of small, medium and large, but only by how best they compete in the marketplace using new technologies. That is why schemes such as SMART, the small firms merit award for research and technology, the innovation and technology counsellors in Business Links and the teaching company scheme are so important—to ensure that we really meet those challenges.

Businesses have to prepare themselves for some challenges in the next few weeks and months. Whether the UK is in or out of the European monetary union, businesses will have to learn to deal with the single currency. The year 2000 problem, the so-called millennium bug, also has to be faced, which is why the Government have invested so much time, money and effort in the matter. Of course, the setting up of Action 2000, specifically working with business, is so important in that regard.

All British firms that trade with the 11 European member states that will have a single currency from 1 January next year will be affected by European monetary union, so we have a duty to ensure that those firms are as prepared as they possibly can be to take advantage of the opportunities that that will bring.

I am delighted that my hon. Friend the Member for Luton, South has raised this important subject and recognises the importance of creating an environment that encourages entrepreneurial activity. I again congratulate her on her work in her constituency on the issue, thank her for, so early on in this new Session, giving me the opportunity to speak about the Government's plans in this sector and assure her and the House that enterprise will be at the heart of the competitiveness White Paper which will be published by the Government this autumn. I congratulate her again. The contributions that we have received from hon. Members on both sides of the House demonstrate the importance of this vital topic.

Lieutenant-Colonel Miller

12.58 pm

Mr. Nick Hawkins (Surrey Heath): Although this case concerns my constituent, Lieutenant-Colonel Miller, I shall be urging the Minister to regard it as a matter that goes much wider than one individual case. I believe that the case raises points of general principle.

The history of the matter is somewhat complex—it is certainly a long-running saga. Nevertheless, it is important to realise that, in taking up Lieutenant-Colonel Miller's case, both I and my predecessor, Sir Michael Grylls, have believed in the strength of Lieutenant-Colonel Miller's case for recognition of the significance of his work in developing the most important and pioneering bomb disposal equipment that the tragedies of Northern Ireland have seen.

The general principle is that those who are serving officers who invent equipment that is well beyond the scope of their normal duties should be recognised for that work. I have mentioned in the title of this debate, which appears on today's Order Paper, the "Committee on Awards to Inventors". Today, I should like specifically to deal with the judgment of that committee and of current Ministers on the principles under which that committee operates.

I start by praying in aid the correspondence that I have seen from those, other than Lieutenant-Colonel Miller himself writing about his case, who have personal experience of the importance of the development of Wheelbarrow. I am delighted that my hon. Friends who have extensive experience in Ulster—as a serving officer, in the case of my hon. Friend the Member for Reigate (Mr. Blunt), and as a Minister, in the case of my right hon. Friend the Member for Tonbridge and Malling (Sir J. Stanley)—have come into the Chamber to give their support.

I should like first to mention a gentleman whom I shall not name, because of sensitivity about the names of those who served in Ulster in defusing terrorist bombs. It is sufficient to say that not only is he a Member of the Order of the British Empire, he has won the George medal once and then a bar to that George medal.

In a letter to my predecessor, Sir Michael Grylls, that gentleman states:

"My credentials for writing in support of Col. Miller's application to the Committee on Awards to Inventors (COATI) are 23 years in the Royal Army Ordnance Corps (now the Royal Logistics Corps) working solely in the field of explosives and munitions. I joined the Metropolitan Police Explosives Officers in 1973 and became head of that department in 1985 until my retirement in December 1991. I was awarded a George Medal for my bomb disposal work in Northern Ireland, an MBE for gallantry for defusing car bombs in London and a Bar to the George Medal for making safe a device in Oxford Street in 1981."

He is clearly a gentleman who speaks from extensive experience. Moreover, he continues to work on explosives ordnance disposal in retirement.

The gentleman goes on to say:

"I first met Col. Miller in 1972 during my tour of duty as an EOD"—

explosives ordnance disposal—

"Officer in Belfast. As you may know, 1972 was a particularly conspicuous year so far as terrorist bombs were concerned and, during that year, the EOD teams in Northern Ireland dealt with 4,295 incidents involving the use of explosives or suspected explosives.

Between January 1971 and August 1972, eight EOD operators were killed while attempting to defuse bombs in Northern Ireland. Wheelbarrow"—

the piece of equipment invented by my constituent—

"was first brought into use in late August 1972 and, in the period September 1972-December 1973, only three operators died. This downward trend in mortality of EOD Officers has continued to the present day and, despite the relatively high level of terrorist bombing, only one operator has been killed in the last seven years. Although it is impossible to state categorically that the dramatic reduction in loss of lives and casualties is solely due to the introduction of Wheelbarrow, there is no doubt the machine played—and continues to play—a major role. In my opinion these figures alone bear testimony to the exceptional and life-saving nature of Col. Miller's invention. It has also led to radical changes in bomb disposal methods which, in turn, have resulted in terrorists changing their tactics.

The difficulties being experienced by the troops on the ground in Northern Ireland during 1972 was mentioned 'in passing' by the Chief Ammunition Technical Officer (CATO) to Col. Miller. Col. Miller went away, put on his thinking cap and, largely in his own spare time, developed Wheelbarrow and produced several prototypes."

I should say that the genesis of the concept of Wheelbarrow occurred well before any conversation about the need for a new device in Northern Ireland. In 1970, my constituent had invented a technique for mowing the lawn at his own house by remote control. He attached a Suffolk Punch petrol-driven lawn mower by a long lanyard to a central post of such a diameter that the 14 in lawn mower would generate a 12 in cut in the lawn. He was also able to steer the machine by hand at the end of the lanyard.

The other matter that I should mention is that it has consistently been suggested by Ministry of Defence officials that my constituent, Lieutenant-Colonel Miller, was "paid to invent", and that therefore the development of Wheelbarrow was part of his "normal duties". That aspect of the matter is the one that most irritates and annoys Lieutenant-Colonel Miller, as his work was as a gunnery trials officer. He did much distinguished work developing gunnery equipment. However, by no stretch of the imagination could a gunnery trials officer have had it regarded as part of his normal duties to develop a bomb disposal vehicle equipment. I shall, later in my speech, provide supporting testimony on that matter.

The gentleman went on to say:

"I understand that one of COATI's objections to granting an award to Col. Miller is that inventing was part of his job. That is certainly not my experience of Trials Officers. In fact, I cannot think of another Trials Officer at MVEE (now Test and Evaluation Establishment) Chertsey who has invented anything, either then or since, let alone an invention as ground-breaking as Wheelbarrow.

Wheelbarrow was—and still is—a pioneering piece of equipment. It has contributed greatly to British exports over the years in that numerous foreign governments and organisations, recognising Wheelbarrow's use and technical achievement, have purchased many hundreds of the machines. I believe this is further evidence of the fact that Col. Miller 'got it right'."

Sir John Stanley (Tonbridge and Malling): I am most grateful to my hon. Friend for giving way. Is he aware that I believe, certainly from my time both as Minister for the Armed Forces and in Northern Ireland, that Lieutenant-Colonel Miller's Wheelbarrow invention is the single most important breakthrough in bomb disposal technology that has been achieved anywhere in the world

since the second world war? It has been of the most profound benefit to our own country in securing the removal of bombs in a manner that does not endanger life.

Mr. Hawkins: I am most grateful to my right hon. Friend, who speaks from his extensive experience as a former Northern Ireland Minister. I know that my constituent will be delighted to hear his words. I am sure that the Minister and the Opposition spokesman, my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Norfolk (Mr. Simpson), will take his comments very seriously.

The gentleman went on to say:

"It is of great personal regret that Wheelbarrow has not been acknowledged as an invention of singular brilliance. Several friends of mine died in Northern Ireland as a result of terrorist bombs prior to the invention of Wheelbarrow. Obviously, I cannot say for certain that these friends would have lived if Wheelbarrow had been around, but I can assuredly say they would have stood a far better chance.

Prior to 1972, terrorist devices could be made safe only by dismantling them by hand. This was recognised as a very dangerous practice but there was no other reliable method. Then, in the early part of 1972, a new method of terrorist bomb disposal was introduced. In basic terms, this relied on disrupting the circuitry of a bomb by means of an explosively-propelled jet of water. The technique is known as 'disruption' and the first British disruptor was codenamed 'Pigstick'. It was highly successful and gave the EOD operator a very good chance of defeating a bomb no matter how complex the fusing system or how many anti-handling devices it incorporated.

Unfortunately, the Pigstick is an extremely short-range weapon and, to be effective, the muzzle must be placed within 3 ins of the bomb. This meant, of course, that the EOD operators still had to approach the bomb to place the Pigstick."

The gentleman states that terrorists

"soon recognised—and exploited—this weakness and changed their tactics in two ways:

1. Hand-delivered bombs were fitted with time fuses which were set to expire around the time of arrival of the EOD operator on the scene.

2. The use of car bombs increased dramatically as"

terrorists

"realised that the Pigstick was virtually useless against such bombs.

The danger from the hand-delivered bomb was largely overcome by regulation insisting on long soak times. This reduced the risk to operators but it meant that virtually all hand-delivered bombs exploded and hoax calls caused huge disruption.

The major problem, however, was that of car bombs. These normally contain very large charges of explosive and are capable of causing death, injuries and damage over considerable areas. Moreover, as the car bombs of that period could not be disrupted by Pigstick",

terrorists

"continued to fit the cars with anti-handling devices.

Although there was no clear idea of how to tackle a car bomb it was realised that the ability to safely move a suspect vehicle would be a great advantage. Blast overpressure resulting from a detonation of a charge of explosive falls off very rapidly as the distance from the seat of the explosion increases and moving a car bomb just 10 metres could make the difference between major structural damage and nothing more than broken windows. Various agencies were approached for help and although the problem was addressed with enthusiasm the early results were disappointing . . . although the machines came in a great variety of shapes and sizes, they all had one common failing—they were totally impractical for use outside a workshop and were often of hindrance rather than help to EOD officers.

Col. Miller put his mind to the matter and the first Wheelbarrow was conceived and delivered in a remarkably short time. This machine was eminently practical, very reliable and cheap and it dramatically reduced the odds against the EOD man. It may well be viewed now that the early machines were simple but . . . in 1972, on the streets of Northern Ireland, the invention was definitely considered to be of exceptional brilliance and utility.

With a reliable, easy-to-use robot vehicle available, it became possible for EOD operators to attach tow ropes to suspect cars in relative safety. Once a tow rope had been attached it was a simple matter to pull the suspect vehicle to a position where, should the car bomb explode, it would be less likely to cause injuries or major damage to property. Towing the suspect vehicle away from the target was undoubtedly a great help but it still left the EOD operator with the problem of making the vehicle safe. Having been told of the problem, Col Miller designed and developed a range of attachments which enabled Wheelbarrow to carry and position various disruptive EOD weapons. In use, the Wheelbarrow carried the selected weapon to the vehicle, placed the weapon in the optimum attack position before withdrawing to a safe area.

Judged by today's standards, the methods of delivery and the weapons might be thought crude but they were surprisingly successful and, for the first time, it became possible to render safe a car bomb without endangering the life of an EOD operator.

Having done much to help reduce the dangers presented by car bombs, Col Miller then devised a method of attaching Pigstick to Wheelbarrow. This too was a success and it became possible to safely attack a hand-delivered bomb within minutes of the EOD operator arriving on the scene of an incident. There is no doubt the ability to render-safe time bombs using the Wheelbarrow/Pigstick combination was a huge step forward compared to the previous practice of 'soak times' which allowed the majority of the devices to detonate.

As will be seen from above, the introduction of Wheelbarrow had profound effects on both terrorist tactics and the safety of bomb disposal operators. It is impossible to give hard and fast statistics regarding just how many lives Col Miller's machines have saved but, in the period 1972-1978, and taking into account machines which had been exported, over 400 Wheelbarrows were destroyed while dealing with terrorist devices. In many of these cases, it can be assumed that the loss of a machine represented the saving of an EOD man's life."

Having heard that, Mr. Deputy Speaker, you will understand why I feel very strongly that my constituent deserves the recognition that he has been denied.

Very belatedly—in 1996—officials finally acknowledged in writing to my predecessor that there was no question but that Lieutenant Colonel Miller's invention was of enormous use. Unfortunately, despite that acknowledgement, it was still not regarded as being outside the scope of his normal duties. Before I ask the Minister to respond to this serious issue, I shall provide other supporting testimony which shows that the invention was outside his normal duties.

The following testimony comes from a gentleman who held the rank of brigadier—again, I shall not mention his name for obvious reasons—and who was a deputy director and head of the Trials Division. He states:

"No formal order was ever given to Lieutenant Colonel Miller but, after failing to find an answer to the problem using existing equipment and techniques he turned, relying on his own initiative and imagination, to outside sources and came up with an electrically powered garden instrument produced by a local firm. This he took and adapted, uniquely and ingeniously, to become the prototype of the anti-terrorist weapon known as 'Wheelbarrow' which has been so successfully and spectacularly used in Northern Ireland.

Fortunate in having at his disposal in the Military Vehicles and Engineering Establishment, the facilities to develop and test his ideas, the whole concept nevertheless, starting from an imprecise requirement, culminated in an ingeniously practical machine which was undoubtedly the fruit of Lieutenant Colonel Miller's fertile imagination and determination to succeed."

[Mr. Hawkins]

I now cite another gentleman who was greatly involved. He was a chartered engineer and a member of the Institution of Mechanical Engineers. He states:

"During our discussion, I mentioned the fact that had we"—

those in his division—

"been told in March of 1972 that Weapons Trials"—

the department for which Lieutenant-Colonel Miller worked—

"was about to develop a wheeled or tracked vehicle to meet a specific IS requirement under the terms of the GSOR, we would certainly have objected, through the proper channels, to that action. It would certainly *not* have been within the scope of Weapons Trials objectives to embark on such a course of action. The divisions of responsibility between the various Branches as they were then called, were quite clearly defined; and no doubt they still are to-day albeit since becoming a Defence Research Agency".

Writing to Lieutenant-Colonel Miller, this senior gentleman said:

"As I have said before, there is absolutely no doubt in my mind as to the true origin of 'Wheelbarrow'; that was clearly and unequivocally to your credit and yours alone."

All the correspondence that I have seen says the same.

Another retired officer states:

"I can confirm that, prior to and during the initial development work on Wheelbarrow, while I was Superintendent, Weapon Trials, there was no duty placed upon the Section to design or develop any form of wheeled or tracked vehicle, for EOD or any other purpose, and I cannot recall such activities being written into the Job Descriptions of any member of my staff.

I well remember at the time you telling me that the idea for Wheelbarrow had arisen from your private efforts to produce a labour saving method for mowing your extensive lawn.

If it had been within the jurisdiction of Weapon Trials to design and develop such a vehicle, I would have expected that the work on Wheelbarrow would have remained the responsibility of the Section . . . instead of being passed over to VE(L) . . . just at a time when the initial concept had been fully vindicated".

Referring to officials' suggestion that Lieutenant-Colonel Miller was paid to invent the Wheelbarrow, another senior person stated:

"There was no scope for invention by a Trials Design Officer ('TDO') within the TS"—

or trials specification. He continued:

"neither is there reference in the job description for a TDO 'to invent'. Hence the comment that Col Miller was 'paid to invent' is, in my opinion, erroneous."

I could say far more. Given that we are talking about a vital piece of bomb disposal equipment that has saved hundreds of lives, not only in the Province but around the world, proper recognition for the gentleman who invented it is long overdue. After the long saga of the issue having been raised by my predecessor and now by me, it is time, for the sake of other officers who may come up with life-saving or otherwise helpful equipment, for the Committee on Awards to Inventors to recognise my constituent's claim.

1.16 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. John Spellar): Let me make it clear at the outset that while there is clearly no case for a monetary award to Lieutenant-Colonel Miller, his work, that of his team—the Motor Vehicles and Engineering Establishment—and of others who contributed to the success of the Wheelbarrow bomb disposal vehicle is fully recognised and appreciated by the Ministry of Defence. That work has without question saved many lives and the destruction of much property, as was well described by the hon. Member for Surrey Heath (Mr. Hawkins). However, we are today dealing with the question whether the hon. Gentleman's constituent qualifies for an award from the Committee on Awards to Inventors.

As has been made clear, this case relates to events which took place more than 25 years ago. In 1973, the Department's Committee on Awards to Inventors, known as COATI, a body that was set up many years before to make discretionary awards for inventions produced by civilian and military personnel, received an application for an award from Lieutenant-Colonel Miller for Wheelbarrow.

By that time, COATI had considered and made awards for inventions ranging from gas turbines to electronics and covering chemical, electrical and mechanical inventions. COATI was staffed by experienced people including patent agents and by others with scientific, engineering or legal backgrounds. There is no doubt that COATI was a well-run and properly staffed committee which had the right expertise and the right qualifications. It had to make difficult decisions within the terms of reference that it had been set. It had been given, and had to maintain, standards to help it to determine whether an award should be made and, if so, the right and proper amount of that award.

All COATI awards were and, indeed, are made on an ex gratia basis at the absolute discretion of the Department. There is no formal entitlement to an award, and it is exceptional to have a case reconsidered by COATI.

Lieutenant-Colonel Miller's first application to COATI was made in 1973 through his establishment at Chertsey, the Military Vehicles and Engineering Establishment, known as the MVEE. The application for an award for the Wheelbarrow invention was made by Lieutenant-Colonel Miller and members of MVEE workshop staff, and considered on three different occasions by COATI. As I said, that was fairly unprecedented.

The committee was strongly of the view that the work on Wheelbarrow appeared to be in response to an official requirement and was no more than might have been expected by the individuals concerned. Lieutenant-Colonel Miller was status-barred by reason of his positions at MVEE from receiving any financial award as he was carrying out work that he was paid to do, and the invention, although useful, and vital, as the hon. Member for Surrey Heath aptly described it in introducing the debate, was not considered to be of exceptional utility and exceptional brilliance. In other words, it had to meet both those criteria.

The applications by the workshop staff were referred back to a local committee for consideration of local awards which were made. Undoubtedly, the work that was done by Lieutenant-Colonel Miller and his team at the time was important and was to have a significant effect on bomb disposal, particularly in Northern Ireland.

The application was considered further by COATI in April 1975 and it was decided that, as a member of the professional and scientific class who could well have been

expected to make inventions in his field of work, Lieutenant-Colonel Miller was not eligible for an award. I repeat that further consideration is unusual.

The matter was considered a third time on 24 July 1975, when COATI had the benefit of advice from one of the deputy controllers of establishments and research and the director of MVEE, who were of the view that no award was appropriate because of Lieutenant-Colonel Miller's position at the time and the duties that he was being paid to carry out. On that basis, once again, COATI concluded that no award should be made.

Mr. Crispin Blunt (Reigate): Having heard the account by my hon. Friend the Member for Surrey Heath (Mr. Hawkins) and having read his brief, the Minister clearly must have reached a personal judgment about the merits of the case. Perhaps we could hear his personal judgment as to whether an invention that has saved so many lives is worth an award.

Mr. Spellar: We charge those on the committee with the relevant technical expertise with making those decisions, which should not be overridden by ministerial judgment. I am not technically qualified to make a judgment as to whether an invention is of exceptional utility and of exceptional brilliance. That is a matter for professional judgment.

Mr. Keith Simpson (Mid–Norfolk): Churchill did.

Mr. Spellar: We sometimes hear some interesting interventions from the hon. Gentleman. As he should know, having been on the payroll of the Ministry of Defence, we have proper committees to deal with such matters, and this case has been reconsidered. It has also been considered by a number of Ministers, as I shall explain in a moment. I do not remember whether Churchill dealt with the case of Lieutenant-Colonel Miller, but I bow to the knowledge of the hon. Member for Mid–Norfolk (Mr. Simpson). *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): Order. The sedentary comments by the hon. Member for Mid-Norfolk (Mr. Simpson) are now becoming disruptive.

Mr. Spellar: A few years later, Lieutenant-Colonel Miller decided to make a direct application to COATI for an award. His words at the time were:

> "As far as I am aware the fully story was not revealed. I feel therefore, in justice to myself, that I should submit the whole story as I saw it."

The second application gave further details of Wheelbarrow and ran to some 31 pages with accompanying photographs of various marks of Wheelbarrow. It represented a complete description of his work, and the whole text was considered by the committee in the light of his previous application.

The committee once again concluded that no award should be made because he was status-barred at the time he carried out his work on Wheelbarrow. The committee, which had great experience in such matters, concluded that his work on Wheelbarrow was work that would have been expected by an officer at that level and in the circumstances that prevailed at the time. That is not to say that the committee disagreed with Lieutenant-Colonel Miller's version of events, but considered that his status was a bar to an award.

In between the two applications for an award for Wheelbarrow, Lieutenant-Colonel Miller discussed his application with his Member of Parliament at the time, Michael Grylls, who wrote on his behalf to the then Minister of State for Defence, Dr. John Gilbert. His reply was that Lieutenant-Colonel Miller's case had been considered with great care by COATI, and that a Crown servant employed and paid to carry out research and development work is not eligible for an award unless his invention displays exceptional brilliance and exceptional utility.

Mr. Hawkins: Does the Minister recognise the intense frustration on the part of my constituent? It appears to me that the basic misunderstanding that the invention was part of his normal work led to all the subsequent rejections. What is happening again today as the Minister reads out his prepared brief is a repeat of the same answer which the independent testimony of the officers involved completely undermines. That is what is so frustrating for my constituent. It is a factual error.

Mr. Spellar: Many of our constituents are frustrated. Sometimes they are right and sometimes they are wrong. In this instance, the Department believes that the committee is right and the individual constituent is wrong.

As hon. Members will remember, COATI awards are made on an ex gratia basis at the absolute discretion of the Department. However, Lieutenant-Colonel Miller persisted and wrote again to his Member of Parliament, Mr. Michael Grylls, who wrote to the Department. The then Minister of State for Defence, Lord Strathcona, replied that the claim had been considered long and hard at the time and a judgment made that it did not meet the stringent criteria laid down. It is understood that, by 1980, Mr. Grylls was satisfied that the matter had been fully considered.

I would add that the exchange of correspondence and the detailed consideration by Ministers of both parties and by officials over the past 20 years was unprecedented. I find it slightly surprising that the right hon. Member for Tonbridge and Malling (Sir J. Stanley), who served as a Minister in the Department at the time, and other hon. Members who were on the payroll of the Department should appear in the Chamber today. The case has been fully considered, and exceptionally so. No other COATI case has been given such detailed consideration by so many individuals, including COATI members, the director and other staff of MOD's directorate of intellectual property rights and the director-general of contracts.

In 1996, Lieutenant-Colonel Miller again asked his Member of Parliament, by then Sir Michael Grylls, to take up the matter with the then Minister of State for Defence Procurement, the right hon. Member for North-East Hampshire (Mr. Arbuthnot). A meeting was arranged, and it was concluded that no new information of significance had come to light that would warrant reopening the case. We believe that still to be the position today. However, the 1997 election brought a new Member for Surrey Heath, and, as hon. Members realise, this often leads to a temporary burst of old cases. Indeed, the hon. Gentleman

[Mr. Spellar]

was approached by Lieutenant-Colonel Miller and has been in correspondence with my right hon. Friend Lord Gilbert, who has been reincarnated as Minister of State for Defence Procurement.

It is important to note that, at the time the applications for an award were made by Lieutenant-Colonel Miller, the COATI rules required that, if the inventor was status-barred, as was the case with Lieutenant-Colonel Miller, an award could be made only if the invention was of exceptional utility and exceptional brilliance. The committee looked carefully at the invention on several occasions and, in the light of its experience, decided that it did not qualify. It did not meet the criteria by which other inventions were judged.

The Department has dealt with Lieutenant-Colonel Miller's claims for an award with great patience and forbearance over a long period. We are satisfied that the matter has been dealt with properly and fairly. There is no evidence that leads us to believe otherwise. We cannot arbitrarily and retrospectively change the rules. That would be unfair to all the other applicants over the years who have not qualified for a COATI award. That has been made clear to Lieutenant-Colonel Miller and to his current and previous Members of Parliament. We believe that the case should be laid to rest.

SARP (UK) Ltd.

1.29 pm

Mr. Harry Barnes (North-East Derbyshire): There have been two major incidents of clouds of acid vapour escaping from SARP (UK) Ltd. at Killamarsh in my constituency. They presented considerable and serious dangers to the residents of Killamarsh and the surrounding built-up areas, including parts of the constituencies of my hon. Friends the Members for Rother Valley (Mr. Barron) and for Sheffield, Attercliffe (Mr. Betts). The plant is situated close to housing and within a few hundred yards of a junior school. It is also on the border of the Rother Valley country park—I see my hon. Friend the Member for Rother Valley in the Chamber—which is used by thousands of people.

The first incident occurred on 14 May. I explained the events in detail to the House in a speech on 20 May. I shall not repeat the points that I made then, not least because the case is being placed before the courts in a prosecution by the Environment Agency. However, I should like to place on record details of the second major incident and subsequent events before making some general comments. Although the matters that I shall refer to are under investigation by the Health and Safety Executive and the Environment Agency, no official reports or prosecutions on them have yet seen the light of day. In the absence of such prosecutions, I am free to speak about the issues.

The second major incident took place on 30 May. I visited the site soon after, and met local residents. I have not been able to inform the House of the second incident until now, having been out of parliamentary action from 4 June because of a stroke. Apart from the short recall of Parliament following the tragedy at Omagh, the House has not met for 12 weeks.

However, I raised the issue through early-day motion 1385 on 3 June, and presented a petition to the House on 24 July on behalf of 7,000 residents in north-east Derbyshire, Killamarsh, Rother Valley and Sheffield, Attercliffe—my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Attercliffe is also in his place. I should like to mention on the record the help that I obtained from my agent Bob Harper and other Labour party members in the Killamarsh area during my illness and subsequently.

The SARP plant at Killamarsh is a chemical reclamation plant. At its acid-alkali treatment plant, there were four storage tanks surrounded by a concrete bund near the base. On 30 May, one of the tanks collapsed, with two thirds of its sides immediately disintegrating. The tank contained nine tonnes of liquids, 26 per cent. of the contents being nitric acid.

As the liquid, including considerable amounts of acid, fell into the bund, a huge orange cloud of acid vapour rose and escaped. The atmospheric conditions were poor and the acid cloud moved back to the site and its vicinity before slowly dispersing. Firefighters who went to tackle the toxic spill were initially refused entry to the plant on the grounds that the matter was under control, even though the plant's fire hose, which had been found to be defective on 14 May, had not been put right by 30 May.

That second major incident, just 16 days after the first escape of acid vapour from a tanker, had a dramatic impact on officialdom, the local communities and SARP.

The authorities—the Health and Safety Executive and the Environment Agency—set up investigations into that further major incident, and embarked on a full audit of all the processes at the plant.

The reaction of the communities in Killamarsh and surrounding areas was dramatic. Everyone had had enough, and demanded the removal of the plant to a site away from areas of population. A residents committee was formed, known as RASP—an anagram of SARP that stands for Residents Against SARP Pollution. It has persistently campaigned for the closure of the plant in dramatic style, including a visit to SARP's parent company, Vivendi in Paris—a multinational that is embarrassed because it likes to portray itself as environmentally friendly.

The parish council, the district council, the local county councillor Alan Charles and the three Members of Parliament have all made vigorous representations to my right hon. Friend Minister for the Environment. We are all thankful to my right hon. Friend for visiting SARP and meeting representatives of RASP and the councils in Killamarsh on 29 July. However, the determination of the residents did not come out of the blue. It has built up over a long period, which included an explosion at the site in 1986, when the plant was run by Leigh Environmentals.

I took a deputation to meet the Minister for small firms, Mr. David Trippier, even though I was not a Member of Parliament at the time. That deputation was made up of local councillors and representatives of KRAC—the Killamarsh Residents Action Committee. I placed details of those and further serious matters before the House when I became a Member of Parliament, most notably in an Adjournment debate on 28 February 1990. There had been the additional possibility of the infamous Karen B being brought to this country, with materials from it being likely to go to the Killamarsh site.

Astonishingly, although SARP has been under constant supervision by the Killamarsh community since the second incident, it has failed to get its act together. A catalogue of incidents has been unearthed. On the day of my right hon. Friend's visit to Killamarsh, it was discovered that barrels of rocket fuel were stored close to the local junior school. My right hon. Friend will remember his visit to the school playing field, with the SARP site starkly nearby.

The consignment of rocket fuel came in 1,507 drums in 20 deliveries between 1993 and 1995. Of those, 184 were left to deteriorate and had to be stored under water. Some of the remaining drums were incinerated, while others remain in storage on the site. I know that my right hon. Friend is concerned about the matter, which is under investigation by the Environment Agency, as are another five incidents.

First, waste was left on the ground, with serious smells affecting the community, when an old storage tank was being cleaned out. Secondly, substantial off site odours were caused following leachate recycling. Thirdly, 20 tonnes of slurry were dumped on a landfill site. There are questions as to how that met the provisions of the waste disposal licence. Fourthly, the recirculation of effluent in storage tanks caused serious smells. Fifthly, a gas scrubber was not properly maintained, leading to a further inability to remove smells from waste.

There have been numerous other incidents, such as the sample bottles of aniline carried from Killamarsh to Teesside by TNT that leaked en route. The material is hazardous, and causes skin and eye irritation. TNT was not informed of the contents of the bottles. Past carbon monoxide releases from the incinerator have also been found not to have complied with the licence. Then a tanker started to leave the site, although a worker was still on top of it.

In addition to the responses of officialdom and the community, and because of them, SARP has had to react. It closed down the six chemical reclamation processes at the plant following the incident on 30 May. Although the company attempted to restart the secondary liquid fuel plant within 48 hours, it backed off when I objected to the Health and Safety Executive. On 18 June, however, as I was leaving hospital, the process was reopened—not least because it accounts for 48 per cent. of SARP's turnover on the site. The other processes have remained closed down—20 weeks after the tank collapsed.

SARP has announced its intention to transfer its acid plant, oil plant and transport depot from Killamarsh, while reducing the number of drums on site, including the rocket fuel. It claimed to me that that will involve the end of emissions into sewers, which have caused major unrest in the area for years. I welcome SARP's belated recognition that too many processes operate on the site, and appreciate that employees need to be fully consulted about transfer arrangements, as they will affect half the 110 jobs on the site.

SARP's proposals still leave us with the secondary fuel plant in operation, and would involve the reopening of the incinerator and the solvent recovery plant. We are awaiting the outcome of the reports of the Health and Safety Executive and the Environment Agency, including the audit of the plant. Those could lead to SARP having to remove more, or even all, of the operations from Killamarsh. I am therefore keen that the official reports into incidents should be completed as soon as possible and put into the public domain. I ask my hon. Friend the Minister to respond specifically to that point.

I am also concerned about whether highly critical reports of SARP will be enough to prompt the authorities to take action to close down SARP's remaining processes. A House of Commons Library briefing tells me that, under part 1 of the Environmental Protection Act 1990,

"local authorities are statutorily obliged to include conditions in any authorisations they issue which are designed to ensure that the process is operated under the Best Available Techniques Not Entailing Excessive Cost . . . to prevent and minimise emissions of prescribed substances and to render harmless any substance that may be emitted . . . local authorities can issue enforcement, variation, prohibition and revocation notices to ensure that appropriate standards of control are met, and raised in line with new techniques and new awareness of environmental risk. Prohibition notices are a mechanism for stopping a process if there is an imminent risk of serious pollution of the environment."

Will fresh legislation be needed to strengthen such provisions so that the experiences of the long-suffering residents of Killamarsh may come to shape legislation that will have a wider application in protection against industrial pollution?

A series of reports is being prepared about SARP's operation at Killamarsh. The Health and Safety Executive and the Environment Agency are conducting three major reports—plus six other investigations, which I have described. SARP commissioned a report by W. S. Atkins after the first incident; it has not seen the light of day. The company is going on to commission a unit at Sheffield

[Mr. Harry Barnes]

university to produce a further report, and the area's Member of the European Parliament is undertaking his own inquiry. RASP has been first off the blocks and has published a report. In fact, SARP has responded to it—it was published yesterday—in a four-page fax to me. That response is somewhat more speedy than the emergence of the reports that it has commissioned.

It is essential that the mountain of paperwork produces results. After all, actions speak louder than wordy surveys. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will respond to the points that I have placed on record, especially in connection with the availability of reports and whether consideration has been given to improvements in environmental protection legislation in order to ensure that the type of problems that have for so long occurred in Killamarsh begin to be solved—not just there but in other communities.

1.44 pm

The Minister for the Environment (Mr. Michael Meacher): I am very pleased that my hon. Friend the Member for North-East Derbyshire (Mr. Barnes) has secured a debate on this important subject. I pay him a very great tribute for the extremely thorough and persistent manner in which he has pursued this serious case—not least because, as he said, in the middle of the events, he was struck down by illness. I know that I speak for everyone present when I say that we are delighted to see him again fully active, in pursuit of these matters with all his accustomed vigour.

I should express my real and unreserved sympathy and concern for the Killamarsh residents' worry and anger about the two occurrences that my hon. Friend has described. As he said, I have taken the opportunity to visit the plant in order to see for myself at first hand what has led to the concerns. I want to put on record how tremendously impressed I was by the poignant and forceful manner in which members of Residents Against SARP Pollution presented their case. It made a very big impression on me.

Having said that, I am sure that my hon. Friend will understand why I cannot comment on the two specific incidents on the SARP site—not least because it would involve a discussion of matters that are before the courts. Another key constraint that prevents me from discussing the specific issues is that activities at the site are subject to waste management licensing. The Secretary of State exercises a quasi-judicial role in relation to appeals by waste management licence holders or applicants against licensing decisions made by the Environment Agency. I therefore cannot comment on any individual case that may become the subject of one of those appeals. Having said that, I shall still do everything I can to deal with the issues raised.

As my hon. Friend said, the Killamarsh site is a waste treatment site which has been in operation for several years. At the end of last year, its operation was taken over by SARP (UK) Ltd. To be fair, the company inherited a legacy left by the previous owners and operators of the site. None the less, the legal responsibility for the two incidents in May and other concerns rests with SARP.

As a result of investigations by the Health and Safety Executive and the Environment Agency into the first incident on 14 May, SARP (UK) Ltd has been charged with contravention of section 2 of the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974, regulation 10 of the Carriage of Dangerous Goods by Road Regulations 1996, and section 33 of the Environmental Protection Act 1990.

The other incident took place on 30 May. A Health and Safety Executive inspector attended the site on the day of the incident, where he met my hon. Friend the Member for North–East Derbyshire and several parish councillors. He advised that, following the investigation of the incident and the previous one, there would be a comprehensive inspection and audit of all activities carried out on the site. The investigation into the second incident is highly complex, and may yet take several more weeks before it is concluded.

Several key actions have been taken since the very regrettable incidents in May.

First, an off-site safety plan is now being developed by SARP in co-operation with the local emergency authorities. Secondly, all processes on the site were suspended following the incident. Some have restarted to a limited extent, following detailed audits by HSE and the other authorities. Others, including the acid plant that was responsible for the incidents, have been closed down permanently.

Thirdly, my hon. Friend asked about publication of the HSE audit, and I am glad to say that it will be made public in full. Fourthly, SARP has appointed Sheffield university's environmental consultancy to undertake a full and independent audit of the site. The recommendations of that will be published, and SARP has committed itself publicly to implementing them all. Fifthly, HSE and the Environment Agency continue to monitor closely the activities on the site, and are co-operating fully with one another.

Such serious incidents raise many issues concerning underlying standards, procedures and systems, and I shall try to deal briefly with the main questions. The waste management licensing system established under the Environmental Protection Act 1990 is intended to ensure that waste management activities do not cause pollution of the environment or harm to human health. I note my hon. Friend's lengthy list of the company's alleged breaches of consent.

Anyone who deposits, recovers or disposes of controlled waste without a waste management licence, or contrary to the conditions of a waste management licence, or in a way that causes pollution or harm to health, commits a criminal offence. There are strict penalties for such offences. For example, the maximum penalty for the illegal management of special waste is five years' imprisonment and an unlimited fine.

My hon. Friend asked whether additional legislation was needed. I am happy to reconsider that question, but I do not believe it is. I believe that adequate powers are already there, and it is up to the authorities to exercise them where any of the licence conditions are not met.

The Environment Agency already has extensive powers to take enforcement action against the holder of a waste management licence. It may modify a licence in whatever way is necessary to ensure that it does not cause pollution to the environment or harm to human health, or become seriously detrimental to the amenities of the locality affected by the activities. That is a significant power, and I look to the agency to exercise it.

Where the agency considers that there is an imminent risk of serious pollution, it has a duty to serve a prohibition notice specifying the risk and the steps to be taken to overcome it, and suspending the authorisation for whatever aspects of the operation are causing the risk.

I addition, the agency has the power to revoke an authorisation—in effect, to shut down the process—where, for example, there has been persistent failure to comply with conditions. I heard what my hon. Friend said about that. It is, of course, for the agency to decide what action is appropriate in which circumstances. For the reasons that I have already given, I cannot comment on whether it would be appropriate to take action along those lines in the case of the Killamarsh site. I can only repeat that I listened attentively to what my hon. Friend said, and those words too will be noted by the Environment Agency.

I shall now talk about standards regulating tankers. The first incident involved a vacuum-operated waste tanker, and I am aware that my hon. Friend is concerned that standards for tankers may be less rigorous in the United Kingdom than in other European countries. I have looked into the subject, and let me assure him that that is not the case. Regulations for the domestic transport of dangerous goods in all EC member states are essentially harmonised as a result of the ADR framework directive adopted in November 1994.

The introduction into ADR of requirements for vacuum-operated waste tankers has been a United Kingdom initiative, and the adopted text is based primarily on existing UK controls. UK safety requirements for such tankers have therefore been accepted by Europe as the best model for future regulation.

Mr. Barnes: The Minister is aware that, as he told me in a parliamentary answer, there have been about 125 incidents involving leakage from tankers over the past 10 years. I do not believe that, until the incident on 14 May, any of those incidents concerned vehicles operated by Leigh Environmentals or SARP. However, there has since been a second incident involving a SARP tanker, near Grantham, which caused considerable leakage on the M1.

Even if we are in line with European standards, it is a matter for consideration whether the regulations on the movement of materials about the country are tight enough. One of the problems is that the first incident at Killamarsh might have happened not on the site but in transit. It was bad enough at the site, but it could have happened in all sorts of more dangerous conditions—either at the origin of the goods being moved or during transit through heavily populated areas.

Mr. Meacher: My hon. Friend raises an important issue. It is true that there have been many instances of leaks from tankers either in transit or at their destination, as was the case with the first SARP incident. I am concerned about that, and I am asking HSE to investigate whether there is a pattern behind the large number of incidents, and whether there is a case for revision of the regulations.

My understanding is that the regulations are tight and clear, and that the incidents have largely been caused either by human error or by management failure. However, I accept the fact that the number of incidents is sufficiently high to warrant further examination. I will have that undertaken, and will then report to my hon. Friend.

Sheffield council has called for an official public inquiry into the activities on the Killamarsh site. Having been there and talked to the residents in Residents Against SARP Pollution, and having seen how the site is cheek by jowl with the local community, I have every sympathy with that request. However, I have to bear in mind the constraints imposed by the legal proceedings now under way, the impact of which I trust I have made clear. It is very unlikely that any public inquiry could start substantive considerations until the legal proceedings are concluded.

As I have already said, SARP itself has announced that it has appointed Sheffield university's environmental consultancy to undertake a full and independent inquiry into operations at Killamarsh. I have been formally advised that SARP will refocus and simplify operations at the site to make it more manageable. That will include a substantial clean-up of the facility.

As my hon. Friend knows, I have enormous sympathy with the local strength of feeling, and will continue to take a close interest in developments.

Mr. Barnes: I thank the Minister for the nature of his response. I know that he takes the issue seriously. For my 11 years as a Member of Parliament, I have been concerned with the issues surrounding the site, and my right hon. Friend's responses today are much more serious than those that I received from the previous Administration when we were dealing with such problems many years ago.

Mr. Meacher: I am grateful for my hon. Friend's comments. I must choose my words carefully here, but I am inclined to say that the previous Government undervalued health and safety issues. The present Government take such issues extremely seriously. Two worrying incidents involving SARP have taken place within a fortnight of each other, and, having listened for several hours to the people who experienced the consequences, I intend to ensure that justice is done.

It being Two o'clock, the motion for the Adjournment of the House lapsed, without Question put.

Sitting suspended, pursuant to Standing Order No. 10 (Wednesday sittings), till half-past Two o'clock.

Oral Answers to Questions

CABINET OFFICE

The Minister was asked—

Press Officers

1. **Mr. Jim Cousins** (Newcastle upon Tyne, Central): What new guidance he has issued to *(a)* press officers and *(b)* press advisers of Ministers in departments. [54712]

The Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office (Mr. Peter Kilfoyle): The values and conventions which govern the work of press officers—both permanent civil servants and special advisers—are set out in guidance on the work of the Government Information Service, published in July 1997.

As my hon. Friend will be aware, the Government are currently considering a recommendation from the Select Committee on Public Administration for further guidance.

Mr. Cousins: I welcome the Minister for the Cabinet Office, my right hon. Friend the Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) to his new position, where he will display his style, robustness and determination. When the Prime Minister created the new Cabinet Office in July, he made it clear that the head of the Government Information Service would be part of that office, and that the Cabinet Office would be responsible for the overall presentation and corporate management of government and Government policy.

Does my right hon. Friend have the power and the authority under the new regime to ensure that there is no secondary market in information and access to information; that all aspects of government—all facts, policies and debates—will be presented in a proper fashion and that there will be no question of privateering and spin in such matters? Is the ministerial team satisfied that it now has that power?

Mr. Kilfoyle: I can assure my hon. Friend that my right hon. Friend the Minister for the Cabinet Office will do all within his extensive powers to effect the co-ordination of the development and the presentation of policy across government under the direction of the Prime Minister.

I can also assure my hon. Friend that the head of the Government Information Service is now based in the Cabinet Office, directly answerable to the head of the home civil service. That is part of our stated commitment to make presentation an essential ingredient in the success of the Government. At the heart of our modus operandi is a commitment to ensuring that we have a co-ordinated view on policy and that it is presented robustly, and with strong political guidance.

Sir Peter Emery (East Devon): Will the Parliamentary Secretary have a word with his right hon. Friend the Minister—whom we congratulate on his appointment—not about press advisers, but about efforts to ensure that press statements are made in this House by the Ministers responsible? Will he ensure that they are not spun out with a lot of words, as we have just heard in the Parly Secretary reply to the previous question?

Mr. Kilfoyle: I am sorry if the right hon. Gentleman considered my answer verbose. It was not intended to be—it was intended to be a full answer to a series of questions. The statements made in the House will continue to be germane to the subject matter.

Sir George Young (North-West Hampshire): On behalf of the Opposition, may I also welcome the Minister for the Cabinet Office, the right hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham), to his new position and wish him well? No doubt any sadness that he feels at leaving the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food will be compensated for by the pleasure that he will get from enforcing Government policies on reluctant colleagues.

To revert to the question about the Government Information Service, which the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, Central (Mr. Cousins) asked, is it not misleading for the annual report to airbrush out all references to bad news, such as the Bernie Ecclestone affair, the difficulties over Sierra Leone and corruption in local government, to name but three? Would it not be better if the Prime Minister presented his report not in the rose garden at No. 10 before his cronies, but in the Chamber before all hon. Members?

Mr. Kilfoyle: It is a travesty of the situation for the right hon. Gentleman to say that the bad news was airbrushed out. Surely the reality is that there has been so much good news that there has been no time to communicate any bad news.

Civil Service

2. **Mr. Keith Vaz** (Leicester, East): What plans he has to increase awareness of civil service careers among the ethnic minority community. [54715]

The Minister for the Cabinet Office (Dr. Jack Cunningham): The Cabinet Office and other Departments participate fully in workplace development schemes such as the Windsor fellowship, exhibit at careers and other fairs and undertake outreach work with universities. Nine Whitehall Departments, including mine, will next month be promoting civil service careers at the Mega Mela Asian festival at Birmingham, which is expected to attract more than 100,000 visitors. I will shortly be launching with Sir Richard Wilson, the head of the home civil service, a charter for action to redress under-representation of ethnic minorities in the senior civil service. That initiative has been jointly agreed with the civil service unions.

Mr. Vaz: May I warmly welcome my right hon. Friend to his new position and also welcome the initiative undertaken by the Cabinet Secretary, Sir Richard Wilson, including the appointment of Mr. Suma Chakrabarti, who becomes the most senior Asian person in the civil service? Can I tempt my right hon. Friend to go a step further and take a leaf out of the Home Secretary's book by considering the possibility of initiating a system of targets, so that the civil service is truly representative of modern Britain?

Dr. Cunningham: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his kind remarks and good wishes. We shall soon publish guidelines on the mainstreaming of equality throughout

the Government. I can assure him that, as Minister for the Cabinet Office, I will play an important role in taking that forward.

Sir Sydney Chapman (Chipping Barnet): Although I welcome the initiative that the right hon. Gentleman has taken to make job and career opportunities in the civil service as wide as possible, and known about by as many people as possible, will he take this opportunity to stress that people will be appointed on merit?

Dr. Cunningham: It is one of our guiding principles that people are always appointed on merit, and that will continue to be the case. Nevertheless, we also need to take more effective action to ensure that the under-representation of people from Asian and ethnic communities in senior civil service posts is redressed.

Mr. Hilton Dawson (Lancaster and Wyre): Will the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster accept my sincere congratulations on his new appointment? One of the great joys of the city of Lancaster is its diverse range of people from different cultural backgrounds. At this stage, can my right hon. Friend tell me what part he intends to play in the celebration in that glorious city of the 600th anniversary of the Duchy of Lancaster? Also, will he please reconsider his use of the description, Minister for the Cabinet Office, as it is certainly no less opaque than Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, and it lacks a great deal of style as well?

Dr. Cunningham: That would never do. First, I must thank my hon. Friend, who represents the wonderful and ancient city of Lancaster, for his kind remarks and good wishes. Perhaps I should point out to him and the House that I have the honour and privilege of two titles: Minister for the Cabinet Office and Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster. It is only in the interests of brevity that I use the former and not both when addressing the House.

As for the celebrations for the 600th anniversary, I hope to play a part in those, too.

Citizens Charter

3. **Mr. Nicholas Winterton** (Macclesfield): How he monitors *(a)* the effectiveness and *(b)* the consistency of citizens charters across Government. [54716]

The Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office (Mr. Peter Kilfoyle): To support the launch of the new service first programme, we have made available to all public services comprehensive advice on how to draw up effective charters that best meet the needs of users. We have also created a new team in the service first unit to audit the quality and effectiveness of selected national and local charters. Those new initiatives reflect the Government's commitment to first-class, responsive public services.

Mr. Winterton: I am sure that the Minister accepts that the concept and implementation of the citizens charter were the result of actions taken by the previous Government. Will he also accept that efficiency and all that goes with it will be achieved in the public sector only through the greater involvement of the private sector? Will he turn his attention to the winter fuel payments to pensioners by the Department of Social Security, so that last year's chaos is not repeated this year and so that my excellent pensioners in Macclesfield enjoy a better and more reliable service?

Mr. Kilfoyle: May I correct the hon. Gentleman's inadvertent misrepresentation? The notion of the citizens charter came from Labour local authorities—specifically York and Nottingham—but we did not mind the previous Government stealing a good idea. His question about winter payments to pensioners should be raised with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security.

Rural Policies

4. **Mr. Peter Luff** (Mid-Worcestershire): What plans he has to improve the co-ordination of the Government's rural policies; and if he will make a statement. [54718]

7. **Mr. David Winnick** (Walsall, North): If he will make a statement on the structures for co-ordinating Government policies. [54723]

The Minister for the Cabinet Office (Dr. Jack Cunningham): My role is to assist my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and ministerial colleagues in the implementation, co-ordination and effective presentation of Government policy. In accordance with the resolution of the House on ministerial accountability made on 19 March 1997, it is for the Ministers to account for the policy decisions and actions of their Departments and next steps agencies. I shall, of course, answer questions on my responsibilities for the work of the Cabinet Office, including the better government agenda, and on my responsibilities as Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster.

Mr. Luff: I am sure that the House realises that MAFF's loss is the Cabinet Office's gain, but, bearing in mind the Minister's recently relinquished responsibilities at MAFF; the growing crisis in rural Britain because of the problems facing British agriculture; the direction in which the common agricultural policy is moving; and the large number of Departments that are concerned with rural policy across the whole waterfront of issues, will he not say something a little more constructive in answer to my question?

Dr. Cunningham: First, I thank the hon. Gentleman for his kind words. I thought that I was answering his question, which was about my role in the co-ordination and presentation of the Government's policies. He mentions rural areas, and I return his compliment in wishing him well in his continuing role as an effective and constructive Chairman of the Select Committee on Agriculture. He will know that, following the comprehensive spending review and announcements by my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister, the Government are paying greater attention and giving more resources to the undoubted problems in rural areas. I know those problems well, because I represent a rural constituency.

Mr. Winnick: Is it not necessary to explain to the country, through the co-ordination of policies, why it is absolutely essential to spend the extra £40 billion on schools and health services? In doing so, should it not also be explained why that money was not made available before the election and why, even now, the Conservative Opposition seem very much opposed to its being spent on education and health?

Dr. Cunningham: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. It would certainly help the House and, I think, the country too, if we had a clear exposition of the Opposition's policies in this area. First, my hon. Friend is right to say that the Government are whole-heartedly committed to providing an extra £21 billion for health and £19 billion for education. The shadow Chancellor says that that is extravagance and that the investment should not be made; Opposition spokesmen on health and education say that it is not enough; and the Leader of the Opposition says nothing at all.

Sir Patrick Cormack (South Staffordshire): In adding my words of welcome to the right hon. Gentleman, I hope that he will think again about which title he uses in the House. It is good to see the right hon. Member for South Shields (Dr. Clark) in his place. It is typical of his courtesy to the House that he should be here at this particular Question Time.

Is the right hon. Gentleman really satisfied that the Government are doing everything to address the plight of the farmers, and will he guarantee to the House that he will assist his successor in getting rid of the ban on beef on the bone, which has been his prime achievement to date as an enforcer and which has done a great deal of damage to British agriculture?

Dr. Cunningham: First, I thank the hon. Gentleman for his kind remarks, and I join him in paying tribute to the work of my right hon. Friend the Member for South Shields (Dr. Clark). He is not just a right hon. Friend, but a friend. It is a great honour for me to continue the work that he set in train in the Cabinet Office. As for my title, the reality is that the merger of the Office of Public Service and the old Cabinet Office and the new responsibilities that the Prime Minister announced in a written answer to the House on 28 July 1998, at columns 132-34, mean that the overwhelming burden of my responsibilities is to do with the work of the Cabinet Office rather than the Duchy of Lancaster, important though that work will continue to be.

As for co-ordinating policy on farmers, specific questions about agriculture must remain issues for my right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. On the hon. Gentleman's comments about beef on the bone, the reality is that beef consumption in Britain at present is at a 20-year high, so his suggestion in that connection is wholly misplaced. The biggest problem facing farmers at present, as I am sure he will recognise, is not that ban but the ban on the export of British beef to Europe and elsewhere. I can assure the hon. Gentleman that the Government, including the Prime Minister, are working hard to resolve that problem, which results from the incompetence of the previous Conservative Government.

Quangos

5. **Mr. David Heath** (Somerton and Frome): How many quangos have been *(a)* abolished and *(b)* brought under direct democratic control since 1 May 1997. [54720]

The Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office (Mr. Peter Kilfoyle): Since 1 May 1997, Ministers have abolished 44 quangos and have announced plans to abolish 37 more. The Government's recent paper "Quangos: Opening the Doors" set out a range of new measures for improving the accountability and openness of all quangos which remain. We have already started to implement these policies, which include supporting and encouraging closer co-operation between local authorities and quangos with local offices.

Mr. Heath: Here is a job for enforcement, because that really is pitifully slow progress after 18 months. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that, for Ministers to be appointing about 30,000 people who should be appointed by election by the people, is unacceptable? Does he further agree that replacing Tory cronies with Labour cronies, or even Liberal Democrat cronies, does nothing for accountability or democracy?

Mr. Kilfoyle: In answer to the hon. Gentleman's charge, I can only say that he should understand the exact definition of a quango as established by the Conservative Government in 1980. None of those had a locus within local authorities, with the exception of some, such as urban development corporations, which have obviously gone, and the Funding Agency for Schools for England, which will be abolished in 1999. As regards the membership of the quangos, this Government have been far more open about appointments to those quangos and their terms of reference.

Mr. Andrew Reed (Loughborough): Although I welcome the steps that have been taken so far in abolishing a number of quangos and opening up the process, I want to ask my hon. Friend the Minister to speak to his colleague, the Secretary of State for Education and Employment, particularly since he has just sat beside him, about the future role of the training and enterprise councils, particularly the growth and development of the regional development agencies. If my hon. Friend is looking for a pilot area for regional development agencies to take over the role of the TECs, I suggest that the east midlands should be at the top of the list.

Mr. Kilfoyle: I wish that it was within my gift to make my hon. Friend that promise but, unfortunately, I cannot. The publication "Quangos: Opening the Doors" is only the beginning of a process and, within the Cabinet Office, we continue to review the role, designation and membership of all quangos.

Mr. Eric Forth (Bromley and Chislehurst): What will the Government do to democratise the gigantic quango that they will create if they go ahead with the ill-thought-out plan to remove hereditary peers from the House of Lords?

Mr. Kilfoyle: The answer is extremely simple. We will be maintaining faith with the electorate. We set out clearly

and unequivocally that we would abolish hereditary peerage in the House of Lords as the first stage in its modernisation, and that we fully intend to do.

Information Technology

8. **Ms Margaret Moran** (Luton, South): What plans he has to use new technology to increase public participation in government. [54725]

The Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office (Mr. Peter Kilfoyle): An increasing number of Departments already use the internet to carry out public consultation exercises on policy proposals. We are keen to extend that further and want to encourage wider public participation in government via new technology.

We will shortly be publishing our market research results on peoples' attitudes to electronic government and intend to use the findings to help ensure that our better government programme will bring government closer to the needs of all our people.

Ms Moran: I thank my hon. Friend for that reply *[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: Order. I cannot hear the hon. Lady.

Ms Moran: May I ask my hon. Friend to look seriously at some of the work done by local government, such as the Lewisham democracy project, in the extension of what we now call e-governance and to look at the connecting Canada e-governance strategy which could be of benefit to us? Will he consider incorporating some of those ideas into the eagerly awaited White Paper on better government?

Mr. Kilfoyle: The former Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, my right hon. Friend the Member for South Shields (Dr. Clark), went to look at some of those projects. We have considered their place in the better government White Paper and programme. I should point out that, when my hon. Friend was the leader of Lewisham council, she was one of the leaders in all the uses of information technology in delivering better services in that council. We have a programme of visiting many of our local authorities which can provide a lead in this area in partnership with central Government.

Better Government Project

9. **Mr. Peter L. Pike** (Burnley): What progress he proposes to make in the next 12 months on the better government project. [54729]

The Minister for the Cabinet Office (Dr. Jack Cunningham): The better government project is one of the Government's and my top priorities. We will publish a White Paper in the spring setting out proposals for modernising government and joining up public services, to secure effective decision making and services that work and respond to the people who need them.

Mr. Pike: I thank my right hon. Friend for that answer. Can he give me an assurance that, in the discussions that are taking place between national and local government to ensure better co-operation between them, one of the primary objectives is that of replacing 18 years of confrontation and clampdown with co-operation, better government and better service for the people of this country?

Dr. Cunningham: Yes, Madam Speaker, I can give my hon. Friend that assurance. Local government remains a key partner in taking forward our preparations for the better government initiative. I can tell my hon. Friend and the House that the invest-to-save budget, announced in the document on modernising public services following the comprehensive spending review, run jointly by the Treasury and the Cabinet Office, is exciting considerable interest. A fund of £150 million over the next three years is available, and public sector organisations will bid for funds to develop projects that bring together two or more public service bodies to deliver services in an innovative and more efficient way. That is another of the many important vehicles for taking forward better government.

Mr. Crispin Blunt (Reigate): Can the Minister explain how it contributes to better government that, while the House was debating defence yesterday, the Prime Minister was briefing Philip Webster and other journalists about a major revision to defence policy with regard to Europe—a proposal about which the House heard nothing during the debate? Was that at worst unco-ordinated government, or was the Defence Secretary holding the House in contempt in the same way as the Prime Minister was?

Dr. Cunningham: No, it was neither of those. I am sure that the Prime Minister was not briefing Philip Webster, either.

Public Servants

10. **Mr. Dennis Canavan** (Falkirk, West): How many representations he has received about employment in the public service of citizens of the Commonwealth and the Republic of Ireland. [54730]

The Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office (Mr. Peter Kilfoyle): Since April 1998 we have received five representations, including one from the hon. Member for Portsmouth, South (Mr. Hancock), written with the support of 32 other hon. Members. Some have pressed the case for reversing the 1996 change to the civil service nationality rules. That meant that new entrant Irish and Commonwealth citizens ceased to be eligible for 25 per cent. of civil service posts, known in European Community terms as "public service". Others have sought early progress on introducing legislation to open the civil service to recruitment on merit, regardless of nationality.

Mr. Canavan: Does my hon. Friend agree that Irish and Commonwealth citizens have traditionally made an important contribution to public service in this country? Given that in June 1996 the previous Government changed the rules so that Irish and Commonwealth citizens are now debarred from some 25 per cent. of civil service posts, will the Government take steps to end such unfair discrimination, which reduces the employment prospects of many individuals and deprives the civil service of many talented potential recruits?

Mr. Kilfoyle: Those in post before 31 May 1996 would be eligible for the full range of civil service posts.

Nevertheless, it would require primary legislation to amend the Aliens Restrictions (Amendment) Act 1919 in order to effect changes. I have great sympathy with my hon. Friend's concern and we are currently examining the position.

Public Officials

11. **Mr. Tim Boswell** (Daventry): What steps he is taking to co-ordinate departmental policies in respect of the conduct of public officials. [54731]

The Minister for the Cabinet Office (Dr. Jack Cunningham): On behalf of the Minister for the Civil Service, the Cabinet Office is responsible for the civil service code, the civil service management code and the model code for staff of executive non-departmental public bodies. Policies relating to groups of public servants for which other departments have lead responsibility are co-ordinated with the Cabinet Office as necessary.

Mr. Boswell: Will the right hon. Gentleman remind special advisers that they are, generally, civil servants? In particular, will he advise and encourage them not to brief against one another with the views of their departmental Minister? In his capacity as lord high enforcer, will he bring some order to government in case the term "beef on the bone" develops an entirely new connotation?

Dr. Cunningham: I can agree with most of what the hon. Gentleman says—I hope that he is pleased with that. As the Opposition know, special advisers are subject to a model contract and to the civil service code. Those provisions will continue.

Mr. Robert Maclennan (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross): May I add my congratulations and those of my right hon. and hon. Friends to the Minister on his new appointment? On the co-ordination of Government information services, is he aware that a number of people, not just the Home Secretary, find it difficult to accept the view expressed by Lord Neill that Government information services should not be used during the holding of referendums where Government policy is being put to the test of public opinion?

Dr. Cunningham: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for his comments. He will know that in due course the Government will give a considered response to the proposals from Lord Neill and his colleagues. The specific point that he raised is shared by many hon. Members on both sides of the House.

Policy Co-ordination

12. **Mr. Dennis Skinner** (Bolsover): How many meetings he has had with other Ministers to discuss enforcing greater co-ordination of Government policy. [54732]

The Minister for the Cabinet Office (Dr. Jack Cunningham): I frequently meet my ministerial colleagues to discuss the co-ordination and presentation of Government policies, and I should be happy to meet my hon. Friend, too, if he so wishes.

Mr. Skinner: Instead of using up valuable time meeting me or anyone else from the Labour Benches, perhaps my right hon. Friend would meet someone else, who I believe is probably undermining Government co-ordination. I refer, of course, to Eddie George. Does my right hon. Friend agree that he should ascertain from him whether he used the words that unemployment in the north is necessary to keep inflation down in the south? If he did, it is time that he went.

Dr. Cunningham: I am sorry that my hon. Friend does not want to meet me to advise me on how I might be more effective in my enforcer role. I understand that there is some doubt about whether Eddie George used the words at which my hon. Friend has understandably taken offence. As for my meeting Mr. George, I think that I will leave that pleasure to my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer.

Mr. Anthony Steen (Totnes): I wonder whether the Minister knows that the members of the Select Committee on Deregulation have been twiddling their thumbs since May 1997, as it has virtually nothing to do. Is he proposing to wind it up or that we should exercise some better regulation, in which case, when does he propose that we should discuss that on the Floor of the House?

Dr. Cunningham: As I think the hon. Gentleman knows, the appointment or disbandment of a Select Committees of the House is, fortunately, not a matter for me. On better regulation, I should be happy to see the hon. Gentleman, and members of the Select Committee, to discuss how we are taking those important issues forward, not only in this country, but in the European Union.

PRIME MINISTER

The Prime Minister was asked—

Engagements

Q1.[54740] **Mr. Don Touhig** (Islwyn): If he will list his official engagements for Wednesday 21 October.

The Prime Minister (Mr. Tony Blair): This morning, I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I will have further such meetings later today.

Mr. Touhig: May I tell my right hon. Friend that the people who sent me to this House warmly welcome the extra £40 billion promised for health and education? They see it as an investment in their future. Will he make it clear that cutting spending on schools and hospitals is the Tory way? It is not our way.

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is right. The £40 billion for our schools and hospitals will not just ensure that we can get waiting lists and class sizes down and improve standards in the health service and our schools; it is also an investment in this country's future. The worst thing we could do would be to take the Tory way and cut that spending next year.

Mr. William Hague (Richmond, Yorks): After a summer in which one job has been lost every 10 minutes,

manufacturing has been taken to the brink of recession, agriculture has been deep in recession and the Chancellor has had to admit that his central economic forecasts are seriously wrong, will the Prime Minister tell the Chancellor to come to the Dispatch Box and explain how he got us into this mess and how he is going to get us out of it?

The Prime Minister: I note that the right hon. Gentleman claims that a job is being lost every 10 minutes in the United Kingdom. Since May last year, when the Government were elected, employment has increased by 373,000 in 537 days. That is one new job every two minutes. The right hon. Gentleman will know that the Chancellor will make his pre-Budget report within the next two weeks, and he will give that at the appropriate time.

Mr. Hague: What a statement of extraordinary complacency from a Member of Parliament in whose own constituency 600 jobs were cut a few weeks ago. In July, when we last had Question Time, the Prime Minister told us that his forecasts were absolutely prudent. The Social Security Secretary, at the same time, told a Select Committee that people had said, "No, you are being too prudent; you are being too cautious." By August, the Education and Employment Secretary was saying that the economy was on a knife edge. By early October, the Chancellor was saying that his forecasts were seriously wrong.

Given that the Government's assumptions have proved so seriously wrong, does the Prime Minister think that the Government have any share of the responsibility for what has happened, or is it all somebody else's fault?

The Prime Minister: No. I shall give the right hon. Gentleman the figures for the north-east. He is quite wrong. Unemployment in the north-east has fallen since the Government came to power, and employment has risen. On any basis, not merely will we meet the fiscal rules that the Chancellor has set out, but borrowing will be less under this Government than in any year under the Conservative Government of whom the right hon. Gentleman was a member.

Mr. Hague: If the Prime Minister thinks that there is not a serious economic problem, he is not living in the real world. He is not listening to businesses across the country, which have been telling the Government about the situation. All along, the Government's attitude has been to blame the managers, the workers, the investors and the Bank of England. This morning, we even had the Trade and Industry Secretary—who is gaff-prone now that he has to speak for himself—telling the workers at Rover to sharpen up their act. I think that the workers at Rover would tell the Prime Minister, the Chancellor and the Trade and Industry Secretary, none of whom have ever worked in a business in their lives, that they must sharpen up their act.

Given that the Prime Minister, who is also the First Lord of the Treasury, will not bring the Chancellor the Dispatch Box, does he agree with the Bank of England's report, which said that some of the reasons for higher inflation and higher interest rates were the Government's spending decisions in July? Does he think that the Bank of England got that right?

The Prime Minister: I have made it clear that the Government's spending proposals—£40 billion extra on our schools and hospitals and investment in the country's transport infrastructure—are right. I take it from what the right hon. Gentleman says that he would cancel that spending. If the Conservatives' response to the economic situation is that they would cancel that spending on schools and hospitals, they are wrong economically and wrong socially, and they will pay a very heavy price politically.

Mr. Hague: It is not an adequate response to these questions simply to attack the Opposition. It is not an adequate response for people in the midlands who went to work this morning knowing that they were in danger of losing their jobs for the Prime Minister to tell the parliamentary Labour party this morning that the economic difficulties would be a political opportunity for the Labour party—that is how he regards the situation.

Has not the Prime Minister put the Bank of England in an impossible position? The Chancellor has his foot on the accelerator while telling the Governor of the Bank of England to put his foot on the brake. As the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) pointed out, the Governor of the Bank of England says that the policy amounts to sacrificing jobs in the north to deal with the inflation problems that the Government have exacerbated. Is that the Government's policy? If not, what do they intend to do about the situation?

The Prime Minister: Borrowing is lower under this Government than it was under the Conservative Government. When we came to office, we cut the budget deficit from the £28 billion we inherited to less than £8 billion. Employment has risen by almost 400,000, and unemployment has fallen.

As for the car industry, there is a problem at Rover Longbridge. We will work with management, unions and others to try to deal with it. However, it is mainly a problem of productivity, and we must tackle that if we are to make our industry competitive. If the right hon. Gentleman wants a balanced picture of what is happening in the car industry, I can tell him that Rover at Cowley is expanding jobs, Vauxhall has just announced an extra 1,000 new jobs, Jaguar is announcing an extra 1,300 new jobs, and there are more jobs at Honda, more jobs at Toyota and more jobs at Nissan. I can also give him the figures on car production for the past six months, which has risen by 4.5 per cent. Exports for the same period have risen by more than 8 per cent. I agree that there is a problem at Rover Longbridge and that we must tackle it, but it is not helped by the idiotic hysteria that the right hon. Gentleman has just exhibited.

Mr. Hague: Not for the first time, we have a Labour Prime Minister who says, "What crisis?" He is not remotely in touch with how it feels for businesses, small businesses and farms across the country. Is not the truth that the Prime Minister inherited a golden legacy, and in 18 months he has squandered it? The last Labour Government had a winter of discontent. This Labour Government have had a summer of complacency, and are

now facing an autumn of rising unemployment. Is it not the case that jobs are being lost, investment is being cut and factories are being closed on a far greater scale than need have happened were it not for the policies of this Prime Minister and this Chancellor?

The Prime Minister: No. Let me give the right hon. Gentleman the facts relating to the week that has just ended. In actual fact, although it is true that around the country about 5,000 job losses have been announced, 15,000 extra jobs have also been announced. It is important to balance the picture.

When we came to office, we inherited a national debt that had doubled. We are reducing that national debt. We inherited borrowing that was out of control; we brought it under control. Yes, giving the Bank of England independence was a difficult decision, but it is right in the long term. That is why long-term interest rates are at their lowest for 30 years.

Interest rates are now coming down from 7.5 per cent. Everyone will remember that they were at 15 per cent. for a year or more under the last Conservative Government. That is the choice—the choice between boom and bust under the Conservatives, and long-term strength and stability with us. I believe that, in the long term, the country will choose the course that is right for it.

Mr. Tom Clarke (Coatbridge and Chryston): Following the Prime Minister's visit to New York last month and the subsequent meeting of the International Monetary Fund and the World bank, is it not right to continue to focus on the problems of developing countries during the current global crisis? Has the Prime Minister had an opportunity to read Friday's report of the United Nations Development Programme, showing that 1.5 billion people in the developing world are earning less than a dollar a day? Will the Prime Minister make dealing with those problems a priority, so that the poorest people in the poorest countries, who have been the major casualties of our global difficulties, can be given the attention that they deserve?

The Prime Minister: Of course the difficulties involved in the world financial crisis have made a difference to developing as well as developed countries. The International Monetary Fund has now halved its world growth forecast for next year. But I know that my right hon. Friend will recognise the work that has been done by the Chancellor of the Exchequer for developing nations, both in terms of debt relief and in terms of constructing a new World bank facility to help them.

Ultimately, with the right financial and political systems, those nations can grow, and the benefit of their growth, and their escape from the heavy burden of debt, will be felt by the developed world as well as by developing countries themselves. That is why we have always felt, when investing money in aid and development, that, if that investment is properly targeted, it is in the mutual self-interest of both the developing and the developed world.

Mr. Paddy Ashdown (Yeovil): Beneath all the sound and fury and the Government's flawed economic forecasts, are not these the human facts? Whatever the situation may have been in the past, most observers now believe that some 300,000 manufacturing jobs are in jeopardy, and one of our greatest industries—agriculture—is now experiencing its deepest crisis for 50 years. Will the Prime Minister at least start by acknowledging those facts?

The Prime Minister: As I did acknowledge in respect of Rover Longbridge, I readily acknowledge this in respect of the farming industry. Certain parts of manufacturing industry have been either very dependent on exports from Asia, or have been troubled by the strength of the pound. Yes, they are in a difficult position; but I believe that the long-term policies that we are pursuing—which ensure low inflation, stable growth and action on education, investment, skills and technology to deal with productivity problems—are our best option. The farming industry has a particular problem. That particular problem—the problem of BSE—we inherited, but I am hopeful that we can bring about relief for the farming industry over the next few months.

Mr. Ashdown: Instead of indulging in the blame game, the Prime Minister could do three things now. Will the Government consider them? First, the right hon. Gentleman could tackle our exchange rate problem by making a clear commitment to the single currency. Secondly, he could end the policy of seeking to control growth just through higher interest rates. Thirdly, he could ensure that our farmers in Britain enjoy the same financial package and advantages as every other farmer in Europe. Three things: will he do them?

The Prime Minister: I cannot promise to do that, I am sorry to tell the right hon. Gentleman. First, in relation to the euro, as I have said many times, the worst reason for joining is short-term exchange rate issues. I simply point out to him that the exchange rate is now below the level that we inherited last May.

As for farming incomes and subsidy, we do put an enormous amount of subsidy into the farming industry, but the problem is that there has been a collapse world wide in beef, lamb and pork prices, and of course it has affected our industries as well. We and the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food are looking at what can be done to help our industry; but in respect of the rest of Europe, I do not believe that we should emulate its agriculture policies. We should be working to reform the CAP in the interests of all the consumers.

Dr. David Clark (South Shields): We in the north are delighted by the net increase in jobs that we have had since the general election, but we did inherit a legacy of the highest unemployment of any region in the United Kingdom. Does my right hon. Friend understand the anger and offence that have been caused in the north-east of England by the statement by the Governor of the Bank of England that the high unemployment in the north-east is a price worth paying for low inflation in the south? That is grossly offensive. Will the Prime Minister take the opportunity this afternoon to make it clear that that is not the policy of our Government?

The Prime Minister: It certainly is not the policy of the Government. Although Eddie George is perfectly able to look after himself, if we look at his remarks in context, he was not saying that. He was simply saying that we had

to set interest rate policy for the whole of an economy, not merely any one region—that we could not, in other words, differentiate interest rates in different parts of the economy.

Again, my right hon. Friend will know not just that, since this Government came to power, we have reduced unemployment and raised employment, but that the new deal, which is bringing new hope to many of the young and long-term unemployed, is working particularly well in the north-east. The help for some of the most deprived communities in the new scheme that has been announced by the Deputy Prime Minister will also help. It will take us time to repair the damage of the Conservative years, but we are making a start on it.

Q2.[54741] **Mr. David Maclean** (Penrith and The Border): With jobs being destroyed across Britain at the rate of one every 10 minutes because of a recession made worse by bungling in Downing street, and with our British countryside dying because of the Government's neglect, will the Prime Minister stop trying to blame it on other people or pretend it is not happening, and do something about it now?

The Prime Minister: I am sorry to trouble the right hon. Gentleman with the facts, but the facts are, as I say, that employment has risen since this Government came to power, and unemployment has fallen. In respect of both his region and other regions of the country, more jobs are being created.

Of course, as we have said, the economic difficulties we face, in part as a result of world conditions, are faced by countries around the world. What is important, however, is that we have the right spending and the right monetary policy. The right hon. Gentleman's party is now committed to reversing Bank of England independence. That would be a terrible mistake for the interests of the country. *[Interruption.]* The Tories shake their heads. Will they shake their heads at this—that they are opposed to our extra spending next year? *[Interruption.]* The Conservative party says that it opposes all the spending in general, but it applauds it all in particular. It wants inflation taken out of the system, but without Bank of England independence—although it now says that it will retain it. The great black hole is the space where the Conservative party's brain used to be.

Mr. Richard Burden (Birmingham, Northfield): My right hon. Friend will understand my concern at the report circulating about Rover Group and how unsettling that is, not just for my constituents in Longbridge, but for all those thousands of jobs that depend on Rover in the midlands and elsewhere.

Does my right hon. Friend agree that, while Rover is facing difficulties at the moment, that has to be set against the launch of a new model at the motor show this week and the millions of pounds worth of investment that has already been put in? Does he further agree that, if the difficulties are faced, Rover plants, including Longbridge, can have a bright future; and that the role of Government and politicians is to help the management and work force to reach the agreements that are necessary to face those challenges? That is surely better than, like the Conservative party, standing in some pretty fragile glasshouses and throwing stones.

The Prime Minister: Quite correct. As my hon. Friend rightly said, the balance of the situation is that Rover, for example, is expanding at Cowley, and that it has tremendous opportunities at Longbridge as well. I greatly hope that the new R30 model will come to Longbridge. However, the important thing is that management and unions sit down and work out how they can raise productivity, as needed for the long term. The Government's role is to help in any way that we can, but also to recognise honestly that, ultimately, the future lies in the hands of the management and work force together. With the right partnership, I believe that it can be done.

Q3.[54742] **Rev. Martin Smyth** (Belfast, South): As the House congratulates my right hon. Friend the Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble) and the hon. Member for Foyle (Mr. Hume) on being the first British parliamentarians in 39 years to receive the Nobel peace prize, will the Prime Minister accept that real peace will develop only when his written commitments made to the people of Northern Ireland before the referendum are delivered, and that real peace surely includes the decommissioning of terrorist weaponry and cells?

The Prime Minister: Of course that is right. We want decommissioning to happen as quickly as possible. Under the agreement, decommissioning is due to be completed within the two-year period. I therefore entirely agree that the agreement—the whole of the agreement—has to be properly implemented. I agree also with the hon. Gentleman's comments on his right hon. Friend. The award of the Nobel peace prize to him and to the leader of the Social Democratic and Labour party in Northern Ireland is a tremendous vote of confidence in the future of the whole of the Northern Ireland community.

Mr. Andrew Reed (Loughborough): The Prime Minister talks about tough choices. May I suggest to him—and ask whether he agrees with the House—that the easiest choice that he will have in the next few months will be whether to abolish the hereditary peers down the Corridor? Does he accept that he would receive massive support from Labour Members in making that simple and easy choice?

The Prime Minister: I notice that the Conservative party is now entirely opposed to any step to abolish hereditary peers—apparently on the grounds that hereditary peers are a representative cross-section of the British people. I have done a little work on that. Of the 750 hereditary peers, only two are black or Asian, only 16 are women, and 45 per cent. went to Eton. I think that that is a representative section of the British community that the House of Lords could do without.

Official Visits

Q4.[54743] **Mr. Tim Boswell** (Daventry): If he will pay an official visit to Silverstone in 1999.

The Prime Minister: I have no plans this year to visit Silverstone, but I very much want to visit it in the future, as I have already told people there.

Mr. Boswell: While the Prime Minister will always be welcome to come back to Silverstone, such a visit would perhaps not be as welcome as a firm start date for the Silverstone bypass. Will he not use this opportunity to

acknowledge the importance of the grand prix and the formula one industry as a centre of engineering excellence that is not only world class but a creator of several thousand jobs in my and adjoining constituencies? Will he specifically undertake not to succumb to pressure to pull the rug from under tobacco advertising and sponsorship unless and until firm arrangements are made to sustain that vital industry?

The Prime Minister: I think that I am probably in as good a position as anyone to understand the importance of formula one. I simply tell the hon. Gentleman that we believe that the industry is very important. Some 50,000 jobs depend on it, and it has a huge spin-off effect in technology and other areas for many different parts of industry.

The precise reason why we wanted to ensure that the European directive was phased in over time was to give the industry the chance to get other types of sponsorship. As those in the industry themselves have said, their best future lies in freeing themselves from tobacco sponsorship, which will take time. Because of our negotiations, they have that time, and we will help them to use it.

Engagements

Q5.[54744] **Helen Jones** (Warrington, North): Does the Prime Minister accept that one of the hard lessons that we had to learn in opposition was that statements made on a wet night in Dudley, as a former Chancellor put it, can come back to haunt one? If so, will he agree to make available the services of a Government statistician to help the Opposition to understand the implications of the shadow Chancellor promising to cut spending and shadow departmental Ministers promising to increase it—or does he think that they will never reach the required standards of numeracy?

The Prime Minister: It is certainly correct that the Government will hold firm to our spending plans next year. After this Question Time, it is unclear whether the Opposition are in favour of or against the spending plans, or whether they are going to ballot their members to find out; but whatever twists and turns the Opposition engage in, this spending is right. It is an investment in this country's future, and the worst thing that we could do would be to cancel it at the present time.

Q6.[54745] **Mr. Lembit Öpik** (Montgomeryshire): Will the Prime Minister confirm that the great British millennium dome, the showcase for British culture, will not be sponsored by a great big American fast food corporation, which would probably try to reduce it to a large McDome and fries?

The Prime Minister: I do not quite know what the hon. Gentleman means by that, but it is important that we get sponsorship for the dome. That is in line with what hon. Members have continually been saying—the more private sponsorship we can get, the better. I am sure that the dome is going to be a tremendous success, and I look forward to welcoming the hon. Gentleman there.

Q7.[54746] **Ms Rachel Squire** (Dunfermline, West): At one of my constituency surgeries, two brothers and a sister told me that they had recently met for the first time. The two brothers were sent to an orphanage while their parents were still alive and were shipped to Australia when they were nine and 12 years old. They were then separated and sent to institutions where they experienced hardship and abuse. They were among 10,000 children sent on a Government-approved child migrant scheme which continued until the late 1960s. These children were sent without parental approval and were told that their families were dead.

Will my right hon. Friend join me in welcoming and paying tribute to the work of the Child Migrants Trust and in welcoming the report by the Select Committee on Health which was published just before the summer recess? Will he ensure that the Government will do all they possibly can to give immediate and full access to the former child migrants and their representatives, so that, before age takes its toll, some may at long last find the families that they lost so long ago?

The Prime Minister: I am well aware of my hon. Friend's interest in this subject and of her campaigning work. I am also very much aware of the heartache that is caused when families are unable to trace their relatives. The Department of Health has made some £200,000 in grants available to the Child Migrants Trust. As my hon. Friend knows, the trust and other bodies work very hard on behalf of former child migrants. The Department of Health will consider very carefully any future applications to the trust, and the Government will consider what else we can do to assist families to trace their relatives.

Q8.[54747] **Mr. Ian Bruce** (South Dorset): Does the Prime Minister appreciate the fact that, despite the wonderful summer that we had in Dorset, the tourist industry is doing very badly? Given that hoteliers face the prospect of ever higher interest rates, a high pound, increased costs of regulation and an economic downturn, does the Prime Minister believe that they should go out of business now—or should they wait for the flood of new customers experiencing the enforced leisure that his downturn at Downing street is going to bring about?

The Prime Minister: I would simply point out the facts. Interest rates are coming down, in case the hon. Gentleman has not noticed the reduction, and the pound is now below the level that we inherited. As I have often said, I do not believe that the answer to all industry's problems is perpetual devaluation. That game was tried by the Conservatives for 20 years, and it did not yield long-term benefits. The hon. Gentleman should at least applaud the efforts being made by this Government to improve training and skills within the tourist industry—making the industry a high value-added industry is giving it the best future that it can have.

Q9.[54748] **Mr. Ian Pearson** (Dudley, South): Further to the question from my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Northfield (Mr. Burden), will my right hon. Friend stress personally to BMW the importance that the Government attach to Rover's forward investment programme and the need for the replacements of the 200 and 400 series vehicles to be manufactured in the west midlands? Does he agree that, given the launch of the new Rover R75 and Jaguar S-type, 1,000 new jobs on Merseyside and major investment plans by Nissan, Toyota

and Honda, we should be talking up the British motor industry, not talking it down as the Conservatives do? After all, their policies were directly responsible for the loss of 1 million manufacturing jobs and interest rates of 15 per cent. for a year.

The Prime Minister: Yes, my hon. Friend is right. We must balance the problems at Rover Longbridge, which we have to try to tackle, with what is actually a continuing success story in the British car industry. If production has risen by 4 per cent. in the past six months, that is something of which we can be proud. It is expanding, but it can expand in today's highly competitive market only if the investment and the skills are there. The work force is willing, and I know that BMW management want to make that commitment. By management and unions working together—and we will help in any way proper for a Government to help—we will get the investment and the rise in productivity that we need at Rover Longbridge so that the future of the plant can be secured.

Madam Speaker: Thank you. Time is up.

Rover

3.31 pm

Mr. John Redwood (Wokingham) (*by private notice*): To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on the crisis at Rover and on what action the Government propose to take.

Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Mr. Peter Mandelson): I have been taking and will continue to take a close personal interest in the developments at Rover, and I have travelled twice to the west midlands, for different reasons, already this week. I have been in touch with the company on a number of occasions in recent weeks. I met union officials on Monday evening, and have a further meeting with the chairman of BMW, Berndt Pischetsrieder, and the chairman of Rover, Walter Hasselkus, tomorrow morning.

The company is in the process of a wide-ranging review of Rover's car operations in the United Kingdom. No decisions have yet been made, but clearly they need to establish a commercially viable basis of production. The company has indicated that it needs a £150 million cost reduction every year for the next three years. That is a tall order, and must inevitably include an examination of company employment practices as well as investment in new plant and technology.

Rover's investment plans are designed to deliver the right models to the market which are attractive to customers and affordable for them to buy. On the basis of those plans, the new R75 is under production at Cowley, and there is an assured future for Longbridge with the production of the new R30 model, but, critically, it depends on the right cost structures being put in place at the plant.

Rover has a long way to go to match the best world standards of productivity and competitiveness. BMW has indicated that Rover's overall current productivity levels are only two thirds of those of its German counterparts. The company and its work force need to focus very clearly on the changes required to bring about the raised performance it needs in order to be commercially successful.

The company has already come a very long way in introducing the necessary productivity changes that it needs. The investment by BMW amounting to between £500 million and £600 million per annum has gone a long way to address the previous shortfall of investment in the company, but more needs to be done.

I am told by the company that, one way or another, a solution to its current difficulties has to be found by the end of November. Without question, everyone will have to share in the burden of finding that solution—shareholders, management, work force and suppliers.

My Department and I will continue to work closely with BMW and Rover as their review develops. There is a role for the Government in ensuring that all the parties are brought together and properly focused on the issues. However, ultimately it is for the company to rise to the challenge and ensure that Rover continues to thrive in the global market place.

There has been comment that this is just another instance of the car industry in the UK in decline. That is far from the case. In addition to Rover's new R75, launched this week, Vauxhall has just started a third shift to produce the new Astra at Ellesmere Port, and Ford has invested £400 million in its new Jaguar S-type car, also launched this week. Other announcements this year include a £500 million investment by Honda to produce a third model at Swindon, creating 1,000 new jobs, and on Monday the Deputy Prime Minister opened a £200 million engine plant expansion by Toyota at Derby.

British automotive production is delivering excellent vehicles at competitive prices to some very tough markets. That continuing success deserves full acknowledgement and encouragement by all hon. Members.

Mr. Redwood: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for that statement. It was as patronising as it was complacent. Of course Rover needs to produce affordable models. Why, then, have the Government that he represents done everything in their power in the past 18 months to make it dearer to make cars in Britain, rather than making it cheaper? Why does he dare to deliver a speech like an undertaker denying all knowledge of the reasons for the death, when his Government's policies have been throttling British industry over the past 18 months? When will the Government wake up to the terrible damage that they are doing to manufacturing industry? The Trade Secretary needs to sharpen up his act rather than calling on others to do so.

I hope that the Secretary of State notices that Rover is not alone in finding conditions in the United Kingdom hostile to manufacturing. Day by day, and week by week, we are witnessing a tidal wave of redundancies and closures across our industry. For the past year, the Opposition have consistently warned that Labour's policies would trigger a manufacturing collapse.

Every time that interest rates were put up, more factories were bound to close. Every time that the Government's actions pushed up the value of the pound, more jobs were bound to go. Every measure that they took to make it dearer to employ people meant that more projects were bound to go elsewhere. Every time that they increased business taxes, companies were left with less cash for new plant, products and jobs.

It has taken only 18 months to squander a golden economic legacy—18 months of heavy taxes by stealth; 18 months of high sterling; 18 months of high interest rates; 18 months of many new costs and regulations for anyone who dares to employ someone. On the "Today" programme this morning, we heard the Secretary of State blaming the employees. He washed his hands of all responsibility. He is the Secretary of State for industry, so why does he not behave like it? The unions and the Opposition were offered no right of reply on the programme to the view that it was all the employees' fault, and that Rover was somehow a unique problem.

How can the Rover employees compete when the Government have made it so difficult for business in Britain? Why should they accept criticism of their work from the right hon. Member for Hartlepool (Mr. Mandelson), when he insults them with his remarks and fails at his job? Perhaps he should try getting his hands dirty in the right way, for a change. All we get from the Government are idiotic soundbites. We are promised a stable and competitive exchange rate. Which will they try first? We have had neither so far. They tell us that they are building for the long term. When will the

demolition in the short term stop? Will the Secretary of State shoulder some of the responsibility? Does he understand that Ford is going on to a four-day week? Textile, engineering and high-tech companies are closing down or laying off people? Does he know or care that a job is being lost every 10 minutes under this Government? Will he take some action with his colleagues to delay the damage that they are doing to British business? Will they delay some of the costs that they are heaping on British business? Will they control the social security budget and address the black hole in their finances which is worrying the Bank of England and keeping interest rates too high? Will they return to the much lower level of business taxation that the Conservative Government left them—once they have managed to control their massive increase in welfare spending?

Outside the House, they will call the right hon. Member for Hartlepool "Mr. Mandelson, the Minister for Manufacturing Collapse". If he does not do something soon, he will become "the Minister for Manufacturing Slump". He and his colleagues have made it too dear to make things in Britain. They must act now to help save some jobs at Rover, and at all the companies which today are considering the same type of action. This is a recession made in Downing street. The Government must awaken soon before much more is lost.

Mr. Mandelson: Unless I blinked, the right hon. Gentleman did not mention Longbridge once. It is absolutely clear why he tabled the private notice question: he is determined to continue competing in ridiculous hyperbole with the leader of his party. To hear him carrying on in such a way, anyone would think that the Tory party leadership contest was still going on.

In his lectures about manufacturing and manufacturing jobs, the right hon. Gentleman seems to have forgotten that, under his Government, the number of manufacturing jobs fell from 7 million to 4 million. One million manufacturing jobs alone were lost in the recession that his party created in the early 1990s. He seems to have overlooked the fact that, since this Government came to office, more jobs have been created than have been lost. Indeed, since we were elected, 400,000 new jobs have been created as a result of our policies and the success of British business.

It is clear that the right hon. Gentleman is interested only in trying to manufacture a crisis out of a rather complicated company reconstruction, which has been undertaken by Rover with immense difficulty. Everyone agrees that Rover has to undertake the reconstruction in order to make the company and the plant at Longbridge competitive and profitable. Success and reconstruction will come only from increases in productivity, which everyone except the right hon. Gentleman recognises needs to be made.

Dr. Lynne Jones (Birmingham, Selly Oak): When I asked the previous Prime Minister a question about the future of Rover, he said that it was not a matter for him. I hope that that will not be this Government's attitude. We all knew—BMW knew when it took over Rover—that a problem of differential productivity needed to be addressed. That has obviously been exacerbated by the strength of the pound, which was not anticipated.

The key to dealing with the issue must be investment, which has been made in other plants but not yet in Longbridge at the necessary level. Will my right hon. Friend do all he can to secure that investment? Does he agree that, with such investment, Rover at Longbridge faces a bright future? Does he also agree that, in securing the investment, it would be helpful if there were a promise that the pound will be more competitive in the long term?

Mr. Mandelson: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for her support for the action that the Government have already taken. I am sure that she acknowledges that, at the end of the day, the company's future rests in its hands. As I have said, there is much that the Government can do in bringing together all parties to ensure that all the key issues involved are properly addressed. We are certainly doing that.

In all my discussions with management, the work force and trade union representatives at the company, I have been impressed by their sense of realism as well as their shared commitment to resolving the difficulties that the company is experiencing. Such resolution will be achieved only if there is continued commitment and if all members of the work force, the management and the executives of the company act in partnership in order that changes are made.

I am confident that, given the discussions that I have had, those changes will be made, that investment at Longbridge will be secured, and that Rover will be able to sort out its future and continue successful production on the basis of a commercially successful, viable, profitable future.

Mr. David Chidgey (Eastleigh): I fully support and welcome the efforts that the management and work force of Rover at Longbridge are making to turn the company around. It is easy to blame poor productivity or poor management alone for the crisis that manufacturing industry, especially the car industry, faces, but we must recognise that those problems have been with us for decades, and it will not be possible to turn them round at a stroke.

Does the Secretary of State accept that the Government must bear some responsibility for the fact that we are losing 300 jobs a day in manufacturing? One of the reasons for that is the Government's policy for sterling, which has created the highest value of sterling for at least 15 years, and is making life extremely tough, if not impossible, for our manufacturing industry. Does he agree with this week's forecasts that, unless the Government make some commitment—as I think he has already said they should—on entry into the single European currency, we face the loss not only of 300 jobs a day in manufacturing industry, but of at least 300,000 jobs next year?

Mr. Mandelson: I may or may not share the hon. Gentleman's view on economic and monetary union, but I do not think that the Rover company will find its salvation or the solution to its problems in Britain's immediate, early or later entry into the single currency—with, of course, the full-hearted consent of the British people.

I hope that the hon. Gentleman will not join other Opposition Members in talking down the British economy and talking ourselves into recession, which is enormously damaging to the confidence of those in business, who are struggling all the time, successfully, to increase productivity and maintain Britain's share of world markets.

[Mr. Mandelson]

I stress to the hon. Gentleman the fact that the job news is not all bad. Indeed, there is more good news than bad news on jobs. Recently there have been tremendously important job gains. For example, Oracle is opening a new plant that will create 2,000 new jobs in Solihull; Syntel is creating 2,000 new jobs in Belfast; Microsoft, in a joint venture with Computacenter, is creating 900 jobs in London and the south-east over the next three years; IBM, in a joint venture with Cable and Wireless, is creating 400 jobs nationwide. I could go on and on.

There is an enormous amount of good news—and that news will continue to flow so long as the Government maintain our commitment to economic stability, which gives companies the confidence and the ability to predict and plan for the future. That is what they need, and that is what they will continue to get from the Government's policies.

Jacqui Smith (Redditch): Does my right hon. Friend agree that an important element of the competitiveness of a business is the supply network that it can build up around it? Many businesses in my constituency have played a vital role in supplying Rover, and they and their work forces have been willing to adapt to the demands that have been made. In his meetings with Rover and BMW executives, will my right hon. Friend stress the importance of that west midlands supply network, and remind them that it will not be easy to rebuild it in other parts of this country or Europe?

Mr. Mandelson: My hon. Friend makes a good point. I know how well aware Rover and BMW are of the importance of that excellent supply chain, which also stretches beyond the west midlands. I am pleased that so much work is going on in the Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders. I was in Birmingham this morning addressing its conference, and its members are doing an enormous amount to improve their networks, their business links and their mutual dependency.

Business is learning from business; they are learning how, throughout the supply chain as a whole, they can serve each other. You are right, Madam Speaker, to say that there is an excellent supply base and skill base in the west midlands. I am confident that those will not be dispersed as a result of premature decisions taken by BMW or Rover.

Mr. William Cash (Stone): The Secretary of State says that the decision lies with company management. Does he accept that there are serious questions to be asked—in relation not only to Rover, but to a whole range of British industries—concerning decisions taken by the European Commission and/or by the German Government, which are leading to the increased uncompetitiveness of British industry?

Does the Secretary of State accept that there ought to be proper investigations at the proper level in Europe and in the DTI of the real reasons why, over and over again, Britain gets the rough end of the argument? Why, for example, are massive subsidies paid in other countries—such as to Air France and in Germany? Why are cheap loans made at no interest from the lender banks, putting Britain at a competitive disadvantage? Will he do the right thing and have a quiet and careful examination of the matter in the British interest?

Mr. Mandelson: I do not share the hon. Gentleman's paranoia about Britain always being at the rough end of the European stick. However, he makes a reasonable point—which I acknowledge—that we must be vigilant at all times about any proposal or measure emanating from Brussels that threatens Europe's economic competitiveness. I am vigilant about that—I take it very seriously indeed. One cannot return from a week in the United States—as I have done—having seen the vibrancy of that economy and the lack of barriers to investment, production, innovation and flexibility in that country without having some concern about Europe's record.

However, in the past 15 months, the Labour Government have done a darn sight more—and a darn sight more successfully—to prise open and liberalise European markets to the advantage of British firms. We will continue to challenge every measure proposed by the European Commission which we believe to be inconsistent with Europe's paramount need to maintain its competitiveness in the world economy.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Madam Speaker: Order. I have been able to call only a few hon. Members to put questions. I would ask that questions now be brisk, and if the Secretary of State would oblige me with brief answers, it would be extremely helpful to our debate later today.

Mr. Richard Burden (Birmingham, Northfield): Does my right hon. Friend agree that the criticisms from the shadow Secretary of State, the right hon. Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood), do not carry much credibility? The Conservative Government sold off Rover at a knock-down price, laced it with sweeteners which proved to be illegal, and did so behind the backs of the employees of Rover Group.

Does my right hon. Friend agree that we want to work towards the fulfilment of plans for renovations at Longbridge—plans which have already received planning approval—and towards a full-model range, starting with the new Mini and building up to a new medium-range model? I welcome what he has said about assisting the discussions between management and unions to achieve those ends. Will he pay tribute to the work that has been done by employees at Longbridge in improving productivity there? They are confident that they can improve productivity still further there and at other plants in the future.

Mr. Mandelson: I can do all those things, Madam Speaker. I pay tribute to my hon. Friend, who has been extremely active and conscientious in the past few weeks in making sure that the Government have been properly focused on what we can do to support the efforts of all at Rover, and particularly at Longbridge.

My hon. Friend is absolutely right—the previous Government sold off Rover without lifting a finger to help to put in place the conditions for Rover's future success. They will for ever be indicted for that. Following my discussions with management and union officials at

Longbridge, I acknowledge the strong determination there to find a solution to all the problems that the company faces. Judging by their success so far in raising productivity, I am confident that that is what they will do.

Mr. Jonathan Sayeed (Mid-Bedfordshire): I have a brief question which, I hope, will receive an accurate answer. How much will the working time directive cost Rover on a year-by-year basis?

Mr. Mandelson: A sound and straightforward technical question of that sort will get a perfectly sound, straightforward, technical answer from me if it is possible for me to provide it when the hon. Gentleman gives me notice of the question.

Mr. Andrew Miller (Ellesmere Port and Neston): My right hon. Friend mentioned the success in Ellesmere Port that Vauxhall has just announced. He will have noticed from files that he inherited how complex was the process of securing the agreement that took Ellesmere Port and Luton into the long-term future. Does he agree that that was done through a partnership between the work force and management and, indeed, Government both central and local? Are there not lessons that can be learned about the problems facing us at Longbridge?

Mr. Mandelson: My hon. Friend is absolutely right, but not merely about Vauxhall at Ellesmere Port. Look at the success story of Jaguar following Ford's investment in that company, its strength now and the tremendous attractiveness of the new model, the S-type, which was launched this week. What were people saying about Jaguar not so long ago? They were writing it off, but people helped and came together—the work force and the Government, and the management contributed, too. If we can do similarly in relation to Rover and help to create as much success in that company as we did following Ford's purchase of Jaguar, we will be doing extremely well.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield): I am sure that the Secretary of State is aware of my total commitment to manufacturing, whatever Government are in power. Does he accept that manufacturing is in severe difficulty—some believe, in recession? Is he confident that his announcement this afternoon will give the necessary reassurance to Rover management at Longbridge and to the work force, who have done an extremely good job in recent years?

Perhaps the right hon. Gentleman should have a word with the Chancellor of the Exchequer, as the Treasury appears to be anti-car and anti-road. So many of the extra taxes imposed by this Government have been imposed on the motorist, and there is now talk of a higher excise duty for the larger capacity car as from next year. Is that the way to encourage a healthy market for the car industry in this country? I do not believe so. Will he have a word with the Treasury?

Mr. Mandelson: I hope that the hon. Gentleman will agree that I have shown as strong a commitment to the future of the car industry today as I acknowledge he has to British manufacturing. I share his concern, and look forward to engaging with him and other Conservative Members who share that commitment to manufacturing. I do not know how many Conservative Members there will be. It might be a dialogue between the two of us, but, hopefully, as he continues to champion British manufacturing, he may eventually gain some recruits on his own side.

Whatever the hon. Gentleman says about pessimism among some people in manufacturing, he should not talk down British manufacturing. He does not mean to do so, but let us acknowledge that manufacturing output is up, and manufacturing jobs are being created. With the additional investment and productivity boosts that we have seen in other sectors being transferred and translated to the automotive sector, success in that sector, including Rover, will be similar to that in other parts of United Kingdom manufacturing, and it will be a continuing success.

I can assure the hon. Gentleman that I am absolutely focused on the needs of UK manufacturing. Those needs, as well as the needs of the service industries, will be the focus and target of the competitiveness White Paper and the measures that I will propose when I publish it in early December.

Mr. Dale Campbell-Savours (Workington): If, as was said, levels of productivity at Longbridge were two thirds of those in Germany, that is a stark statistic—it makes exchange rate problems pale into insignificance. Has that statistic been independently produced, and do the trade unions at Longbridge accept it?

Mr. Mandelson: My hon. Friend makes a good point about Conservative point scoring on the value of sterling. Everyone at Rover, in all parts of the company, acknowledges that the dominant factor is the competitiveness that flows from the cost structure and levels of productivity. The trade union leadership in the company and at the plant, with whom I had a realistic exchange on Monday evening, also accepts that.

There will obviously have to be some difficult discussions with the work force, but there is no question of people rushing to conclusions and driving through quick-fix, superficial changes; we are talking about root-and-branch reorganisation. I remain confident that, given the commitment shown by everyone in the company, we shall see such a jump in productivity and improvement in competitiveness.

Dr. Evan Harris (Oxford, West and Abingdon): Rover's announcement will send a shiver down the spines of those people in my constituency and in the constituency of the Minister for Employment, Welfare to Work and Equal Opportunities, the right hon. Member for Oxford, East (Mr. Smith), who work at the Oxford Rover plant—after the job losses of the 1980s, they are thinking, "Not again."

Does the Secretary of State accept that there is a suspicion that this manufacturing mess was made in Millbank for Murdoch when tax increases were ruled out for this Parliament, which has left a one-club strategy of interest rates? Has not the problem been caused by the fact that the delay and dither of the previous Government has been replaced by "wait and see until News International gives the go ahead on EMU"? The right hon. Gentleman cannot claim credit for the creation of jobs in manufacturing unless he accepts the blame for the loss of jobs.

Mr. Mandelson: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will forgive me if I do not respond to his stream of clichés.

[Mr. Mandelson]

He would do better to congratulate the Cowley plant and Rover, which has successfully launched the R75 model this week. Moreover, Rover's expansion of production at Cowley will result in the creation of 800 new jobs in the new year, which is a cause for celebration.

Mr. Geraint Davies (Croydon, Central): Does my right hon. Friend agree that global economic conditions and prospects are significantly worse than they were over the 18 years of the previous Government—who none the less caused two recessions—and that the level of sterling, in an uncertain world, is a measure of confidence in the British economy, where the number of jobs is increasing? The key to success must be to refocus on stability and productivity, and I look forward to seeing that re-emphasised in the forthcoming White Paper on competitiveness.

Mr. Mandelson: My hon. Friend will certainly not be disappointed. Everyone, with the exception of the Opposition, acknowledges that the British economy, which was operating at the peak of the business cycle, had inevitably to slow down—that analysis is shared by all. No one could have predicted the crisis in the world financial system that began in Asia and spread like a contagion to the rest of the world. Our task is to ensure that, against the background of world instability, we keep our eyes firmly focused on long-term stability in the British economy. Our policies are designed to achieve that, and I am confident that they will.

Sir David Madel (South-West Bedfordshire): To secure substantial improvements in productivity at the Vauxhall plants at Luton and Ellesmere Port, the trade unions agreed to big changes in work practices and patterns. Have the trade unions at Longbridge agreed in principle to make such changes?

Mr. Mandelson: It is too early to describe conclusions or changes that people are signing up to or entering into, but, on the basis of my discussion with the union officials on Monday night, I can say that they are facing the situation with considerable realism. Everyone has to do that if everyone is to share the burden that will be involved in finding a solution to Rover's current difficulties. I think that they acknowledge that costs have to be reduced in the company and I believe that they accept that that will involve considerable restructuring and reorganising in the company's employment arrangements. I think that they will face that with great fortitude and they deserve our support and help in doing so. They will certainly get that from the Government.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Madam Speaker: Order. We shall move on now.

Point of Order

4.4 pm

Mr. Crispin Blunt (Reigate): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. Having just sat through the two days of the defence debate, you will have been as surprised as I was by the headline in *The Times* today: "Britain to back defence role for Europe". Nothing that was said by Defence Ministers in this place could possible bear that interpretation, despite the fact that the Government were being pressed on the matter by my hon. Friend the Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Mr. Maples) and by my right hon. Friend the Member for Wealden (Sir G. Johnson Smith).

It is now clear that, while the House was debating defence, the Prime Minister was briefing Philip Webster and other journalists from Europe about an important change in defence policy as regards Europe. The only question is whether the Secretary of State for Defence and his team were party to the contempt of Parliament or whether they were victims of the high-handed treatment to which we have become used.

Madam Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman will resume his seat. I gave the hon. Gentleman an opportunity to put that question to the Minister for the Cabinet Office during Question Time. If he did not like the answer that he received, that does not give him a reason to put the same question to me now.

Schools and Colleges (Funding Formula)

4.5 pm

Mr. David Chaytor (Bury, North): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to make provision for a common funding formula for 16 to 19-year-old students in schools and colleges.

The Bill requires the Secretary of State for Education and Employment to establish a common funding formula for school sixth forms, sixth-form colleges and further education colleges, so that students pursuing the same or similar courses in different institutions receive broadly the same level of public funding. At present, 60 per cent. of full-time 16 to 19-year-old students now study in the college sector, with only 40 per cent. in school sixth forms.

The need for the Bill lies in the increasing evidence that in recent years a funding gap has opened up between school sixth forms and colleges that could now be of the order of 20 per cent. That is to say that most sixth forms receive up to 20 per cent. more funding per student than their neighbouring colleges. We are used to differential levels of funding between private and state schools, but here there are unacceptable differentials within the state sector.

The Bill does not deal with the related issue of differential funding between colleges and training and enterprise councils, but that may be an issue that other hon. Members wish to pursue. Nor does it deal directly with the anomalies of differential funding between local education authorities or between colleges funded by the Further Education Funding Council.

The nature of the current problem is that there is essentially one curriculum for students aged 16 to 19, but two distinct sectors, two financial systems and two funding regimes. The issue has been widely discussed within the profession during the last five years, particularly since the incorporation of colleges in 1993 and the establishment of the FEFC, although it has been difficult to reach agreement over the exact methodology for calculating comparative costs.

I remind the House of the different funding regimes that apply to school sixth forms and colleges. Schools receive their funding through local education authorities. I am delighted to say that the formerly opted-out schools will be brought back within the remit of local authorities in due course. There is wide variation between LEAs. Funding for 16 to 19-year-olds is distributed according to the LEAs local management of schools scheme, mainly according to pupil numbers: on average, 16-year-olds are worth about 140 per cent. of an 11-year-old funded through the average weighted pupil unit. Up to 20 per cent. of the budget may not be related strictly to numbers, but the numbers of students are determined on a single census day, no account is taken of drop-out, and there is no allowance for achievement.

By contrast, colleges are funded through the Further Education Funding Council. The funds are distributed according to the number enrolled, the number continuing to participate and the results at the end of the course. There is a weighting for the different curriculum areas. The funding reflects the real cost of delivering the courses. High-cost areas such as science achieve more than lower-cost areas such as humanities.

Schools receive funding that is front loaded, depending largely on the number of students enrolled at the start of the course. College funding is determined by the number of students who continue on the course, and on their levels of achievement.

To date, the policy of both the previous and the present Government has been to support convergence in principle. The former Government made that clear in their competitiveness White Paper, and our Government have referred to it recently in the consultation paper on fair funding. Earlier this year, the report of the Select Committee on Education and Employment drew attention to the subject. There has also been considerable research, although there is a dispute over the methodology. It is likely that the latest piece of research from the Department for Education and Employment will be published in the next few weeks showing that the difference in funding levels has increased.

A common funding formula would help to restore some of the savage cuts imposed on colleges in recent years. It would concentrate the minds of local authorities and individual schools with small sixth forms which have not yet grasped the nettle of the damaging implications of post-16 competition. It would release resources which could also be used to increase spending in schools at key stage 3. Most importantly, by encouraging greater collaboration to secure economies of scale, it could widen curriculum choice for young people to enable them to pursue the course that best suits their interests, abilities and career aspirations.

I do not claim that the proposals in the Bill for a common funding formula for schools and colleges will achieve all those objectives overnight—nor do I believe that a common funding formula alone can address the crisis of funding or the chaotic legacy of the internal market that continues to damage post-16 education. For the nettle to be truly grasped, we need to establish new planning powers at regional level. However, the Bill would be an important means of getting the ball rolling in the right direction, and I commend it to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Mr. David Chaytor.

SCHOOLS AND COLLEGES (FUNDING FORMULA)

Mr. David Chaytor accordingly presented a Bill to make provision for a common funding formula for 16 to 19-year-old students in schools and colleges: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on Friday 13 November, and to be printed [Bill 247].

HUMAN RIGHTS BILL *[LORDS]* (PROGRAMME)

Ordered,

That the following provisions shall apply to the Human Rights Bill [*Lords*]:—

1. The proceedings on consideration and Third Reading shall be completed at this day's sitting.

2. The proceedings on consideration mentioned in the first column shall, if not previously concluded, be brought to a conclusion at the time mentioned in the second column:

New Clauses up to and including New Clause 2	1½ hours after commencement
New Clause 3	2½ hours after commencement
Amendments up to the end of line 24 on page 1	3 hours after commencement
Amendments up to the end of line 29 on page 7	4½ hours after commencement
Remaining amendments	6 hours after commencement

3. The proceedings on Third Reading shall, if not concluded, be brought to a conclusion 7 hours after commencement.

4. In paragraphs 2 and 3 "commencement" means commencement of the proceedings on the Motion for this resolution.

5. Standing Order No. 15(1) (Exempted business) shall apply to proceedings on consideration and Third Reading for any part of the period of 7 hours mentioned in paragraph 3 which falls after 10 o'clock.

6. Standing Order No. 82 (Business Committee) shall not apply to proceedings on the Bill.

7. For the purpose of concluding any proceedings which are to be brought to a conclusion at a time appointed by this Order—

(1) The Speaker shall put forthwith the following Questions (but no others)—

(a) any Question already proposed from the Chair;

(b) any Question necessary to bring to a decision a Question so proposed (including in the case of a new Clause which has been read a second time, the Question that the Clause be added to the Bill);

(c) the Question on any amendment moved or Motion made by a Minister of the Crown; and

(d) any other Question necessary for the disposal of the business to be concluded.

(2) Proceedings under sub-paragraph (1) shall not be interrupted under any Standing Order relating to sittings of the House and may be decided, though opposed, at any hour.—[*Mr. Robert Ainsworth.*]

Orders of the Day

Human Rights Bill *[Lords]*

As amended (in the Committee), considered.

New clause 2

NO REMEDIAL ORDER BEFORE DETERMINATION OF EUROPEAN COMMISSION OF HUMAN RIGHTS

'.—Where

(a) a Court, as defined in section 4(5), has made a declaration of incompatibility in respect of any legislation and where there is no further domestic right of appeal; but

(b) it nonetheless appears to a Minister of the Crown that it is desirable in the public interest that the question of compatibility, and all and any issues arising in the proceedings which have given rise thereto should not be the subject of any remedial order unless and until such issues shall have been fully considered by the European Commission of Human Rights or, if admissible, should have been the subject of a judgement, decision, declaration or opinion of the European Court of Human Rights;

he may issue a certificate to the said effect in writing, and in such event the said declaration shall be of no effect pending consideration of the said issues by the Commission and the Court.'.—*[Sir Nicholas Lyell.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

4.12 pm

Sir Nicholas Lyell (North-East Bedfordshire): I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

With this Bill we now turn from the damage being done to the economy by the Government to the damage which, alas, is being done to our constitution. I do not think that that is the intention of the Home Secretary, but he is party to it.

We have two main debates on this aspect. First, there is the debate on new clause 2 which relates to the need for an appeal to Strasbourg for the Government and for local authorities in certain circumstances. Secondly, there is our continued resistance to the Government's proposal for a fast-track system for remedial orders—in other words, for a system whereby, if there is a declaration of incompatibility by our courts, instead of the matter coming before Parliament for a proper Bill and Act of Parliament in the normal way, with full consideration by the House, the matter can simply be pushed through with a three-hour debate after a period of outside consultation. Both those matters are important if our constitution is not to be damaged.

The purpose of the new clause, to which we return because of the rather uncomprehending and unsatisfactory response by the Government in Committee, is to make clear what is unclear at present—that is, that the object of the Bill and incorporation of the convention is to bring our law into line with that of Strasbourg and make it easier for UK citizens to get a ruling from our domestic courts on issues that would hitherto have been taken to Strasbourg.

I hope that the Home Secretary agrees that the object is not to create a substitute constitution in the broad language of the convention, against which our domestic courts might be tempted to reshape our law in a way that goes further than the requirements of the convention. The

convention was not designed to become a substitute written constitution for the United Kingdom. It was designed to keep UK law in line with the human rights law of Council of Europe member states, as declared in Strasbourg.

The new clause seeks to help in that process and the Government have nothing to fear from it. I therefore call on the Home Secretary to make it clear that what I have outlined is the Government's objective, and no more.

Hopefully, the problems to which I refer will not arise, but they are not fanciful. The answer may be that those problems do not arise frequently on the continent of Europe, but there are significant differences between the structure of our law and that of civil law countries, such as France, Germany or Spain. Indeed, almost all countries on the mainland of Europe are civil law countries, and their laws are much more heavily codified than ours. They have much more "black letter" law. It is not open to their judiciaries to develop their law as our judiciary has developed ours through the common law over the centuries.

In most ways, our system is a strength. The development of the common law has been rightly informed by a belief in the rights and liberties contained in the convention. We are rightly reminded that the convention was largely drafted in Britain in the late 1940s and early 1950s. However, any common law development has—subject to the European convention—always been subject to modification by the elected representatives of the people in Parliament. That gives democratic legitimacy to our constitution.

In future, that is to change somewhat, but I hope that the House agrees that it must not change too far. It is one thing to keep our law in conformity with Strasbourg concepts, which are, on the whole, cautious and seek to enforce basic standards; but the commission and the court in Strasbourg have also recognised that there must be a "substantial margin of appreciation". That is Strasbourg jargon, which means a substantial discretion and latitude should be given to each member state in respect of the exact method of implementation of the high principles set out in the convention. That margin of appreciation must also apply to domestic judgments based on the convention.

I hope that the Home Secretary agrees that the convention is not to give the judiciary carte blanche to rewrite our laws. Although one hopes that our courts will not over-use their powers—I think that most of them will not—the Government are right to anticipate that they will frequently be requested to do so. They will often come under a great deal of pressure and hear a lot of carefully prepared arguments in that direction.

If hon. Members need convincing of that danger, they need only read the speech given by the Attorney-General to the Bar Council at the beginning of this month. He explained, and I agree with him, how every level of the Government needs to undergo training as to the reach and relevance of human rights law. Repeated and extensive arguments are to be anticipated by those who, on behalf of defendants and others, appear before the courts. He said that the Crown Prosecution Service is to be trained and furnished with model answers to the more obvious submissions that are to be anticipated. Magistrates and judiciary are likewise to receive training, but what will happen if there is a ruling by our domestic courts against the Government—of whatever complexion, for we are legislating for as far as the eye can see and beyond—or a public authority which is believed to have gone too far?

Here, with respect to the Home Secretary, his answer on 24 June—I am sorry that I could not be present, but, as he knows, I was in hospital—is not, in our view, adequate. We need to create a more formal structure so that the individual citizens involved in particular cases and the country at large know where they stand. Are the Government accepting a particular ruling, and do they propose to legislate promptly?

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Jack Straw): I am grateful to the right hon. and learned Gentleman. I simply want to ask him whether he has a reference for the occasion on which I made this point.

Sir Nicholas Lyell: I shall look to help from the Bench behind, as the Home Secretary is better able to do. I should not say that he is better able to do that, because I have my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Harborough (Mr. Garnier) with me.

Mr. Straw: The junior.

Sir Nicholas Lyell: No, my hon. and learned Friend is not my junior at all now; he is one of Her Majesty's counsel learned in the law, no less.

Mr. Edward Garnier (Harborough): Learned or not, may I interrupt my right hon. and learned Friend? The Home Secretary's speech, in response to mine, began at column 1127 of *Hansard*, or thereabouts.

Sir Nicholas Lyell: Some of the Home Secretary's answers on that occasion seemed to be rather dismissive, or even—this is not like him—a little trite. I am sure that he did not intend them to be so, but the Opposition are well aware that there is no "right" of appeal for Governments or public authorities to Strasbourg. It is precisely because we are aware of that that it was necessary to draft new clause 2, the purpose of which we have already put before hon. Members in Committee, in this careful way.

My impression from the Government's answer is that they recognise that there will be occasions when it is necessary to force a case to continue on to Strasbourg. I should be grateful if the Home Secretary would either make it clear that he does not agree with that point or acknowledge that there are likely to be cases when the Government or public authorities would not think that our House of Lords, or whichever of the highest courts had ruled on the matter, had given a ruling in accordance with what was likely to be Strasbourg law, and would want the matter to continue to Strasbourg.

It is not good enough, in our opinion, for the Government in answer to say that the mechanism to force a case on to Strasbourg already sufficiently exists. It may exist in theory, if I understand the Home Secretary's answer correctly. It is true, as was argued by the Government on that occasion, that, if the Government of the day, having received a declaration of incompatibility, do precisely nothing, citizens will, sooner or later, be

[Sir Nicholas Lyell]

forced to take the matter on to Strasbourg or will find themselves deprived of their remedy—but what an unsatisfactory way in which to proceed.

How long is the citizen—the litigant—to wait? What is the country to assume in the meantime? What is the status today of the hallowed and rightly time-honoured convention that Government will never knowingly break the law? It cannot be satisfactory to leave such matters in limbo.

Having been Attorney-General, I ask myself and the House, in the hope of an answer from the Government, what an Attorney-General would say if there had been a ruling of incompatibility by the House of Lords on a particular aspect, but the Government had taken no steps to correct it. Would the Attorney-General remain silent while the Government considered what to do?

Would that ruling—which, under clause 4(6), would not have any legal effect at that stage—have no effect on the courts? If, the House of Lords having delivered its judgment, a new case came before the courts, could the matter be argued de novo, or would the ruling stand as authority? If the Government have thought about these matters, we should be grateful to hear their conclusions. If they have not thought about them, we should be grateful if they would do so and would tell us their conclusions at some future date, although it would be preferable to hear them now. It cannot be satisfactory to leave such matters in limbo.

The individual citizen and the country at large are entitled to be told within a reasonable time—we suggest six weeks—whether the Government intend to change the law and, again within a reasonable time, how they propose to do so. If they do not intend to change the law, the citizen and the country should be told. The citizen could then take his case to Strasbourg. There would be a proper mechanism, certainty and comparative expedition. However, what the Government seem to propose is a recipe for confusion, delay and injustice.

Although I said that such problems would, I hope, be rare, I also said that they were not fanciful. One only has to look across the Atlantic to see what powers the courts have taken for themselves under their own constitutions. Periods of judicial passivity can be followed by periods of judicial activism. The classic example—I hope that it is not thought too high flown—is the American constitution, which showed itself inadequate, despite its fine phrases, to protect its citizens from slavery, but has more recently been construed so as to overturn the views of the legislature on the subject of abortion.

Likewise in Canada, the courts have struck down the federal law and state laws on abortion. We hope that that would not happen here, but fashions change. The language of the convention is certainly broad enough to provide pegs on which the courts could hang an argument to intervene. If they were to do so, on that example most people would probably think that the judges had seriously overstepped the mark. They would want a particular case to be brought to Strasbourg to challenge and to test such a serious extension of judicial power. We would certainly wish to have it tested at Strasbourg, yet at present, no satisfactory mechanism exists to enable that to be done.

Even at this late stage of the Bill, we call on the Government to think again on this matter and, I hope, to accept our amendment. I am not saying that it is perfectly drafted, but it is carefully drafted, and if it needs polishing, let it be polished. If that involves a little ping-pong between this House and the other place, let that take place. Above all, let us get this right.

Our new clause establishes a straightforward and workable system under which everyone knows where they stand. If a case needs to go on to Strasbourg, the litigant can take the necessary steps without uncertainty or delay. If not, he can await with confidence some appropriate amendment of the law by the House. Above all, it will make it clear to our courts and judiciary that the House does not intend to set up the convention as a substitute constitution. I commend the new clause to the House.

4.30 pm

Mr. Garnier: Let me begin by correcting something that I said earlier. I believe that the Home Secretary's response to my few remarks in Committee began not in column 1127, but in column 1119. No doubt the right hon. Gentleman has spent many a happy hour since last June reading *Hansard* in order to hone his arguments in time for today's debate.

I commend what my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for North-East Bedfordshire (Sir N. Lyell) has said, not least because, to a degree, it mirrors what I said in Committee last June. I say that not because I consider myself to be a man of great original thinking, but because all people of good will and common sense who have given the matter some thought will have reached the same conclusions as my right hon. and learned Friend and me. Indeed, much of what I said on 24 June flowed from discussions that I had on the telephone with my right hon. and learned Friend when he was on his sickbed.

Be that as it may, I hope that, over the recess and in the hours available to him when he has not been dealing with other matters, the Home Secretary has had an opportunity to reconsider his response to what I said in Committee on 24 June. Although he was, as always, very courteous in dealing with my arguments, I am not sure that he did himself or the Committee justice in responding to what I had said on behalf of the official Opposition.

Let me take the Home Secretary back to 24 June, and column 1121 of *Hansard*. He said—just before an intervention by the right hon. Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross (Mr. Maclennan)—

> "Therefore, although I understand the point of new clause 2, it would not achieve anything. Nothing in it could not equally be achieved—and will not equally be achieved—within the framework of the Bill as it stands."

I regret to say—because I do not like being unduly controversial—that the Home Secretary missed not only the point, but the points. I fear that, unless it is amended to include new clause 2, the Bill will remain deficient, and will remain a source of aggravation and difficulty between the House, as the originator of legislation, and institutions and citizens who may, from time to time, come up against either the Government or Government institutions in complaining about the implications of the European convention on human rights under the Bill.

The points that I sought to make in my short contribution on 24 June were, I hope, reasonably clear. My first point was that we were left with an imbalance between Government and citizen. It seems to me that in any litigation, there should be fairness, if not parity,

between the two parties to the action. In my view, each party—be it citizen or Government—should have the right of appeal to the highest court of appeal in the given system of justice. Under the convention and the Bill, the citizen has the right to take his concerns from the lowest courts—the courts of first instance—through our domestic appeal tribunals, to the court in Strasbourg. The Government do not have that right.

Responding to my point—this is also in column 1121—the Home Secretary said:

"New clause 2 seems to be based on two assumptions. The first is that a declaration of incompatibility will have some legal effect unless a ministerial certificate is issued. The second is that the Government must make a remedial order following a declaration of incompatibility."

However, he went on to say that there may be occasions when the Government might not do those things, which leaves the legal situation in a state of uncertainty.

Although there are advantages politically in leaving things in a state of uncertainty, as the Government demonstrate day by day, there are higher demands on a justice system than there are on party political interest. Where a Government, albeit ably assisted by men of integrity such as the Home Secretary, allow themselves to be led into a position where the citizen is unfairly advantaged compared with the opposite party in the litigation—the public institution, alias the Government—in the ability to appeal to the highest court, there is a glaring uncertainty, which our new clause would adequately deal with.

As I say, I do not like chiding the Home Secretary. I hope that he will see the reasonableness of the arguments of my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for North–East Bedfordshire and myself—on this and the previous occasion—and that they will convince him of the good sense of new clause 2.

It troubles me that the Home Secretary said on the previous occasion:

"Nor is there any obligation on the Government to remedy any incompatibility by means of a remedial order."—[*Official Report*, 24 June 1998; Vol. 314, c. 1121.]

If there is incompatibility, it should be remedied; otherwise there is no point in introducing into domestic law the terms of the European convention. I urge the Home Secretary either to come up with some new and better arguments, or to accede to our new clause.

Mr. Straw: I am delighted to see the right hon. and learned Member for North–East Bedfordshire (Sir N. Lyell) in his place and, I hope, fully recovered from his ills. He began his speech with some uncharacteristic hyperbole: with claims that we were damaging our constitution. I shall simply take that incantation as a necessary step that all Opposition Front Benchers have to go through. Then, because he was obviously uncomfortable with what I think is widely recognised in the House as wide of the mark, in relation to this Bill anyway, he went on to make his case in his usual reasoned way, joined by the hon. and learned Member for Harborough (Mr. Garnier).

I do not dismiss the arguments of the Opposition, but nor do I agree with them, and I should like to explain why. The right hon. and learned Member for North-East Bedfordshire asks me first, and it is an important point, to confirm that we do not view this Bill as a substitute for a written constitution for the United Kingdom. The answer is that we do not.

It is precisely because we have been determined that it should not be a substitute written constitution for the UK that we have structured the Bill in the manner that we have and, in particular, ensured that no court in this land, not even the Judicial Committee of the House of Lords, can place itself in the position of sovereignty over the High Court of the elected Parliament.

We looked at various ways in which the European convention could be incorporated. We looked at the experience of not only continental countries—I accept what the right hon. and learned Member for North–East Bedfordshire says about the differences that arise because of the fundamental distinction between our common law tradition and their civil law traditions—but Commonwealth countries. They have not incorporated the European convention on human rights because they are not within the continent, but New Zealand and Canada, for example, have incorporated Bills of Rights, often drawn on the European convention, into their domestic law. Some of those countries have chosen to structure their incorporation legislation so that their bill of rights emerges as basic law.

The right hon. and learned Member for North-East Bedfordshire spoke about "black letter" law, and I am grateful to the hon. and learned Member for Harborough for providing further and better particulars of the definition of such law. In countries that have written constitutions, there is not only statute law passed by the congress or Parliament but fundamental or—to use the continental term—basic law, which is the constitution itself. The constitution overrides, and is promulgated differently from, ordinary law.

If we had stated in the Bill that courts could not only declare incompatible any statute of this Parliament but override those statutes and declare them unenforceable, thereby abrogating them, we would have been establishing—either by the front or back door—a substitute written constitution for the United Kingdom. We would have been altering what I regard as a fundamental position established in our constitution: the sovereignty of Parliament. I think that one of the profound strengths of our system is that, although we may bind ourselves to the European Union, to United Nations treaties or to the European convention, we do not bind ourselves for ever, and that it remains open to this Parliament, at any stage that it chooses, to decide to withdraw from those conventions. Although we would, of course, have to accept the consequences of withdrawing, the decision would be made by this elected Chamber and the other place and by no one else.

The Government thought—there was no great argument about the matter, but it was important that we should deal with all the arguments—that it was important to enshrine Parliament's sovereignty in the Bill. We therefore developed the scheme of declarations of incompatibility. We did not propose that the Judicial Committee of the House of Lords should have the power to override Acts of Parliament by stating that, because they were incompatible with the convention, they were unenforceable and of no effect.

We said that the Judicial Committee of the House of Lords would be able to declare whether, in its opinion, an Act of Parliament was incompatible with the convention,

[Mr. Straw]

and subsequently to refer the matter back to the Government, which is answerable to Parliament. In the overwhelming majority of cases, regardless of which party was in government, I think that Ministers would examine the matter and say, "A declaration of incompatibility has been made, and we shall have to accept it. We shall therefore have to remedy the defect in the law spotted by the Judicial Committee of the House of Lords." Therefore—as has been discussed in previous debates, and will be discussed again today—we have included in the Bill procedures for remedial orders. It is also always open to Ministers to introduce amending legislation in the normal way.

It is possible that the Judicial Committee of the House of Lords could make a declaration that, subsequently, Ministers propose, and Parliament accepts, should not be accepted. The right hon. and learned Member for North-East Bedfordshire mentioned abortion, which provides a good example. Although I hope that it does not happen, it is possible to conceive that, some time in the future, a particularly composed Judicial Committee of the House of Lords reaches the view that provision for abortion in either the United Kingdom or part of the United Kingdom is incompatible with one or another article of the convention. Although the Committee would be entitled to say that such provision was incompatible with the convention, such a view would create very great controversy and, in some quarters, considerable social anxiety.

We judged that, in that event, it would be wrong simply to accept what the Committee had said, and that a right to abortion, albeit quite properly limited and developed in this country over a period of 30 years, should suddenly be cast aside. My guess—it can be no more than that—is that whichever party was in power would have to say that it was sorry, that it did not and would not accept that, and that it was going to continue with the existing abortion legislation.

I want to pick up two further points made by the right hon. and learned Member for North-East Bedfordshire.

4.45 pm

Mr. Garnier: Is the Home Secretary entirely satisfied with the argument that he is deploying? He cannot have it both ways. Either the Government are introducing into British domestic law the convention on human rights—or the bits that they have identified—and are setting up mechanisms whereby the courts can make declarations of compatibility or incompatibility, or they are not. If the Judicial Committee of the House of Lords, in its court capacity, says that certain legislation—on, say, abortion—is incompatible with the convention, and if the Government, speaking through their Ministers in the House of Commons, say, "You may say that, but we don't care and we don't intend to do anything about it," there is a lacuna in the constitution, which is unsatisfactory. The highest court in the land will be saying one thing, while Parliament, through its elected Members, will be saying another. That will lead to friction. With respect to the Home Secretary, it is no good his saying that he will leave it like that and will rely on clause 4(6). That leaves a vacuum that needs to be filled, and it will be filled by public dissension.

Mr. Straw: I do not accept that. Yes, indeed we would rely, as would any Ministers, on clause 4(6). That is its purpose. It does not leave a lacuna, because it states:

"A declaration under this section ('a declaration of incompatibility')—

(a) does not affect the validity, continuing operation or enforcement of the provision in respect of which it is given; and

(b) is not binding on the parties to the proceedings in which it is made."

That means that, as long as the Government, with the House's approval, say that they do not accept the declaration of incompatibility, the

"validity, continuing operation or enforcement"

of, in this case, the abortion legislation, would continue. I shall develop that point later.

Sir Nicholas Lyell: I have been listening extremely carefully to the Home Secretary. I am grateful that we agree on the key point that the Bill is not to become a substitute constitution. I hesitated before getting to my feet, because I felt that the Home Secretary might be going to deal with this point, but what worries me—this formed the second part of my speech—is how the citizen will know where he or she stands. There is no structure in the Bill to force a Minister, or to enable a public authority through a Minister—we have suggested the latter—to say that, if there is no agreement and if someone wants to pursue a case, the case must go to Strasbourg, and new clause 2 would remedy that.

I do not want my intervention to be too long, but I want to make one more point. Let us consider a case that must be exercising the Home Secretary, just as it exercised me. It is that of Phyllis Bowman and the Society for the Protection of the Unborn Child and the effect of that case on our election law—that 24,000 or so leaflets could be put through the doors of the constituents of the hon. Member for Halifax (Mrs. Mahon). That seems to have driven a coach and horses through our election law.

Had that been the ruling of the House of Lords—although I do not think that it would have been—I am sure that it would be a good example of the kind of case that we would wish to push to Strasbourg to try to get it overturned as being a step too far. How would citizens know where they stood? How would Phyllis Bowman know where she stood? That is why we need an answer.

Mr. Straw: The Phyllis Bowman case has caused difficulties that we intend to address in future legislation, because the decision was taken by the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg and not by our domestic courts.

For the sake of argument, let us assume that an equivalent judgment had been made in the form of a declaration of incompatibility by the Judicial Committee of the House of Lords. It has been suggested that the Government would hide away and refuse to explain their position. Within five minutes of such a judgment being made, the Government would be asked for their position. If I happened to be the relevant Minister, I should say that we would study the judgment and no doubt consult the Law Officers, but within a matter of weeks we would

have to explain our position, and quite rightly, too. If we did not volunteer our position—that would be an abdication of good government—we would be brought to the House to explain ourselves.

In those circumstances, there would be a number of options. First, we could accept the declaration of incompatibility and bring forward remedial orders, and that is a straightforward process. Secondly, we could make a compromise and say that we half accepted it—a solution that normally appeals to Ministers and their legal advisers—and cobble something together. *[Interruption.]* I speak in general terms.

Thirdly, we could say that we were very sorry, but we disagreed with it. Assuming that we gained the support of the House in that, we could say that we did not accept it for very good reasons and that the current law was right. Then the party to the proceedings—in this case, Mrs. Bowman—would say either, "This is no good. I am going to take the case to Strasbourg," or, "I have fought the good fight and I will put up with what has happened." In the first case, she would exercise her right of appeal and go to Strasbourg. Meanwhile, we would continue to apply the existing law unless and until there was an adverse judgment in Strasbourg.

As the right hon. and learned Gentleman knows, there has to be some certainty about the law. The alternative is that Mrs. Bowman, as the initiator of the proceedings, would decide not to proceed to Strasbourg, in which case, notwithstanding the declaration of incompatibility, the existing electoral law would continue to be valid and would continue in its operation and enforcement.

Precisely because of that, and with respect to the right hon. and learned Gentleman, I genuinely do not see that there is any need whatsoever for Government to be given a right of appeal to Strasbourg. Why should the House have a right of appeal to Strasbourg when simply doing nothing but saying that we did not accept a declaration of incompatibility would put it in the position it wanted? What is the point?

Let me make this point particularly to the hon. and learned Member for Harborough: it would have been necessary to give the Government and public authorities a right of appeal in respect of an adverse declaration of incompatibility in the Judicial Committee of the House of Lords had the Bill provided that decisions and judgments of the Judicial Committee overrode decisions by the House. If we had made the House subordinate to a supreme court, of course we would need a right of appeal to Strasbourg, as we would then have been providing a written constitution, and, essentially, vesting the House of Lords and the European Court of Human Rights with the function of a supreme court and removing the sovereignty of Parliament. We have not gone down that route.

Sir Nicholas Lyell: The cavalry is waiting to come to the Home Secretary's rescue. I have listened carefully to him and it is clear to me that either I have failed to get my point across or he does not understand the structure of his Bill. The purpose of the new clause is not to give the Government and public authorities a right of appeal, because it is not within the power of the House to do so. I am sure that the Home Secretary understands that. Only by changing the convention could the Government be given a right of appeal to Strasbourg. The convention gives the right to citizens only. That is the reason for the somewhat convoluted structure of the new clause, which those who have read it carefully will have noticed.

The new clause would do exactly what the Home Secretary says he will do. I was fascinated to listen to the Home Secretary telling the House that the Government will follow the structure that we have recommended in the new clause. If the Government agree with that, they should put it on the statute book. Otherwise, the citizen will not know where he stands. Will the Home Secretary please answer that point?

Mr. Straw: The proposition before the House on 24 June was that there should be a right of appeal exercised by the Government.

Sir Nicholas Lyell: I drafted the new clause before 24 June. Its purpose is the same today, and it means what it says.

Mr. Straw *rose—*

Mr. David Lock (Wyre Forest) *rose—*

Mr. Straw: I shall give way to my hon. Friend.

Mr. Lock: I have listened to the debate with enormous interest, and it seems somewhat bizarre. Are not our opponents are making two criticisms of the Bill: first that it takes sovereignty from the House; and secondly that it politicises the judiciary? They are now proposing a new clause that will result in judges telling the House what it has to do, and will kick-start a political process—both of which consequences they vehemently oppose. I do not understand the logic or consistency of their position. Does my right hon. Friend agree with that analysis?

Mr. Straw: I understand my hon. Friend's point. I am glad about what the right hon. and learned Member for North-East Bedfordshire has said, because we have narrowed the ground considerably. He accepts what I say about the nature of the process and asks us to accept the new clause. However, we do not believe that it is necessary. All the processes that I have described are bound to happen anyway.

The hon. and learned Member for Harborough said that some great lacuna might develop—not a minor procedural hole, but a substantive black hole on the enforcement of the law. I do not think that I am misinterpreting him when I say that he was talking about a limbo developing in which no one knew where they were. People will know where they are. There is no question about that, because the situation will be clear. The speed of the Government response will depend on the complexity of what is handed down from the other place and on other matters, but the Government will respond.

Sir Nicholas Lyell: This leaves me breathless after 11 years in government. The idea that the Government come leaping forward with clear answers to difficult questions immediately does not correspond with the experience of any parliamentarian who has been in the House for any time. That is clearly not the Home Secretary's experience. The judgment on Bowman and the SPUC has stood for many months and we have not heard a whisper on how it should be dealt with. The Chahal judgment has stood for more than a year and we have not

[Sir Nicholas Lyell]

heard a whisper on that. The Home Secretary is saying that a report to the House as suggested in the new clause will happen in practice. That defies experience.

5 pm

Mr. Straw: I do not accept what the right hon. and learned Gentleman says. He mentioned the Chahal case; it makes our point, not his. We have acted on the issuing of the judgment. The Special Immigration Appeals Commission Act has provided a remedy to the mischief identified by the European Court in the Chahal case. That is a very good example. Since the original Chahal decision was made under the Government of whom he was a member, it is fair to point out that, quite quickly after the Chahal judgment, the previous Administration said what they needed to do, and got on with it.

The other point to be made about the Chahal judgment was that it was made by the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg and not by the Judicial Committee of the House of Lords. Had it been a judgment of the Judicial Committee and had the Bill been in force, it would have been open to the Government to say, "We do not accept this, and we shall simply run the procedures of the Immigration Act 1971 as we always have." They would have been very unwise to do that in that circumstance, because it would have been obvious that, since the matter was one of the liberty of a subject, there would be an appeal to Strasbourg, which almost certainly the Government would have lost. The Government may have decided—such considerations must be borne in mind—that it was worth taking such a risk for other reasons of state.

The new clause, which would tie us down, anticipates that, wherever there is a question of an incompatibility and it has not been the subject of a remedial order, there is likely to be an appeal to the European Court. I have already explained that there may not be such an appeal. Despite all the arguments about some hole developing in law enforcement, the default setting is the status quo.

My very last point is on the issue of both sides having a right of appeal—something that the hon. and learned Member for Harborough mentioned. He implied that the new clause was somehow a paver for both sides having a right of appeal. To dispose of that, I hope that I have satisfied the House that a circumstance in which both sides have the right of appeal would be incompatible with the sovereignty of Parliament and could arise only if, say, we had gone down the track of accepting that the European convention was a substitute for a written constitution and that Parliament would be subordinate to European courts. We do not intend to go down such a track.

Sir Nicholas Lyell: I apologise to the Home Secretary for intervening again, but this is the last time that I can draw out from him the key point. As—I think—he accepts, it is not possible for any member state to create a right of appeal for Governments or public authorities without the agreement of all other member states. However, if we want issues to be taken to Strasbourg, we must have a structure whereby the Government or public authorities can legitimately refuse to abide by a declaration of their own courts, thus forcing the citizen to go to Strasbourg. The Home Secretary rightly pointed out that clause 4(6) provides a good deal of what is required in that direction.

Where the Home Secretary's argument does not, in my opinion, meet the requirements both of effective justice and proper legislation, is when he says that the Government will always come forward promptly with a declaration about what they will do, despite the fact that there will be nothing on the statute book to say that they should do so. We are relying entirely on the alertness of the Government to achieve what is suggested by new clause 2.

We do not seem to disagree in principle about the need to achieve what the new clause suggests. Taking my last opportunity to ask the Home Secretary to reconsider, I submit that it would be wiser for him to accept new clause 2 and take it on to the statute book. There would then be a framework enabling all citizens involved in litigation—and, what is more, the far greater number of citizens interested in the outcome of such litigation—to know where they stood.

At the moment, that is not clear; the position is dependent on the efficiency and good will of the Government. I do not doubt their good will, but with difficult issues, especially those involving public authorities, and perhaps equally those involving the Government themselves, the likelihood is that there would be periods of delay and uncertainty, and people would not know where they stood. The statement that a ruling of the Judicial Committee was to have no effect would cause great confusion.

I ask the Home Secretary—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): Order. The right hon. and learned Gentleman is extending the right of intervention much too far.

Mr. Straw: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I think that this will be my last point.

The right hon. and learned Gentleman would have a point if we were simply relying on the efficiency and good will of the Government, but we are not. We are relying on the black letter of clause 4(6). The default setting, which everybody knows about, is that a declaration of incompatibility by the Judicial Committee or the House of Lords

"(a) does not affect the validity, continuing operation or enforcement of the provision in respect of which it is given; and

(b) is not binding on the parties to the proceedings in which it is made."

There is certainty there.

The right hon. and learned Gentleman asked me what would happen with the lower courts, and whether they would follow the judgment. No, they would not, because clause 4(6) is clear: a declaration does not affect the validity, continuing operation or enforcement of the provisions in respect of which it is given. There is absolute clarity there. In a judicial and political sense, the status quo ante would apply. Then, obviously, the Government would have to consider, and in most cases they would consider the position pretty rapidly. No time limit is set down, but the reverse could not apply. We could not, for example, say that the declaration of incompatibility would have force unless or until the Government said the reverse. That would create considerable uncertainty, and that would be one of the effects of new clause 2.

I understand the point that the right hon. and learned Gentleman and his hon. Friends have made, and the debate has been illuminating, at least in making it clear that there is understanding on both sides of the House that giving the Government a substantive right of appeal to the European Court in Strasbourg would be outwith the structure of the convention.

I think that there is also understanding that that would be unnecessary for the Government, given the structure of the Bill. The issue comes down to one of procedure when there is a declaration of incompatibility. I am not making a nit-picking point about the phraseology or drafting of the new clause, because of course, if we accepted the principle behind it, those could be dealt with by the draftsmen.

However, the overall effect would be different from what I believe is the clearer idea contained in clause 4(6). That is why I hope that the right hon. and learned Gentleman will withdraw his new clause. If he does not, we shall have to resist it.

Sir Nicholas Lyell: I am sorry for making a long intervention, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but this is a very important point. I shall not withdraw the new clause, for this fairly straightforward reason. This will be a real, practical problem. The Attorney-General, speaking to the Bar conference this year, made the point that there will need to be a great deal of training in the matter. We shall see a lot of human rights cases—

Mr. Paul Stinchcombe (Wellingborough) *indicated assent.*

Sir Nicholas Lyell: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman, who is nodding to me, recognises that.

There will be a great many attempts to make human rights points, particularly in the criminal sector—for example, in relation to manners of arrest. From time to time, there will be rulings that are adverse to our existing law and that we may or may not wish to accept. The Government will have to think about those matters, and decide whether they will amend the law in this House or whether they want the matter to go to Strasbourg on the basis that our courts have gone too far and that Strasbourg will give a wider margin of appreciation or discretion to us, as a member state, to make our own law. Unless there is a proper structure—whereby the Government come forward within a reasonable time to state what is happening—the courts will be in real difficulty.

I do not think that the Home Secretary understands the point, and I ask him to focus on it for a second. It is no good for the House to point to clause 4(6) and say that, because the clause states that a declaration of incompatibility shall have no effect on the law of this land, the rulings of the Judicial Committee of the House of Lords will not be followed in the lower courts in the meantime. It would be a recipe for absurdity for the lower courts—during a lacuna in which we say nothing—to pay no attention to a House of Lords ruling on a point of criminal procedure in this context until we amended the law. It would be far better for the Government to be clear, and for them to have a statutory requirement to come forward promptly to say either what they are doing or that the matter must go to Strasbourg.

In the interests of clarity and good legislation, I am afraid that I must ask the House to divide on this issue.

Question put, That the clause be read a Second time:—

The House divided: Ayes 132, Noes 372.

Division No. 363] **[5.11 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Amess, David
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Arbuthnot, Rt. Hon James
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baldry, Tony
Beggs, Roy *(E Antrim)*
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Brady, Graham
Brazier, Julian
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Burns, Simon
Butterfill, John
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clark, Rt Hon Alan *(Kensington & Chelsea)*
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rayleigh)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cran, James *(Beverly)*
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham & Stamford)*
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Duncan, Alan
Duncan Smith, Iain
Evans, Nigel
Fabricant, Michael
Flight, Howard
Forsythe, Clifford
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Fox, Dr. Liam
Gale, Roger *(N Thanet)*
Garnier, Edward
Gibb, Nick *(Bognor Regis)*
Gill, Christoper
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gray, James *(N Wilts)*
Green, Damian
Greenway, John
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archie
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John *(S Holland)*
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Horam, John *(Orpington)*
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson Smith, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Key, Robert *(Salisbury)*
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lansley, Andrew
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, Oliver
Lewis, Dr. Julian *(New Forest E)*
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter *(Mid-Worcs)*
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
Mackay, Rt Hon Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
Madel, Sir David
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Mates, Michael
Maude, Rt Hon Francis
May, Mrs Theresa
Moss, Malcolm
Nicholls, Patrick
Norman, Archie
Ottaway, Richard
Paige, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Prior, David
Randall, John
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewkesbury)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Faversham & Mid-Kent)*
Ruffley, David
St. Aubyn, Nick
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shepherd, Richard
Simpson, Keith *(Mid-Norfolk)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spring, Richard
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Swayne, Desmond
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, John M. *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Townend, John
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trimble, Rt Hon David
Tyrie, Andrew
Waller, Robert
Wardle, Charles
Whitney, Sir Raymond
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Ann

Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Woodward, Shaun
Yeo, Tim *(S Suffolk)*
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Stephen Day and
Mr. Nigel Waterson.

NOES

Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Alexander, Douglas
Allan, Richard
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale and Darwen)*
Armstrong, Ms Hilary
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Ashton, Joe *(Bassetlaw)*
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Baker, Norman
Ballard, Jackie
Banks, Tony *(West Ham)*
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, Rt Hon Mrs Margaret
Beith, Rt Hon A. J.
Bell, Stuart *(Middlesbrough)*
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, Andrew F.
Benton, Joe *(Bootle)*
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Blunkett, Rt Hon David
Borrow, David
Bradley, Keith *(Manchester Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brake, Tom *(Carshalton)*
Brand, Dr. Peter
Breed, Colin
Brinton, Mrs Helen
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Burnett, John
Butler, Mrs Christine
Byers, Rt Hon Stephen
Cable, Dr. Vincent
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(Cambridge)*
Campbell, Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, Dale
Canavan, Dennis
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Chaytor, David
Chidgey, David
Chisholm, Malcolm
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Rt Hon Dr. David *(S Shields)*
Clarke, Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge and Chryston)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann *(Cynon V)*
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Iain
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cooper, Yvette
Corbett, Robin
Corston, Ms Jean
Cotter, Brian
Cousins, Jim
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Curtis-Thomas, Claire
Dafis, Cynog
Dalyell, Tam
Darvill, Keith
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Davies, Rt Hon Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, John
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim *(Heywood)*
Donohoe, Brian H.
Dowd, Jim *(Lewisham)*
Drown, Ms Julia
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(Liverpool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff *(Barnsley E)*
Etherington, Bill
Field, Rt Hon Frank
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul *(Newport W)*
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings and Rye)*
Foster, Michael J. *(Worcester)*
Fyfe, Maria *(Glasgow Maryhill)*
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike *(Ilford S)*
George, Andrew *(St. Ives)*
George, Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr. Ian
Gilroy, Mrs Linda
Godman, Dr. Norman A.
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mrs Eileen
Gorrie, Donald
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Grogan, John
Gunnell, John
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hanson, David
Harman, Rt Hon Ms Harriet
Harris, Dr. Evan
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Healey, John
Heath, David *(Somerton)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hodge, Ms Margaret
Hoey, Kate *(Vauxhall)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy *(Clydesdale)*
Hoon, Geoffrey
Hope, Phil *(Corby)*
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howells, Dr. Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Ms Beverley *(Stretford and Urmston)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan *(Braintree)*
Hutton, John
Iddon, Dr. Brian
Illsley, Eric
Jackson, Ms Glenda *(Hampstead and Highgate)*
Jackson, Helen *(Sheffield Hillsborough)*
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W)*
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Barry *(Alyn)*
Jones, Mrs Fiona *(Newark)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Ms Jenny *(Wolverhampton SW)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Dr. Lynne *(Birmingham Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jowell, Ms Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford)*
Keetch, Paul
Kelly, Ms Ruth
Kemp, Fraser
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross Skye and Inverness W)*
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Khabra, Piara S.
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green and Bow)*
Kingham, Ms Tess
Kirkwood, Archy
Kumar, Dr. Ashok
Ladyman, Dr. Stephen
Lawrence, Ms Jackie
Laxton, Bob *(Derby N)*
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom *(High Peak)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Linton, Martin
Livingstone, Ken
Lock, David *(Wyre F)*
Love, Andrew
McAllion, John
McCabe, Steve
McCafferty, Ms Chris
McDonagh, Siobhain
McDonnell, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKenna, Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
Maclennan, Rt Hon Robert
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Mandelson, Rt Hon Peter
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury and Atcham)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Merron, Gillian
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll)*
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin
Moonie, Dr. Lewis
Moore, Michael
Moran, Ms Margaret
Morgan, Alasdair *(Galloway and U Nithsdale)*
Morgan, Julie *(Cardiff N)*
Morgan, Rhodri *(Cardiff W)*
Morris, Ms Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon John *(Aberavon)*
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Murphy, Paul *(Torfaen)*
Naysmith, Dr. Doug
Norris, Dan *(Wansdyke)*
Oaten, Mark *(Winchester)*
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Hara, Eddie
Öpik, Lembit
Osborne, Ms Sandra
Palmer, Dr. Nick
Pearson, Ian
Pendry, Tom *(Stalybridge)*
Perham, Ms Linda
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L.
Plaskitt, James
Pond, Chris *(Gravesham)*
Pope, Greg *(Hyndburn)*

Pound, Stephen
Powell, Sir Raymond
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Quinn, Lawrie
Radice, Giles
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd *(Portsmouth N)*
Raynsford, Nick
Reed, Andrew *(Loughborough)*
Reid, Dr. John *(Hamilton N. and Bellshill)*
Rendel, David
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Roy, Frank *(Motherwell)*
Ruddock, Ms Joan
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Russell, Ms Christine *(City of Chester)*
Ryan, Ms Joan
Salter, Martin
Sanders, Adrian
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shipley, Ms Debra
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Miss Geraldine *(Morecambe and Lunesdale)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Smith, Sir Robert W. *(Aberdeenshire and Kincardine)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Ms Helen
Spellar, John
Starkey, Dr. Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr. Howard
Strang, Rt Hon Dr. Gavin
Straw, Rt Hon Jack
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Stunell, Andrew
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Swinney, John
Taylor, Rt Hon Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomas, Gareth R. *(Harrow W)*
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark *(S Derbyshire)*
Tonge, Dr. Jenny
Touhig, Don *(Islwyn)*
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Desmond *(Brighton Kemptown)*
Turner, Dr. George *(NW Norfolk)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tyler, Paul *(N Cornwall)*
Vaz, Keith *(Leicester E)*
Vis, Dr. Rudi
Wallace, James
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N.
Watts, David
Webb, Steve *(Northavon)*
Welsh, Andrew
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr. Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Alan W. *(E Carmarthen and Dinefwr)*
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wise, Audrey
Wood, Mike *(Batley)*
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wray, James *(Glasgow Baillieston)*
Wright, Dr. Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. David Jamieson and Mr. Clive Betts.

Question accordingly negatived.

New clause 3

CONSULTATION AND GUIDANCE PRIOR TO COMMENCEMENT OF ACT

'The Secretary of State shall, before making an order under section 22(3) of this Act—

(a) provide guidance to public authorities on the steps which they need to take to comply with section 6 of this Act,

(b) consult public authorities, and such other bodies and persons as he may consider appropriate, on the most effective long term arrangement for providing public authorities, and persons who may wish to exercise their rights under section 7 of this Act, with advice and assistance on their respective responsibilities and rights under this Act,

(c) include within that consultation the options for establishing a Human Rights Commission to fulfil those functions, and

(d) inform Parliament of the outcome of that consultation.'.—*[Dr. Tony Wright.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

Dr. Tony Wright (Cannock Chase): I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

I move the new clause because I hope that the House will think it important and worth while. Also, it enables Members who are not lawyers to join in the debate, which is always refreshing during proceedings on this Bill.

As we reach the closing stages of this important Bill, the question is whether any gaps remain to be filled—gaps that might prevent the Bill from delivering its potential. We believe that there are such gaps, and seek, tentatively, to fill them by means of the new clause. It argues that, for the Bill to be effective, it will need some underpinning which is not in place and will not be unless the Government put it there. This is the moment when they should do so. They have put such support in place for every previous similar human rights measure—for example, with the Equal Opportunities Commission and the Commission for Racial Equality—that has extended and strengthened human rights.

In each of those cases, albeit 20 years ago, it was believed that some institutional structure should be put in place to ensure that the rights being enshrined in a Bill would be operational in practice. It was necessary to ensure that people could access the rights and that something would happen after the House had passed the measure. That legislation was given the necessary institutional support, and it is crucial for a similar approach to be taken with this measure.

It is crucial, too, that prevention issues be dealt with; for example, how we can prevent cases from even arising by developing good practice in public bodies and private bodies charged with public functions. How can we promote access to justice? How can we advise and assist the people who might benefit from the provisions of the Bill? How can we promote awareness of human rights and develop a real human rights culture in this country? How can we scrutinise draft legislation to ensure that it is consistent with the convention and with other human rights obligations to which this country has signed up? How can we advise Government and Parliament? The latter will need an independent source of advice, and this is our opportunity to ensure that it is put in place. For a range of reasons, it is essential at this late stage in the passage of the Bill that we insert a provision to ensure that all that can happen.

The new clause would provide the support that the Bill requires. As hon. Members may see, it asks the Government to take three steps prior to the Act's coming into force. The first step will be to provide guidance to public authorities on the steps that they need to take to ensure that they comply with the Act.

Everyone who has looked at the Bill knows that it has momentous implications for all public authorities and all private bodies that exercise public functions. The Government accepted that both in this House and in the other place. Indeed, in the other place there was talk of a transformation that would need to occur in the behaviour of public bodies.

[Dr. Tony Wright]

It is not difficult to assemble a long list of the issues that public bodies may have to face as a consequence of the Bill. The current issue of *Local Government Chronicle* carries the dramatic headline "Human rights Act unleashes legal deluge", and contains a long list of the Bill's legal implications for local authorities. My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary spoke about exaggerated rhetoric and perhaps the article is over the top, but it is not difficult to assemble a wholly convincing list of matters about which public bodies may be required to respond.

5.30 pm

The Institute for Public Policy Research drew up such a list after a series of conferences between practitioners in different fields. It shows—I shall only dip into it—under which articles of the convention public bodies may have to respond. The cases that could arise for health authorities, for example, include, under article 2:

"inadequate steps taken to protect/save a life—shortage of resources may be no defence—eg Health Authority's refusal to fund expensive treatment for a child because it would only prolong his life a few months—or for an elderly person . . . failure to prevent death or injury by providing a senior/experienced enough doctor to carry out an operation . . . that turning off a life support system for someone in a vegetative state denied his/her right to life . . . that a foetus's right to life should override a woman's refusal to have a caesarean section".

Cases that may arise for local authorities include, under article 2:

"failure to protect the public from known and avoidable dangers—eg a local authority which failed to exercise its enforcement powers against a known polluter".

Cases that may arise under article 8 include a

"public landlord's failure to repair or maintain a home—or all of the homes within an estate . . . local authority's failure to issue an abatement and enforcement notice against a creator of a statutory nuisance—bad neighbour factory in a residential area".

An article 3 case may arise because of

"any treatment in residential homes/institutions of the elderly, mentally ill, homeless, young people, asylum seekers, remand prisoners (for example) which could be considered degrading".

The list identifies cases that Government Departments may have to face, such as, under article 8,

"refusal to allow children conceived by artificial reproduction to know the identity of their birth parents . . . deportation of a parent which effectively denies a child the right to family life".

An article 3 case that could arise would be

"degrading treatment by a public official".

The list mentions education authorities and schools. Under protocol 1, a case could arise concerning

"whether a school's decision to expel a child was proportionate to his/her behaviour".

A case of

"whether the suspension of a pupil for writing a critical article about the school in a local paper denied his/her right to education *and* his/her right to freedom of expression"

could arise under protocol 1 and article 10.

One can, without any difficulty, compile an extraordinarily long list of cases that will land on the desks of public authorities. Those of us who have supported the measure and who have long wanted to bring rights home must not allow the House to be misled about the scale and impact on public bodies of the proposals. We must ask from whom public authorities will obtain the guidance that they will need to know whether they are complying with the Bill. Where is the agency that will provide the public bodies with the help that they will need?

When the race and equal opportunities legislation was enacted, the Commission for Racial Equality and the Equal Opportunities Commission were established precisely to provide such guidance for the bodies that would be covered and for the individuals who believed that their rights had been infringed. The commissions were the support mechanisms that underpinned the legislation. As a human rights commission has not been established to fulfil such a function in respect of this Bill, the implications for public authorities are far greater.

Senior lawyers who have been providing training on the implications of the Bill over the past weeks—mostly under the auspices of Justice—have drawn attention to cases of medical negligence, personal injury, environmental health and nuisance, family law, privacy and mental health. They have based their judgments on the cases that have been taken successfully to the European Commission and the European Court of Human Rights.

Not only will public bodies need advice prior to the Bill's enactment on the steps that they will have to take to avoid unnecessary litigation; they will also have a continuing need for advice as the case law develops—for example, on how, under article 3, the courts are defining degrading treatment or, under article 8, people's homes and correspondence and the scope of the right to respect private and family life.

Private bodies will urgently need guidance on the definition of public function so that they know whether they are covered by the legislation. Large public authorities and companies may rightly be expected to pay for legal advice, but it is unreasonable to expect voluntary organisations—such as Barnardos, which will be centrally involved in the operation of the measure, or bodies that provide residential care for education—to do so.

The new clause was designed to focus attention on prevention—how we can prevent cases being brought by ensuring that public authorities are behaving as they should. We cannot assume that the Bill's enactment will in itself lead to the culture of awareness to which we all look forward. In the absence of a human rights commission or a similar mechanism, the Government will need to be active in approaching the wide range of organisations to which the Bill applies so that the legislation leads to the desired change in culture rather than to a series of avoidable and expensive cases in the courts. Some training has begun, but there will have to be much more. A concerted and coherent programme is needed, and that must come from an agency that is provided for in the Bill.

The new clause would also require the Government to consult interested parties on the most effective long-term arrangements through which to provide guidance to public authorities and advice and assistance to individuals who believe that their rights have been infringed. In the White Paper and in subsequent debates, the Government have said that they are not convinced that a human rights commission is essential to the successful implementation

of the Bill and that they want a greater consensus on the functions and structure of such a body before they legislate. However, it is clear from that that some arrangement is needed to provide continuing assistance to public bodies and individuals.

Paragraph (b) of the new clause would ensure that the Government take the lead in finding out what the most effective arrangements would be. The Government have, in a sense, conceded that there will need to be such arrangements, and the clause asks them to consult on that and to make those arrangements an integral part of the Bill.

Since the Bill was last debated in the House, the Northern Ireland Bill has been introduced, with its provision for a human rights commission in Northern Ireland. That body will have a responsibility to advise and assist individuals taking cases under the Human Rights Act. That assistance will be available whether a case raises issues related to Northern Ireland's particular problems, or issues which could equally have arisen in Britain, such as infringements of privacy or of the right to education. Such assistance will not be available to people living in Britain, with the exception of disabled people, who will be able to seek assistance from the proposed disability rights commission. Whether it is fair that people in Northern Ireland should have access to such support when people in Britain do not is surely a matter on which, at the very least, the Government should consult.

The Northern Ireland Office does not expect the human rights commission in Belfast to provide guidance to public bodies on their new responsibilities under the Human Rights Act, on the grounds that the provision of such guidance for public bodies throughout the UK will be the responsibility of the Home Office. That therefore leaves a gap.

Finally, there is the third step which the clause asks the Government to take in order to inform Parliament of the outcome of the consultation exercise that they have been invited to put in hand. On a number of occasions, the Government have suggested that Parliament should establish a human rights committee, and have proposed that the committee's first inquiry could be into the question of a human rights commission. We do not know when such a committee is to be established. The House has not considered it, and such a committee is clearly not in place.

It would be appropriate for that committee, if and when it is in place, to be informed of the outcome of the Government's consultation on the kind of arrangements that they think are appropriate and necessary for the Bill, so that it can then consider the issue and in turn make its own recommendation. If the Government fail to take the lead in conducting such a consultation exercise, there will inevitably be a long delay before the human rights committee could give the Government its view—a delay at the very moment when public bodies are in most need of the kind of support that the Act will mean they require.

During that time, the Government would have to be the principal source of guidance to public bodies, and individuals in Britain will have no statutory body to which they can turn for advice and assistance in taking cases under the Act.

Furthermore, it is my firm belief, based upon some little experience of the ombudsman model in Britain—it works well because a committee of the House, of the kind which has been proposed with the human rights committee, is linked to an external agency—that such a model is needed here if the measure is to be effective. It is because the ombudsman's office and the committee here work in partnership that the model is so effective. One is not a substitute for the other: they should properly be seen as complementary.

I have no desire to invite the Government to invent another quango. I am a fully paid-up member of the quango hunters club, and I have a track record to prove it. A body is only invented when there is a task to be done. I am persuaded—it is a view shared by almost every organisation that has been consulted on the matter—that for the Bill to be effective it will require some underpinning machinery, and that is what the clause affords. If the answer is to be, which it has, albeit obliquely, been, that all machinery is expensive, there is a moment when we have to decide whether we believe in something. If we do and we want it to be effective, it must be sustained and not be trumped by the Treasury saying, "It will cost tuppence ha'penny so we must not have it."

When Back Benchers are being difficult, they always say that they are being helpful, but I intend to be helpful here. New clause 3 is entirely in the spirit of everything that the Government have previously said about the measure. They have talked about the need for further machinery to support the Bill, they have said that they are not persuaded about a particular model—the human rights commission—but that they want to explore the matter further and want the relevant bodies to come to a view. The need for that is still there. The clause translates that acknowledgement of need into some mechanism for doing something about it.

The Bill, hugely important though it is, is only the beginning of a process which will strengthen and extend human rights in Britain. It needs some supporting machinery so that its potential can be fulfilled; the clause enables the Government to ensure that that happens.

5.45 pm

Mr. James Clappison (Hertsmere): I am sure that the House will agree that we have just listened to a thoughtful speech by the hon. Member for Cannock Chase (Dr. Wright). He has clearly given much thought to the consequences of the incorporation of the European convention and the way in which the Government have chosen to achieve that. The House will have listened carefully to the hon. Gentleman, who takes a great interest in these matters. In many ways, he proceeds from the worthiest of motives. He seeks to uphold the human rights culture, as he puts it, and to give the Government advice on the best way to implement the Bill.

The hon. Gentleman gave a long and considered list of possible ways in which the human rights convention could give rise to legal action and, while all are in favour of upholding human rights, it is to be hoped that that will not be at the expense of a descent into sheer litigiousness, which did seem possible from what the hon. Gentleman was saying. We do not want to see the European convention cropping up in every nook and cranny of our relationships with others, but after listening to the hon. Gentleman's speech that seemed a possible outcome.

The hon. Gentleman proceeds from the worthiest of motives. He seeks to improve and underpin the Bill but, in doing so, he has exposed for all to see one of the glaring

[Mr. James Clappison]

weaknesses in the Bill's structural foundation. There is much to be said for what the hon. Gentleman is seeking to require the Secretary of State to do—to consult about the Bill's implementation and to give long-term advice and assistance to public authorities—but what he proposes has one glaring problem which we have come up against time and again in our consideration of the Bill.

New clause 3 requires the Secretary of State to consult public authorities and to give them advice and assistance, but at this point no one can say who or what a public authority is. There is no list in the Bill. The Under-Secretary smiles. He is aware of the problems that this has caused, and he knows the point. It is there for all to see in the Bill. A public authority is a court or tribunal and any person some of whose functions are functions of a public nature.

As the hon. Member for Cannock Chase said, that will include a wide range of organisations, persons and bodies who at this moment may not necessarily feel that they are public authorities. But any of those organisations, which may be private organisations for many purposes, when they carry out a function of a public nature may become a public authority, subject to the provisions of the European convention and therefore at risk of litigation for alleged breach of the convention. That will catch a wide range of organisations. The hon. Member for Cannock Chase gave some examples, and even mentioned charities such as Barnardos. A wide range of people could be brought within the ambit of the Bill.

It is difficult at this stage to say what a public authority is. That is the problem that the Government have come up against in the past. We can go back to a much earlier stage of the Bill and look at the view of an esteemed lawyer, someone who is much wiser than I am in these matters: none other than the Lord Chancellor. In another place he gave the considered opinion, when asked, that the Press Complaints Commission was not a public authority. He then received even more learned and distinguished legal advice—it came from one of my constituents who happens to be a lawyer, so I have to call it learned. That person told the Lord Chancellor that it was possible for the Press Complaints Commission to be a public authority. The Lord Chancellor then had to go back and say that he was wrong.

I am a great admirer of the Lord Chancellor. We are fortunate in having a Lord Chancellor who is so wise that it is good when he is right and even better when he is wrong. He said that it was marvellous for the Press Complaints Commission to be a public authority, because, as such, it would have all the protections available to it under the European convention.

That is an example of the problems that can arise. It is not only an esteemed legal authority such as the Lord Chancellor who has had some difficulty in saying what a public authority is. In another place, Lord Donaldson highlighted this as one of the problems of the Bill. He gave a long list of examples, rather like that given by the hon. Member for Cannock Chase, as to what may or may not constitute a public authority. He referred to a public authority as anything that is an emanation of the state, any arm of local government or central Government, and courts and tribunals—they are in the Bill. But his list went on. He said that he believed that it could include the BBC, ITV and the press. He asked:

"is Safeways conducting a business of a public nature?—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 13 November 1997; Vol. 582, c. 1293.]

He came to the conclusion that it probably was not, but he could not say why. A wide range of organisations and persons will be brought within the definition of a public authority.

We cannot support the hon. Member for Cannock Chase, because we cannot ask the Secretary of State to consult public authorities when it is difficult, if not impossible, to say what a public authority is. The words of the hon. Member for Cannock Chase contain a clear warning that many people should heed. There are many organisations and bodies which may think that they are perfectly private in what they do, but which may brought within the ambit of the Bill as a result of the way the Government have chosen to incorporate the European convention in our law. In the future, they may face all the problems and difficulties that come with litigation.

The hon. Member for Cannock Chase is right to the extent that people need to be aware of the problem that will emerge as a result of the Government's whole approach to this matter.

Mr. Robert Maclennan (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross): The hon. Member for Cannock Chase (Dr. Wright) was right to draw attention to the wide consequences of the Bill and its broad impact on many aspects of public administration. He was right to draw attention to the need for advice to be made available. Before the election, the Government recognised that quite clearly, and put their hand to an agreement with the Liberal Democrats indicating that they would favour the establishment of a human rights commissioner or commission or a similar public body to discharge that responsibility. It is a matter of some disappointment that the Home Secretary has not felt able to continue the undertakings he gave before entering his high office.

The intellectual basis of the Home Secretary's objection to introducing a human rights commissioner or commission at this stage appears to rest upon the difficulty of reaching agreement about the form it might take, particularly as there are already a number of bodies in existence, to which the hon. Member for Cannock Chase referred in passing, in the context of race relations and equal opportunities, whose roles have not been defined.

Since the introduction of the Northern Ireland legislation and the provisions for setting up a commission in Northern Ireland to deal with exactly the functions in respect of Great Britain with which a human rights commission would be dealing, the basis for objection has disappeared. It seems to be boiling down to nothing more than a penny-pinching unwillingness to foot the bill of establishing a human rights commission. That may prove to be not only penny-pinching but pound foolish, since it is quite possible to envisage—the hon. Member for Cannock Chase did envisage this—that many people might embark upon litigation who might otherwise not do so. That could result in substantial public expenditure in answering cases that might, advisedly, not have been brought.

I have predicted that there will not be a landslide of litigation arising out of this Bill. I do not believe that there is so much action by public authorities or legislation on the statute book that runs foul of the human rights

convention that we could anticipate the need for such a lot of litigation. However, people will try their hand, and they are more likely to do so if they are not given the sort of advice that would be available from bodies cognate to the European Commission of Human Rights and the Equal Opportunities Commission in the wider field of human rights.

It is clear that the House should view with sympathy the new clause tabled by the hon. Member for Cannock Chase. I fear that he will not persuade the Government of the basic case for establishing a human rights commission at this stage, so his new clause does not seek to go down that route. It seeks to impose a duty on the Secretary of State to act in substitution for the role of a human rights commissioner.

I suggest that that might have some dangers for the legislation. I agree that the provision of advice and the provision of guidance to public authorities is necessary, but I do not think that that advice should be a prescription of law prior to the enactment of the legislation. There is some doubt at this stage as to the Government's intentions with respect to giving effect to the legislation. What is to be the operative date? When will the order be made under clause 22(3)? Will it be long delayed? I profoundly hope not.

The Government have put in train some work and have found some money to carry out a programme of judicial education on the consequences of the Bill becoming law. However, there can be no public policy merit in a long delay in giving effect to the will of Parliament that, as the Government's White Paper says, rights should be brought home.

I fear that, if we were to accept new clause 3, it could mean the Government embarking upon extensive consultations with public authorities before giving the date for implementation. If one is to follow the argument of the hon. Member for Cannock Chase, that process would be extensive, with many bodies involved. It could lead to a great deal of uncertainty if the Government cannot provide legal advice about the effect of their legislation in this or any other area, in an authoritative and binding way. Governments are reluctant to do that, for example in taxation. We would not normally argue that a tax bill should not be implemented until its provisions have been fully understood by those to whom it may apply. The same must be said about this legislation: we cannot wait for the Government to provide advice before giving effect to the Bill.

Although I have considerable sympathy with the arguments outlined by the hon. Member for Cannock Chase, and share his broad view about the necessity, if we are to avoid confusion and unnecessary public expenditure, of establishing a public body to fulfil the functions that he described, I cannot bring myself to suggest that the House would be wise to vote for new clause 3. He has, however, performed a valuable service in highlighting the potential problems and the need for the Government to address them. None the less, the manner in which he suggests they should be addressed is inappropriate.

I reaffirm my view and that of my right hon. and hon. Friends that the Government should commit themselves to the modest expenditure of establishing a human rights commission at an early date.

6 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Mike O'Brien): I think that this is the first intervention that my hon. Friend the Member for Cannock Chase (Dr. Wright) has made in the parliamentary proceedings on this Bill. I welcome his speech, which he delivered with his customary eloquence, and, most importantly, his "non-lawyerly" eloquence. We must all pay heed to his theme of consultation and guidance if we are to ensure that the Bill is a success.

Clause 22(3) provides for most of the Bill's provisions to be brought into force on such day as the Secretary of State may by order appoint. New clause 3 would require the Secretary of State to carry out certain actions before making such an order. One is to provide guidance to public authorities on what they need to do to avoid breaching people's convention rights under the Bill. In general, our laws and procedures comply with the convention. When in the past they have been found by the European Court of Human Rights not to do so, successive Administrations have had a good record of taking action to bring them into line. However, the Bill will render alleged breaches of the convention rights liable to challenge much more easily and quickly in our domestic courts.

We agree that Government Departments and other public authorities should review their legislation and procedures for compatibility with the convention, and consider what amendments are feasible. We are considering ways of providing guidance to help that process along. We shall issue a guidance booklet on the Bill, and provide an overview of the Bill and the convention rights. It will provide advice to help Government Departments and other public authorities comply with their obligations under the Bill. Drafting is at an early stage, but we hope to issue the guidance early in the new year.

My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary will say a little more about our implementation plans when he moves Third Reading shortly. Those will include the establishment of a task force of non-governmental organisations and Government representatives, which will help the Government to prepare for implementation. It is unnecessary to insert in the Bill a provision that expressly requires the Government to provide guidance. No one doubts that guidance is needed before the legislation can begin to operate.

We have reservations about another of my hon. Friend's proposals—to consult on the most effective long-term arrangements, including the options for establishing a human rights commission, to provide advice and assistance to public authorities and those whose convention rights might be breached by their actions.

We do not object to consultation on the human rights convention. Indeed, we would want to encourage discussion on the issue, because there is a lack of consensus, as the right hon. Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross (Mr. Maclennan) said. That is evidenced in recent documents, such as the book published only last week by the Institute for Public Policy Research, which presents markedly different proposals from those that will operate in Northern Ireland. Thus there is a wide debate yet to be had.

[Mr. Mike O'Brien]

The important point is that the Secretary of State would be prevented from enacting the Bill until he had consulted on the options for a human rights commission. As the right hon. Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross said, that could be a prolonged process, particularly if a parliamentary committee on human rights wished to consider the matter. We could not guarantee when it would publish the results of its consideration. It might wish to take evidence, or want the matter to be the subject of a much wider public debate. Implementation of the legislation would therefore have to hang on the completion of that.

As we made clear in the White Paper "Rights Brought Home", which we published last year, our priority is our manifesto commitment to give effect to the convention rights in our domestic law. Establishing a human rights commission in Great Britain is not central to that objective, which is why it does not form part of the Bill.

Before taking the matter further, we want to see how the Bill operates in practice, and to give the proposed parliamentary committee on human rights an opportunity to examine the detailed issues surrounding the establishment of a commission in Great Britain. We do not have a closed mind on the issue of a human rights commission; on the contrary, we want to encourage a healthy debate on it. However, tying the Bill's implementation to some form of statutory consultation would not be helpful, but would merely tie the Secretary of State's hands.

We already know that there is far from being a consensus on this matter. The Equal Opportunities Commission has its own views on its future and how it might tie into a human rights commission. The Commission for Racial Equality has somewhat ambivalent views and has shifted one way and another on the matter. It now seems to suggest that it is in favour, but it is a somewhat lukewarm view. The IPPR's proposals envisage a federal structure involving the CRE and the EOC being part of a human rights commission while operating independently on equal opportunities issues. The way in which any structure would work is still vague, and we do not know whether it would bring benefits. Much more discussion is needed.

The passing of the Bill will do much that my hon. Friend the Member for Cannock Chase seeks. He seeks access to human rights; the Bill will provide that access for ordinary individuals in our courts. He seeks to develop a human rights culture; the Bill will provide the basis for developing that culture in our country.

The hon. Member for Hertsmere (Mr. Clappison) rehearsed some of the arguments on definitions of public authorities. If he will forgive me, I shall not pursue him down that route, because the House has already discussed the issue at length. However, I wish to touch on a couple of points made by the right hon. Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross. He said—I have some sympathy with his view—that he did not share the fears of the hon. Member for Hertsmere or the view of my hon. Friend the Member for Cannock Chase that there will be a landslide of litigation. There will be a settling-in period in which the courts will have to resolve a number of issues, but I, too, do not anticipate a massive landslide which will overwhelm the courts, or anything like that. The fears on that account are, as we shall see in due course, likely to be unfounded.

We must start to develop a discussion on these issues. I cannot agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Cannock Chase that, somehow, the Bill will fail or be less of a success without a human rights commission. There has been criticism that the Bill will fail to achieve the Government's objectives unless it has what my hon. Friend described as the "underpinning" of a human rights commission. We do not accept that. The purpose of the Bill is to give access to convention rights in our courts, rather than people having to incur the cost and delay of going to Strasbourg.

Remedies will be nearer home, and I believe that people will seek them. They will not lack advice. There is tremendous interest in the Bill among non-governmental organisations, the legal profession and academics. I have not the slightest doubt that learned books on how the Bill will affect everyone will be published shortly after it is passed. The result will be the beginning of the strong development of a human rights culture in this country.

A commission is not essential to ensure compliance with convention rights by the Government or public authorities, or to ensure that Parliament can properly carry out its functions of scrutinising legislation. The Bill provides for Ministers to make statements about the compatibility of Government Bills with convention rights, which we believe will enhance the scrutiny of such Bills within the Government. We have also said that we would support the creation of a parliamentary human rights committee with a range of functions relating to human rights.

There are a number of sources of advice, and the fears expressed by my hon. Friend the Member for Cannock Chase about lack of advice will not come to pass. The Bill will deliver what the Government intend. The issue of the human rights commission can be resolved later; there needs to be greater consensus before we move on that. I hope that my hon. Friend will not seek to tie the hands of the Government by pressing the new clause. In view of what I have said, I ask him to withdraw it.

Dr. Tony Wright: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for those remarks. He said at the outset that this is my first intervention during the passage of the Bill. Indeed it is. Until this point, I had believed, perhaps mistakenly, that I was constrained, as parliamentary private secretary to a Minister closely associated with the Bill, from taking part. If that is not the case, it is good news. As is well known, parliamentary private secretaries are the castrati of political life. I am enjoying having my vital organs returned to me, which explains the nature of my remarks.

Mr. O'Brien: If my hon. Friend had been constrained, or thought that he had been constrained, in any way, the House would have missed his contribution, which I very much welcome. We are all the better for it.

Dr. Wright: That is enough mutual flattery, but I agree with my hon. Friend about one thing: lots of learned books will be published. There is no question that the Bill is good news for academics and terribly good news for lawyers—there will be lots of trade. The point of the new clause is to show that citizens are involved, too, and that

public bodies will be affected by the Bill. We need to provide assistance for them, and they need to get part of the action, too.

I am slightly puzzled by what the right hon. Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross (Mr. Maclennan) said, because there was an agreement between my party and his that we were committed to a human rights commission. Whatever else the new clause does, it keeps the door open on the idea of such a commission, which his remarks would close. I am puzzled, not for the first time, by what Liberal Democrats say. Although I am one of those who are always in favour of co-operative politics, I sometimes find theory easier than practice.

6.15 pm

What my hon. Friend the Minister said about setting up a task force is interesting. We know that we like task forces—we have a great proclivity for them, and they are useful institutions—but they are not the same as the mechanism that I propose, and should not be confused with it, because they do not provide those support mechanisms.

My new clause does not propose the establishment of a human rights commission. It simply states that there should be consultation about the most appropriate arrangements with which to underpin the Bill, one of which might be a commission. It could not be a more helpful and open-ended new clause, and I am disappointed that the Government cannot support it.

This is one of those occasions on which the House—if it did what it wanted to do or did what it would do if it knew what it was doing—would probably bless a new clause of this kind. Indeed, early-day motions have expressed wide support for it, and we have all kinds of evidence that the outside community, which knows about these things, is in favour, but the House will not support it, even though it would like to, because that is how we operate.

I shall endeavour to keep myself cheerful by hanging on to the words about doors not being closed. I hope that they are true, and that the Government will return to the matter, which is extremely important. Those of us who wish the Bill well and have campaigned for it for a long time think that a commission should be an essential support for it.

I know that this will bring good cheer all round: in trying to cheer myself up, I beg to ask leave to withdraw the motion.

Motion and clause, by leave, withdrawn.

Clause 2

INTERPRETATION OF CONVENTION RIGHTS

Mr. Mike O'Brien: I beg to move amendment No. 5, in page 2, line 1, leave out 'under this Act'.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to discuss the following amendments: Government amendments Nos. 6 to 22, 24 to 30, 36 and 37.

Mr. O'Brien: This is an array of minor and technical amendments concerned mainly with the operation of the devolution legislation. In particular, the Bill and the Northern Ireland Bill need to be made consistent with each other, and hon. Members may remember that we undertook a similar exercise in Committee in respect of Scotland and Wales. I am happy to answer questions on the detail of the amendments, but I anticipate that the substance of the debate will relate to the Opposition's remedial orders proposals. Unless hon. Members want me to go through the detail, it may be convenient to move on. No one is suggesting that I should go through all the amendments, so I propose to move on to some of the points that may be raised by the Opposition.

Amendments Nos. 40 and 41 would add to clause 10—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. We are not dealing with that group of amendments. We are dealing with a group of Government amendments. The Minister cannot speak to amendments which have not yet been moved.

Mr. O'Brien: I am grateful for that guidance, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

I commend Government amendment No. 5 to the House.

Amendment agreed to.

Amendments made: No. 6, in page 2, line 17, at end insert—

'(aa) by the Lord Chancellor or the Secretary of State, in relation to any proceedings outside Scotland;'.

No. 7, in page 2, line 19, leave out lines 19 and 20 and insert—

'(b) by a Northern Ireland department, in relation to proceedings before a tribunal in Northern Ireland—

(i) which deals with transferred matters; and

(ii) for which no rules made under paragraph (aa) are in force.'.—*[Mr. Mike O'Brien.]*

Clause 5

RIGHT OF CROWN TO INTERVENE

Amendment made: No. 8, in page 3, line 21, at end insert—

'( ) a Northern Ireland Minister,

( ) a Northern Ireland department,'.—*[Mr. Mike O'Brien.]*

Clause 7

PROCEEDINGS

Amendments made: No. 9, in page 5, line 2, at end insert—

'(aa) in relation to proceedings before a court or tribunal outside Scotland, rules made by the Lord Chancellor or the Secretary of State for the purposes of this section or rules of court,'.

No. 10, in page 5, line 4, leave out

'the purposes of this section'

and insert 'those purposes'.

No. 11, in page 5, line 5, leave out from 'before' to end of line 7 and insert

'a tribunal in Northern Ireland—

(i) which deals with transferred matters; and

(ii) for which no rules made under paragraph (aa) are in force,

rules made by a Northern Ireland department for those purposes,'.

No. 12, in page 5, line 20, at end insert—

'( ) "The Minister" includes the Northern Ireland department concerned.'.—*[Mr. Mike O'Brien.]*

Clause 10

POWER TO TAKE REMEDIAL ACTION

Mr. Garnier: I beg to move amendment No. 38, in page 6, line 34, leave out Clause 10.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to discuss the following amendments: No. 40, in page 7, line 17, at end insert—

'(3A) For the purposes of this section, "compelling reasons" shall be taken to exist where, and only where, a failure to proceed under this section would be likely to jeopardise national security, public health, or the liberty of an individual.'.

No. 41, in page 7, line 17, at end insert—

'(3B) Where the Secretary of State considers that there are compelling reasons for proceeding under this section, he shall, before or at the same time as laying before Parliament a remedial order or draft remedial order, lay before Parliament a written statement of those reasons.'.

No. 39, in schedule 2, page 18, line 36, leave out Schedule 2.

Mr. Garnier: We had an interesting discussion about clause 10 in Committee last June. It is appropriate to revisit some of the arguments that were deployed on that occasion while discussing these amendments. We are returning to this debate on clause 10, which gives the Government the power to amend the law by using a fast-track procedure, because we remain convinced that it is wrong in principle. We have stated that in Committee and my noble Friends have made the point in the other place. On both occasions, the Government have not provided us with any compelling answers.

Bluntly, the clause is designed to increase the power of Ministers, to diminish the role of Parliament, and to weaken our democracy. At this point, I imagine that the Home Secretary wishes to leap to his feet to say that I am being unfair, that this is merely a fallback procedure, and that clause 10(2) makes it clear that it can be used only if a Minister of the Crown considers that there are compelling reasons for doing so.

I shall explore that proviso in a minute, but first I must emphasise that this basic provision, designed to bypass our normal parliamentary procedures, is just one more facet of the Government's attack on our constitution, aimed at increasing the power of the Executive and diminishing the power of the people, through their elected representatives in Parliament, to hold the Government to account.

We are witnessing this centralising grip in every aspect of the Government's so-called modernisation—that grossly over-used word—of our constitution. We see it in their insistence on list systems for elections to the European Parliament: power is taken from the people and given to the party. We see it in the Prime Minister's proposals for proportional representation, as evidenced by the Jenkins commission, which is rigged in its composition and rigged in its terms of reference. We see it in the Prime Minister's half-baked proposals for the so-called reform of the other place, which abolish the rights of hereditary peers because they are undemocratic and based on the patronage of the past, only to substitute them with a system of patronage and nepotism in which all the power is placed in the hands of—surprise, surprise—the present and much-revered Prime Minister.

Those systems are wrong, and—to give him his due—the Home Secretary knows that they are wrong. It is precisely because he knows that they are wrong in relation to the Bill that he has introduced what is now clause 10(2), which provides that the fast-track system may be used only if Ministers consider that there are compelling reasons to do so. It is further fair to the Home Secretary to say that it is reported that he has strong objections to abolishing our tried and tested system for electing Members of Parliament and replacing it with a system of proportional representation. He, at least, is said to understand that that is wrong for a host of reasons, but particularly because it diminishes the power of the people to choose not only their elected representatives but the complexion of their Government.

We start from the position where even the Government recognise that their proposals for the fast-track procedure—for the diminution of Parliament—are wrong in principle, yet they persist with them. I question whether they understand why they are wrong in principle. I am not sure that they do.

The European convention on human rights is not a system for making laws: it is not a substitute for Parliament. It is a broad framework within which all our laws should be framed and with which our laws must comply. The courts will tell us, after due argument, whether some aspect of our law is incompatible, but it is not for the courts to redesign those laws. They are not equipped to do so. It would be wholly undemocratic if they were to attempt to do so. That is the role of Parliament. What possible justification is there for the Government to diminish the role of Parliament? What are the compelling reasons which are to entitle Ministers to override the rights of the people and of our electorates to be represented in these matters by their chosen representatives? We are not told.

The Government have proposed no definition. I can find nothing in the previous pronouncements of the Home Secretary, the Lord Chancellor or of any Ministers, here or in the other place, to pin down the circumstances in which these compelling reasons will be considered by Ministers to exist. It is not that there will be too many of these changes and that it would clutter up Parliament. We are told repeatedly by the Lord Chancellor and the Home Secretary that we expect changes to primary legislation to be rare. I said in Committee in June that there have been only 13 such changes in the 32 years since 1966, when we first granted the right of individual petition to citizens to take their cases to Strasbourg.

Even if there were to be a significant increase in the number of these cases, does that not make it all the more important that there should be full and proper parliamentary scrutiny of any changes to the law? As the Home Secretary knows, I am a lawyer and I have a high respect for lawyers and judges, as does my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for North-East Bedfordshire (Sir N. Lyell), who is sitting beside me. However, we are not to be ruled by judges, and the courts are not the right place for making laws. The people are not represented in the courts. The judge has to decide the issues brought to him by individual litigants. The duty of the lawyers

representing their clients is not to the public at large, and it is not even to the programme of a party tested before the electorate, but to the aim of winning that particular case to protect the immediate interests of that individual litigant.

The cases to be expected are not all that many, but the issues are seldom trivial. Perhaps the Minister or the Home Secretary will tell us whether triviality is one of the grounds for deciding that the reasons are compelling. Most of the cases involve great issues of real difficulty. Let me illustrate that by reference to the three cases that we all know to be outstanding and requiring legislative change at the present time. I correct myself, because only two cases are now outstanding, as Chahal no longer applies following the immigration legislation that was passed just before the recess.

My right hon. and learned Friend the Member for North–East Bedfordshire has tabled a parliamentary question to the Home Secretary to ask him how many cases he knows of at the moment, but we know of two: Bowman and the recent case about the rights of parents to chastise or not to chastise their children. Both those cases involve complex issues about the liberty of the subject and the security of the state. Are they to be regarded as compelling reasons? I ask that question forensically, as our probing amendment suggests that national security and public health may be compelling reasons for a fast-track procedure, but I emphasise that this is merely a probing amendment. When we have debated it, I intend, with the leave of the House, to withdraw it, for the very consideration of those issues shows how inappropriate it would be in many cases.

Is Parliament not to have a full opportunity to discuss the nature of the necessary court procedures? Is it not to have a full opportunity to discuss, amend and test the Government's proposals in relation to national security, or is the whole thing to be rammed through in a simple three-hour debate and one vote at the behest of the Government of the day? I have observed the number of people in the Chamber this evening, and in the Committee during our debates in June. I do not expect all Members of Parliament to be present for every debate, but it is instructive that all parties are pretty thinly represented this evening. Matters on which we are deciding now and which will be dealt with by remedial orders at the behest of Ministers deserve greater attention, and I fear that they will not get the House's attention in the three-hour debates that clause 10 foreshadows.

The case raised by Bowman is illustrative. We were disappointed, frankly, that the present Attorney-General, for whatever reason, did not go to Strasbourg to argue the case himself. He is an elected Member of Parliament and understands, as probably nobody else in that court building does, the care with which our electoral law has been framed. Now, if we are not careful, a coach and horses is to be driven through that system.

My right hon. and learned Friend touched earlier on the case involving the Society for the Protection of Unborn Children and Mrs. Phylis Bowman. They oppose, as is their democratic right, our present abortion laws, and delivered 25,000 leaflets to every household in the constituency of the hon. Member for Halifax (Mrs. Mahon) personally attacking her for her pro-abortion views on the subject, which differed strongly from their own.

It was the personal attack on the hon. Lady that fell foul of our election law. The society was perfectly entitled to deliver leaflets expressing its views on the issue, and inviting each voter to take that issue heavily into account in deciding how to vote. What happened, however—and what will happen if others are permitted to do likewise—was that our system of a balance of arms, or equality of spending, which governs most people's view of what is a fair system, was deeply undercut. As I have said, we do not know the Government's view. Perhaps they propose to consult—but will they say that, whatever their own conclusion, this is a suitable case to ram through via the fast-track procedure and a debate lasting a mere three hours?

6.30 pm

Then there is the question of the extent to which parents may or may not punish their children. Our present law permits what is described as reasonable chastisement. In one case, a British jury held that the caning administered was not unreasonable. It must be said—with respect to the court—that that may have been a surprising decision. In any event, in recent years the court has on the whole been careful to give a proper margin of appreciation, as the phrase goes—to give proper discretion—to individual member states on domestic matters such as this.

Now the British Government must decide what to do about a delicate and difficult issue, which should be subject to full debate, with a proper opportunity for amendment and reflection on the part of both Houses. It is not suitable for such a measure to be pushed through by means of an unamendable order after a three-hour debate. I am sure that the Minister will accept that, even if he accepts nothing else that is said by the Opposition. Our first request to the Government, and to the Home Secretary, is simply for them to drop clause 10 and to accept our amendment, which would remove it and schedule 2.

The Home Secretary does not need these powers. He has shown us no "compelling reasons" why he should have them, either in terms of business management or in terms of advantage to the citizen—although I suspect that business management may underlie the Government's proposals.

Schedule 2 also demonstrates the Government's growing disregard of Parliament. First, there is its Henry VIII quality. Paragraph 1(1) states:

"A remedial order may . . . contain such incidental, supplemental, consequential or transitional provision as the person making it considers appropriate".

Paragraph 1(2) states that those powers include

"power to amend or repeal primary legislation"—

including both primary and subordinate legislation—

"other than that which contains the incompatible provision".

Consequential or transitional provisions might be reasonable, but how do the Government propose to justify incidental and supplemental provisions?

What is more, the whole procedure becomes increasingly unparliamentary. To allow for the normal and proper requirements of primary legislation, the schedule provides for draft orders to be laid and for representations to be summarised. As I said in Committee, the power to edit is a power that editors are loth to give up. The power

[Mr. Garnier]

to summarise is a power that sub-editors are loth to give up. I am afraid that, when the power to summarise representations is given to the relevant Minister, my alarm bells start ringing in clarion.

Changes as a result of representations are to be explained, but what is the excuse for going outside normal parliamentary procedures? Not only do our normal procedures hold the Government to account; they are faster and more flexible than the procedures that are being proposed. The aim is plainly to bypass Parliament and enhance the power of the Executive—and all this is in the name of modernisation.

During our last debate, I crudely commented that clause 10 constituted not so much a Henry VIII clause as a Henry XVI clause. Despite the crudity of my analogy, I do not resile from it. Our request is this: we ask the Government to drop both clause 10 and schedule 2. They will be perfectly able to proceed with primary legislation when faced with a declaration of incompatibility.

We all await with interest the Government's answers to our questions. What are these "compelling reasons" for overriding the rights of the people in Parliament? Where and how will the fast-track procedure benefit the citizen? Is the truth that behind this unjustified measure lies not the good sense of the Home Secretary, but the requirements of his Whips—the business managers—the jackboot of the new Government enforcer and the disregard of Parliament for which the Prime Minister's reputation is increasing daily?

The clause, and the schedule, will return to haunt this Government and this Prime Minister. They will —I trust— be one of the factors that will wipe the smile from the Prime Minister's face in the coming weeks and months. Clause 10 is a dangerous clause, and schedule 2 is a dangerous schedule. I invite the House to agree with us that the Government ought to consider the issue rather more maturely.

Mr. Mike O'Brien: I suspect that the Prime Minister's smile will be reinforced when the Bill is passed, and we ensure that human rights are enhanced and ordinary citizens are given access to their rights. That is what the Bill is really about.

The hon. and learned Member for Harborough (Mr. Garnier) commented on the number of hon. Members present. I, too, regret the lack of attenders, but I noted earlier that the number of those present was roughly proportionate to party membership in the House, although it occurred to me that our proposals did not seem to have caused a large number of Opposition Members to rush into the Chamber and express their outrage. Perhaps that is because we cantered through many of the arguments in Committee—although I noted then that not many hon. Members were expressing such outrage.

Mr. Garnier: I am not going to express outrage. I simply wish to remind the Minister gently that mine was not a party political point but a parliamentary point—a House of Commons point. The fact that I was able to make it, although my party is largely unrepresented this evening, reinforces my good will.

Mr. O'Brien: In a sense, I accept that good will. I agree that it would have been better for far more hon. Members to attend our debates, given the importance of the subject. Mine is a different point, however. My point is that, if Opposition Members had been enormously concerned—if they had felt that our proposals matched the hyperbole that the hon. and learned Gentleman employed at the beginning of his speech—I suspect that far more of them would have been present, complaining about what the Government are doing. That has not happened, because the Government have proceeded thoughtfully and constructively throughout consideration of the Bill, in an attempt to ensure that we take on board the points made by Opposition Members—as well as our hon. Friends—and construct a lasting provision that will genuinely enhance human rights in this country.

Let me deal with the details. Amendments Nos. 40 and 41 would add two new subsections to clause 10. At present, clause 10(2) provides that, if a Minister of the Crown considers that there are compelling reasons for proceeding under clause 10, he may by order make such amendments to the legislation as he considers necessary to remove the incompatibility. Amendment No. 40 would limit "compelling reasons" to cases in which a failure to proceed would be likely to jeopardise national security, public health or the liberty of the individual. Amendment No. 41 would require the Secretary of State—before or at the same time as laying before Parliament a remedial order or draft remedial order—to lay before Parliament a written statement of those reasons.

The requirement for compelling reasons in clause 10(2) is itself a response to concern expressed here and in another place about the remedial order provisions. It is there to make it absolutely clear that a remedial order is not a routine response in preference to fresh primary legislation. We would not want to go further, as in amendment No. 40, and limit "compelling reasons" to the three categories mentioned. There may be other circumstances that constitute compelling reasons sufficient to justify a remedial order: for example, a decision of the higher courts in relation to basic provisions of criminal procedure affecting the way in which, perhaps, all criminal cases must be handled.

An example is a provision that might invalidate a crucial part of the codes of practice under the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984, or provisions relating to the detention of suspects. Therefore, there are a number of issues where we would want to proceed with care. We also might need to respond very quickly simply to avoid the criminal justice system in such cases either collapsing or not being able to deliver justice and proper convictions.

"Compelling" is a strong word. We see no need to define it by reference to particular categories. In both the outstanding cases that the hon. and learned Member for Harborough has put to me, our view is likely to be that those would not create the compelling reasons that would justify a remedial order. In any event, on those issues—electoral law and chastising children—everyone would expect primary legislation rather than a remedial order. I hope that that gives some reassurance.

I noted that the hon. and learned Member for Harborough said that this is, in a sense, a probing amendment. He has asked me some clear questions about how we would perceive those two cases and I hope that those are clear answers. We do not expect that those will be the sort of issues in which remedial orders would be likely.

On amendment No. 41, if Conservative Members look at schedule 2, they will find that a document must be laid before Parliament containing certain information. It must explain the incompatibility that the remedial order or draft remedial order seeks to remove, and it must state the reasons for proceeding under clause 10 and for making an order in the terms in which it is made.

Therefore, the document is bound to explain why the Government believe that there are compelling reasons for making a remedial order and what those are. The document must be laid before Parliament and will be available for the debate in each House on the motion for affirmative resolution, which will be necessary before a draft remedial order can be made, or in order for an urgent remedial order to continue in existence, so amendment No. 41 is unnecessary.

The approach in amendments Nos. 38 and 39 is more extreme. They would simply remove clause 10 and schedule 2, so that there would be no procedure at all for amending legislation by order to remove an incompatibility with the convention rights. That raises the principle whether it is right, even in tightly drawn circumstances, to amend primary legislation by order.

It would be open to the Government to take no action in response to a declaration of incompatibility—that issue has already been rehearsed during this afternoon's debates—but, where a declaration is made, a Government who are committed to promoting human rights, as we are, will want to do something about the law in question. It is possible for primary legislation to be introduced and passed quickly, but the pressures on the timetable can make it very difficult to find a slot.

The power to make a remedial order is there for cases where there is a very good reason to amend the law following a declaration of incompatibility or a finding by the Strasbourg court, but no suitable legislative vehicle is available. Where a remedial order is made or proposed, we accepted that the procedures for parliamentary scrutiny needed to be strengthened. That is why the requirement to provide a document containing all the relevant information and a statement providing a summary of any representations on an order or draft order was added to schedule 2 in Committee.

We think that we have the balance right here. Clause 10 and schedule 2 enable Parliament to fulfil its responsibilities and ensure that onerous powers are not given to the Government. Our proposals safeguard parliamentary procedures and sovereignty, ensure proper supervision of our laws and ensure that we can begin to get the ability both to enforce human rights law and to create a human rights culture. They also ensure that we can do it in the context of not having to worry that, if something is decided by the Strasbourg court or by our courts that creates an incompatibility, we do not have a mechanism to deal with it in the quick and efficient way that may be necessary.

Sir Nicholas Lyell: I am grateful to the Minister for what he has said, and, to some extent, I think that he has sought to meet the criticisms that we have made. The only pity is that the logical outcome of his argument is that he should accept our demand that clause 10 and schedule 2 be dropped from the Bill.

I have done my best to listen very carefully—I notice the Minister frowning at those strong words—but I want to focus on the portion of his speech where he sought to describe the sort of case where normal parliamentary procedure would be ridden over and where we would go to the remedial order procedure.

The thing about the remedial order procedure—this is the frightening thing and why it is worrying that the Chamber is not fuller—is that it creates a parallel system to Parliament that does not fully engage Parliament. Schedule 2 sets up a system whereby the Government put out their ideas, consult for 60 days, come to Parliament, say what they are going to do as a result of their consultation, and then ram their provisions straight through Parliament.

6.45 pm

If we are going to have that extra parliamentary procedure, which to some extent mirrors our normal parliamentary procedures, why do we not stick with the parliamentary procedures themselves? That has not been properly explained by the Minister or the Home Secretary. This is simply put forward as some sort of reason for hastening things on. It is not good enough.

If the Government are going to wait for 60 days while they consult, the immediate urgency is removed. If in rare cases—I think that it is generally agreed that these cases would be rare—they have to use this fast-track procedure, they need to get on quickly. They are not going to be able to get on much more quickly than if they come to the House.

I have been in the House for nearly 20 years. Time and again, the Opposition have accepted sensible remedial legislation fairly rapidly by consensus. It is rare that sensible and uncontroversial amendments to the law—as a result, for example, of a respected ruling by an international body such as the European Court of Justice in Strasbourg—are made the opportunity for parliamentary hay-making and obstruction. Therefore, to create a new and parallel system that is far less effective than the proper systems of Parliament is wrong in principle.

The Minister sought to find an example where this rapid procedure is needed. I may have missed something that he said, and I hope that he will remind me if I have, but the only example that I thought I heard him mention was the need to amend codes of practice under PACE. Did the Minister mention another example?

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The other example was some basis on which suspects may be held.

Sir Nicholas Lyell: Both those examples fall by the wayside, for this reason. As I understand it, and I do not have the legislation at my fingertips, the amendment of codes of practice under PACE can be done by statutory instrument in any event, so that is not a good example to bring forward in answer to the criticism and our suggestions that clause 10 and schedule 2 be removed from the Bill. It is not an answer.

I can see that, if there were some serious criticism of our procedures in relation to the liberty of an individual, there is a need to move with speed, but the answer that the Minister has given in this debate sits ill with the answers that the Home Secretary was giving in our earlier debate about the need for Government, or a public authority, to have an appeal to Strasbourg.

There, I was seeking to set a tight timetable of about 60 days for Government, in which Government, having been criticised and condemned on the ground that our law is

[Sir Nicholas Lyell]

incompatible by our own courts—by the Judicial Committee of the House of Lords—should say whether they accepted the criticism and what they proposed to do about it. I suggested that, if the Government did not accept the ruling of incompatibility, they should say so, so that the citizen concerned could take the case to Strasbourg, which would, in any event, undoubtedly take at least another year to achieve. Nevertheless, the need for speed is offered as a reason for justifying an alleged fast-track procedure.

I think that Ministers now accept in principle the Opposition's criticisms of the proposed procedure, although they did not accept them before. The Under-Secretary has rightly said—I was grateful to hear it—that there has to be a very good and compelling reason indeed for the Government, or any future Government, to attempt to use the fast-track procedure. Such occasions will therefore be rare and deal only with exceptional circumstances. The procedure will not be used regularly or apply to codes of practice—which, regardless, can be amended by statutory instrument. If there is a very good and powerful reason, affecting the liberty of the subject, I do not foresee Conservative Members, other Opposition Members or the Labour Members, as and when they come to be in opposition, standing in the way of such rapid amendment.

I do not believe that the Government have made their case for the fast-track procedure. However, I give them credit for backtracking about as far as they reasonably can, having already set out on this course. None the less, the course is wrong. The Opposition must criticise it as wrong, and make it perfectly clear that such a provision should not be enacted.

I am sorry to have to pitch in that criticism with our other criticisms of the Government trying to ride roughshod over Parliament. I hope that, by so doing, I will not be accused of hyperbole—although I may get the occasional rise of an eyebrow from a Labour Member. However, the Government are attempting to ride roughshod over Parliament. That is being demonstrated by the Jenkins commission, which is rigged in both its composition and its terms of reference. *[Interruption.]* Yes, it is.

I see the Secretary of State for Scotland spitting and saying "rigged?" The fact is that the Jenkins commission was given terms of reference to examine only one side of a very important picture. The three people on the commission, highly distinguished though they are, were all picked and chosen because of their known views on the subject. The Secretary of State for Scotland may wriggle and wave his hand and seek to rise to the occasion—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Lord): Order. We are not debating the Jenkins commission.

Sir Nicholas Lyell: You are quite right, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I was making the point—I am entitled to make this point—that the fast-track procedure is an attempt to ride over the rights of the citizen to be represented in the proper making of legislation by their representatives in Parliament. The fast-track procedure is of a piece with other constitutional changes proposed by the Government—I have mentioned Jenkins, and I mention proposals to abolish the rights of hereditary peers in the House of Lords and to replace them simply by nominated Members.

There is inadequate respect for Parliament, which, sadly, is shown also in this Bill. I put it down to the good sense of the Home Secretary—I am certainly prepared to concede this—that the proposal has now been heavily watered down, as we recommend. However, even something that is watered down can still be wrong in principle. We must therefore oppose the proposal. If Ministers will not accept this group of amendments, we must ask the House to divide on it.

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 110, Noes 362.

Division No. 364] **[6.53 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Body, Sir Richard
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Brady, Graham
Brazier, Julian
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Butterfill, John
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clark, Rt Hon Alan *(Kensington)*
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rayleigh)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cran, James
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham)*
Duncan, Alan
Evans, Nigel
Fabricant, Michael
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Fox, Dr Liam
Gale, Roger
Garnier, Edward
Gibb, Nick
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gray, James
Green, Damian
Greenway, John
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archie
Hawkins, Nick
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Horam, John
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson Smith, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lansley, Andrew
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, Oliver
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
Madel, Sir David
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Mates, Michael
Maude, Rt Hon Francis
May, Mrs Theresa
Nicholls, Patrick
Norman, Archie
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Prior, David
Randall, John
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Faversham)*
Ruffley, David
St Aubyn, Nick
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Richard
Simpson, Keith *(Mid-Norfolk)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spring, Richard
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Swayne, Desmond
Syms, Robert
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Tredinnick, David
Tyrie, Andrew
Waller, Robert
Wardle, Charles
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Woodward, Shaun
Yeo, Tim

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Nigel Waterson and Mr. Stephen Day.

NOES

Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Alexander, Douglas
Allan, Richard
Allen, Graham
Armstrong, Ms Hilary
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Ashton, Joe
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Baker, Norman
Ballard, Jackie
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, Rt Hon Mrs Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bell, Martin *(Tatton)*
Bell, Stuart *(Middlesbrough)*
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, Andrew F
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Borrow, David
Bradley, Keith *(Withington)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brake, Tom
Brand, Dr Peter
Breed, Colin
Brinton, Mrs Helen
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Butler, Mrs Christine
Byers, Rt Hon Stephen
Cable, Dr Vincent
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, Dale
Canavan, Dennis
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Chaytor, David
Chidgey, David
Chisholm, Malcolm
Church, Ms Judith
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Rt Hon Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clarke, Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Iain
Colman, Tony
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cooper, Yvette
Corbett, Robin
Corston, Ms Jean
Cotter, Brian
Cousins, Jim
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Curtis-Thomas, Mrs Claire
Dalyell, Tam
Darvill, Keith
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, John
Dewar, Rt Hon Donald
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim
Donohoe, Brian H
Dowd, Jim
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Etherington, Bill
Field, Rt Hon Frank
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foster, Michael J *(Worcester)*
Fyfe, Maria
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
George, Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Mrs Linda
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mrs Eileen
Gorrie, Donald
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Grogan, John
Gunnell, John
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Harris, Dr Evan
Harvey, Nick
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Healey, John
Heath, David *(Somerton & Frome)*
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Hill, Keith
Hoey, Kate
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Ms Beverley *(Stretford)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Jackson, Ms Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Mrs Fiona *(Newark)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Ms Jenny *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Jones, Dr Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jowell, Ms Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Keetch, Paul
Kelly, Ms Ruth
Kemp, Fraser
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross Skye)*
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
Killoyle, Peter
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Kingham, Ms Tess
Kirkwood, Archy
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lawrence, Ms Jackie
Laxton, Bob
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Linton, Martin
Livingstone, Ken
Lock, David
Love, Andrew
McAllion, John
McCabe, Steve
McCafferty, Ms Chris
McDonagh, Siobhain
McDonnell, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKenna, Mrs Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
Maclennan, Rt Hon Robert
McNulty, Tony
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Meale, Alan
Merron, Gillian
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheff'ld Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll & Bute)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moore, Michael
Moran, Ms Margaret
Morgan, Alasdair *(Galloway)*
Morgan, Ms Julie *(Cardiff N)*
Morgan, Rhodri *(Cardiff W)*
Morris, Ms Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Murphy, Paul *(Torfaen)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
Norris, Dan
Oaten, Mark
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Hara, Eddie
Öpik, Lembit
Organ, Mrs Diana
Osborne, Ms Sandra
Pearson, Ian
Pendry, Tom
Perham, Ms Linda
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Plaskitt, James
Pope, Greg
Pound, Stephen
Powell, Sir Raymond
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd
Reed, Andrew *(Loughborough)*
Reid, Rt Hon Dr John *(Hamilton N)*
Rendel, David
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Cov'try NW)*
Rogers, Allan
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Roy, Frank
Ruddock, Ms Joan
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Ms Joan
Salter, Martin
Sanders, Adrian
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shipley, Ms Debra
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*

Smith, Miss Geraldine *(Morecambe & Lunesdale)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'dfns)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Ms Helen
Spellar, John
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Straw, Rt Hon Jack
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Stunell, Andrew
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Swinney, John
Taylor, Rt Hon Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverhton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tyler, Paul
Vaz, Keith
Vis, Dr Rudi
Wallace, James
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watts, David
Webb, Steve
Welsh, Andrew
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Alan W *(E Carmarthen)*
Willis, Phil
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wise, Audrey
Wood, Mike
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wray, James
Wright, Dr Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. David Hanson and
Mr. Kevin Hughes.

Question accordingly negatived.

Amendment made: No. 13, in page 7, line 25, leave out lines 25 and 26.—*[Mr. Mike O'Brien.]*

Clause 13

FREEDOM OF THOUGHT, CONSCIENCE AND RELIGION

Mr. Clappison: I beg to move amendment No. 4, in page 8, line 24, leave out from 'it' to end of line and insert

'shall not make any determination which infringes, or which could lead to the infringement of, that right.'.

We deal once again with the important subject of freedom of thought, conscience and religion. We make no apology for returning to it. It must be dealt with satisfactorily, and we do not believe that matters can be left as they stand. Having said that, we recognise that the Home Secretary has made sincere attempts to overcome the problems created for the Churches and other religious organisations by the incorporation of the European convention. We understand that he has listened to the views of Church leaders and to those of the leaders of other faiths.

Amendment No. 4 would strengthen the protection that the Bill currently offers. It would extend protection of the freedoms to which I adverted, especially the freedom of religion. It was the widely held concern about religious freedom which led to the Lords amending the Bill when it began its progress through the other place. The Lords were anxious to afford a defence to Churches and other religious organisations.

I refer to "Churches and religious organisations", as concerns about religious freedom cut across the boundaries of religious faith. Not only Christian Churches, but other great faiths and religious organisations are deeply interested in these matters. Churches, religious organisations and faiths all come within the ambit of the Bill, because, for some purposes, they may be considered to be public authorities.

Turning once again to the definition of public authorities which is very much at the heart of our concern, it is not correct to assert—as has been asserted in some quarters—that Churches and religious organisations will come within the ambit of the Bill only when they are standing in the place of the state—for example, when they are providing education in Church schools. Although they will be deemed to be public authorities when they are standing in the place of the state, there may be other circumstances in which they will be public authorities for the purpose of the Bill.

Like any other person or body, Churches, religious organisations and faiths and the charities associated with them will be public authorities within the terms of the Bill when they carry out functions of a public nature. Ultimately, the courts will determine when they are or are not carrying out functions of a public nature. It follows that, when Churches and religious organisations are deemed to be public authorities, they will risk legal challenge from any person who asserts that they have breached a convention right.

It has come about in a strange way that a Bill which has been put forward as upholding human rights and promoting a human rights culture contains the seeds of a threat to the freedom of religious organisations and Churches to follow their own beliefs and order their own affairs—something that they cherish. It applies across the board.

The Secretary of State for Scotland is on the Government Front Bench. He will be concerned about the position of the Church of Scotland, and he may well wish to say more about that this evening.

The Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr. Donald Dewar) *indicated assent.*

Mr. Clappison: I certainly bow in deference to the Secretary of State for Scotland in his knowledge of the Church of Scotland. I enjoyed the resumé of its history that he imparted to the House when we last discussed the Bill, particularly when he referred to the time during the late 19th century when one third of the ministers departed their livings and took their elders out into the wilderness—a feeling that we understand. I also enjoyed the next part of his speech when he said that that was followed by a period in which there was a great upsurge of enthusiasm among the congregations, and a great growth in the membership of the Church of Scotland.

Like all the other Churches in the United Kingdom, the Church of Scotland comes within the ambit of the European convention and is under threat in the way in which I have described. How great is that threat? We simply do not know. To be fair, in the past, the European Court of Human Rights has often been conservative in that respect, but there is no guarantee for the future and for what will follow incorporation of the European convention.

People who are well placed to know, such as Lord Alton and the Bishop of Ripon, are afraid of groups who, they believe, will be only too happy to take religious

organisations to court to prove a point. Even if, ultimately, they are not successful, vexatious litigants can be a drain on those against whom they bring litigation. They could be a drain on the Churches in terms of cost and effort. The Home Secretary conceded that members of the congregations and Churches do not want to see their resources going into defending legal actions.

Mr. Straw: I did concede that point when the matter was debated in the House in May, and it was partly for that reason, although it was a subsidiary reason, that I thought it extremely important to introduce amendments to the Bill which sought to address the substantive concerns of the Churches and to block their being at risk from vexatious litigants.

7.15 pm

Mr. Clappison: I am grateful to the Home Secretary for that intervention. As I said earlier, I accept that he has been entirely sincere and done his best in difficult circumstances to give the Churches protection. I now turn to why the amendments that replace those made in another place are inadequate and do not fulfil the objective that the Home Secretary has just described of giving the Churches protection.

The problem is that the protection in the Bill is simply not strong enough; it is probably the weakest protection that the Government could have chosen. The Home Secretary's amendments simply require a court to pay particular regard to the importance of rights under article 9—freedom of thought, conscience and religion. A court may well consider that it has paid particular regard to the importance of those freedoms under article 9 and then find that, none the less, certain religious organisations are in breach of the convention. The Home Secretary may say that the provision affords religious organisations a defence, but it will not stop any of the challenges that they fear. He cannot reasonably assert that it amounts to a defence. It is merely a request or a requirement that a court pay particular regard to those freedoms. In itself, it does not amount to a defence.

Amendment No. 4 would be an improvement, as it would afford such a defence. Under the terms of the amendment, a court cannot make any determination that infringes the freedom of religion or any other article 9 rights. It is a stronger and altogether more appropriate form of protection than that which is presently in the Bill. Even at this late stage, we invite the Home Secretary to give it serious consideration and to look carefully at what we believe is the stronger protection that it offers our Churches, faiths and religious organisations.

If the Home Secretary is not prepared to accept the amendment, will he give us a careful explanation of his reasons, as we think that it is appropriate and we cannot see any reason why the Government should not give Churches and religious organisations stronger protection? There are precedents elsewhere in Europe for the freedom of religion to be given such protection, so we see no reason why similar circumstances could not prevail here. Religious freedom is one of our most cherished causes and it needs and deserves stronger protection from the possible threat that may arise under the incorporation of the European convention than is presently provided in the Bill.

Mr. Straw: I am grateful to the hon. Member for Hertsmere (Mr. Clappison) for the manner in which he made his speech. I shall seek to reply in a like manner and to explain as carefully as I can why, with the best will in the world, we cannot accept the amendment.

The matter was debated at considerable length on 20 May, when I spoke for almost 40 minutes. Let me reassure the Whips that I do not intend to do so this evening. However, I hope that the hon. Gentleman will take as read some of the arguments that I made on that occasion.

We never had the least intention of bringing forward a Bill that threatened religious freedom. I entirely subscribe to the sentiments that the hon. Member for Hertsmere expressed a moment ago. We did not believe that the Bill as originally drafted would have threatened religious freedom. However, concerns were expressed in the other place and here on the subject.

Contrary to the admonition of the right hon. and learned Member for North–East Bedfordshire (Sir N. Lyell) that the Government are showing contempt for Parliament, I hope that hon. Members will acknowledge that none of us on the Treasury Bench has come to the debates with a "not invented here" attitude towards amendments from the Opposition or from the other place. I live in hope that there may be a broad consensus behind the Bill, so I thought it very important not to insist that the Bill as originally drafted represented the last word and the best judgment, but to take action on any serious concerns raised about the drafting. We did that for the Churches.

For reasons that I explained at considerable length, we were not able to accept the amendments passed in the other place earlier in the year. We came forward with a new clause, which now stands as clause 13 on page 8. It says:

> "If a court's determination of any question arising under this Act might affect the exercise by a religious organisation (itself or its members collectively) of the Convention right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion, it must have particular regard to the importance of that right."

The hon. Member for Hertsmere made a point about the relative strength of the clause. Similarly worded clauses often say that a court "may" have regard to a particular factor. We have gone as far as we can to make the provision as strong as possible, saying not that the court may have regard, but that

> "it must have particular regard to the importance of that right."

We believe that that is a strong provision.

The amendment would replace those words with an alternative provision that would mean that, when such an issue arose, the court would not be able to make a determination that might infringe the article 9 right. As the hon. Gentleman has explained, the intention of the amendment is to protect the article 9 rights of religious organisations, even if other parties to the proceedings are asserting different and competing convention rights, such as the right to respect for private and family life under article 8 or the right to freedom of expression under article 10.

The hon. Gentleman has asked me to explain why we are not willing to accept the amendment. If it had the effect that I have described—we believe that it would, because of how the words are used—it would be contrary to the convention.

Mr. Clappison: Before the Home Secretary comes to the next stage of his argument, does he accept that, under

[Mr. Clappison]

the Bill, it will be possible for a Church or religious organisation to be found in breach of the convention, but that the amendment would prevent that by giving them a guaranteed defence?

Mr. Straw: The answer is yes. The hon. Gentleman is seeking to place the Churches beyond the convention, so that, even if they were exercising the functions of a public authority and were plainly in breach of the convention, they could not be found to be in breach. If we accepted the amendment, the Act would be in breach of the convention. Instead of matters being resolved here, they would go off to Strasbourg, and the Court would eventually declare that part of the Act in breach of the convention. I understand the purpose behind the amendment, but it would be self-defeating.

The right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion guaranteed by article 9.1 is not absolute. It is important to make that clear. Under article 9.2, it may be subject to such limitations as are prescribed by law and are necessary in a democratic society, in the interests of various factors, including the protection of rights and freedoms of others. In that respect, article 9 is similar to articles 8, 10 and 11. The court must weigh the competing interests and come to a decision. It is not open to a court to give automatic priority in all cases to one convention right over another.

Having said that, I want to reassure the Opposition on two points. The hon. Gentleman said that a Church will act as a public authority not just when standing in place of the state, but when it carries out functions of a public nature. That is not correct. To the extent that the second part of what he said was accurate, he was simply tautologically making the same point as the first. Churches will be subject to the Act only when standing in the stead of the state and exercising functions of a public nature. I explained that at considerable length at column 1015 of the *Official Report* of 20 May. I should also like to reassure the hon. Gentleman on Strasbourg jurisprudence.

Mr. Clappison: I am grateful to the Home Secretary for generously giving way for a second time. I appreciate that he is trying to give reassurance, but there is nothing in the Bill to say that Churches are public authorities only when they are standing in the place of the state. They are subject to the same definition in clause 6 as everybody else. They are public authorities when they are carrying out functions of a public nature. The Bill says nothing about Churches being public authorities only when they are standing in the place of the state. Whenever they carry out functions of a public nature, they will be public authorities.

Mr. Straw: The convention exists to protect individuals from abuse by the state or by people standing in the stead of the state. That is the point of the convention. It is not there to deal with the abuse of rights by bodies acting in a private capacity. That is spelt out in the relevant clause. For the avoidance of doubt, I shall repeat what I said on 20 May about how we think that the Bill will operate in relation to Churches:

"Much of what the Churches do is, in the legal context and in the context of the European convention on human rights, essentially private in nature . . . For example, the regulation of divine worship, the administration of the sacrament, admission to Church membership or to the priesthood and decisions of parochial church councils about the running of the parish church are, in our judgment, all private matters.

In such matters, Churches will not be public authorities; the requirement to comply with convention rights will not bite on them. We do not believe that, for example, the Church of England, the Church of Scotland or the Roman Catholic Church, as bodies, would be public authorities under the Bill. I was asked to clarify that by many people, not least the Cardinal Archbishop.

On the occasions when Churches stand in place of the state, convention rights are relevant to what they do. The two most obvious examples relate to marriages and to the provision of education in Church schools."—[*Official Report*, 20 May 1998; Vol. 312, c. 1015.]

Having dealt with that, I should like to reassure the hon. Gentleman on his second point. There is good Strasbourg case law to suggest that, in practice, article 9 rights are afforded considerable protection from attack. I should like to quote from page 359 of the text book "Law of the European Convention on Human Rights" by Harris, O'Boyle and Warbrick:

"Where there is a conflict between protected rights, the judgment of the Court in Otto-Preminger-Institut *v.* Austria speaks in favour of the strong regard to be had for religious beliefs (and therefore, Article 9 rights) in deciding priority between the competing rights. In that case, the state had interfered with the applicants' Article 10 right to freedom of expression by seizing and ordering forfeit a film found likely to offend the religious feelings of the Catholics who constituted the large majority of people in the region where the applicant proposed to show it. The Court upheld the interferences with the applicant's right as being necessary for the protection of 'the [religious] rights and freedoms of others.' In confirming that the interference had a legitimate aim, the Court said: '. . . the manner in which religious beliefs and doctrines are opposed or denied is a matter which may engage the responsibility of the state, notably its responsibility to ensure the peaceful enjoyment of the right guaranteed under Article 9 to the holders of those beliefs and doctrines'".

The passage went on:

"—in the context of religious opinions and beliefs—may legitimately be included an obligation [on individuals] to avoid as far as possible expressions which are gratuitously offensive to others".

The authors conclude:

"This is a strong affirmation of the power and even the duty of states to protect manifestations of religious belief."

7.30 pm

The hon. Member for Hertsmere invited us to speculate on what might happen if the Court in Strasbourg or the Judicial Committee of the House of Lords had a rush of blood to the head and, say, became evangelical atheists. I do not think that that is going to happen. Who knows what would happen if courts of the land or the European Courts went mad? All sorts of things could happen.

On the whole, the best guide to the future—indeed, in many ways the only guide—is the past. The Court's record provides substantial reassurance. So should the history of Europe, which was written in blood until 1945. Much of that blood was spilt in the alleged cause of religious belief and religious conflict. Many of the states of Europe which now form the core of the European Union and the Council of Europe have had peacefully to accommodate conflict between Churches—between the Lutheran Church and the Catholic Church in Germany and the Catholic and other Protestant Churches in other states—just as we have in this country, and just as we at

long last are seeking to do in the north of Ireland. Against that background, our courts and the European Court in Strasbourg have been and will continue to be alive to the need to respect the exercise of religious freedom. They have clearly done so in the jurisprudence that has been laid down in Strasbourg.

The provisions of clause 13, which we introduced in May, require the Court to have particular regard to the importance of the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion. That is as far—honestly—as we think that we can go consistent with the convention. We believe that that has also been recognised by the Churches.

I do not argue with the hon. Member for Hertsmere for seeking to revisit the issue, although the debate on the subject in Committee on 20 May followed the most intense period of discussion that I have had with representatives of the Churches. I was not able to meet their every request, but I can give a flavour of their response by quoting, as I did in Committee, from a letter that I received from Cardinal Archbishop Basil Hume, which said:

"I have sought the best legal advice and my initial assessment is that the amendment in the form tabled by the Government"—

which now appears in the Bill as clause 13—

"may be the best that can be reasonably be achieved to reinforce the protection given by the Convention to the churches and other faiths under Article 9."

I was very grateful to the cardinal archbishop for saying that. I happen to believe that the legal advice that he received is accurate.

Since that debate—this should provide a further reassurance for the hon. Member for Hertsmere—we have received hardly any representations from religious organisations about the potential impact of the Bill on them. We received many beforehand. I understood them, took them on board and went as far as we could with them. It is interesting that, although they have since had five months fully to consider the matter, we have not received representations from them. If they thought that clause 13 was insufficient or capable of improvement, I am sure that they would have told us so.

In the light of that explanation, I hope that the House will accept the reasons why we cannot agree to the amendment and that Opposition Members will not press it to a vote.

Mr. James Wallace (Orkney and Shetland): Anyone who listened to the Home Secretary would accept that he has obviously given the matter considerable thought and has gone a long way to meet the many concerns expressed in Committee. He made the very telling point that there is a danger of going too far, thereby threatening the entire protection that is sought.

I shall briefly comment on matters regarding the Church of Scotland, to which the hon. Member for Hertsmere (Mr. Clappison) alluded when he moved the amendment. I welcome the fact that the Secretary of State for Scotland is present. He will know from the representations that he has seen that the matter has been the subject of considerable discussion between the Government and the Church of Scotland over recent months. Although I am not sure whether it is relevant, I declare an interest as an elder of the Church of Scotland.

As the Secretary of State for Scotland suggested in the history of the subject that he described in Committee, the Church of Scotland Act 1921 is constitutionally important. The Act was a settlement, agreed between Parliament and the Church of Scotland, that guaranteed the Church separate and independent jurisdiction in matters spiritual and paved the way for the union of the Church of Scotland and the Free Church in 1929. I would not want to detain the House, but it would be helpful if the Secretary of State confirmed that, when he wrote to the Moderator of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland on 13 May, he said:

"I hope it goes without saying that I, and the government, would not wish the Bill to be a vehicle for undermining the position of the churches. That is certainly not the government's intention. Nor do we believe that it will be the effect of the Bill".

Although I am sure that that sums up the Government's position, it would be helpful if the Secretary of State confirmed it in the context of the Church of Scotland. It is a matter of considerable importance and concern to the Church, which would certainly wish to be reassured that the Government are satisfied that the Bill is consistent with provisions of the 1921 Act and does not conflict with the Church's independent spiritual government and jurisdiction as recognised by that Act since 1921.

Mr. Dewar: I was touched that the hon. Member for Hertsmere (Mr. Clappison) remembered what I said on the previous occasion on which we debated this matter. Having a suspicious mind, however, I thought that he had read my remarks recently in order to pad out his own. Being a man of not infinite but occasional charity, I am prepared to take the more generous view of my own efforts on that occasion.

There is no doubt that this is a matter of importance. If I remember rightly, I said on 20 May that I was in a slightly awkward situation because I was being asked to deal with a wide range of points that were put to me on matters furth of the affairs of the Church of Scotland and felt at something of a disadvantage. I remember rather vaguely, for instance, some interesting exchanges about the employment policy of the Dutch Salvation Army occupying the attention of the Committee for some time.

On this occasion, I am not in the same difficulty, because the only contribution from outwith the respective Front Benches has been that of the hon. and learned Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Wallace), who has taken a very close interest in these matters and who I know has—I do not know whether this is the right way of putting it—a long connection with the Church of Scotland, which he declared a few minutes ago.

The issue requires close attention; it has been an anxious matter. As there have been for my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary, so there have been many discussions on the topic between myself, my Department and legal representatives in the form of the Lord Advocate and the procurator to the General Assembly. I pay tribute to the care with which the Church of Scotland has advanced its case. I do so in the knowledge that the clerk to the General Assembly is present. The discussion has been civilised, but the fact that it has a civilised face does not undermine or hide the fact that it was taken seriously by those on both sides of the argument.

I do not know whether many of my colleagues in the House have taken the trouble to look at the Church of Scotland Act 1921; perhaps it is unfair to expect them to have done so. As I have said before, that Act must be almost unique in terms of House of Commons

[Mr. Dewar]

draftsmanship, certainly in this century. It is a splendid piece of prose, full of resounding cadences. Beneath those cadences, however, it is an attempt to define and offer protection to some significant and important principles. My first message is that we take those principles seriously.

I am conscious of the fact that we are dealing with a United Kingdom Bill, and that the amendment is of general application. None the less, it is important that I take the opportunity to make a statement about the position of the Church of Scotland under the Bill, and especially about the relationship between the provisions of the Bill and the Church of Scotland Act.

As I have already explained, concerns have been expressed during the passage of the Bill, both in the other place and in our Committee debate in May, that it may intrude unacceptably on the Church of Scotland's independent jurisdiction in spiritual matters. That was recognised in the 1921 Act, and relates to all matters of doctrine, worship, government and discipline in the Church.

My colleagues and I discussed those concerns fully with the then moderator and his colleagues within the Church. What I say today is not new, and I shall not pretend that it is, but I hope that it will be a clear statement of the Government's policy and intentions.

I set out in Committee the historical background to the position of the Church of Scotland in our national life, and the events that led to the Church of Scotland Act 1921, which recognised the independent jurisdiction of the Church of Scotland in spiritual matters. We do not want to do anything to disturb that important settlement.

Of course, that separation does not exempt the Church institutions from the operation of the law in general. In my experience, that fact has been accepted in all the conversations about the legislation. The Church has always recognised that, if by mischance it did something that constituted a criminal offence, it would not be immune from prosecution simply because it asserted that it was operating in a purely spiritual matter.

In addition, as we all know, the Church operates in non-spiritual areas—when it provides much-valued social work services, for example, and when it acts as an employer. In such matters, it is subject to the law, as is any other body in the field; there is no dispute about that.

The civil courts in Scotland have held that they have jurisdiction to inquire whether a question before them falls within the definition of spiritual matters, but not to determine the spiritual matter itself. The Government do not intend to disturb that position.

The general effect of the Bill is to bring rights home, and to make existing convention rights enforceable against public authorities directly in the courts of this country. We are making it unlawful for public authorities to act in a way incompatible with the convention rights. We have no intention of interfering with the religious freedom of any Church, and I emphasise strongly the fact that the Bill does not do so. We are not introducing any new civil rights beyond those in the European convention on human rights, which individuals can already found upon in Strasbourg; indeed, they have been able to do so for many years.

In our view, the courts of the Church of Scotland are not courts for the purposes of the Bill. That is in line with the separation of Church and state embodied in the 1921 Act. The Church has suggested that the Church or its courts might, in some circumstances, be held to be public authorities in the terms of the Bill when acting in spiritual matters. However, in all our discussions with the Church, neither party has been able to come up with a specific example of how that possibility might arise. There has been no challenge in Strasbourg to the actions of the Church in the more than 40 years since we ratified the European convention. In addition, jurisprudence to date, both domestically and at Strasbourg, suggests that the civil courts are reluctant to become involved in the spiritual affairs of any Church. The Home Secretary advanced some important evidence to that effect a few minutes ago.

7.45 pm

Only last month, the 1921 Act was successfully invoked by the Church of Scotland in proceedings before an industrial tribunal. The role of the civil courts will be to determine whether the Church was acting as a public authority, and if so whether any convention right had been breached, and what is the minimum intervention necessary to redress that breach. That simply reflects what the court in Strasbourg has always done in relation to cases brought against the United Kingdom.

In implementing our policy of bringing rights home, we would expect no less; equally, we would expect no more. Requiring the Church to carry out its functions in a way that respects convention rights, and providing a remedy in the civil courts if that is not done, does not affect the Church's independent jurisdiction in spiritual matters under the 1921 Act.

We have already explained both here and in the other place why we have been unable to accept the various amendments proposed that would have exempted the Church of Scotland, when acting in spiritual matters, from the provisions of the Bill. Briefly, we have not been willing to concede a specific exemption for one Church; nor do we think that an exemption for Churches in general would be justified.

The Church of Scotland is the only religious body in the United Kingdom that benefits from a statute guaranteeing its independence in spiritual matters, but there are many different religious groups in our society, all of which feel passionately about the preservation of their independence.

It is not the intention of the Bill to force any religious group to do things that might be inconsistent with its principles and conscience. The amendment that we tabled in Committee applies to all Churches and faiths, and reassures them that the domestic courts will have particular regard to their rights to freedom of thought, conscience and religion under article IX. We could not treat the spiritual independence of the Church of Scotland any differently.

I hope that I have been able to make it clear that the Government do not think that the Bill will undermine the position of the Church of Scotland under the 1921 Act. It is certainly not our intention that that Act should be undermined. We do not therefore think it necessary to make an explicit reference in the Bill, beyond the amendment that we have already made to recognise the position of Churches generally.

I hope that I have also explained why it is neither necessary nor desirable to make the point explicit in the Bill. The Church sought reassurances from us following both its own extensive internal debate, and a motion passed at the general assembly in May. I emphasise the fact that, throughout all our discussions with the Church, it has unfailingly welcomed the Government's intentions behind the Bill and reaffirmed its commitment to convention rights.

I have said to the Church that, if in practice the provisions of the Bill produce any real difficulties in connection with the 1921 Act, we shall be prepared to consider the matter, but that we shall not alter the Bill as it stands to deal with a possibility that we believe to be no more than hypothetical.

I hope that those words are of some help in clarifying our intention and our position. As for the specific points made by the hon. and learned Member for Orkney and Shetland, I hope that what I have said reinforces, and states at rather greater length, what I wrote in the letter that he quoted.

Mr. Wallace: I thank the Secretary of State for that statement and the clarification that he has given, which I think will be widely held to be helpful.

Mr. Dewar: I am grateful to the hon. and learned Gentleman. I am looking now at the schedule to the 1921 Act, which says:

"This Church is in historical continuity with the Church of Scotland which was reformed in 1560, whose liberties were ratified in 1592, and for whose security provision was made in the Treaty of Union of 1707."

It would be somewhat brazen and presumptuous, even by my standards, if I were to put at risk such a fine pedigree so well established by custom and long usage. On those good intentions, I rest my case.

Mr. Clappison: This has been a worthwhile debate, in the sense that it has given us an opportunity to raise our concerns about religious freedom. Despite the words of the Home Secretary and the Secretary of State for Scotland, we remain unconvinced that the Bill as it stands sufficiently affords protection for religious freedom.

I appreciate that the Home Secretary was choosing his words with care and that he has made considerable effort in that regard. I am not so sure about the reference to evangelical atheists. I shall have to think about that later—possibly with the aid of a dictionary. We think that the amendment would have afforded stronger protection.

We accept that the Churches want to promote human rights, but I am sure that they share our anxieties that the Bill, as it stands, would have the unintended consequence of creating challenges and threats to religious freedom that do not exist at present. We are seeking not to take the Churches outside the Bill or the ambit of the human rights framework, but merely to provide Churches, religious organisations and faiths with a defence. We could have tried to take the Churches out of the Bill by tabling an amendment proposing that they were not to be public authorities for the purpose of the Bill. There are those in some Churches and faiths who would have preferred that course.

Churches and religious groups will be within the framework of the Bill. They could be public authorities, and they could rely upon the provisions of the Bill themselves to bring an action against another public authority which was in breach in some circumstances. The Churches, if regarded as public authorities, could have an action brought against them by another person or body, alleging that they were in breach. If the amendment were passed, the Churches—by relying on their freedom of thought, conscience or religion—would be afforded a defence. In the Bill as it stands, there is no such defence.

I heard what the Home Secretary said about Strasbourg, but it is interesting that, if the Churches were found to be in breach as public authorities in this country, they would have no right of appeal to Strasbourg as public authorities. I think that I made it clear in my opening remarks that Strasbourg's jurisprudence had been conservative in the past, but that is no guarantee for the future. The Secretary of State for Scotland's reference to the Dutch Salvation Army reminded me of the case brought against that organisation by a group under the auspices of human rights. The case was ultimately defended by the Dutch Salvation Army, but it was an expensive exercise.

Mr. Straw: The hon. Gentleman says that what I said was no guarantee for the future. Since we are talking about matters spiritual, I should say that there are no guarantees about the future that any of us can give, except that there will come a moment when we are no longer here. According to our point of view, we then may or may not be somewhere else. That is the only certainty there is about life—in the absolute sense. In the relative sense in which we must deal day by day, week by week and year by year, a considerable guarantee about the future conduct of the courts can be found in clause 2, which imports into English and Scots law the jurisprudence of the European Court of Human Rights, which gives a high emphasis to the protection of article 9 rights.

Mr. Clappison: That is so, but there may be cases that are not covered by that jurisprudence. Even so, in applying that jurisprudence, it may still be the case in some circumstances that the Churches or religious organisations could be found to be in breach. The Home Secretary cannot gainsay that, under the amendment, Churches relying upon an article 9 right could not be found to be in breach. No matter how we foresee the future, that is certainly a much more secure defence than the defence being provided by the Government—if, indeed, it is a defence at all.

We join the Home Secretary in expressing the hope that there will not be unintended consequences from the Bill in the shape of challenges to our Churches and great faiths, and we hope that they will not find themselves brought before the courts by litigants—perhaps the vexatious litigants which some have foreseen—at great expense to themselves. We hope that that will not occur.

We cannot express that hope with as much confidence as we would like. We cherish our religious freedoms, and we would have preferred to give them the superior defence afforded by the amendment—an altogether stronger defence. However, this has not been a contentious or partisan debate, and it is in the spirit of expressing that hope—although without much confidence—that I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Clause 19

STATEMENTS OF COMPATIBILITY

Mr. Clappison: I beg to move amendment No. 1, in page 11, line 33, after 'compatibility)', insert

'which statement must be accompanied by a report setting out any issues which the Minister considers to be relevant to the question of the compatibility of the Bill with the Convention's rights and giving the Minister's reasons for stating that the Bill is compatible'.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to discuss the following amendments: No. 2, in page 11, line 36, after 'Bill', insert

'which statement must be accompanied by a report setting out

(i) any issues which the Minister considers to be relevant to the question of the compatibility of the Bill with the Convention's rights;

(ii) the reasons why the Minister is unable to make a statement of compatibility; and

(iii) the reasons why the Government nevertheless wishes the House to proceed with the Bill notwithstanding the Minister's inability to make a statement of compatibility.'.

No. 3, in page 11, leave out lines 37 and 38 and insert—

'(2) A statement and report made under subsection (1)(a) must be in writing and be published in such manner as the Minister making it considers appropriate.

(3) A statement under subsection (1)(b) must be an oral statement given to both Houses of Parliament, and a report under subsection (1)(b) must be in writing and be published in such manner as the Minister making it considers appropriate.'.

Mr. Clappison: We now come to the question of statements of compatibility. As matters stand, a Minister must, before Second Reading of any Bill, make a statement to the effect that the provisions of the Bill are compatible with the European convention, or state that, although the Minister is unable to make that statement, the Government wish the House to proceed with the Bill. We will be interested to hear from the Government examples of when they think the latter might apply.

We believe that the proposal puts more emphasis on presentation than substance—something with which we are not unfamiliar under this Government. If Ministers are to pronounce in this way and make statements of compatibility, it would surely be more meaningful for them to give their reasons. We wonder just how many Ministers will state that they are unable to make a statement of compatibility before Second Reading. How many will come to the House and say, "This is a bit dodgy, but we want you to go ahead anyway"?

We suspect that Ministers will use the measure as a rubber stamp to present their Bills as complying with the European convention, irrespective of the reasons for doing so and without an informed debate on the subject. We think that it would say rather more if Ministers were prepared to give their reasons. We are not heartened by the attitude taken by the Government so far when they have had considered opinions given to them about some of their legislation.

The Minister will be aware that certain provisions in the Crime and Disorder Bill were subject to critical questioning by a group of distinguished academics as to whether those provisions would comply with the European convention on human rights. Since then, there has been a steady stream of legal and academic opinion about some of the measures that the Government have proposed and whether they comply with the Government's own incorporation of the European convention.

A few days ago, the chairman of the Bar, Heather Hallett QC, said that reforms in the pipeline from the Government could be challenged under the new Human Rights Bill, soon to reach the statute book. She said:

"It would be a dreadful irony if the very first challenge in the courts was to legislation passed in the same session by the same Parliament . . . If the reports of some of the proposals emanating from the Home Office are accurate, that is exactly what will happen."

The Government will legislate with one hand, but will be challenged under that very legislation on the other. That is not a desirable state of affairs, and a rubber-stamp statement of compatibility—as appears in the Bill—is not much of a guarantee against it. We cannot see why Ministers should not be prepared to give their reasons so as to make this measure more than a rubber stamp, and we look forward with interest to the Minister's explanation of why the Government are not prepared to be open and give their reasons.

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The three amendments relate to statements of compatibility, or incompatibility, made under clause 19. The clause is a demonstration of the Government's commitment to human rights. It is one which we need not have included in the Bill, but we have chosen to include it because of the importance we attach to these rights. The added responsibilities placed on a Minister are justified on that basis.

By requiring a Minister in charge of a Bill to give a statement on its compatibility, we are underlining our commitment to pre-legislative scrutiny of all new policy measures. Also, where the Minister states that he is unable to make a positive statement about the Bill's compatibility, that will be an early signal to Parliament that the possible human rights implications of the Bill will need to be given careful consideration by the House—especially, no doubt, in Committee.

The amendments add to the requirements placed on Ministers by clause 19. Amendments Nos. 1 and 2 would require a statement on the compatibility or otherwise of a Bill to be accompanied by a report setting out issues relevant to the Bill's compatibility with the convention rights and, where the Government wanted Parliament to proceed with a Bill for which a Minister could not make a statement of compatibility, reasons why they nevertheless wished the House to consider it.

Amendment No. 3 would provide that an oral rather than a written statement, as the Bill currently provides for, be made in respect of a Bill for which a statement of compatibility could not be given.

I can understand why the amendments have been tabled, but in many ways it is a matter of judgment as to how the House will proceed. Our view is that the amendments are unnecessary, because the House provides for the examination of such issues in its procedures in any event. The amendments would almost create an artificial mechanism to do what the House already does. A statement as provided for by the Bill as it stands will be sufficient to achieve the important aims that both we and, in many ways, Opposition Members want clause 19 to deliver. That would flag up the issue to the House, which

in the normal course of events would be able to look into the reasoning behind the statement of compatibility. Inevitably, that will be an issue during the passage of a Bill.

A debate would provide the best forum in which the Government's thinking could be fully explained. I cannot imagine how the mere giving of such a statement could enhance the debate that would normally take place on Second Reading or in Committee, which would usually elicit the required answers.

8 pm

In such circumstances, a written report would not provide much added value. In some cases, a requirement to provide such a full report might also be odd—for example when the terms of a Bill meant that there was no connection with the convention and no convention rights were affected. Then it would merely be a pointless exercise.

Similarly, the requirement for a Minister to make an oral statement when he or she cannot make a statement of compatibility, as imposed by amendment No. 3, is not necessary or appropriate. Acts of Parliament do not usually regulate what a Minister will or will not say in the Chamber. A written statement would be readily available to whoever wanted to read it. As I said, anything in that statement and any other aspect of the human rights implications of a Bill could be debated under the normal proceedings of the House.

What might be of assistance would be any report made on the Bill, for example, by a human rights Committee of the House, if it decided to set one up. In due course, that might certainly be a way of informing the debate, whether in Committee or elsewhere, and looking into the detail of why such a statement was made by the Government. Obviously, such a Committee of the House could discuss the detail.

The hon. Member for Hertsmere (Mr. Clappison) has tabled the amendments for legitimate and proper reasons, in the sense that he wants to be sure that the House has the opportunity to discuss the issues fully, but his concerns are covered by the procedures of the House.

The hon. Gentleman asked for some examples of when the Government might want to proceed with a Bill that was not compatible with the convention. One example would be if we were legislating on the length of time for which the Secretary of State might authorise the detention of terrorist suspects under the Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Acts. The Strasbourg Court found our court in breach of article 5 of the convention some years ago, but we have maintained the arrangements because of the situation in Northern Ireland through a derogation as set out in schedule 3 of the Bill.

We already know that we may want to proceed with certain Bills even though there is some incompatibility. It is difficult to predict all the situations that might arise, as they are exceptional, like the example I gave.

The hon. Gentleman will realise, I think, that it is right that the Government should flag up an issue to the House, which can go into the detail and the reasoning behind the statement of incompatibility through its normal procedures. He will see from my example that we may properly want to proceed with a Bill that is incompatible with the convention, although that will be rare and exceptional. I hope that, in view of my comments, the Opposition will withdraw their amendment.

Mr. Clappison: Although I listened carefully to the Minister's arguments, I remain afraid that this will be little more than a rubber stamp and a presentational device. The hon. Gentleman and the Government would do well to be aware of the stream of legal and other academic opinion about the consequences for possible future legal action of some of the legislation that they have put before the House. The Opposition certainly do not want such a situation to arise, but we fear that it might.

I am not convinced by what the Minister has said. This is more a matter of presentation than of substance. However, in view of the lateness of the hour, I will not press the matter to a vote. I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Clause 20

ORDERS UNDER THIS ACT

Amendments made: No. 14, in page 11, line 40, after 'power' insert

'of a Minister of the Crown'.

No. 15, in page 11, line 42, after 'power' insert

'of the Lord Chancellor or the Secretary of State'.

No. 16, in page 12, line 1, after 'made' insert

'by the Lord Chancellor or the Secretary of State'.

No. 17, in page 12, line 5, at end insert—

'( ) The power of a Northern Ireland department to make—

(a) rules under section 2(3)(b) or 7(9)(b); or

(b) an order under section 7(11);

is exercisable by statutory rule for the purposes of the Statutory Rules (Northern Ireland) Order 1979.

( ) Any rules made under section 2(3)(b) or 7(9)(b) shall be subject to negative resolution; and section 41(6) of the Interpretation Act (Northern Ireland) 1954 (meaning of "subject to negative resolution") shall apply as if the power to make the rules were conferred by an Act of the Northern Ireland Assembly.

( ) No order may be made by a Northern Ireland department under section 7(11) unless a draft of the order has been laid before, and approved by, the Northern Ireland Assembly.'.—*[Mr. Mike O'Brien.]*

Clause 21

INTERPRETATION, ETC

Amendments made: No. 18, in page 12, line 6, at end insert—

' "amend" includes repeal and apply (with or without modifications);'.

No. 19, in page 12, line 17, at end insert—

' "Northern Ireland Minister" includes the First Minister and the deputy First Minister in Northern Ireland;'.

No. 20, in page 12, line 24, leave out lines 24 to 27 and insert—

'(f) Order in Council—

(i) made in exercise of Her Majesty's Royal Prerogative;

(ii) made under section 38(1)(a) of the Northern Ireland Constitution Act 1973 or the corresponding provision of the Northern Ireland Act 1998; or

(iii) amending an Act of a kind mentioned in paragraph (a), (b) or (c);'.

No. 21, in page 12, line 28, leave out from 'made' to 'under' in line 30.

No. 22, in page 12, line 30, after 'legislation' insert

'(otherwise than by the National Assembly for Wales, a member of the Scottish Executive, a Northern Ireland Minister or a Northern Ireland department)'.—*[Mr. Mike O'Brien.]*

Mr. Mike O'Brien: I beg to move amendment No. 23, in page 12, line 34, at end insert—

'"the Sixth Protocol" means the Protocol to the Convention agreed at Strasbourg on 28th April 1983;'.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to discuss Government amendments Nos. 31, 32, 34 and 35.

Mr. O'Brien: The amendments all concern the death penalty and arise as a result of decisions in Committee and an announcement made earlier in the year. In Committee, amendments tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Hull, North (Mr. McNamara) were accepted on a free vote. They inserted references to articles 1 and 2 of the sixth protocol into clause 1 of the Bill and inserted some of their text into schedule 1. The sixth protocol provides for the abolition of the death penalty.

However, my hon. Friend's amendments did not define the sixth protocol for the purposes of the Bill, and we are now doing so in amendment No. 23 to clause 21. My hon. Friend also left out a sentence from article 1 of the protocol—inadvertently, I am sure—which is inserted at the correct place in the sentence in schedule 1.

The other three amendments arise from a decision announced by the Minister for the Armed Forces in a statement to the House on 24 July, in columns 1372 to 1386 of *Hansard*. He announced that the Government intended to abolish the death penalty for military offences in all circumstances, whether in peace or wartime.

Accordingly, amendment No. 31 inserts a new subsection into clause 21, which provides that any liability to the death penalty under the Armed Forces Acts is to be treated as a liability to life imprisonment or some lesser penalty instead. That general statement will be supplemented by detailed amendments to the Armed Forces Acts when the next legislation to consolidate them is introduced. The services were fully involved in the review and consultation took place at all levels, up to and including the chiefs of staff, who believe that the time is right to abolish the death penalty.

Amendment No. 32 provides that the new subsection inserted by amendment No. 31 comes into force when the Bill receives Royal Assent. That is consistent with our intention to honour the decision of the House by proceeding without delay to sign and ratify the sixth protocol.

Amendment No. 34 provides that the new subsection inserted by amendment No. 31 has effect in any place in which the Armed Forces Acts have effect, which is necessary because, unlike the Human Rights Bill, those Acts are not limited in their territorial extent to the United Kingdom. That is consistent with our intention to extend the ratification of the sixth protocol to the Channel Islands and the Isle of Man, subject to their agreement. Jersey and the Isle of Man have already agreed and Guernsey will next week debate a recommendation from the Advisory and Finance Committee to do so.

The practical effects of the amendments are such that Parliament will not be able to reintroduce the death penalty, other than for acts committed in time of war or imminent threat of war, unless the United Kingdom denounces the European convention on human rights.

The inclusion of article 2 of the sixth protocol in the Bill shows that we recognise that, in ratifying the protocol, we must ratify the whole protocol rather than any part of it. Leaving article 2 in the Bill does not signify any intention to reintroduce the death penalty for acts in time of war. Parliament could do that whether or not article 2 were in the Bill, but that would be inconsistent with the Government's position as set out in the statement that my right hon. Friend the former Minister for the Armed Forces made in July. The amendments give effect to that new policy.

Mr. David Wilshire (Spelthorne): The death penalty is always a matter for a free vote in the House—as, indeed, it was in Committee—but as there is unlikely to be a vote tonight, I want to ensure that my views appear on the record.

I have always believed that capital punishment is not a party political issue—it transcends the partisan quarrels that we have in this place. I have opposed judicial murder all my life, however hideous the crime and however great the desire for punishment, even in times of war. In my 11 years in the House, I have supported every attempt to abolish the death penalty in the armed forces. I want simply to say that I support this attempt tonight.

Mr. John Maples (Stratford-on-Avon): I shall not oppose the amendments, but I shall ask the Minister some questions. Like my hon. Friend the Member for Spelthorne (Mr. Wilshire), I have always voted against the reimposition of the death penalty; I cannot envisage any circumstances in which I would not do so except in the narrow area of military discipline in time of war.

We are talking about very serious offences in wartime, such as assisting the enemy in battlefield conditions; we are not talking about peacetime, when the disciplinary aspects of the matter are not relevant. However, I want to know why we are dealing with the death penalty in the Bill. I know that the matter was discussed in Committee, but it is extraneous—it is not necessary for the incorporation of the convention or for the accession to protocol 6.

I am aware of the statement made by the former Minister for the Armed Forces, but, like my hon. Friends, I thought that the matter would be dealt with in the new military discipline Bill, which we expect to be brought before the House in the parliamentary Session after next. That would have given us the opportunity for an extensive debate about this radical and fundamental step. I do not think that there is any prospect of the death penalty being enforced in peacetime between now and then, so I believe that it would have been better to wait.

The Minister said that the matter had been discussed at all levels up to and including chiefs of staff. I forget his exact words, but I think that he said that they thought that

the time had come to implement the measure. I would appreciate his assurance that they are confident that the ultimate penalty will not be needed in wartime conditions and that they are happy for it to be abolished. If they are happy, I have no further argument except to say that circumstances could change. Are we—the Minister may have answered this—committed for all time to the measure, short of resiling from the treaty under the general provisions of public international law?

I am slightly concerned about the interpretation of article 2 of protocol 6 and whether it applies only to laws that are notified at the time of accession to the protocol. Is the Minister confident that a state that did not have the death penalty in wartime at the time of accession could subsequently give notification that it had enacted it, so registering such a derogation? Article 2 seems to imply that, when a state accedes to the protocol, it can retain the death penalty for wartime military offences. Is the Minister saying, as I think he is, that that applies equally to a subsequent derogation?

8.15 pm

Can we withdraw from protocol 6 under article 5 without resiling from the whole convention? If I understand what the Minister is saying about article 2, that question is redundant, but if my interpretation is not right, I believe that we could withdraw from the protocol under paragraph 3 of article 5, which states:

"Any declaration made under the two preceding paragraphs may . . . be withdrawn by a notification addressed to the Secretary General."

My concern is that that applies only to those territories that are nominated under paragraph 1 of article 5, not to a withdrawal from the protocol. If so, is it the case that to withdraw from the protocol one would have to withdraw from the whole convention, which, of course, any state has the right to do under public international law?

I should be grateful if the Minister were to give his interpretation, on the advice that he has been given, of article 2 of protocol 6. If the House were, under wartime conditions, to reintroduce the death penalty in military discipline legislation, could such a derogation from the convention be registered with the Secretary General?

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The hon. Member for Spelthorne (Mr. Wilshire) set out his views on the death penalty, which many of us share. The hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Mr. Maples) asked trenchantly why we were introducing the measure now, in this Bill. He obviously was not present when we discussed the death penalty; the House, not the Government, decided that protocol 6 should be introduced into the Bill. When my hon. Friend the Member for Hull, North (Mr. McNamara) tabled an amendment on the death penalty, I suggested that the Bill was not the right vehicle for the matter. However, the House in its wisdom took an alternative view, so the Government had to table these amendments.

As I understand it, the Ministry of Defence was consulting on the use of the death penalty in military circumstances; my ministerial colleagues moved to examine the matter as quickly as possible in view of the wish of the House. That is how we arrived at where we are today—the House took the view that the matter was best dealt with in the Bill rather than in military legislation, and it is right and proper that the Government should listen to the views of the House.

The hon. Gentleman asked whether the chiefs of staff were satisfied with the way in which we were proceeding. My information is that they are.

The hon. Gentleman also asked about article 2 of protocol 6. The question of derogation does not really arise here, because article 2 does no more than permit a state to have the death penalty in wartime. It is not so much that we are derogating; we would merely inform the powers that be, or make the necessary statement, that we intended to reintroduce it. Obviously, the House would have to make a decision then on its reintroduction into our law. Therefore, in time of war, should we wish to make that decision—I think that we would all hope that it would not be necessary—we would not be handicapped in a way which we would find unsatisfactory.

Given those reassurances, I hope that the House will agree to the amendments.

Amendment agreed to.

Amendments made: No. 24, in page 12, line 41, leave out 'or' and insert—

'(ii) made'.

No. 25, in page 12, line 42, at end insert

'or the corresponding provision of the Northern Ireland Act 1998; or

(iii) amending an Act of a kind mentioned in the definition of primary legislation;'.

No. 26, in page 12, line 45, leave out 'Northern Ireland Assembly' and insert

'Assembly established under section 1 of the Northern Ireland Assembly Act 1973;

(da) Act of the Northern Ireland Assembly;'.

No. 27, in page 13, line 7, leave out 'or (d)' and insert ', (d) or (da)'.

No. 28, in page 13, line 8, at end insert—

'( ) order, rules, regulations, scheme, warrant, byelaw or other instrument made by a member of the Scottish Executive, a Northern Ireland Minister or a Northern Ireland department in exercise of prerogative or other executive functions of Her Majesty which are exercisable by such a person on behalf of Her Majesty;'.

No. 29, in page 13, line 8, at end insert—

' "transferred matters" has the same meaning as in the Northern Ireland Act 1998;'.

No. 30, in page 13, line 21, leave out subsection (5).

No. 31, in page 13, line 23, at end insert—

'(6) Any liability under the Army Act 1955, the Air Force Act 1955 or the Naval Discipline Act 1957 to suffer death for an offence is replaced by a liability to imprisonment for life or any less punishment authorised by those Acts; and those Acts shall accordingly have effect with the necessary modifications.'.—*[Mr. Clelland.]*

Clause 22

SHORT TITLE, COMMENCEMENT, APPLICATION AND EXTENT

Amendment made: No. 32, in page 13, line 25, leave out 'and 20' and insert ', 20 and 21(6)'.—*[Mr. Clelland.]*

Mr. Mike O'Brien: I beg to move amendment No. 33, in page 13, line 33, leave out 'committed' and insert 'taking place'.

This is a drafting amendment to clause 22(4). At present it provides that clause 7(1)(b) applies to proceedings brought by or at the instigation of a public

[Mr. Mike O'Brien]

authority whenever the act in question took place, but that otherwise clause 7(1)(b) does not apply to an act committed before clause 7 comes into force. Amendment No. 33 replaces "committed" by "taking place" so as to be consistent with the earlier reference.

Amendment agreed to.

Amendment made: No. 34, in page 13, line 35, at end insert—

'( ) Section 21(6), so far as it relates to any provision contained in the Army Act 1955, the Air Force Act 1955 or the Naval Discipline Act 1957, extends to any place to which that provision extends.'.—*[Mr. Clelland.]*

Schedule 1

THE ARTICLES

Amendment made: No. 35, in page 18, line 28, at end insert

'No one shall be condemned to such penalty or executed.'.—*[Mr. Clelland.]*

Schedule 2

REMEDIAL ORDERS

Amendments made: No. 36, in page 19, line 6, leave out 'or repeal'.

No. 37, in page 19, line 10, at end insert—

'( ) A remedial order may be made so as to have the same extent as the legislation which it affects.'.—*[Mr. Clelland.]*

Order for Third Reading read.

8.21 pm

Mr. Straw: I beg to move, That the Bill be now read the Third time.

The House has made a number of changes to the Bill since it was introduced eight months ago. Some of those, such as amendment No. 33, have been detailed but necessary technical improvements. Some of the amendments have raised important issues of public policy, where we have sought to respond to the concern expressed both in this House and previously in the other place.

I thank right hon. and hon. Members on both sides of the House for the way in which they have contributed to the debates. I hope that it will be acknowledged that we have sought to respond in a like way and, whenever we could, to accept the spirit and, in some cases, the detail, of amendments and, where we could not accept the precise wording, to come forward with alternative wording to meet as much of the mischief identified in those amendments as possible.

Three sets of changes have been made as a result of concerns expressed here and in the other place. The first concerns remedial orders. We continue to believe that it should be possible to amend Acts of Parliament by a remedial order so as to bring them into line with the convention rights, but we have, after listening carefully to the debates, considerably restricted the circumstances in which they can be made, and we have significantly enhanced the parliamentary opportunities for scrutiny of those orders.

We have explained that any response to a declaration of incompatibility by the courts, whether by fresh primary legislation or by a remedial order, is a matter on which the Government will propose, but it is for Parliament to dispose. One of the Bill's many strengths is that it promotes human rights while maintaining the sovereignty of Parliament and the separation of powers which underpins our constitutional arrangements.

Secondly, there is the issue of the Churches, on which we had an interesting debate some minutes ago, including an entertaining excursion into the history of the Church of Scotland. We were, for reasons that I explained, unable to accept the amendments made by the other place which would have exempted Churches from the Bill's public authority provisions in the few circumstances where they would otherwise have been regarded as public authorities. At the same time, we recognised their concern about what they saw as the Bill's potential impact on such matters as faith and doctrine. In that regard, I tabled an amendment in Committee requiring the courts to have particular regard to the rights of religious organisations to freedom of thought, conscience and religion, and in so doing I believe that the Government and the House were able to go a long way towards meeting their concerns.

The third issue is that of the press. We never believed that the Bill would undermine the freedom of the press. The Strasbourg institutions attach a high value to freedom of expression, as is clear from a series of cases, including the "Spycatcher" case. Our courts will take that case law into account. But as with the Churches, we sought to meet the concerns of the press in a way which is consistent with the principles on which the Bill is based.

We did so with an amendment in Committee requiring the courts, among other things, to have particular regard to freedom of expression when they are considering granting any relief which might affect it. The amendment followed detailed discussions with the chairman of the Press Complaints Commission, Lord Wakeham, and with media representatives. I think that the amendment was well received in the House and outside.

I have commented on three particular issues that have arisen from the Bill. More generally, it is clear to everyone that the Bill has significant ramifications. Its provisions will have profound implications for the conduct of all public authorities, for the interpretation of legislation and for the operation of the court system at all levels. It will be much easier for individuals to rely on their convention rights against public authorities, and I believe that they will take that opportunity.

Over time, the Bill will bring about the creation of a human rights culture in Britain. In future years, historians may regard the Bill as one of the most important measures of this Parliament. I talk about a human rights culture. One of the problems which has arisen in Britain in recent years is that people have failed to understand from where rights come. The philosopher David Selbourne has commented on the generation of an idea of dutiless rights, where people see rights as consumer products which they can take, but for nothing. The truth is that rights have to be offset by responsibilities and obligations. There can and should be no rights without responsibilities, and our responsibilities should precede our rights.

In developing that human rights culture, I want to see developed a much clearer understanding among Britain's people and institutions that rights and responsibilities have properly to be balanced—freedoms by obligations and duties.

Sir Nicholas Lyell: I am grateful to the Home Secretary, who is always courteous in giving way. It does not follow exactly from what he has just said, but when do the Government expect to implement the Bill? When will the measure be brought into force?

Mr. Straw: May I deal with that in a few moments after my next remarks?

As the Bill nears the end of its parliamentary passage, it is right to look ahead to its implementation. Precisely because the Bill will have such a fundamental effect, we need to prepare for it thoroughly. We are providing training through the Judicial Studies Board for all courts and tribunals to enable them to deal adequately with the convention points that will come before them in case after case. We have allocated just under £5 million in addition to the normal budget of the Judicial Studies Board and associated bodies for this judicial training.

We are also ensuring that Government Departments and other public authorities are properly prepared for the obligations that the Bill places on them. They will need not only to review their legislation and practices for compatibility with the convention but to ensure that their staff are trained in an awareness of the convention rights so that those rights permeate all the decisions that they make. We need to work out how the criminal justice system can best accommodate the additional pressures that are likely to follow from the Bill.

To answer directly the point made by the right hon. and learned Member for North-East Bedfordshire (Sir N. Lyell), that means that there is a great deal of work to do before the Bill can be implemented. We need to carry that out in a fair, systematic, balanced and positive way. The right hon. and learned Gentleman asked me to give a precise date for implementation. It cannot happen in the near future, and I hope that he will forgive me for being unable to give a precise date. We want to implement the Bill as soon as is feasible, but we must all recognise that we cannot do so straight away.

One exception is clause 19, which requires ministerial statements of compatibility. The clause, which is important for the presentation of Bills before the House, does not form part of the main scheme of the Bill, and could be brought into force well in advance of the main provisions. I am considering the options for implementing clause 19 with my right hon. Friend the President of the Council and others, and I hope to make an announcement as soon as possible.

Mr. Maclennan: Before the Home Secretary leaves the matter of the date of the Bill's effective operation, will he tell us more about the criteria that he will apply in determining the practicality of proceeding? I understand that there is a need for judicial training, and the Home Secretary has spoken of the Government's efforts on that, but are there any other hidden obstacles to proceeding with implementation that he might want to disclose?

Mr. Straw: I do not think that there are any other hidden obstacles—I was trying to search my brain for secrets, but there are none. We are bringing into Scots law and English law—by which, for the avoidance of doubt, I mean also the law that applies in Wales and Northern Ireland—not only the convention, which is easily stated, as it is in the Bill, but its jurisprudence. It is crucial that we properly prepare our judicial system, including senior judges who have in many ways been living with the convention for a long time.

Often when the law is ambiguous, the courts use the convention and its jurisprudence as an aid to interpretation. However, the convention has not reached many Crown courts or county courts, and it has certainly not reached magistrates courts—it is outwith their experience. If we are not prepared and if we do not prepare those who serve in a judicial capacity, including 30,000 lay magistrates, we will find that sharp lawyers will seek to make disruptive points. We must be aware of that—we have always acknowledged it—and we must be prepared for it.

The Bill not only concerns the rights of individuals in a narrow sense, but will change our society's culture. For example, those who are charged with criminal offences have rights, and we must recognise and protect those rights, but others in society also have rights. It would be wrong to set sharp lawyers who have examined the jurisprudence against lay magistrates, justices' clerks, busy county court and Crown court judges who have not had the opportunity to do so. That would bring the Bill's implementation into disrepute. I want the process to succeed, so we need time to prepare for it.

I do not want to implicate the right hon. Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross (Mr. Maclennan) in the process, but he has been closely associated with the project, both in opposition and in government. I thank him for that contribution. He knows that the Bill is an important priority for the Government, and that there was considerable discussion about it in the joint consultative committee—of which he was a joint chairman—of the Liberal Democrat party and the Labour party. He will recognise that we must get on with the project—I know that he is on the case—but we must balance that against the need for preparation.

My next point may further reassure the right hon. Gentleman and, with a bit of luck, the right hon. and learned Member for North-East Bedfordshire. The work of preparing for the Bill's implementation is not for the Government alone. We recognise that many outside the Government have a keen interest in how the Bill is implemented and want to contribute to its success. We draw on their expertise, as we did in opposition, and we take account of their concerns.

As the Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department, my hon. Friend the Member for North Warwickshire (Mr. O'Brien), said earlier, I have decided to establish a task force to assist the Government in the preparations for implementation.

The task force will be chaired by my noble Friend the Lord Williams of Mostyn and will include my hon. Friends the Solicitor-General and the Minister of State, Lord Chancellor's Department. The membership will also include those non-governmental organisations which have made extremely valuable contributions to the project and have continued to offer their advice as the Bill has proceeded through Parliament. They will include Francesca Klug, from the Human Rights Incorporation

[Mr. Straw]

Project; Anne Owers, from Justice; Andrew Puddephatt, from Charter 88; Sarah Spencer, from the Institute for Public Policy Research; Veena Vasista, from the 1990 Trust; and John Wadham from Liberty.

The task force will help us to create the human rights culture to which I referred. Its tasks will include maintaining a dialogue between the Government and non-governmental organisations on the readiness of Departments, other public authorities and the legal profession for implementation and on its timing; working together to heighten public awareness of the Bill relating to responsibilities as well as rights; providing training opportunities for public authorities outside Government, and co-operating with other organisations in disseminating awareness, particularly among young people, of the rights and responsibilities inherent in the convention.

We are preparing guidance on the Bill which is designed to assist Government Departments and others, and I expect the task force to take a keen interest in that.

Mrs. Maria Fyfe (Glasgow, Maryhill): Will the abolition of the death penalty take place soon, or does it depend on the deliberations of the task force?

Mr. Straw: That will take place on Royal Assent. It is a simple, straightforward and important matter. We do not have to wait a relatively long time before it comes into force.

I hope that the task force will be able to have its first meeting in the near future and will continue to meet regularly, at least until the Bill is fully implemented. It will be of great practical use. I am grateful to those who have accepted the invitation to serve on the task force, and I look forward to it starting its work.

I have looked to the future of the Bill because, with this Bill more than any other, the word is not the deed. We have started the business of introducing a formal statement of human rights into our law. That will not be completed until the European convention on human rights is embedded in our jurisprudence. Our immediate task is to complete our consideration of the Bill before it finally returns to another place.

8.38 pm

Sir Nicholas Lyell: I welcome the Home Secretary's explanation of the Bill. My right hon. Friend the Member for Sutton Coldfield (Sir N. Fowler) has to be abroad today, but he has been following and taking a close interest in the Bill and its development.

The Home Secretary is right to emphasise that rights also involve responsibilities. The short speech by the hon. Member for Cannock Chase (Dr. Wright) brought home to those who were in the Chamber the extraordinary reach that the Bill is likely to have. A great many lawyers will look at every aspect of it and seek to stretch it as far as possible.

In respect of a human rights culture, it is important to stress that a human right given to one individual may adversely affect the rights of other individuals. It is important that the Bill be implemented in a way that balances the rights of all citizens fairly, or there will be some strange results.

The Home Secretary was also right to say—I may not quote him quite correctly—that we do not know exactly where this legislation will lead us. When we acceded to the European convention in 1951, few people would have expected some of its far-reaching effects over the past 47 years. The decisions by the Strasbourg Court have not necessarily been radical, but their effects have often been more radical than the decisions themselves. For example, it was decided that parents could choose the type of discipline to be imposed on their children in school, which had the radical effect of removing what many people regard as old-fashioned systems of discipline. Nobody would have expected that to happen at the outset.

We must be careful that cases brought before our courts do not lead to changes in our society that would not have the support of this House and of the country through its elected representatives. That is why it is extremely important that, when remedial orders are made, the House should have the fullest opportunity to consider them.

The Home Secretary said that Governments propose and Parliaments dispose. It is important that that phrase should be profound as well as elegant, because if we were to use too much of the fast-track procedure, the Government would be proposing and Parliament would have little option but to dispose. The history of this Bill has shown that real improvements have been made during its proceedings.

Although we may not have achieved all that we sought to achieve through remedial orders, we are grateful for the clear explanation by the Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department, the hon. Member for North Warwickshire (Mr. O'Brien), that "compelling reasons" means compelling reasons, and that the Government will consider it necessary or proper to use the fast-track procedure only in a narrow band of cases.

I am also grateful that the Home Secretary made it clear that the Bill is not meant to create a substitute written constitution for this country. It is simply to ensure that our law is kept in line with Strasbourg law so that cases are dealt with more swiftly, easily and effectively. I continue to hope that, while there will be no formal right of appeal—there could not be—for Government and public bodies to Strasbourg, ways will be found to enable the public to know when the Government or a public body are deeply concerned that a decision of our courts at the highest level is wrong. They should know that an effective method is available to drive the matter on to the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg and that the ultimate determination will be in accordance with the decision of our highest judiciary. That judgment will therefore be binding not only on the citizens of this country, but on those of every other member state of the Council of Europe.

I believe profoundly in the European convention on human rights, but it is a backstop. It must always be remembered that the convention was created after the war to prevent some dreadful things from ever happening again, and it should not start to reach into the nooks and crannies of the private lives of the citizens of these 30 or 40 countries. I hope that the courts will bear that in mind, and that reading the debates will encourage people to do that.

Although we have opposed aspects of the Bill, we now wish it well and hope that it will be implemented effectively, to the benefit of the citizenry as a whole.

8.45 pm

Mr. Maclennan: I also express my gratitude to the Home Secretary for the way in which he has handled the Bill—his openness to suggestions, and his diligence in pursuing arguments and proffering explanations. I believe that the Bill has benefited from the deliberations of Parliament, and that cannot be said of all our legislative activity.

For me, the Bill is something of a landmark in personal terms. Fifteen years ago, in December 1983, I introduced a Bill that enjoyed a great deal of support—not, alas, from any of the current members of the Labour Cabinet. Indeed, their absence was noted when the matter was brought before the House again in 1987, by Sir Edward Gardner, from the Conservative Benches. Only 15 Labour Members supported the proposal.

It has been a long haul to get to this point, and it is therefore a matter of great satisfaction that there has been such a clear movement of opinion—a movement that is, I believe, reflected in the judiciary. When one thinks of the arguments that were made 10 years ago about how such a measure might politicise the judges, and how that was considered to be a baffling obstacle to the reforms that are here encompassed, one can take great satisfaction from what has happened.

I pay particular tribute to my noble and learned Friend Lord Lester of Herne Hill, who has campaigned for even longer, and whose individual contribution to the debates is probably without parallel.

Mr. Straw: I should like to be associated with the right hon. Gentleman's remarks about Lord Lester.

Mr. Maclennan: My noble and learned Friend will be most grateful, as will my personal friend, David Selbourne, the philosopher, from whose home I returned on Saturday to read the Home Secretary's remarks about dutiless rights. They were most appositely chosen, for it is true not only that obligations balance rights, but that rights cannot be secured without duties being observed. Too often, that has been lost sight of.

A couple of questions remain, which are not entirely clear to me and which may not become clear for some time, about the impact of the Government's decision on implementation. I am grateful for what the Home Secretary has said about the task force on implementation. Some of the work that he proposes to assign to it might have been undertaken by a human rights commission, and he is clearly seeking voluntary help to fulfil some of the necessary groundwork. I hope that there will be urgency in implementation.

I am not entirely satisfied that these matters can be handled effectively by our courts until the matter has come before them. It is prudent not to rush into instant implementation, and thereby run the risk of discrediting the process. However, that is not a reason for long delay. It is clear from what the Home Secretary said in reply to my intervention that he shares that view.

Subordinate legislatures, to which power is being decentralised, could be in some difficulty if the Bill is not implemented. The Home Secretary will be aware that provisions in the Northern Ireland Bill, the Scotland Bill and the Government of Wales Act 1998 require legislative proposals to be compatible with convention rights as set out in this Bill. It would be unfortunate if legislative issues arose and there were some question as to whether the proposals of the three bodies concerned were incompatible with the Bill, and that could not be resolved because the Government had not given effect to this Bill.

Mr. Straw: As I explained earlier, it is my intention to bring clause 19 into force as soon as possible, and well before the rest of the Bill. Clause 19 requires Ministers, when they present a Bill, to give a clear statement on whether they believe, on the basis of good advice, that the Bill is compatible with the convention. That provision, as it affects the United Kingdom Parliament, will come into force earlier than the provisions of the Scotland Bill, the Government of Wales Act and the Northern Ireland Bill, and should have an impact on those bodies.

The second point is that—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael J. Martin): Order. An intervention should be brief. The right hon. Gentleman's second point should be dealt with in the winding-up speech.

Mr. Maclennan: I am grateful to the Home Secretary for his intervention. He has gone some way to removing my concern, which flowed from clause 28 of the Scotland Bill. That provides that the Scottish Parliament should have legislative competence only in respect of matters for which there is no incompatibility with convention rights. I am greatly relieved if the declaration of a Minister is sufficient to remove that condition, and if that will be triggered by the earlier implementation of clause 19.

I do not want to conclude my contribution to the debate on a minor, perhaps querulous, note. The issues that are covered by the Bill are of historic importance. Although the Minister has said that the Government do not intend to take a step towards establishing a written constitution, I do not doubt that that is, in fact, what is happening.

In drafting the Bill, the Government have been extremely careful to avoid the possibility of judges striking down the legislation of Parliament, on the ground that it would fall foul of fundamental law. That is understandable in the light of the current attitude of judges, who would not altogether welcome such a power. There can be no doubt, however, that judges have changed their minds to the extent that they broadly support this measure. I anticipate that, as they have inspired confidence that they would use the power judiciously, they will feel less reluctant to take the greater responsibility of deciding that Parliament has gone beyond the accepted view of people, as expressed in a written constitution. I do not consider that an embarrassing prospect; indeed, I think that many would regard it as highly desirable.

I also think that—as the Minister emphasised—the Government have sought to secure what they describe as the sovereignty of Parliament. Earlier, I expressed doubt about whether that was necessary or even desirable: I felt that the people were sovereign, and that their views could be expressed outside the House.

Mr. Straw: That is a Scottish point.

Mr. Maclennan: Indeed. It has always been understood by the Scottish courts that that is the position. However, such a philosophical argument, or

[Mr. Maclennan]

discussion, is not appropriate in this context. In this Third Reading debate, we are discussing what is in the Bill, and what is in the Bill is highly satisfactory. I believe that it will reinforce protection of the fundamental rights and freedoms of our people, that it will not lead to a landslide of litigation, and that it will provide valuable support to ensure that those fundamental rights and freedoms are sustained, as all who have spoken today wish them to be.

8.57 pm

Fiona Mactaggart (Slough): The right hon. Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross (Mr. Maclennan) referred to what is in the Bill. It may seem odd, on Third Reading, to deal with what is not in a Bill, especially given that, during today's debate—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Lady should not talk about what is not in the Bill, because the purpose of Third Reading is to talk about what is in the Bill.

Fiona Mactaggart: Indeed, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

The Home Secretary has shown a willingness to take on the issues that have been raised, and to amend the Bill. It has therefore become more comprehensive, and deals more effectively with Labour's manifesto promise to bring rights home. It may not be able to fulfil that promise completely, owing to what the Home Secretary, on Second Reading, described as a fine balance. It has not incorporated article 13 of the convention.

It is said that the existence of the Bill creates an article 13 right. Interestingly, subsequent case law may suggest that article 13 constitutes a separate right, which can be considered separately. Someone whose human rights are not delivered by the institutions of government may have the right to have that properly investigated. In the Aydin case, the inability of the Turkish authorities effectively to use their power to visit the scene of the incident—this was following a rape—to summon witnesses and to call forensic evidence was queried. For example, no officers had been questioned in the critical initial stages of the investigation. I expect that that criticism of the lack of a domestic remedy might sound familiar to the parents of Stephen Lawrence.

I believe that we can deliver a domestic remedy within the framework of the Bill as it is. I hope that the Home Secretary, in his usual approach of finding solutions—the task force that he has incorporated to work with him on this will do that effectively—will ensure that, in practice, that domestic remedy is delivered.

We have done some radical things during this Bill. To the Government's surprise, we have incorporated protocol 6. That was an important step. In the White Paper that preceded the Bill, the Government announced their intention to introduce legislation that would mean that our laws were compatible with protocol 7, so that we could incorporate it. I urge a similar approach to be taken on the fourth protocol.

We have already made announcements—there was a series of announcements during the summer—about the rights of British dependent territory citizens. If we extended their right to reside in the UK, some of the difficulties in ratifying the fourth protocol would be avoided, but what we have done in the Bill so far has consequences.

The committee that—even though we have not approved the present setting up of a commission to establish the work of the Bill—has been envisaged in Ministers' statements should start work early on. It could assist Ministers in the business of making clause 19 statements; it would be good if that happened early on. I would be interested if the Home Secretary could respond to that point. However, I hope that the committee will also be able to look at the issues of ratifying the protocols that remain unratified because that is part of the unfinished business. If we do that, we shall do a better job of bringing rights home.

9.2 pm

Mr. Straw: With the leave of the House, I shall respond briefly to the points that have been made in the debate.

First, I thank the right hon. and learned Member for North-East Bedfordshire (Sir N. Lyell) for the trust of his remarks. I had hoped that, during the passage of the Bill, it might be possible to deal with matters in a way that did ensure that there was some consensus behind it. I am pleased that it looks as though that may be the case.

Of course I understand that the official Opposition—it is not their right, but their duty, to express different views—have reservations about aspects of the Bill. Its implementation needs to be not only prepared carefully, but monitored with great care.

Earlier in the debates, my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary referred to our intention, which we had flagged up in the White Paper, to establish, or to propose the establishment of, a parliamentary Committee on human rights—it is a matter for Parliament, not for us, to determine—to monitor progress in implementing the Act and the way in which it develops and, where appropriate, to make recommendations to Parliament for changes that may be needed.

I should like also to thank the right hon. Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross (Mr. Maclennan) for his particularly generous remarks about me. I am grateful to him for those. As I said before, I am grateful not only for the co-operation but for the inspiration that he and his colleagues have provided. He was right to say that some of us have been later converts to the cause than he was. I should have taken more notice of the views of my former head of chambers, Sir Edward Gardner, when he was promoting his Human Rights Bill in 1987. He was a distinguished man, and I should have listened to him. Nevertheless, we have got there in the end.

Those of us who know Lord Lester know him to be indefatigable in pursuit of incorporation of the European convention on human rights. Although he is sometimes indefatigable to the point of exhausting his friends and colleagues, that only adds to our admiration of him. He has worked extremely hard on the issue and the Bill's passage, and he deserves our collective thanks.

I should deal with the points made on Scottish and Welsh incorporation of the convention. The Government's intention is that implementation will occur on the same date for all constituent parts of the United Kingdom. On the obligation of the Scottish Parliament, the Welsh Assembly and the Northern Ireland Assembly to ensure either that their legislation is compatible with the convention or that, if it is not, they state that it is not, as I said earlier—in an over-long intervention—the

Government's intention is that the obligation will not apply to those institutions before it applies to the House and to the other place. I should add that, in practice, both this Government and the previous Government have observed an obligation to attempt to ensure that Government legislation is compatible with the convention, albeit currently such compatibility can be tested only at Strasbourg and not in United Kingdom courts.

My hon. Friend the Member for Slough (Fiona Mactaggart) asked a question about article 13. Article 13 states:

"Everyone whose rights and freedoms as set forth in this Convention are violated shall have an effective remedy before a national authority notwithstanding that the violation has been committed by persons acting in an official capacity."

Although article 13 mentions a national authority, the truth is that it is there to provide a remedy for the international Court at Strasbourg. For that reason, the Government thought that it would be inappropriate to include article 13 in the Bill to incorporate the principal operational parts of the convention that provide substantive rights.

English law and Scots law have been imaginative and innovative in developing new remedies. As proof of that, one has only to consider development of the idea of judicial review, which—from an almost standing start—has developed into a rather large industry.

Sir Nicholas Lyell: The Home Office knows all about that.

Mr. Straw: That is true. However, we end up being judicially reviewed more regularly than some other Departments because of the nature of our business. It is right that we should be reviewed more regularly, as we are daily dealing with crucial issues of the liberty of the subject. I personally have no difficulty about the fact that the quasi-judicial decisions that I have to make—like the decisions that the former Attorney-General had to make—have to be made with very clear application of the law and judicial review.

Judicial review and many other remedies have been developed, and the Government believe that the courts will be imaginative in developing other remedies if they are needed. If—as I do not think will happen—there turns out to be some gap in the remedies, the safeguard is that it will be possible for litigants to go to Strasbourg, where article 13 will arise.

I do not want to go into too much detail about the Turkish case, except to say that it involved the most extraordinary allegations of failure against the Turkish police, failure on a scale that no one could conceive would apply in this country. The case involved the killing of civilian by a Turkish police officer and the almost total and wilful failure of the Turkish authorities to investigate. It is impossible to conceive of such a circumstance arising in this country. We considered the matter carefully but do not believe that we lose anything by the omission of article 13. Indeed, we think that there could be problems if we included it.

Mr. Edward Leigh (Gainsborough): I apologise to the Home Secretary for intervening at the last gasp, but I do so on a narrow point that the Plymouth Brethren have asked me to put to him. The Plymouth Brethren occasionally have to exclude members, and they want a reassurance that, under clause 6, they will not be considered "a public authority". The Home Secretary kindly gave that reassurance in a letter to me on 25 June, but the Brethren would be grateful if he could confirm it on the Floor of the House.

Mr. Straw: Yes, I can. I am smiling because I have very good relations with the Exclusive Brethren in my constituency

Mr. Bob Russell (Colchester): That is the old brethren.

Mr. Straw: The old Labour Member for Colchester (Mr. Russell) said that from a sedentary position.

In the debate on 20 May this year, I stated:

"the regulation of divine worship"—

and I mean regulation—

"the administration of the sacrament, admission to Church membership or to the priesthood"—

obviously, the term "admission" covers non-admission and exclusion—

"are, in our judgment, all private matters."—[*Official Report*, 20 May 1998; Vol. 312, c. 1015.]

It could not conceivably be asserted that, when it comes to questions of discipline, the Plymouth Brethren or the Exclusive Brethren are standing in the place of the state. I am therefore happy to give the hon. Gentleman the reassurance that he seeks.

We have had a very interesting debate. I am grateful to all hon. Members who have contributed, and I look forward to the Bill receiving its Third Reading.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill read the Third time, and passed, with amendments.

St. Helena

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Betts.]*

9.12 pm

Mr. Bob Russell (Colchester): The people—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael J. Martin): Order. An hon. Member is addressing the House. Other hon. Members should leave the Chamber quietly.

Mr. Russell: The people of the island of St. Helena are not asking for anything new; they simply want restored to them the status which they enjoyed until it was shamefully removed by the previous Government under the British Nationality Act 1981. With citizens of other British dependent territories, they had the door slammed in their faces. They had their full British citizenship taken away, and found that they were no longer welcome as full members of the British family. Loyalty to the Crown and to Britain counted for nothing. There were rejected in a cynical move which embraced them and others from a handful of small British communities in various parts of the world in order to justify the introduction of legislation to stop people from Hong Kong coming to Britain.

St. Helenians have always and only been British. They have British nationality but not full citizenship, which makes them second-class citizens. The islanders seek full British citizenship status, a restoration of their ancient rights granted by the British Crown. I look to the present Government to put right the wrong of a previous Government and end the years of rejection and dejection experienced by the Saints, as residents of St. Helena are generally known.

The British dependent territories have a combined population of around 160,000, but tonight I shall confine my comments to the plight of those who reside on St. Helena. The island's entire population of some 5,500 could be accommodated in Colchester United's football stadium, with room to spare.

Not all the 13 populated territories seek what St. Helena is asking. I understand that some are content with their current status. I hope that tonight the Minister will give a commitment that, sooner rather than later, and certainly in time for the new millennium, the Saints will be able to rejoice in the restoration of their previous status of full British citizenship.

The door is currently locked. Recent speculation that perhaps the present Government are to open it is welcome, but is it true? It is not enough simply to say that the key has been found. The door needs to be unlocked and swung wide for the Saints to be invited back to where they rightly belong, to the status they had until 17 years ago—not so much marching in, but rather as members being welcomed back into the British family home whenever they are this way.

Is it seriously suggested, regardless of the previous Government's motives, that the restoration of full British citizenship to 5,500 residents of the island of St. Helena will somehow create difficulties for Britain? It is an insult and nonsense even to contemplate a single practical difficulty or justification to maintain the outrage that has existed since 1981.

I hope that the Minister will find her previous duty as Prisons Minister to be of help in considering releasing the Saints from the sentence of exile imposed on them by the Thatcher Government. She will, of course, be aware that Napoleon's exile is St. Helena's most historic claim to fame: while Napoleon would dearly have loved to leave the island for good, the vast majority of today's island residents do not wish permanently to leave their home in the south Atlantic, but seek simply the right to regain their status as full British citizens so that they can freely travel to Britain and return.

The St. Helena Government representative in London, Mrs. Catherine Hopkins, told the Foreign Affairs Committee on 18 November last year:

> "From St. Helena's point of view, I doubt very much whether very many Saints would want to come to take up permanent residence in the United Kingdom. We regard St. Helena as home and the young people of the island have made it quite clear that they wish to see the island develop rather than coming to England. They would like access, they would like the ability to move freely."

She added:

> "The idea that 5,500 St. Helenians are going to uproot themselves and come to Britain, where they would be very easily absorbed into the community is just ludicrous. There is no way it would happen."

The vessel RMS St. Helena is currently moored at Cardiff, and tomorrow evening it makes its somewhat infrequent sailing from the UK to the island. It would be nice if the captain could take a message of hope with him from tonight's debate.

To continue with the maritime theme, by one of those happy coincidences, today is Trafalgar day. Admiral Nelson was renowned for turning his blind eye. For 17 years, the British Government have been guilty of a double Nelson—closing their eyes and ears to the people of St. Helena. The time has come for Britain to stop wrestling with its conscience, and I look to the present Government to give St. Helena a fair break.

Napoleon would no doubt be amused that today a citizen of France has easier access to Britain than do residents of the British dependent territory of St. Helena. St. Helena is not the only island in the south Atlantic with British roots. Indeed, had it been invaded by Argentina as the Falkland Islands were in 1982, presumably it too would have had the British Nationality Act 1981 amended to release its residents from their current second-class status. They would also have benefited from massive sums of British Government aid, as the Falkland islanders have for almost two decades. St. Helena's only ship, the RMS St. Helena, was called in to support Britain in the Falklands conflict, with Saints volunteering to be part of the crew.

Britain has a moral duty to the island of St. Helena. In fairness, aid is given, but the amount is nothing like that given to the Falklands, which has a population less than half that of St. Helena—but then, St. Helena does not have oil.

I first took a deep interest in St. Helena—a small island with an area of just 47 square miles, 4,400 miles from Britain and situated midway between Africa and South America—when a constituent wrote to me. His grandfather was born on the island. Perhaps a more fitting reason for the strong links being established between Colchester and the island is that the patron saint of Colchester is St. Helena—same spelling, but different pronunciation. One of the town's secondary schools,

which I and my family attended, is called St. Helena, as is the town's hospice. There is a statue of St. Helena on top of the town hall tower—the highest building on the skyline. St. Helena is a saint from Roman times, and Britain's first Roman capital was Colchester.

In June this year, a delegation of legislative councillors from St. Helena was welcomed to Colchester by the mayor. The official visit included a tour of St. Helena school and local craft workshops, which the Saints see as the type of business activity they need to help the island's economy. From January last year until July this year, a Colchester-based company, International Management Consultants Ltd., assisted the Government of St. Helena with its accounting systems and related matters. The current bishop of St. Helena has a sister who lives in a north Essex village not far from Colchester. I am aware of contacts between individual residents of Colchester and islanders. There are high hopes of establishing links between the island and St. Helena school.

The island of St. Helena was discovered by the Portuguese on 21 May 1502—St. Helena day. The English followed in 1588, but not until 1658 was it colonised, becoming a Crown colony in 1834. Britain settled St. Helena with British people, and brought in other ethnic groups who were integrated into the British community. The local population has no nationality other than British. Rights to full British citizenship were confirmed by royal charter in 1673. Islanders enjoyed those rights for more than three centuries, but the British Nationality Act 1981 removed them, making the islanders second-class citizens, and virtual prisoners on their own island.

I call on the Minister to give a pledge that steps to restore full British citizenship will begin without further delay, putting right a wrong that has caused so much unhappiness to the islanders for the best part of two decades. In the past year or so, the Foreign Affairs Committee has considered the plight of St. Helena as part of its dependent territories review interim report. A private Member's Bill to restore citizenship rights was presented by the Earl of Iveagh in the House of Lords. In this House, the hon. Member for Wrexham (Dr. Marek) proposed a British Nationality (St. Helena) Bill, but it was dropped in April for reasons that perhaps the Minister can explain.

We have been promised a White Paper for months on the policy towards British overseas territories. That will cover more than just St. Helena, whose unique case demands an urgent and unique response. For England's lost county, the status quo is not an option. Something must be done. St. Helenians have always been British. They are still British, and they only want the British Government to acknowledge that fact by restoring their birthright of full British citizenship.

9.24 pm

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Ms Joyce Quin): I congratulate the hon. Member for Colchester (Mr. Russell) on securing this Adjournment debate, and on his choice of subject. He referred to my previous ministerial portfolio. Somewhat to my surprise, I find that, for my first debate as a Minister in the Foreign Office with responsibility for Europe, I am responding to a debate on St. Helena. I should convey to the House the apologies of the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, my hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Central (Mr. Lloyd), who is abroad at the moment but to whom I shall report and with whom I shall discuss this debate.

Probably all of us who are present will have appreciated the comments of the hon. Member for Colchester about the connections that he, his family, his constituency and his town have with St. Helena. I wish him success in establishing further links between his area and the island.

In some ways, this debate is timely, because the comments of the hon. Member for Colchester can be very much taken into account in the overseas territories review. In another sense, however, it is perhaps not as timely. As he will realise, I am not in a position to give absolute answers to his questions, simply because the decision was taken to conduct a review of overseas territories, produce a White Paper, and come up with proposals, which we seek to do as soon as possible.

The hon. Member will be aware, too, that we are discussing the constitution of St. Helena with its legislative council. We must await the outcome of those discussions and other studies, such as the transport access study concerning St. Helena. Taken together, we hope that they will put us in a position to give the people of St. Helena a future to look forward to.

As the hon. Member for Colchester pointed out, St. Helena is a tiny island of 47 square miles lying in the south Atlantic, about 1,200 miles from Africa. It is one of the oldest and most remote of our overseas territories. It has certainly been described as a beautiful island. I am sorry not to have had the opportunity to visit it, but in the past, and in preparation for the debate, I have spoken to people who have been there and who follow events there very closely. From what I have been told, there can be no doubt about St. Helena's special place in the family of our overseas territories, each of which has a unique character.

One hardship that St. Helena has had to face is the fact that it has few natural resources. Agriculture, fishing and a growing tourism-related industry are the main activities in the private sector. The role of the public sector—largely Government—is still considerable. The economy of St. Helena continues to rely on British aid for the bulk of new investment and to help balance the Government's revenue budget. That background will be well known not only to the hon. Member for Colchester but to other hon. Members who I know follow the affairs of St. Helena. It certainly affects all decisions about the island and, indeed, the status of its people.

Towards the end of last year, my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary announced that he would set up a review of British dependent territories in order to take a fresh look at our relations with them. In his speech to the Dependent Territories Association on 4 February, he announced some broad interim findings. Above all, he offered the dependent territories a new, modern, secure and lasting partnership with Britain. He emphasised the importance of the territories to us, and the fact that we take pride in the strong historic links—to which the hon. Member for Colchester referred—that have led to a unique family bond which matters to both sides.

Britain remains committed to those sovereign territories that wish to retain their link with us, but the relationship needs to be brought up to date to reflect the idea of partnership in the modern world. One measure that my right hon. Friend took to reflect that change was to alter

[Ms Joyce Quin]

the way in which the territories were to be referred to. They are now to be known by the more appropriate title of UK overseas territories.

My right hon. Friend also announced that, as part of the new framework for partnership, my noble Friend Baroness Symons would become the first Foreign and Commonwealth Office Minister with responsibility for the UK overseas territories. Furthermore, to improve dialogue and understanding between Britain and the overseas territories, an annual UK overseas territories council will be established to provide a forum for Chief Ministers and councillors to raise their concerns directly with the Minister. I know that they feel strongly about such access.

Those and other aspects of the review will be reflected in the White Paper that we shall lay before Parliament. It will cover a range of issues relevant to the overseas territories, and will give details of the partnership that we wish to promote. It will set out ideas for promoting the good governance of the territories, and address constitutional and human rights issues. It will also consider ways of accelerating sustainable development in economic terms and ensuring a sustainable environment, and how to promote the economic prosperity of the UK overseas territories within internationally accepted standards of financial regulation.

The House may wish to know that the elected members of the St. Helena legislative council wrote to the Secretary of State in February congratulating him on his speech to the Dependent Territories Association conference. They welcomed the new partnership and the appointment of Baroness Symons as the Minister with special responsibility. I hope that they will find the White Paper, describing in full the modernised partnership that we want to create and the action needed to take to create it, acceptable, and that they will be content with the blueprint for the future that it sets out.

Mr. Peter Bradley (The Wrekin): I do not seek to anticipate the proposals that the White Paper will make, but does the Minister at least accept that the deprivation of the right to citizenship by the previous Government in 1981 was a callous and insensitive act, which not only slighted the people of St. Helena but critically disadvantaged them?

Ms Quin: I understand that the citizens of St. Helena expressed their great disappointment, but it is important to find a way forward that both recognises their unique position and considers the position of overseas territories in general, to find something that works for the future, with which they will feel happy.

Mr. David Heath (Somerton and Frome): I welcome the hon. Lady to the Dispatch Box in her new role. Does she accept that there is a difference between the position of St. Helena and its dependencies in terms of citizenship, and that of the other overseas territories, which involves issues of reciprocity that do not apply to St. Helena? Secondly, will she tell us when the White Paper will be produced, as it is already overdue?

Ms Quin: There are other territories to which, as in the case of St. Helena, issues of reciprocity do not apply. I do not think that the island is unique in that respect. As for the timing of the White Paper, we hope to be able to publish it by the end of the year, but I cannot give the hon. Gentleman a guarantee from the Dispatch Box tonight. Given that we are talking about a number of overseas territories, I hope that he will appreciate that we want to ensure that we produce a White Paper that addresses all the issues concerning all the territories, and provides a basis on which we can build for the future.

I know that hon. Members have raised such issues in past debates, and some of those debates were rightly mentioned by the hon. Member for Colchester. I certainly accept that the reception of the White Paper in St. Helena will depend largely on how it tackles the issue of the St. Helenians' claim to British citizenship. However, the issue of British citizenship is a complex one for the UK overseas territories. We are reviewing the appropriateness of the status to see whether changes are needed.

A number of Government Departments are involved—it is not simply a Foreign and Commonwealth Office matter. Alteration of the status has implications which Departments need to consider. The Government are sympathetic to the concerns of St. Helena on the issue, and we have told the House so several times in the past. We have not changed our attitude in that respect.

I would like to take this occasion to say a few words about how we are trying to address the economic status of St. Helena—an issue every bit as important to the inhabitants. In 1996, the St. Helena Government conducted widespread consultations, which led to the compilation and publication of a strategic review. This set out a range of policies and goals to deliver the St. Helena vision of a prosperous, peaceful and democratic society for all, achieved through sustainable economic, environmental and social development, leading to a healthy, and eventually financially independent, island.

Incidentally, I accept the point that the hon. Member for Colchester made—that, in general, people are not seeking to leave their home territories. People want to feel secure and at ease in their home land, and I accept that the citizenship argument is not motivated by those concerns. I also accept that, in terms of their ability to travel, the inhabitants of St. Helena welcome the argument.

The strategic review formed the basis of the St. Helena Government aid submission, on which negotiations took place between the St. Helena and UK Governments in 1996. These negotiations led to agreement on a country policy plan. This was a major step forward in the relationship between the British and St. Helena Governments, and underlined the importance of a partnership in which the members of the legislative council have a major role and responsibility.

The UK Government agreed to make available more than £26 million for the three years from April 1997 to March 2000. The country policy plan is monitored regularly to see that it is on track, and to make any adjustments needed. A review of the country policy plan took place in January this year, and concluded that considerable progress had been made. Aid funds for the second year were therefore authorised.

Another review is expected to take place in December. It will look at the extent to which the structural adjustment programme agreed between the two Governments is being followed. Decisions on aid support for the public sector investment programme, which assists the St. Helena

Government with infrastructure development and renewal, will be taken in the light of the evaluation. The country policy plan has met the essential need to have a viable development strategy for the island's future.

The plan recognised that there was an immediate need to improve the efficiency of the public sector. It acknowledged that private sector development was necessary to stimulate St Helena's economy and to help resolve the unemployment problem. Much progress has been made. Attempts are being made to find overseas markets for products such as honey and beauty products, and to develop coffee production on the island. However, more needs to be done.

One area in which I hope we shall see progress is in complying with the aid agreement, whereby consumers of the enhanced infrastructure facilities—for example, water—contribute to the full cost recovery of that capital expenditure. The money thus generated can then be used under social services provision to target the most needy in the community and enable them to pay their bills.

In July 1998, the St. Helena Government signed an agreement with Argos Ltd., a British-Falkland Islands fisheries company. From the beginning of next year, the company will invest in a range of shore-based facilities, including a freezing and processing plant which will offer employment opportunities for a number of St. Helenians. It will process the catch of St. Helena fishermen as well as that of the company's vessels.

Other projects that will help the people of St. Helena include a management scheme to enable farmers to grow fruit commercially once again, road improvements, and the improvement of water quality.

Technical co-operation funds from the Department for International Development are paying for 24 key technical and administrative staff on the island. Those funds also pay for a number of St. Helenians per year to come to the United Kingdom to study at colleges and universities.

The St. Helena Development Agency was established to promote the private sector. It provides financial services, business advice and training. More than 100 jobs have been created or sustained by the agency in the past year.

As I said, St. Helena has few resources except its people. We and the St. Helena Government have taken steps to ensure that as many as possible of them can develop their talents and lead productive lives. Some 60 St. Helenians are in the UK under the training and work experience scheme. Others have been recruited into the British armed forces. Not only do those schemes teach valuable skills: they also give schoolchildren on the island aims to work for, which is important.

The Cheltenham and Gloucester college of higher education has a contract with the Department for International Development to provide educational services to St. Helena and to arrange training in the UK for its teachers and students. With the help of the college, schools on the island are preparing to implement the UK national curriculum in English, maths and science. A scheme was also agreed to improve vocational training on St. Helena. All those measures are valuable ways in which the status of St. Helena's work force can be improved.

We have also taken some direct measures to minimise unemployment and increase incomes. New work permit arrangements announced by the Minister of State in December 1997 allow 30 people per year to come to the United Kingdom to work for up to three years accompanied by their dependants. A further 700 St. Helenians work on Ascension island, and about 300 have found work in the Falkland islands.

Offshore employment has helped to achieve a reduction in unemployment, as have measures taken by the St. Helena Government, for which I pay them credit. Offshore employment has also produced a significant flow of remittance income, which in turn has helped to improve and expand the private sector housing sector. However, offshore employment is not always a one-way benefit, and it can create problems by exacerbating serious shortages of skilled labour in St. Helena, particularly in teaching, nursing and the police force. A task force has been formed by the St. Helena Government to find solutions to that problem.

A major problem affecting St. Helena is the difficulty of communications with the rest of the world. I remember reading the debate in another place about St. Helena, in which a former Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs talked of having dispatched one of his Ministers there, and of not seeing him for several weeks thereafter. He was surprised, but when he looked into the distances involved and how one gets there, he could well understand why that was the case.

There is no airport on St. Helena. Regular access is provided by RMS St. Helena—a cargo and passenger vessel, owned by the St. Helena Government and operated by Curnow Shipping Ltd., based in Falmouth. That ship offers a scheduled service between St. Helena, Ascension, the United Kingdom and Cape Town, and it is subsidised by the Department for International Development by about £1.3 million each year.

As I said in my initial response to the hon. Gentleman, an access study to review ways of tackling the problem was announced by my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for International Development in December 1997. That study started on St. Helena, and will be followed up in the United Kingdom. Its terms of reference will include all forms of transport and the feasibility of an airport.

The tourist infrastructure on St. Helena is still underdeveloped. A director of tourism was appointed last year, and she has developed good contacts, particularly in South Africa. Yachts travelling across the Atlantic have been encouraged to stop in St. Helena, and a yacht race—the Governor's cup—is organised every other year with the Cape Town sailing club. The next race is in December, when I understand that a yacht will, for the first time, be crewed by St. Helenians. We wish them and the other participants well.

I conclude with the words used by my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary to the Dependent Territories Association in February. We will enter into a partnership with the overseas territories based on mutual trust and respect. We already have a firm basis from the past, founded on centuries of shared history. Together we face a new millennium, and together we will carry forward the relationship on a more modern basis.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at fifteen minutes to Ten o'clock.

House of Commons

Thursday 22 October 1998

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

BODMIN MOOR COMMONS BILL *[Lords]* (*By Order*)

Order for consideration, as amended, read.

To be considered on Thursday 29 October.

ALLIANCE AND LEICESTER PLC (GROUP REORGANISATION) BILL *[Lords]* (*By Order*)

Order for Second Reading read.

To be read a Second time on Thursday 29 October.

Oral Answers to Questions

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

The Secretary of State was asked—

Subsidised Employment (New Deal)

1. **Mr. John Healey** (Wentworth): If he will make a statement on the progress of the subsidised employment option of the new deal. [55090]

The Minister for Employment, Welfare to Work and Equal Opportunities (Mr. Andrew Smith): Like the rest of the new deal, that option has got off to an encouraging start. By the end of August, 7,000 young people were in jobs found through that option, in addition to the 16,000 in unsubsidised jobs.

Mr. Healey: I welcome that response. What assessment has my right hon. Friend made of the use of the new deal job option in Wales to create 70 new classroom assistants, and in the NHS in Scotland to create 270 new health service jobs, and what plans does he have to encourage similar initiatives in England?

Mr. Smith: Both those opportunities got off the ground only recently, and we are following them closely. The important thing, whether the job opportunities are in the public or the private sector, is that the processes work in terms of matching the young person with the right potential to the vacancy that meets the needs of the right employer. Whether people are in the classroom, or working in a hospital or a nursery, the important thing is that each one is the right person for the job.

Mr. Andrew Lansley (South Cambridgeshire): Is the Minister aware that, in the Cambridge travel-to-work area, by the end of September, only eight of the 667 persons eligible for the new deal had been placed through the subsidised employment option? Does he recognise the fact that, in some areas such as mine, it would be more relevant for resources to be directed towards, for example, those who are disabled, rather than being spent on promoting an option that is not being taken up or well used?

Mr. Smith: It would not be surprising to find that a relatively small number of people in the hon. Gentleman's area had moved through into employment at this stage of the programme. As the programme did not start throughout the country until April, we would expect the bulk of the intake still to be in the gateway. The hon. Gentleman is right to refer to the importance of provision for disabled people. I remind him that the new deal for young people provides for disabled people too, and, so far, the statistics that we have released showing the progress made by disabled people have been encouraging.

Mr. Tom Levitt (High Peak): Over the summer, I took the opportunity to visit all three of the jobcentres in my constituency to see for myself how the new deal was progressing. I was impressed by what I saw. Will my right hon. Friend take the opportunity to congratulate the staff of the Employment Service on the care, diligence and purpose that they are showing in responding to the challenge that the new deal presents?

Mr. Smith: Indeed, I take pleasure in joining my hon. Friend in congratulating the staff of the Employment Service and the other partners who are working with us to make the new deal a success because, in order to succeed, it has to be a national crusade involving everybody in helping young and long-term unemployed people into jobs. There is no doubt that the commitment of Employment Service staff, the way in which quite a radical culture change is being driven through the service, and especially the dedication of the personal advisers, are greatly appreciated, both by young and long-term unemployed people, and by employers.

Mr. Damian Green (Ashford): The degree of complacency that the Minister displays about the new deal is genuinely alarming. He now quotes figures showing that there are 7,000 subsidised jobs that would not have been there without the new deal, but, on 24 September, he was boasting that more than 25,000 employers had signed up to the new deal. Does he agree that, according to his own figures, there must be at least 18,000 firms that have not yet found a single placement for a new deal trainee? I think that there have been more press releases about the new deal than jobs created by it. Will the Minister tell us exactly how many firms that signed up to the new deal have failed to find even one suitable trainee? That would be one important measure of the failure of the scheme.

Mr. Smith: If there is any complacency around, it is among those on the Opposition Front Bench. Let us not forget—the Conservative party was so complacent about youth and long-term unemployment that there would have been no deal if it had had its way. That is the utmost in complacency. As to the progress of young people into

jobs, 23,000 moving into jobs and 16,000 into unsubsidised jobs is a creditable achievement for a programme that only rolled out nationally in April. That is 23,000 more than would have been achieved under the hon. Gentleman's policies.

Education Action Zones

2. **Mr. Ivor Caplin** (Hove): If he will make a statement on the first 25 education action zones and on his plans for the next round of bids. [55091]

The Minister for School Standards (Ms Estelle Morris): The first 12 education action zones started on 1 September and 13 more begin on 1 January. I expect to invite applications for more zones in the new year.

Mr. Caplin: I thank my hon. Friend for her reply. Is she aware that, during the recess, the Conservative party said that it had left us a golden education legacy? If that were the case, presumably the private sector would have been involved in partnerships in education for some years before we came to power. Clearly, that is not the case. Is not the partnership between the private and public sectors crucial to the long-term stability and economy of this country and to its education, which is why education action zones are an important way forward for education authorities?

Ms Morris: My hon. Friend is right. There was no golden legacy in education—try telling the four out of 10 eleven-year-olds who were not even taught to read and write and use numbers effectively, and their parents, that there was. We shall change that. I agree with my hon. Friend about the importance of partnerships. One positive aspect of education action zones is the willingness with which industry, commerce and other partners have joined with schools, pupils and governors to raise standards for children. That is not just in the interests of schools—every person in this country has a vested interest in getting education right. The partnership being built in education action zones is one symbol of that.

Miss Anne McIntosh (Vale of York): Does the Minister agree that, if the Government adopted a less ambivalent attitude to the participation of private companies in education action zones, companies would be more positive about joining in and less scared of participating?

Ms Morris: The hon. Lady refers to an ambivalent attitude—perhaps that is better than no attitude, which is what we had from the previous Government. I do not know what information the hon. Lady has read. BT, American Express and KPMG are partners in the action zone to which my hon. Friend the Member for Hove (Mr. Caplin) referred. Kelloggs, American Express and Arthur Andersen are all top-rate companies which are joining with local companies to work with education action zones. People from industry are chairing education action zones and industry is represented on every single action zone forum. We are getting the partnership right, because it is not just words—there is action out there, and that partnership in action will raise standards. There is much to do because of the mess that the previous Government left us.

Mrs. Alice Mahon (Halifax): I thank my hon. Friend for establishing an education action zone in Halifax and for recognising the problems that we faced. Will she join me in congratulating Anna White, her teachers, the governors, the local education authority and, most of all, the children for—in the words of Ofsted—having transformed the Ridings? I also pay tribute to the Secretary of State, who has shown such special interest in this school.

Ms Morris: I am delighted that my hon. Friend has given me the opportunity to welcome the education action zone in Halifax, which will build on what has gone on at the Ridings. Yesterday was a good news day for education and for the Ridings school, and not only because of what has happened there and because the life chances of a generation of children in Halifax will be better as a result of the work that has been done in the past few years. Perhaps even more important than that, it was a good day because of the lesson it teaches us—that any school can be turned round with good leadership, good teaching, and strong partnership involving Government and local authorities.

I wish to add my thanks, and the thanks of Ministers, to Anna White for the work that she has done. She deserves to be congratulated, and she will teach others to lead schools in equally good ways. I join my hon. Friend in her thanks to others, but I should also like to thank my hon. Friend, who has been assiduous in arguing on behalf of the schools in Halifax. She has driven the matter forward, and I am sure that she took some pleasure in yesterday's announcement.

Mr. David Willetts (Havant): I begin by congratulating the Minister on her promotion. I believe that this is her first appearance in the House since she became Minister of State and I shall mention it even if her Back-Bench colleagues do not. Will she clarify what the waffle about partnership with the private sector means? Does she agree that, both in education action zones and councils such as Surrey or Hackney, it is acceptable for private firms to make a profit from contracts to run state schools if it is in the interests of pupils? If she gives a clear yes, she can be assured of Opposition support, but we need a clear answer to a simple question. Can private companies make money from running state schools, yes or no?

Ms Morris: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his kind words, but he somewhat spoilt it after that. He may call it waffle, but when some of the nation's top companies go into schools, mentor children, offer learning opportunities and put in business expertise and resources, I would call it not waffle but giving our children better opportunities to achieve at a higher level. We are in favour of partnership. Schools and local authorities have always bought services from the private sector and some of those have included management consultancy. That is happening in one school in Hackney and it is being considered in Guildford—the authorities there will come to us when they have worked out their plans. I can assure the hon. Gentleman that buying services in the private sector does not amount to schools going private; it is not a change in the status of the schools. I very much regret that his present attitude to industry seems to be to question constantly and to undermine its efforts to enter partnerships with schools. He should put first not political point scoring but the interests of schools and children

Yvette Cooper (Pontefract and Castleford): Will my hon. Friend consider broadening the focus of future

education action zones? In Castleford, the number of children getting five or more A to C GCSEs is 14 per cent. below the national average and the number staying on beyond 16 is a massive 40 per cent. below. Will she consider bids from places such as Castleford which concentrate on staying-on rates as well as raising standards?

Ms Morris: I apologise profusely to my hon. Friend for that. She is right and we shall certainly consider education action zones that decide on that as one of their targets. Continuing in education has never been as important for any generation as it is for this one, whether it be for academic or vocational courses. If children do not continue in education, they will miss out on the opportunities at the end of this century and the start of the next. I would very much welcome it if the area to which she referred and others made that one of their targets.

University for Industry

3. **Mr. Phil Willis** (Harrogate and Knaresborough): When he expects the university for industry to be launched; what its projected budget is for each of the next three years; from where those funds will be provided; and if he will make a statement. [55092]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education and Employment (Mr. George Mudie): The university for industry will be launched in 2000. The Government have committed £15 million for start-up costs and £40 million for the financial year 1999–2000. Future years funding will be announced in due course. Other moneys are being expended through pilot schemes under the European social fund Adapt programme.

Mr. Willis: I welcome the hon. Gentleman to his new position. Our paths have been crossing for the past 20 years and it is perhaps appropriate that his first question this Question Time should be from the hon. Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough, who educated both his sons. May I say how pleased we are that we at last have some information about the university for industry and a launch date? Will the money that the Minister has announced—about £40 million plus £6.25 million, which is for Learning Direct—come out of the higher education budget? If that is so, does it not mean that, by 2000, it will represent a 16.5 per cent. cut in the money announced in the comprehensive spending review?

Mr. Mudie: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his kind remarks. My first question could not have come from a nicer person, although I might change my mind when I see who is to ask the second.

The university for industry prospectus was issued in March and should be available in the Library—if hon. Members want a copy, I shall certainly provide them with one. The money for the university is not from the higher education budget, but from a separate budget, which was negotiated under the comprehensive spending review. The £6.5 million for the direct line is additional to the £40 million.

Mr. Derek Wyatt (Sittingbourne and Sheppey): Did my hon. Friend read in the *Financial Times* this week that "UK banks and building societies are on the verge of forming a national network of cash machines for the first time"? Will he open negotiations with the banks and the lottery, which is also a national grid of sorts, as the downtime between midnight and 6 am when bank cash desks and the lottery are not used provides an opportunity to deliver the university for industry on a different system?

Mr. Mudie: Although I am not directly responsible for the national grid for learning, I am aware that my hon. Friend is alive to technological complexities and interchangeability. His point will be taken on board.

Mr. Ian Bruce (South Dorset): The Opposition would welcome the establishment as quickly as possible of the university for industry, which I hope will be a university for life and continuing learning, but would not it be more sensible to put into the scheme a large lump of the money that is being wasted on the new deal? Is the Minister aware that the number of people who came out of long-term unemployment in the most recent quarter is lower than the number of people who did so a year ago? He could pay for continuing learning by cutting some of the waste.

Mr. Mudie: The House will be pleased to see the conversion of Conservative Members to the new deal—for a year or so, we have been wondering why they were opposed to it. The university for industry has to date received £55 million, and further moneys are—depending on the corporate plan—to come, including £76 million from ESF Adapt programme for development, which is a considerable amount. The new deal has brought care, sympathy and action to our poorer communities—

Mr. Bruce: It is not working.

Mr. Mudie: It may not be working as well as Conservative Members want, but they did nothing in government—at least we have introduced the new deal.

School Transport

4. **Dr. George Turner** (North-West Norfolk): What representations he has received on arrangements governing travel from home to school following publication of the Government's White Paper on the future of transport. [55093]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education and Employment (Mr. Charles Clarke): We have received more than 100 letters from members of the public as a result of the White Paper, and we welcome people's views on how its aims can be put into practice. On 13 October, my right hon. Friend the Minister for Transport, my hon. Friend the Minister for Public Health and I hosted the first meeting of the school travel advisory group, which was attended by a wide variety of interested organisations. The group will be making recommendations.

Dr. Turner: As a fellow Norfolk Member of Parliament, I am particularly pleased to give my

hon. Friend a warm welcome to his new role at the Dispatch Box. Will he acknowledge the many problems, especially in rural counties such as Norfolk, that arise from school transport? As a new member of the ministerial team, will he take a fresh look at some old issues?

Mr. Clarke *rose—*

Dr. Turner: In doing so, will he consider the clear need for integration between the variety of methods of transport? For example, safe walking and safe cycling need to be examined with bussing to school. Moreover, will he use the Government initiative on raising standards—action zones—as a way forward in experimentation and innovation, so that new partnerships can produce better solutions for the next millennium?

Mr. Clarke: I thank my hon. Friend. I am always a little too quick out of the traps. I congratulate my hon. Friend on his campaigning on this issue. He is right to say that, in Norfolk and rural counties throughout the country, this is a major issue. A total of £380 million a year is spent by local education authorities on school transport. We are prepared to look afresh at those issues. That is why we had the meeting on 13 October to which I referred. It was a joint meeting between the Departments of the Environment, Transport and the Regions, of Health and for Education and Employment. We believe that the publication of the Government's White Paper on integrated transport strategy gives us a basis for addressing those issues in a proper way. In that context, we are prepared to look at experimental schemes to investigate ways in which we might approach the issue in particular localities.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield): From Her Majesty's Opposition Benches, I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on his appointment as a junior Minister. I have seen him around Parliament for many years, although only latterly as a Member. Does the hon. Gentleman believe that it is unjust that, although free school transport is available, not all pupils in secondary education are entitled to it as of right? I am referring particularly to the decision of some local education authorities—I am thinking about one that is Labour controlled—not to allow sixth-formers in secondary schools in my constituency and throughout the county of Cheshire to take advantage of free school transport. Will the Minister look at that? Does he not think that the situation is unfair?

Mr. Clarke: I thank the hon. Gentleman for those words of congratulation. I do not think that the situation is unfair, but I acknowledge that the current legislative framework, which was established in 1944 and which has not been amended substantially since then, is very much out of time. That is why we need to look at all the issues across the whole range in the context of an integrated transport strategy. The group I mentioned earlier is looking at each of the issues carefully and will take account of the points raised by the hon. Gentleman. It is extremely important to emphasise that the way to solve this problem is through integrated transport strategies of the type that the Government are pioneering and that we hope will deliver results in the future.

LEAs (Capital Projects)

5. **Mr. Peter L. Pike** (Burnley): What additional funding in constant value terms is now available to local education authorities for capital projects in 1998–99. [55094]

The Minister for School Standards (Ms Estelle Morris): In 1998–99, an additional £347 million has been made available to local education authorities for capital projects. That is over and above previous plans. Some £257 million has been made available through the new deal for schools programme; the remaining £90 million was announced by the Chancellor in his November 1997 Budget to reduce infant class sizes, eliminate the need for outside toilets and improve energy efficiency in schools.

Mr. Pike: Will my hon. Friend confirm that the Government are committed to achieving good school premises and to spending on them the money that is necessary after 18 years of neglect and financial starvation for local education authorities and schools? Will she confirm that the Government recognise in the comprehensive spending review and the doubling of money available over the next five years that the condition of school premises plays a vital part in the education of our children?

Ms Morris: I am delighted to do that. My hon. Friend has been assiduous in campaigning for capital resources for schools in his constituency. He will be delighted that his local authority has received £4 million in new deal for schools money—£2 million more than in the last full year of the Tory Government. Our children have a right to be educated in schools that are decent and fit for learning and our teachers have a right to work in that sort of environment. We started from an incredibly low base given the disastrous approach of the previous Government to the quality of our school buildings. However, we have begun to turn that around and we shall continue to do so in the rest of this Parliament.

Mr. Nick St. Aubyn (Guildford): A school in my constituency may benefit from private capital being invested to improve its facilities if the Minister's previous answer were to be clarified. Does the Minister welcome the involvement of private sector firms, which may make a profit, in managing schools that need to be turned around? Does she agree that it would be discriminatory and unfounded to disallow such profit-making organisations from playing a part in improving standards in our schools? Does she agree that to deny them the right to play such a part would mean denying the schools the opportunity to make use of a range of talents and resources that they may need to help them?

Ms Morris: I thought that the hon. Gentleman was going to thank me for the extra £2 million NDS funding that his local authority has received. Like the hon. Member for Havant (Mr. Willetts), he preferred to try to score political points instead of considering the needs of children. If Surrey proposes plans to the Department, we shall consider them, as we have said that we shall, and as we have an obligation to do. I must say that, if the hon. Gentleman and his political colleagues in Surrey had paid half as much attention and given half as much passion to stopping their schools failing, we should not be in this position.

Common Funding Methodology

6. **Mr. David Chaytor** (Bury, North): What plans he has to establish a common funding methodology for 16 to 19-year-old students. [55095]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education and Employment (Mr. George Mudie): None, but we are alive to the concerns of the issue and will watch closely the effects of three factors: first, the use that local education authorities make of the greater freedoms provided by the fair funding regulations; secondly, the effect of the extra money—£100 million this year and £255 million next year—that we have put into the further education sector; and, thirdly, how well and quickly the collaborative protocol agreed between the further education sector, the LEAs and the TEC National Council has an effect.

Mr. Chaytor: I thank my hon. Friend for that reply and add my congratulations on his appointment to the Front Bench. Will he meet representatives of the college sector to discuss the issue further? When will the latest version of the funding costs comparison report be published?

Mr. Mudie: I congratulate my hon. Friend on the ten-minute Bill that he introduced yesterday on the subject. The document will be published as soon as possible and certainly this year. I am happy to meet him and any of his colleagues on any occasion to discuss the matter.

Mr. Tim Boswell (Daventry): Will the Minister with responsibility for lifelong learning accept congratulations from the Opposition on his appointment to an important position? Does he accept that the funding problem is by no means new and that successive Ministers, including myself, have wrestled with it and tried to mitigate the consequences? In the real world, the problems are caused not so much by the different funding streams or the fact that further education has traditionally been funded at the margin and schools have been funded on an average cost basis, but by the danger of destabilising sixth-form provision. Will the Minister neverless accept that we welcome the attempts to bring the various parties together? Anything that he can do to reduce the problems will be welcome.

Mr. Mudie: I thank the hon. Gentleman for those remarks. The funding problem is difficult and we all wrestle with it. I do not wish to be political, but the problem was made worse by the era of competition between the sectors that was introduced by the previous Government and by the cuts that the further education sector experienced. Now that we have increased the money for further education, we might have a better atmosphere in which to work towards a solution.

Literacy Summer Schools

7. **Helen Jones** (Warrington, North): What assessment he has made of the value of the 1998 literacy summer schools; and if he will make a statement. [55096]

12. **Mr. Bill Rammell** (Harlow): If he will make a statement on the initial results of the literacy summer schools. [55102]

The Secretary of State for Education and Employment (Mr. David Blunkett): This year's summer schools are being evaluated by the National Foundation for Educational Research. The report will be received in November and I will place copies in the Library. A sample evaluation of 200 of this year's summer schools has shown substantial results. The summer schools were over-subscribed and many children could not get places. Half those evaluated showed an improvement in their reading of six months or more and that is a tremendous achievement for those summer schools and a tremendous fillip for the education of those children.

Helen Jones: I thank my right hon. Friend for that reply. As he knows, I had three summer schools in my constituency and I was impressed by the work that was done in them. Does he agree that they would not have been so successful but for the dedication and enthusiasm of the staff, both teaching and non-teaching? Will he take this opportunity to congratulate them on the time and effort that they put in, which has raised reading standards substantially for many children?

Mr. Blunkett: I am delighted to commend the teaching and non-teaching staff and the parents who committed time to the summer schools. I can confirm that following the success of 557 literacy schools and 51 numeracy schools this year, we intend to double the number of summer schools next year. At least 1,200 will provide a link between primary and secondary schooling and an opportunity to show to anyone who doubts it the commitment of staff, parents and the community to raising standards in education.

Mr. Rammell: May I tell the Secretary of State about my experience of visiting the summer literacy schools in my constituency? The commitment and enthusiasm of the young people were heart warming. May I tell him too about my discussions with teachers about the Government's overall approach—

Madam Speaker: Order. This is Question Time.

Mr. Rammell: I am getting to it, Madam Speaker. We are setting targets and using the literacy hour and summer schools to improve standards. Is not that the fundamental difference between what we are doing and the attitude of the previous Government, who, far too often, simply accepted educational under-performance as a fact of life?

Mr. Blunkett: I agree entirely. It is a credit to the schools of Harlow that five of the eight summer schools in Essex were held in that town. I commend to the House what my hon. Friend has said. It is important to keep reiterating that there were no summer schools when we took office. The Government are making a difference by

action rather than words and by investing where the Conservative Government merely wrung their hands. Take the example of the Ridings school, and the way in which it has been led by Anna White. I saw that school's improvement, and I was able to announce to parents and teachers that there would be a summer school when I was the first Minister ever to visit the school. The Ridings proves that if a commitment is made and resources are available, we can succeed.

Mrs. Theresa May (Maidenhead): We are talking about the Government's targets for improving literacy skills. Is not the reality that the Government have been blown off course in meeting their targets for literacy and numeracy? The Secretary of State talks of action, not words, but this summer's results failed to meet up to the Government's words. Figures for key stage 2 results published earlier this month show that the Government have been blown off course on literacy because progress is not good enough to hit their targets. Furthermore, numeracy results show a fall rather than an improvement. The Government simply are not going to hit their targets. The Secretary of State is reported as saying that if the Government did not hit their targets, he would resign. Will he confirm that?

Mr. Blunkett: I shall give myself a chance to do the job before I consider resigning. It may have escaped the hon. Lady's notice that the policies carried through in the first year of the Labour Government reflected the total failure of the previous Government to tackle literacy and numeracy. They failed even to put in place a basic curriculum for teacher training in literacy and numeracy. They failed to put in place a literacy and numeracy strategy. We put a framework in place, which started in September. When our numeracy strategy is in place next year, we shall transform the abysmal results that are the miserable legacy that we inherited from the Conservatives into a triumph. Instead of six out of 10 children being able to read and write, eight out of 10—and eventually 10 out of 10—will be able to do so when they leave primary school.

Mr. Bob Blizzard (Waveney): Literacy summer schools must be seen in conjunction with the literacy hour in primary schools. Primaries in my constituency are very positive about that, and the kids enjoy it. The teachers are keen to feed back ideas about the literacy hour to strengthen the project in the light of their experiences. Will my right hon. Friend ensure that a clear and manageable mechanism exists to allow schools to feed their experience to his Department?

Mr. Blunkett: Yes, we are keen to do that. That is why the immediate survey of 200 has taken place and why the evaluation of the national foundation is taking place. We must learn what works best and, obviously, set aside those things that are not working. I should like to take this opportunity to say that when I visited one of the earlier numeracy schools in August, I found imaginative work, inspiring children to want to learn. I should like to see that transferred into the main curriculum programmes, so that children rejoice in learning, not just in the summer but throughout the whole of their school life.

EU Awareness

8. **Mr. Howard Flight** (Arundel and South Downs): What steps are being taken to promote awareness of the EU in schools. [55097]

The Minister for Employment, Welfare to Work and Equal Opportunities (Mr. Andrew Smith): Awareness of the European Union in schools is promoted mainly through the study requirements for geography, history and modern languages laid down in the national curriculum.

Mr. Flight: The Minister will be aware that at the end of last year and the beginning of this year the Minister of State in the other place circulated a large pack to heads of all schools about the EU. I had letters from more than one head in my constituency complaining about this because, on looking through it, in fairness it was propaganda in favour of the euro and of the concept of a European state. In the light of the Neill report comments in particular, will the Minister undertake that the Government are careful that information only, not propaganda, is circulated?

Mr. Smith: We certainly need information and not propaganda, but I am not sure about the hon. Gentleman's definition of which is which. Surely it is sensible that young people whose future and economic prosperity turn to a large extent on our links with European partners should know something about the EU and be properly equipped critically to discuss it. Of course we want balanced teaching on this as on other issues. I am confident that this can and should be left to the good sense of head teachers and classroom teachers acting under their statutory requirements.

Mrs. Anne Campbell (Cambridge): Is my right hon. Friend aware that many schools have improved their knowledge of the EU by establishing a connection with schools in Europe through using the world wide web and electronic mail? Does he consider that that is a useful way of acquiring information? Will he think about incorporating such collaborations within the national grid for learning?

Mr. Smith: I am sure that contact, whether through the internet or school exchanges, which are such a well-established feature of school life, has an enormous amount to contribute. I shall, indeed, pursue my hon. Friend's suggestion. Our young people deserve the opportunity to have accurate balanced information, as I was saying earlier, and to meet and exchange ideas with other young people, whether elsewhere in the European Union or in the world, and the internet provides that great opportunity.

Mr. Christopher Gill (Ludlow): Can the Minister confirm that the glossy children's comic produced by the European Commission and ludicrously entitled "The Raspberry Ice Cream War" has been pulped? In his reply, will he tell the House exactly what his consideration was in taking the decision to pulp that comic and how much it has cost the public purse to produce it?

Mr. Smith: As far as I am aware the comic has not been pulped, but is piled up in a warehouse somewhere

in Oxfordshire. It undoubtedly was an ill-judged and, in part, factually inaccurate publication. The EU Commission representative here, Mr. Geoffrey Martin, sensibly decided that it was inappropriate to distribute it. What happens to it is for the Commission to decide. The Commission might want to donate it to Oxfordshire's recycling effort or simply send it back to Brussels.

Truancy

9. **Mr. Chris Pond** (Gravesham): What evidence he has evaluated on links between truancy and unregulated term–time employment by children of school age. [55098]

The Minister for Employment, Welfare to Work and Equal Opportunities (Mr. Andrew Smith): My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health has lead responsibility on employment of schoolchildren. A review of child employment law is currently being undertaken by officials from his Department, the Department for Education and Employment, the Department of Trade and Industry, the Cabinet Office and the Health and Safety Executive. Children may not, of course, be employed to work during school hours.

Mr. Pond: I thank my right hon. Friend for that answer. Is he aware that Gravesham secondary school heads have written to local supermarkets asking why students preparing for GCSEs and A-levels have been required to work 20 hours a week, and no less, or have no job at all, and that other students work overnight in residential care homes? Given that 4 per cent. of children of school age admit to truanting on some occasions in order to undertake paid employment, does my right hon. Friend agree that dealing with truancy and excessive hours of employment for children of school age should be at the heart of our crusade to improve standards in education?

Mr. Smith: The circumstances that my hon. Friend reports concern me. I will draw them immediately to the attention of local education authorities, so that education welfare officers can look into them. I shall also draw them to the attention of the review to which I referred earlier. The causes of truancy and the things that people do when they are truanting cover much more than employment. There is limited evidence that employment is a major factor in truancy, but where young people are working excessive hours or in dangerous or unsuitable conditions, that has to be stopped. We will ensure that action is taken.

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham): While I acknowledge that the employment of schoolchildren must be strictly regulated by law, I hope that the Minister agrees that such regulation should not prevent them from undertaking safe work that boosts their finances and those of their families. When the Government decided to prohibit the use of children on milk rounds at the request of the National Child Employment Network, did civil servants or the network bother to ask any children or their parents what benefit they gained and how they might suffer in the absence of those rounds?

Mr. Smith: The important thing here is that some common sense is brought to bear. We recognise the benefits that young people derive from a proper amount of suitable work experience. There is not the evidence to show that sensible and appropriate work damages their educational accomplishment. I will certainly ensure that the issue that the hon. Gentleman raises is considered. Let us not lose sight of the fact that the Government are doing far more than our predecessors did to ensure that suitable preparation for work and sensible work experience forms part of the school experience for young people who can benefit from the opportunity to work.

New Deal

10. **Dr. Desmond Turner** (Brighton, Kemptown): If he will make a statement on the progress of the new deal in *(a)* pathfinder areas and *(b)* the rest of the country. [55100]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education and Employment (Ms Margaret Hodge): I am pleased with the early progress of the new deal. Already we have seen more than 145,000 young people invited to start on new deal; 32,000 of them are in the pathfinder areas; 23,000 have moved into jobs and 9,000 have moved into other options.

Dr. Turner: I congratulate my hon. Friend on her appointment to the Front Bench. I am sure that she is already aware that in my constituency and in the rest of Brighton we have a considerable problem of homelessness. Many of the homeless are young people who have been failed by the education system and have a bleak future in employment because, from a position of homelessness, access to employment is doubly difficult. Will my hon. Friend tell the House the ways in which the new deal will help such people?

Ms Hodge: I thank my hon. Friend for his kind words. I am aware of the problems that are faced by some young people in linking homelessness to joblessness. In Brighton it is a particular problem. We have funded a mediation project under the new deal as part of the gateway scheme so that we can provide counselling to young people who are homeless and put them into a secure environment. There are a number of projects around the country that link homelessness to joblessness. That is an integral part of a unique scheme under the new deal. The scheme is not about managing unemployment figures but about creating real and lasting opportunities for the young people of Britain today.

Mr. Graham Brady (Altrincham and Sale, West): Having had the pleasure of working with the hon. Lady on the Select Committee on Education, I, too, congratulate her on her appointment to the Front Bench. From that Committee's deliberations, she, like me, will be familiar with the provenance of the new deal, its having been introduced at a time when unemployment was falling sharply under the previous Government's policies. Now that the economic circumstances are somewhat different and growth forecasts have been revised sharply downwards, what plans do she and her colleagues have to revise the implementation of the new deal, in particular to take account of job losses in manufacturing in the north and the midlands?

Ms Hodge: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his kind words. Despite his remarks, nearly 400,000 new jobs have

been created since the current Government took office. Furthermore, since the general election, youth unemployment has fallen by 15 per cent. and is about 13 per cent. less than it was in early 1979, when the Conservative Government first took office. The new deal's record of success speaks for itself.

Caroline Flint (Don Valley): I congratulate my hon. Friend on her appointment to the Front Bench. From my experience of working with her on the Select Committee and, previously, on the numerous child care projects with which she has been involved, I know that those working in the world of child care will welcome her appointment as much as I do.

May I bring to my hon. Friend's attention, and ask her to congratulate with me, Angela Ashman, who is 24 and is the 100th young person to go to Doncaster college under the Government's new deal? Five years ago, Angela began her training in hairdressing and, having stopped to begin her family, she is now taking a national vocational qualification in hairdressing. I quote her comments, printed in the Doncaster *Star*:

"Without New Deal there's no way I could have got back into training as I just couldn't afford the child care, but now that's been paid for it's great to be back at college."

Does my hon. Friend the Minister share my view that child care combined with education is the best way in which we can help young mothers, rather than telling them,

"Get thee to a nunnery"?

Ms Hodge: I thank my hon. Friend for her kind words. As she spoke, I was reminded of the occasion on which we visited a further education college together and looked in on a course in hairdressing. There were seven lone parents present, all of whom were returning to work through education and the facilities for child care that had been created. It is a vital part of the new deal, both generally and for lone parents, that we make affordable, accessible and high-quality child care available to those women who need it if they are to gain access to the labour market.

Mr. David Willetts (Havant): I, too, welcome the hon. Lady to her new position. I thought that we were not going to hear from her this afternoon, but she has been allowed out on the new deal.

The Minister's answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Altrincham and Sale, West (Mr. Brady) was remarkably complacent—as complacent as the answer we heard yesterday from the Prime Minister to my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition. The fact is that, throughout the summer, we have heard worrying announcements of factory closures and job losses; meanwhile, the Minister's Department is closing job clubs and putting all its effort into the new deal, which is a monumental irrelevance. It does absolutely nothing to help the people who are currently losing their jobs thanks to the Government's economic policies. Why will the Government not treat all unemployed people fairly and shift some resources towards the people who are losing jobs because of the Government's policies?

Ms Hodge: I do hate to blur with simple facts the rather boring and tedious political rhetoric that we are hearing from Conservative Members. The simple facts are that, under our new deal, at this very early stage, more than 23,000 young people who would otherwise have been unemployed are now in work. We are extending that new deal to those who are long-term unemployed—those who have been unemployed for two years. From November, we are piloting the new deal for those who have been unemployed for between 12 and 18 months. That is the proper way to tackle unemployment—with a scheme that is not about massaging unemployment figures, but about creating real opportunities with the gateway and ensuring that we improve employability so that people can go into real jobs.

Mr. Roy Beggs (East Antrim): On behalf of my colleagues, I, too, congratulate the hon. Lady on her promotion. I welcome the fact that the Government have allocated £140 million to Northern Ireland over the next five years for the new deal. Will the hon. Lady join me in urging those who have been disadvantaged to increase their qualifications and upgrade their skills so that they can benefit from the new employment opportunities being created in Northern Ireland?

Ms Hodge: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his kind words and support for the innovative and important new deal introduced by the Government. This is the first time that we have tried to link job opportunities and schemes to training and employment. We know that good skills, education and qualifications matter for the wealth of Britain, so the new deal is a vital scheme which should be supported across the House.

Social Exclusion Unit

11. **Ms Dari Taylor** (Stockton, South): If he will make a statement on the latest report from the social exclusion unit and on what steps he has taken to tackle the problems faced by disaffected young people. [55101]

The Secretary of State for Education and Employment (Mr. David Blunkett): I welcome the social exclusion unit's report, "Bringing Britain Together: A Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal", which is linked to the earlier report on truancy and exclusion. We are setting a target for a reduction of one third in truancy and exclusion over the next three years. During that time we shall invest £493 million to tackle head on the tragedy of exclusion and truancy. We shall use a cross-departmental approach to overcome disadvantages in our most deprived neighbourhoods and we shall invest the resources that the Conservative party denied for so many years.

Ms Taylor: Does my right hon. Friend agree that if we are to be successful in including young people, local partnerships and local authorities must be involved in all policies? Does he agree also that successfully helping young people will be the test of our policy of including the excluded? Are local authorities to be given further advice on funding sixth form education?

Mr. Blunkett: On the first two questions, it is absolutely clear that without a partnership approach that

includes every agency and contributor, we cannot succeed. That is why the schools plus team, which was set up following the renewal report, and our advice on best practice in avoiding exclusion and truancy must combine to spread the excellence that already exists. In addition, the new start programme will target 14 to 19-year-olds.

It is clear that children who are excluded and who truant from school are excluded from life. They cannot get a job; they often find themselves in difficulty with the law, and they find themselves alienated from society. A comprehensive approach to post-16 education by further education and sixth form colleges, which provides work-based training and work in the community, is vital in ensuring that everyone is pulling in the same direction.

Mr. Don Foster (Bath): I congratulate the new members of the Front-Bench team and welcome many of the Secretary of State's proposals for tackling the disaffected. Does he accept that disaffected young people are often those who achieve the least academically? Will he therefore explain to the House why, if targets are so important to him, there are no targets in literacy for the bottom 20 per cent. of pupils, which means that teachers tend to concentrate on the rest? Will not that lead to further disaffection? Is there not already a growing gap between the bottom 20 per cent. of pupils and the rest, which is a recipe for disaster?

Mr. Blunkett: In view of the congratulations coming from all sides to half of my team, I think that I should congratulate them myself.

We have a difficulty in that every time we set new targets, the Liberal Democrats say that we are overloading teachers and causing them aggravation. I shall be delighted to set targets in the not too distant future to avoid having children leaving school with no qualifications. Last year 45,000 young people left school without a single qualification to their name. Regrettably, the vast majority of children in care leave school without qualifications. We shall do something about that. However, a solution will be achieved not simply by setting a target but by putting in place the necessary support mechanisms to ensure that all children are well educated.

Recent GCSE results show an improvement in terms of those gaining an A to G qualification or the equivalent, and a decrease in the number of pupils who leave school with no qualifications. I think that we should take some pride in those results and spread best practice so that we can do even better next year.

Business of the House

3.30 pm

Sir George Young (North-West Hampshire): May I ask the Leader of the House to give us the business for next week?

The President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mrs. Margaret Beckett):

The business for next week will be as follows:

MONDAY 26 OCTOBER—Opposition Day

Until about 7 o'clock there will be a debate on the Economy followed by a debate on Agriculture and the Food Industry. Both debates will arise on motions in the name of the Liberal Democrats.

TUESDAY 27 OCTOBER—Consideration of Lords Amendments to the European Parliamentary Elections Bill.

Motion relating to the Working Time Regulations

WEDNESDAY 28 OCTOBER—Until 2 o'clock, there will be debates on the motion for the Adjournment of the House.

Debate on the Army on a motion for the Adjournment of the House.

THURSDAY 29 OCTOBER—Debate on Quarantine for Pets on a motion for the Adjournment of the House.

FRIDAY 30 OCTOBER—The House will not be sitting.

MONDAY 2 NOVEMBER—Debate on the Security and Intelligence Agencies on a motion for the Adjournment of the House.

The House will also wish to know that on Wednesday 4 November there will be a debate on the Social Action Programme 1998–2000 in European Standing Committee B.

Details of the relevant documents will be given in the *Official Report*.

[Wednesday 4 November:

European Standing Committee B:—Relevant European Community Document: 8328/98, Social Action Programme; Relevant European Legislation Committee Report: HC 155-xxx (1997-98].

It may be convenient for the House if I announce now that the new Session will be opened on Tuesday 24 November.

Sir George Young: The House is grateful to the right hon. Lady for providing the business for the first week. I understand the current uncertainties, but I hope that she plans to revert to announcing two weeks' business in advance so that hon. Members may plan ahead.

Is it not astonishing that, although there is minimal pressure on parliamentary time, the Government have not found time for a full day's debate on the economy? While we may disagree about the reasons for the economic downturn confronting us, the recession concerns our constituents and is the subject of intense debate in the newspapers. It should be debated in the House, and the Government should not rely on Opposition days for debating that key subject. Is that not further evidence of the Government's intention to sideline and marginalise this Chamber?

After Parliament rose for the recess, we saw the publication of the Neill committee's report on the funding of political parties. It is a radical report with wide implications for the political process, and there are rumours that the Government plan to cherry-pick it. Can the right hon. Lady find time to debate the Neill committee report in the overspill? We are expecting the publication next week of the Jenkins report commissioned by the Government. On what day next week does the right hon. Lady expect its publication? Will the Government make a statement about that report? The House will expect an early debate on the report and the Government's response to it.

We are grateful to the right hon. Lady for announcing the date of the state opening of Parliament. Can she confirm when she plans to prorogue the House? In view of the shifting foreign affairs situation in Kosovo and elsewhere, is there any prospect of a debate on foreign affairs?

Finally, the right hon. Lady may know that an important international conference will be held in Buenos Aires from 2 to 12 November following up the Kyoto summit. It would be helpful if the Government could hold a debate before the conference starts so that hon. Members may give the Government the benefit of their views on those issues.

Mrs. Beckett: I shall endeavour to cover all the issues that the right hon. Gentleman has raised. On the economy, the House will be very well aware that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer has announced that he will be making his pre-Budget statement on 3 November. The House will also be well aware that this is when the Government set out in full, with all the latest information, their current view of the economy. In that sense, it is faintly ludicrous to accuse the Government of not being prepared to come to the House and focus on those issues.

The right hon. Gentleman also asked me about the Neill and Jenkins reports. I would normally hope to adopt an attitude of sweet reason in our weekly exchanges, but I find it extraordinary that the Opposition are already trying to make something of the Neill report and accusing the Government of trying to cherry-pick it. As the Conservatives are supposed to have given undertakings to implement some of the recommendations on publishing political party accounts and have singularly failed to do so, I do not think that it lies with them to accuse anyone of cherry-picking the Neill report. It is an extensive report. We were pleased that many of its recommendations chime in with our own evidence, but it goes far wider—

Sir George Young: Not all.

Mrs. Beckett: The right hon. Gentleman says, "Not all". As far as I can recall, the report does not chime in with any of the recommendations made by the Opposition. Indeed, they refused point blank to allow Neill even to consider party political funding, so it seems quite farcical for them to pretend that they have the high ground on this matter. Of course we have every intention that there should be proper debate and consideration of the Neill report. When we have had a better chance to consider its wide range of recommendations and proposals, no doubt the matter will return in some form.

The right hon. Gentleman also asked me when I expected the Jenkins report. I am afraid that is not immediately fresh in my mind. It may be Thursday next week, but I cannot be absolutely categorical. Again, we do not yet have the report, but of course I recognise that it is a matter in which there is passionate interest on both sides of the House and I am confident that it will come before the House at some stage.

The right hon. Gentleman asked me when the House may prorogue. I cannot give him a date, but I anticipate that it is likely to be late in the week preceding the state opening. I have taken note of his request for a debate on matters raised in the aftermath of Kyoto and of the dates that he gave for the conference in Buenos Aires. He also asked me about the prospect of a discussion on Kosovo. He will be aware, I am sure, that Foreign and Commonwealth questions are top next Tuesday.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): Will the House be kept informed of developments over the Pinochet case? Is it not important that the due processes of law apply to all criminals, including a former murderous, criminal dictator and torturer such as Pinochet? Would it not have been far better had Lady Thatcher realised that and kept her mouth shut?

Mrs. Beckett: I entirely share my hon. Friend's view that we should recognise the key importance of due processes of law with regard to all. He has asked for an assurance that the House will be kept informed. Knowing his considerable experience in commenting on such matters, I am confident that he will be well aware of the quasi-judicial role occupied by my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary. Obviously, I will bear in mind his request, consistent with that responsibility.

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall): May I endorse the request for debates, when time can be found, on the Neill and Jenkins reports as well as Kosovo? There is a general feeling in the House that simply answering questions is not a sufficient response to that problem.

Will the Leader of the House undertake an urgent investigation and report back to the House as soon as possible on the terms of reference and the criteria for editing the parliamentary channel? I do not know whether she is aware that the BBC has now taken responsibility for the channel. I am given to understand, and I now have some evidence, that that has put the BBC in a rather invidious position. She may be aware that yesterday, I initiated a debate in the House on the reporting of Parliament by the BBC, which is a matter of considerable concern, and I was told afterwards by an hon. Gentleman that the BBC, in its strapline that runs across the bottom of the picture, was interpolating its own comments on our debate. This is a particularly invidious situation. I hope that the Leader of the House will agree that it is worth looking at the terms of reference of the BBC when it undertakes the reporting of Parliament on our behalf.

This afternoon, I viewed the tape of that debate. My speeches and those of other hon. Members appear with the BBC's own comments on the debate across the bottom of the picture. This may be a special case, but I think the Leader of the House will agree that in such circumstances, it could be invidious for the BBC to comment in that way, and possibly extremely misleading.

Mrs. Beckett: The issue that the hon. Gentleman raises was not familiar to me. I am sure that many hon. Members will share his concern. I take his point that he would wish the House to consider the matter at some stage, and I shall bear that in mind.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): After all the statements have been made about General Pinochet, and if all else fails, may I offer a decent suggestion? The official solicitor should gently take him by the hand to Mrs. Thatcher's flat, and force him to live there for the next six months.

Hon. Members: Cruel and unusual punishment.

Mrs. Beckett: I cannot possibly comment.

Mr. Peter Brooke (Cities of London and Westminster): As I have read that the Government are in favour of the main thrust of the Neill report, which contained 100 recommendations, can the Leader of the House tell us how many recommendations fall under what I assume is the lesser thrust?

Mrs. Beckett: I am afraid that I did not follow the end of the right hon. Gentleman's question, but I can tell him, as I said a few moments ago, that the Neill report is more wide-ranging than any of us had anticipated, and the Government will want to—

Mr. Andrew MacKay (Bracknell): We have accepted all the recommendations.

Mrs. Beckett: In that case, I look forward with eager anticipation to the publication of the Conservative party's accounts.

Mr. Stuart Bell (Middlesbrough): May I build on the response that the President of the Council gave to the shadow Leader of the House, and tell my right hon. Friend and the House that the Jenkins report will be published on Thursday morning with a press conference at the Institute of Directors, which seems entirely appropriate? In the light of my right hon. Friend's comments on sweet reasonableness, may I ask her to ask the Prime Minister to come to the House on Thursday afternoon and give us a statement on the Jenkins commission's report and recommendations, and to follow that with an early debate, given the report's constitutional implications and importance for the House?

Mrs. Beckett: I am well aware of the passionate interest that my hon. Friend, along with many other hon. Members, takes in the matter. I am confident that when the Jenkins report has been published, time will be found to air the issues that it raises, but I am not keen to speculate on when.

Sir Teddy Taylor (Rochford and Southend, East): As the Government of Libya have now accepted in writing the arrangements for a trial in The Hague of the Lockerbie suspects, subject to three amendments, and as the British and American Governments have said that there can be no amendments, is it not rather insulting to the House of Commons that the order providing for the trial and the expenditure, No. 2251, is not subject to debate or consideration by the House or any Committee? Would it not be fairer to democracy and to the relatives of those

[Sir Teddy Taylor]

who lost their lives if the Government would arrange a debate for next week, to allow the House to say whether it approves of the Government's tough line, or whether it thinks that there was some merit in making concessions on the three amendments proposed by the Libyan Government?

Mrs. Beckett: I hear what the hon. Gentleman says in requesting time to be found to raise the matter in the House. He will be aware that it is Foreign and Commonwealth Office questions on Tuesday, when he will no doubt look for an opportunity to raise the matter.

Mr. Harry Barnes (North-East Derbyshire): As I am sure the Leader of the House knows, the Department of Social Security today announced the outcome of the annual review of the cold weather payments scheme. The problem still exists of postal areas being covered by different meteorological offices. In my constituency I have a massive problem with two postcode areas that are dealt with from Leeds, rather than from Nottinghamshire. The question of sorting out which meteorological offices should be used is one that should be aired in the House, bearing in mind that we shall all be receiving massive representations from our constituents.

Mrs. Beckett: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that warning. He may be right to say that we shall receive heavy correspondence on the matter and that the issue will be raised in the House. I am aware that the way in which these matters are settled has long been an issue of controversy. The tabling of Social Security questions will be on Monday 2 November. That will give hon. Members an opportunity to try to raise the issue. It remains the position that as a result of the early actions that the Government took on coming into office, all pensioners receive help with their heating bills in a way that was not previously the case. That at least marginally alleviates the difficulties to which my hon. Friend has drawn attention.

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip-Northwood): May I reinforce the plea made by my right hon. Friend the Member for North-West Hampshire (Sir G. Young) for a debate on foreign affairs? Would not such a debate be particularly apposite before the visit next week of President Menem of Argentina—a visit whose purpose is to effect a full reconciliation between our two countries—in that it would give an opportunity for the Government to explain their policies towards countries that have had civil strife, such as Argentina, where more people died than in Chile? Could not the occasion be used also to remind the House how General Secretary Honecker of East Germany, whose regime was responsible for the deaths of scores of people on the Berlin wall, was received in Chile to pass his declining years with his daughter—with his family? Could not appropriate conclusions be drawn?

Mrs. Beckett: I hear the hon. Gentleman's support for a debate on foreign affairs. We had a statement on foreign affairs on Monday of this week and there will be Foreign Office questions next week. I fear that I do not see time for a foreign affairs debate in the near future.

Mr. Paul Flynn (Newport, West): When can we have a debate on early-day motion 1677?

[*That this House is gravely concerned at evidence of the over prescription of damaging and addictive medicinal drugs in women's prisons; believes that powerful medicinal drugs prescribed to the late Emma Humphries and one other woman may have caused their premature deaths; is alarmed by the claims made by a distinguished author that neuroleptic drugs are routinely prescribed to young women prisoners who mutilate themselves, and that medicinal drugs are used as pacifiers which move prisoners from non-addictive illegal drug use to highly addictive medicinal drug use; and calls for a full inquiry into all drug use in women's prisons.*]

The motion deals with the serious and tragic case of two young women who died at a very early age from, according to the families' belief, addictions to medicinal drugs that they acquired in prison. The claim is being made that there is vast over-prescription of Largactil and other neuroleptics in our prisons, and that Largactil is being used as a pacifier and as a means to enable prison officers to meet their performance targets by weaning prisoners, especially women prisoners, off non-addictive, illegal drugs on to highly addictive and dangerous legal drugs. The case has been made eloquently in a recent book by Angela Devlin entitled "Invisible Women".

The Home Office of this Government and that of the previous Government have refused to give details of prescribing neuroleptics in women's prisons. Is it not right that we should have a debate to ensure that the plight of these defenceless women is made visible?

Mrs. Beckett: I am aware of my hon. Friend's long-standing interest in these matters and of his concern about issues such as the welfare of prisoners. I can only say to him that there will be Home Office questions this coming Monday, which may provide an opportunity to raise the matter to which he has referred. I cannot promise him time for a debate in the very near future.

Mr. Eric Forth (Bromley and Chislehurst): Does the Leader of the House accept that she has perhaps inadvertently given the best possible reason for an urgent debate on the Neill report? The Leader has wriggled obviously about the Government's response to the report, which they set up with much posturing and wringing of hands, allegedly taking the moral high ground. How is it that the right hon. Lady finds it so difficult, even at this stage, to say, "We don't need a debate on the report because we, the Government, accept every proposed measure in it", as the Opposition have done?

Surely we need an opportunity for the Leader of the House and others on the Government Benches to explain why they are so embarrassed about the Neill report and why they will not accept some of the key recommendations, not least those on referendums, which the Government are obviously hell bent on using as a twisted device to massage public opinion for their own needs.

Mrs. Beckett: I have seldom heard such claptrap at any Question Time or debate. Labour asked the Neill committee to report on these matters against the opposition of the Conservative party. We have implemented all the things that we could voluntarily

implement and that were in our evidence to the committee already. The Conservative party claims to accept all the recommendations, but has not lifted a finger to implement any of them. As there are wide recommendations on referendums that require careful consideration, it is sensible for the Government to weigh these matters and then come to the House with their response. As for the notion that the Conservatives have attained the moral high ground by saying that they accept in full all the recommendations, the fact that they have not implemented any of the ones that they could have implemented shows that they would not know the moral high ground if they saw it.

Mr. Jim Marshall (Leicester, South): Has my right hon. Friend seen the words attributed to the Prime Minister this week on the European Union and defence? If she has, could she explain in greater detail than was given in the press what he had in mind on that relationship? If she cannot do that now, could she encourage him to come to the House to flesh out his ideas so that ordinary Members of Parliament can hear his views, and let him know ours, about any possible relationship between the European Union and defence?

Mrs. Beckett: I speak from memory, but I think this matter might have been raised with the Prime Minister yesterday. I understand and respect my hon. Friend's concerns. The Prime Minister was saying that we want some imaginative thinking on how we can enhance the European contribution to NATO. There is no suggestion, and never has been, that he or the Government wish to undermine NATO, which is the cornerstone of our defence and security policy. It has always been made clear that we would not support, for example, a standing European army. If my hon. Friend or other hon. Members wish to explore the matter further, there will be an opportunity next Wednesday in the debate on the Army.

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham): Will the right hon. Lady reconsider and find time for an early debate on the deteriorating state of the economy—that debate to be initiated by the Prime Minister? Is she aware that despite his glib evasions yesterday and the truly gut-wrenching complacency of the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, the European Commission predicts that Britain will slump to the bottom of the European growth table next year? Does she accept that as the Prime Minister's policies of tax, waste and regulate are responsible for, once again, making Britain the sick man of Europe, he is responsible for coming to the Floor of the House to debate the possible cures for the sickness that he has caused?

Mrs. Beckett: I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on trumping the contribution of the right hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth) in the deleteriousness league. I agree with what I think was the underlying thrust of the hon. Gentleman's observations—that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister did an excellent job yesterday of advancing the Government's case on the handling of the economy, although I can well understand that the hon. Gentleman did not like it one little bit.

Mr. Bercow: Glib evasions.

Mrs. Beckett: They were not glib evasions. The problem for the Conservatives is that they were statistics, which are much harder for them to deal with, especially as they seem not to understand them. The hon. Gentleman accused my right hon. Friends of complacency. That is not the case. It is clear that they, like the whole Government, recognise the difficulties that some sections of the economy face, but we also recognise how far-fetched are the suggestions of the Conservative party that all the problems arose only during our tenure of office. The pre-Budget statement putting all these matters in context will be made on 3 November and I am sure that the hon. Gentleman is looking forward to that. We certainly are.

Mr. Tom Clarke (Coatbridge and Chryston): Does my right hon. Friend agree that we have seen a welcome renaissance of the British film industry in recent times? Does she recall that in March, a review co-chaired by Stewart Till of Polygram, called "A Bigger Picture", met with fairly widespread approval? I think that it was the *Financial Times* that said that it was the most comprehensive review of the British film industry for 30 years. Will my right hon. Friend therefore give us some support in ensuring that such an important aspect of Britain's creative industries is given a fair wind, and a debate on the Floor of the House?

Mrs. Beckett: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend. I know of his strong support for the film industry, and I appreciate his welcome for the review that he mentioned. He will know of the strong support being given by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, and about his widespread consultations on how we can advance the future of the film industry, whose importance is recognised throughout the House. I shall certainly bear my right hon. Friend's observation in mind. The day for tabling questions to the Department for Culture, Media and Sport is next Monday.

Mr. Peter Bottomley (Worthing, West): May I follow the question asked by the hon. Member for Leicester, South (Mr. Marshall), who asked whether the Prime Minister would be able to answer questions about his view on what defence co-operation not covered by present arrangements should take place in Europe? Hearing other Ministers speak in Wednesday's debate would not be sufficient.

We are responding to a story that came out through a briefing, so could the Government give us an open register of official briefings to journalists by Ministers and for the Prime Minister, so that the rest of us would know what was said in private? Could we also have a register of the Philip Gould-type groups consulted by the Government and paid for with taxpayers' money, so that we can understand what the Government are being told by other people, in the same way that we hope that the Government will also pay attention to what we say in the Chamber?

Mrs. Beckett: As I am sure the hon. Gentleman has noticed, the Prime Minister comes here every week for half an hour of Question Time in which many such matters can be raised. I am sure that should the hon. Gentleman or any of his hon. Friends catch your eye, Madam Speaker, it will be possible for them to raise such issues directly with the Prime Minister. That will certainly meet the point that the hon. Gentleman made. As for openness, as we are a Government who hold open briefings to the Lobby by the Prime Minister's official

[Mrs. Beckett]

spokesman, and who are committed to introducing proposals for freedom of information, we need no lectures from the Opposition on that subject.

Ms Gisela Stuart (Birmingham, Edgbaston): I am sure that the Leader of the House is aware of the grave situation at Longbridge, next to my constituency. Many jobs are threatened there, and although I agree with the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry that the decision is primarily one for Rover, does not the present situation show us that the previous Government left us with deep structural damage to our industrial base? Our supply chain base is weakened and we lack a sufficiently skilled work force to provide the car industry with the skills that it needs. Can space be found in the near future for a debate on how the regional development agencies, in particular, could take a strategic position in developing our supply chain base, thus helping the people at Longbridge in connection with jobs in the car industry, whether with Rover or with one of the other manufacturers?

Mrs. Beckett: My hon. Friend makes an important and powerful point. It is clear that the difficulties being experienced at Longbridge have been long in the making. She will know that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry met representatives of the company this morning and had a useful discussion. The issues at Longbridge include short-term costs and long-term investment decisions. My hon. Friend is right to say that the present position casts light not only on the reality of our economic inheritance from the Conservatives, but on the need for work such as that of the regional development agencies. I shall bear in mind her view that hon. Members might like to debate the matter in future.

Mr. Howard Flight (Arundel and South Downs): It is a long time since we heard announcements about the Food Standards Agency. In view of the depression facing agriculture and the concern of farmers in particular that consumers should know where the food they buy in the shops is produced geographically—and that it has met the standards and quality of production required in this country and represented by the Food Advisory Board standards—might the Leader of the House make time for a debate on the issue of food standard labelling?

Mrs. Beckett: There will be a debate on agriculture on Monday, as the hon. Gentleman will have heard me say in the statement. I hear and welcome his support for greater information to be provided about food, and his support for food standards. It is unfortunate that the setting up of an agency was not a step that the Conservative Government felt inclined to take. However, I always welcome converts and I am glad to hear of his support. I cannot promise a debate in the near future, but I can promise him that the Government intend to press on with the matter.

Mr. Tony McWalter (Hemel Hempstead): Will my right hon. Friend consider having a debate on science and technology policy in the near future, particularly since the comprehensive spending review allocated a very welcome £1.1 billion to new initiatives? However, the House has not had an opportunity to consider the philosophy under which those funds should be allocated and distributed. In particular, I am worried by the possibility that, because our partner in the initiative is Wellcome, there might be too much of an emphasis on biochemistry or medicinal science and insufficient emphasis on, say, physics, mathematics or chemical sciences. I wish to make a specific plea to the Government to consider aerospace and space technology, particularly in view of the Beagle 2 project. We should make a representation to the European Space Agency before 30 October as to whether we are willing in principle to commit £25 million to support the Mars 2003 project. May we have an early debate on science and technology policy?

Mrs. Beckett: I cannot promise my hon. Friend an early debate on those matters, although I recognise his great interest in the issues. Trade and Industry questions will take place on Thursday. I note also the points he makes about the importance of the aerospace industry—a view he knows that I share—and his concerns about science policy. Some of the boundaries in the handling of and approach to the different scientific disciplines that he identifies are becoming rather blurred these days. I share his view that these are matters of great importance. I cannot promise time for a debate in the near future, but I will bear his views in mind.

Mr. Simon Burns (West Chelmsford): I seek clarification from the Leader of the House on her reply to my right hon. Friend the Member for North-West Hampshire (Sir G. Young), concerning his request for a debate on the Buenos Aires conference on climate change. When the right hon. Lady said that she had "taken note" of my right hon. Friend's request, did she mean that she had taken note because he asked the question and would do no more, or that she had taken note, would go away and would come up with the answer that the House can debate the question—preferably before the start of the conference, but certainly before we prorogue?

Mrs. Beckett: My answer means what it has always meant when the Leader of the House has said it under any previous Government.

Mr. John Cryer (Hornchurch): I wish to support the request of my hon. Friend the Member for Middlesbrough (Mr. Bell) for an early statement and debate on the Jenkins commission. If the reports are correct—and I think they are likely to be—that Jenkins has opted for the additional member system, it will mean not only that he will be trying to perpetrate an attack on democratic accountability, but that he will have broken the parameters of the investigation. He would have known that if he had read the submission to his commission from the first-past-the-post group, of which I am a member. Sadly, it seems that he was unable to stay off the claret long enough to read it.

Mrs. Beckett: I take that to be a call for a debate on the Jenkins commission report. I shall certainly bear it in mind when the report has been received.

Mr. Julian Brazier (Canterbury): May I also call for an early debate on the Jenkins report? Lord Jenkins was generous enough to spare a full hour during his year

researching it to talk to Members of Parliament here. As one colleague of the right hon. Lady pointed out, we all feel terribly humble before him because most of us have fought for only one political party. None the less, it would be nice if the place that is principally affected by his report had an opportunity to debate his findings.

Mrs. Beckett: What is already clear is that such a debate would certainly be lively.

Mr. Shaun Woodward (Witney): Will the Leader of the House clarify exactly what she meant by taking note of the request by my hon. Friend the Member for West Chelmsford (Mr. Burns) for a debate on climate change before the meeting in Buenos Aires? Will she simply say yes or no to whether the Government take the issue seriously and whether they will find Government time for a debate on it?

Mrs. Beckett: It may save the hon. Gentleman much time and trouble in the future if he bears in mind that usually what I say is what I really mean. When I said that I would take note of the views of the hon. Member for West Chelmsford (Mr. Burns), that is precisely what I meant.

Mr. Bercow: What does that mean?

Mrs. Beckett: It means that I will take note of the hon. Gentleman's views. It is quite straightforward. The hon. Member for West Chelmsford made a proposal, gave the date of a particular conference and asked for a debate. I shall consider that request and, if it is possible to grant it, no doubt I will do so. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman attends business questions often enough to know that there are many requests for debates. The whole purpose is that Members should have the opportunity to ask for a debate. I cannot say now what debates will be granted.

Mr. Christopher Fraser (Mid-Dorset and North Poole): Will the right hon. Lady assure the House that the Prime Minister's press office is not trying to influence the present debate about the time of the Independent Television News programme "News at Ten", which was widely discussed by the Select Committee on Culture, Media and Sport this morning and in the press? Does she agree that the issue warrants a debate without the influence of Alastair Campbell?

Mrs. Beckett: I feel sure that the hon. Gentleman is entirely mistaken in the apprehension upon which that question was based.

Mr. Nick Gibb (Bognor Regis and Littlehampton): Given that the Chancellor of the Exchequer announced to the International Monetary Fund on 6 October that growth in the United Kingdom economy next year would be cut by 50 per cent., is not it astonishing that hon. Members have to wait a month before the issue can be debated in full and a month before they are told the Government's actual forecast for 1999? How can hon. Members effectively scrutinise public finances given that the figures in the Blue Book are now completely meaningless, misleading and wrong?

Mrs. Beckett: Few Governments have more experience of figures being misleading and wrong than the Conservatives when they were in power. First, the House did not sit until this Monday. Secondly, my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer has already made it plain that he will be making his pre-Budget statement in about 10 days. That is when the latest information will be available. I am confident that the House awaits it with eager anticipation and, after what has been said today, I feel sure that there will be a full attendance for it.

Mr. Andrew Stunell (Hazel Grove): Is the Leader of the House aware of the statement made by the chief constable of Greater Manchester on Monday that, as a result of a shortfall in funding induced by the comprehensive spending review, there will be a complete ban on recruitment to the police service there from now on? As a result, 400 posts will be lost in the next 12 months. Does she understand the great concern throughout Greater Manchester and certainly in my constituency? Will she ask the Home Secretary to explain to the House the impact of the comprehensive spending review on police services throughout the country and, in particular, in Greater Manchester, so that I can tell my constituents exactly what the future of policing in the conurbation is to be?

Mrs. Beckett: I was not aware of the statement by the chief constable. The hon. Gentleman asked me to ask the Home Secretary to come to the House to deal with the matter, and my right hon. Friend will, of course, be here for Question Time on Monday.

Sir Patrick Cormack (South Staffordshire): Is the right hon. Lady aware that her reply to the request by my right hon. Friend the Member for North-West Hampshire (Sir G. Young) for a debate on foreign affairs was disappointing, as were her replies to hon. Members who raised a certain recent subject? Will she give a categorical assurance that Her Majesty's Government had no political involvement in the recent arrest of a senator from a friendly foreign democracy? Will she ask the Foreign Secretary to confirm to the House next week that the aim of the Government's so-called ethical foreign policy is not to interfere in the internal arrangements of other democratic states, any more than their wish is to have other countries interfere in whatever arrangements we deem it appropriate to make in Northern Ireland?

Mrs. Beckett: The issues that the hon. Gentleman raises have been debated—or at least generally discussed in public. He will be aware of the view that I have expressed that some of these more sensitive issues are a matter for my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary. I readily assure him that the matter is not being handled politically; we have taken the view from the outset that it is a legal matter, which is how it has been and continues to be handled.

Housing

[Relevant documents: Tenth report from the Environment, Transport and Regional Affairs Committee, Session 1997–98, on Housing (HC 495-I) and the Government's response thereto (Cm 4080).]

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Robert Ainsworth.]*

Madam Speaker: I appeal to hon. Members for self-restraint. I know that a number of hon. Members are interested and want to take part in the debates, but I am not able to impose a time limit as the debates are being introduced by Back Benchers and I do not want the limit to apply to them. I simply appeal for self-restraint.

4.10 pm

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett (Denton and Reddish): I welcome the opportunity to debate our housing report and the Government's response to it. I place on record the Committee's thanks to our Clerk and specialist adviser and to our advisers Richard Bate, Peter Chapman and Dr. Christine Whitehead, who gave us so much help in preparing our report. I also thank all those who sent in written evidence and those who came before the Committee to answer our questions—we are extremely grateful to them all. Finally, I thank all the members of the Committee, who worked so hard, and I apologise to the House for the fact that my co-Chairman, my hon. Friend the Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody), is unable to be here today—she is on a Commonwealth Parliamentary Association delegation.

Our inquiry arose out of the previous Government's projection that an extra 4.4 million households would have to be catered for over the next 15 years or so, which represents an increase on the previous projections of about 1 million—that was the key to our inquiry. I was surprised that very few of the people who sent in evidence challenged those figures, even though they raised many other problems. One reason was that there was little detail on how those projections were arrived at. One of the most pleasing aspects of the Government's response was the promise that the next set of projections would include much more detail on how the figures are arrived at, so that there can be much more discussion about whether they are realistic.

If the projections are wrong, there will clearly be problems. If too many households are projected, rows of houses in parts of the country may contain empty properties, and it is extremely depressing to live in a road where some houses are uncared for and untended. It is important that we do not over-provide or over-provide in particular parts of the country.

Equally, it is important that we do not under-provide. If we do, it is almost certain that house prices will increase, which will mean that many people cannot afford to buy a house, giving rise to an increase in the demand for social housing. Ensuring that the projections are right and meeting those projections are extremely important.

The projections show that the extra dwellings that will be needed will be for young single people, for people in middle age who are likely to be living on their own—perhaps through divorce—and, of course, for the increasing number of elderly people.

One of the key questions is where those dwellings should go. There has been a great deal of argument about how many of them can go on to what are crudely called brown-field sites—areas of land that have been used previously. First, the Government suggested about 60 per cent, but the Opposition have looked for a rather higher figure than that. There was evidence to the Select Committee that, in some parts of the country, it would be easy to reach a higher target than 60 per cent.

I believe that we should be a little cautious about making predictions until we have much better information. One of the most useful things will be Lord Rogers's task force, which will carry out the compilation of a database across the country so that we know how much brown-field land there is. That is fundamental. Until we know how much land there is, we cannot prove how realistic the 60 per cent. target is, or whether a higher target can be reached in some parts of the country. I hope that that information will be available within the next 12 months at least.

If there is to be more development on brown-field sites, the Government have to work hard on the issue of contaminated land. The Select Committee on the Environment first looked at contaminated land over 10 years ago, and came up with a series of recommendations. The previous Administration looked at them, rejected them or altered them, but took very little action. I plead with the Government to get on with the regulations for contaminated land. We have to get on with providing the money so that many of the sites can be reclaimed. We will be able to reach a target of 60 per cent. or higher only if we put that in place.

We have to look at the way in which local authorities are hoarding land for industry. I made some inquiries around the local authorities in Greater Manchester about the amount of land they have in the hope of attracting industry to it. When one adds up all such land around Greater Manchester, one realises that it would be impossible to attract that amount of industry to the area, and, if that amount of industry could be attracted, there would be no way in which there would be sufficient people to work in it. Local authorities must make much more effort to hold back a realistic amount of land for the creation of jobs, which is extremely important, while releasing some of the land for housing. That would go a long way towards reaching the target of 60 per cent.

Sir Sydney Chapman (Chipping Barnet): I share the hon. Gentleman's view about the difficulty of deciding how many brown-field sites are available, as opposed to green-field sites. I also take his point that surplus land may be marked for industrial use. Will the hon. Gentleman share with the House his view and that of the Select Committee on green belt land? Does he agree that, wherever the houses go, they should not go on established green belt sites?

Mr. Bennett: There is unanimity across the House that, as far as possible, green belt land should be sacrosanct. However, there is that little phrase, "as far as possible". That reasoning has been behind the tradition of green belt land, and the Committee and I did not deviate from that historical view.

I must point out that many of the people who gave evidence to the Select Committee did not want housing in their area, but they were still working hard to promote

new industries and new jobs. I plead with local authorities, if they are going out to campaign to attract jobs to their area, to accept equal responsibility for providing houses for the people who will carry out that activity.

The core of our report is that we need urban regeneration. We need to make our cities and urban areas work. One of our recommendations was that the Government should produce a White Paper. I am glad that, earlier this week, they announced that we will get an urban White Paper. This is not just a matter for the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions—the Deputy Prime Minister's Department—but one that goes right across the Government.

Regeneration of our cities must include ensuring that the schools are tip-top, and that we deal with crime and the problems that shops face. Regeneration means improving the whole environment, and many Government Departments need to play a part. I therefore hope that the White Paper will not suffer from departmentitis, but will receive full co-operation in its production.

If we are to regenerate our cities, we must regenerate some of their old buildings. The Committee was lucky enough to visit Poundbury to see the Prince of Wales's proposals for housing. However, I found more encouraging the work that he is doing with the Heritage Trust to try to bring back into residential use many of the old buildings in our cities. In my constituency, we have the Houldsworth mill project, which I hope succeeds. In the years that I have been in the House, many proposals have been made to bring that fine old mill into residential use, but they never quite made it. I hope that this time will be different.

I welcome the Government's response to the issue of revising the planning regulations, but quick action is needed. The Government have given a commitment to revise planning policy guidance note 3 on housing, PPG11 on regional plans and PPG12 on development plans. The release of land for housing is a crucial issue. At the moment, local authority plans have to include a five-year supply. Unless the Government move quickly, the danger is that some builders will race to use green-field sites, knowing that it will be difficult to use them in the future. I hope that the Government can reassure the House that they will move as speedily as possible to revise the planning regulations.

I mentioned the probable increased demand for social housing. The Committee was disappointed by the Government's response on social housing, although we may have been a little harsh in our report.

The Minister for London and Construction has made his reputation in championing the need for social housing, but his appearance before the Committee was disappointing. I understand that he knew the results of the spending review and we did not, but I reiterate that we need much more social housing than the Government are so far committed to providing. It is a disappointing cop-out to say that it is the responsibility of local authorities. If one local authority attempts to provide social housing, it is often taken up by people from neighbouring authorities that have made no provision. The Government need to set a much more realistic target.

The key to the whole process is continuous monitoring. I hope that the Government will report regularly to the House on how much new housing will be built on brown-field sites. It is very important that the Government succeed in regenerating our cities, because that would improve the quality of life for people who live in them, as well as stop the continual spread of housing into the countryside. I hope that we have a good debate on the report, and, more importantly, that we see action from the Government.

Mr. Jonathan Shaw (Chatham and Aylesford): Does my hon. Friend agree that an essential measure to regenerate our inner cities and relieve the pressures on the countryside and green-field sites is fiscal incentives for the building industry? The imposition of value added tax on the regeneration of older properties and the zero-rating of new properties on green-field sites is an anomaly. If the position were harmonised, it would provide an incentive for the building industry.

Mr. Bennett: I agree. If my hon. Friend had read the report, he would know that we have made that point, and that we were pleased by the Government's response. It is crazy that there is no VAT on new building, and that anyone who wants to regenerate buildings within cities, or conversions of old mills or shops or whatever, faces the problem of paying VAT. We are tied by Europe, and we cannot abolish VAT, although that would be the best approach.

I am keen to keep within the promised 15 minutes. I recommend to the House our report, and many aspects of the Government's response. My plea is for action on implementing a sensible housing policy for the next 15 years, so that all our people can enjoy decent homes.

4.24 pm

Mr. Simon Burns (West Chelmsford): I congratulate the hon. Member for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett), who chairs the Select Committee on the Environment, Transport and Regional Affairs, and his colleagues on a timely, important and interesting report. They have done the House a service. Partly in jest, I find it slightly puzzling that the Deputy Prime Minister should have strongly welcomed the report, given that it contains a number of veiled criticisms of his own actions, both in the text and between the lines. There is a bald statement that the Committee found the answers given to it by one junior Minister to be both "vacuous and disingenuous".

The report represents a thinly veiled attack on the dithering and inaction that characterise the Government's attitude to housing provision. The Committee's findings vindicate our consistent criticism of the Deputy Prime Minister's failure to address the problem of household growth and of the Government's inability to engage in joined-up thinking on the important issue of housing.

The report is a valuable contribution to debate. Although it is in places couched in soft language, it is in many ways a damning indictment of the complacency with which the Government have approached a critical issue. It is a call to arms to those of us on both sides of the House who care about the preservation of the countryside and the regeneration of our towns and cities.

I shall take the House through some of the Committee's key findings. I hope that the House will forgive me for indulging in some translation, so that hon. Members who have not had the privilege of reading the report in its entirety may have some of its flavour, stripped of the spin that Ministers and their advisers have sought to put on it.

[Mr. Simon Burns]

The proposals in the White Paper "Planning for the Communities of the Future" are, in the words of the Committee,

"well-intentioned, but vague."

The report states:

"We do not believe they will be adequate to achieve their aims."

In other words, unless the Government decide to do something instead of just talking about the problems, the countryside will be swamped with new developments, and our towns and cities will suffer decay and deprivation. The report is certainly a long way short of the ringing endorsement to which the Deputy Prime Minister laid claim on Monday.

The report repeatedly stresses the need for a brown-field development target of 60 per cent. or more, to be applied as soon as possible. The Committee supports

"an interim national target . . . of at least 60 per cent., which should be applied in the coming round of Regional Planning Guidance, rather than over 10 years as the Government has proposed."

If I may take the liberty of paraphrasing once again, unless the Government decide to do something instead of just talking, the green belt will not be saved, and our towns and cities will continue to be scarred by derelict sites. Again, that seems to fall short of the endorsement heralded by the Secretary of State.

The report continues:

"It is important that the target set should be challenging, e.g. 60 per cent. or higher—some witnesses thought 75 per cent. was possible".

For the Government to state—as the Deputy Prime Minister did on Monday—that that constitutes support for the Government's 60 per cent. target is, to coin a phrase, both vacuous and disingenuous.

Our manifesto at the general election stated that we would set a target of more than 60 per cent. We have since pressed the Government to fix a target of two thirds. I hope that the Minister can rise to announce that, in the light of the Select Committee's evidence, he will increase the target to two thirds with immediate effect.

The report is not just critical of what the Deputy Prime Minister has not done. It attacks what little he has done to discharge his duties—for example, in relation to the task force which he set up under Lord Rogers. The report states:

"We are concerned as to whether the Task Force will be able to undertake the wide range of tasks it has been set . . . It must not be used as a means of causing delay."

Again, the implication is clear. The Committee believes what Conservative Members have long suspected: as with so many other task forces and reviews set up over the past 18 months, the Government see this as a way of kicking the ball into the long grass and hoping that the problem will go away.

Mr. Bennett: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Burns: I will certainly give way to the Chairman, although I do not wish to give way again, because of the scarcity of time.

Mr. Bennett: Can the hon. Gentleman explain why the previous Government did not produce in the years after the target was put forward a register of how much brown-field land was available? If we had that information, everybody could put forward a realistic figure, not one based on guesswork.

Mr. Burns: I understand and have some sympathy with the hon. Gentleman's point, but it is important not to overlook the fact that, at the same time during that time scale, my right hon. Friend the Member for Suffolk, Coastal (Mr. Gummer) was determined to ensure that more and more building was done on brown-field sites when it was feasible, so as to protect and preserve the countryside and green-field sites.

The Committee states:

"Central government must support local authorities when they restrict the use of green-field sites."

Does the Deputy Prime Minister now accept that he was wrong on the principle of the issue to force West Sussex county council to cater for an extra 13,000 homes in its local plans, flying in the face of opposition from all three parties on the county council and of the advice of the planning inspectorate?

When the Minister replies, perhaps he will care to tell the House this, despite the answer which the Under-Secretary of State used as a dodge at Question Time on Tuesday to avoid the issue. To get away from the niceties of the sub judice rule that the Under-Secretary used, I am asking whether the Minister would care to answer the question on the principle rather than on the individual case.

How can that decision be squared with the words of the Select Committee and the Deputy Prime Minister's support for the report? How can such developments be squared with the recommendations and the Government's own rhetoric on transport? In particular, can the Minister explain how allowing major developments on green-field sites away from shops and other facilities contributes to the aim of reducing the need to travel? To judge from these glaring inconsistencies, the Government are scarcely capable of joined-up writing, let alone joined-up thinking, on the issue.

The Committee adds its voice to our own and the voices of numerous other interested bodies in calling for urgent revision to the Department's planning guidance notes, particularly PPG3 and PPG13. The Government have said that they intend to issue new guidance, and we welcome the commitment given in the Government's response to the report on Monday. The report rightly states that, without a clear planning framework,

"there will be uncertainty and the likelihood that in some regions the Government's policies on urban regeneration, integrated transport and sustainability will be ignored."

When can we expect to see this new guidance? Does the Minister have any news for us on that during this debate?

Why, when the Deputy Prime Minister announced the 60 per cent. target as long ago as February, has there been no movement so far to start giving effect to that target? He increasingly resembles an archer with only a small target to aim at and a quiver as empty as his rhetoric. The means to replace his stock of arrows are within his own power and the longer he delays, the more people will suspect that he does not want to start shooting at all.

The report also calls for the Government to announce a strategy for meeting the target set by the previous Government for reducing the amount of empty property,

and to issue advice to local authorities. I take the opportunity to add our voice to that of the Select Committee and remind the Government that Labour-controlled councils currently have the highest proportion of stock awaiting letting. The 10 authorities with the highest proportion of properties ready for letting or awaiting minor repairs are all, not unexpectedly, Labour-controlled.

Perhaps the Minister would like to tell us what plans the Government have to make sure that Labour councils bring their performance into line with that achieved by Conservative councils. Is he aware that the number of vacant dwellings is rising? There are now some 80,000 vacant dwellings under local authority management, accounting for almost 2.5 per cent. of the stock. How do the Government propose to tackle that major and growing problem?

Local authorities and the framework within which they operate will play a key role in determining the success of any strategy to bring more brown-field sites into use.

Mr. Andrew Love (Edmonton): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Burns: I am sorry—I will not give way, because time is short and so many other hon. Members wish to speak.

The Government may rest assured that Conservative councillors will continue to protect the green belt against development as long as they are not further hindered by decisions from the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions.

Conservative councillors in towns and cities will continue to urge the reuse of derelict sites and the clean-up of contaminated land. What measures does the Minister plan to introduce to ensure consistency across the planning system to give effect to the target of 60 per cent. of building on brown-field sites? Are the Government prepared to use their influence with the Labour-run authorities in our towns and cities, which control much of the brown land in question, to ensure that local authorities play their part in freeing brown-field sites for housing purposes? How does the Minister intend to encourage local authorities to allow brown land currently designated for industrial or commercial use to be used instead for residential purposes where feasible?

At present, planning law entitles local authorities to ask for contributions from developers towards the cost of overcoming genuine planning obstructions, such as widening road junctions or expanding the capacity of local schools. Conservative councillors will continue to seek fair agreements with developers for the joint funding of necessary local improvements.

Some local authorities allegedly abuse the system in order to finance unrelated spending. I understand that one local authority even demanded a contribution towards play areas from developers who were providing sheltered housing for the elderly. Such abuse discourages would-be developers from making applications to use brown-field sites. What will the Government do to prevent such seemingly sharp practices?

What line do the Government plan to take on the draft EU rules that will bar public bodies from contributing to pollution clean-up, and will insist that all land be returned to its natural state, regardless of its end use? When will the Government fix parameters for pollution clean-up, so that developers and local authorities know exactly where they stand?

The Government's response to the report is a poor attempt to paint it as an endorsement of their approach. That claim is not supported by a careful reading of the report. In fact, as the Deputy Prime Minister said on Monday, pretty much everybody claims to agree with the basic principles that we need more sustainable patterns of development and that we should minimise the use of green-field sites and maximise reuse of brown-field sites. The report exposes the hypocrisy of a Government who purport to defend the countryside and promote urban regeneration, while all the time taking decisions such as that in West Sussex, which undermine and frustrate their declared aims.

When the report was published, Friends of the Earth stated:

"the Select Committee has not been fooled by John Prescott's vague rhetoric."

The Government's response represents more of the same. The Select Committee was not fooled then, and I assure Ministers that the House will not be fooled now.

The Government's response is woefully inadequate. Its so-called strategy for meeting demand for new housing has been exposed as a sham. It is a catalogue of delay, indecision and downright incompetence. Instead of trying to paint a gloss over the report and paper over the cracks in their failed approach, the Government should go back to the drawing board and urgently consider relaying the entire foundations of their strategy to meet the problems facing the countryside and urban regeneration.

4.38 pm

Mrs. Christine Butler (Castle Point): The hon. Member for West Chelmsford (Mr. Burns) has not moved the debate further on—indeed, it has been stripped of context. He has not given due consideration to the Government's response to the Select Committee report—a response that was broadly welcomed by Labour Members. The big strategy of sustainability is one that we must all endorse. To move matters on, it is up to all of us to engage in debate on the detail of how to implement that strategy.

The Government and the Select Committee require sustainability to be at the heart of the debate—sustainability in respect of environmental, social and economic concerns. I urge the Government, when considering local authority planning application assessments, to give as much weight to social and economic criteria as to environmental criteria. That is extremely important, because, if we are not careful, the debate will shift in favour of the environmental agenda, which must not be considered in isolation from the social and economic agendas.

A big issue that has not yet been properly addressed, but which is all too evident, is the existence of huge regional differences in need and capacity. There is an enormous difference between north and south in general, but I should like to highlight the case of the south-east, where some of the biggest problems are found. The expected provision in that area is approximately one third of the 4.4 million new homes that have to be built. That is a pretty tall order. I welcome the so-called brown-field task force, although I would prefer the term "previously

[Mrs. Christine Butler]

used land" to "brown field", as I do not think the latter term is appropriate. The task force has been set up to examine urban capacity for regeneration needs, especially in the London area.

The problem is one not merely of providing more housing, but of creating balanced communities. It is important to pay attention to all an area's needs—economic, social and environmental. Ringing the London region are commuter districts. The majority of my constituents commute to their jobs. If that carries on, it will become unsustainable in terms of both transport and the provision of social housing.

I welcome some of the comments in the Government's response, but one or two issues need further detailed examination. In the context of fiscal strategies, there is a real need to redefine conversions, even though the Government would encounter great difficulty with the European Commission, and there would be a prolonged debate about the equalisation of the value added tax regime between new build and conversions. However, if it is at all possible to redefine conversions in the context of the need for new housing, it might bear down on the existing 17.5 per cent. VAT levy. That would be a great achievement.

A further issue with which we must take great care—one which Friends of the Earth and others might push without giving it proper consideration—is that of the green-field levy. It sounds like a great idea, especially if the money was to be put into brown-field site conversion and solving the problems that exist there. However, although I do not want the Government to abandon the idea, it should be a less immediate priority and the Government should give further consideration to the pros and cons of imposing such a levy.

Of the greatest urgency and importance are the new planning policy guidance notes. Already, local authorities are proposing and adopting plans, and regional planning conferences are at various stages of reporting and adoption. If we do not get the new PPGs in soon, we shall leave ourselves open to speculative developments on green-field land.

Mr. Anthony Steen (Totnes): The hon. Lady mentions PPGs, but does she not agree that the major problem facing the south-east is that 868,000 new houses are scheduled to be built in the south-east of England alone? I am sure that she would agree that the consequences, including the use of public funds for infrastructure, are far-reaching and should be addressed in the House now. Has the hon. Lady actually envisaged what 868,000 houses will mean to the whole of the south-east of England?

Mrs. Butler: I am following my own track and my own agenda. If I am allowed to continue, the hon. Gentleman will hear the answer to his question. The lack of attention paid to the issues dealt with by the Committee and to the smaller points that I am highlighting now is what really matters. We know what the figures are.

There has already been speculative interest in green-field sites in my constituency. The authority would like to reject that, but cannot do so, because of legal niceties. In 1951, a certain site received planning permission for mixed-use, retail and housing development. Try as it might, since that time the authority has been unable to reallocate land use policy in that area, even though the circumstances in the constituency and the wider region have changed dramatically. Why is the authority unable to act? The answer is that a road was built—one road through the whole site, with the result that the site holds developers' interest unfairly.

That is why I welcome a hint in the proposed PPG3 that the Government might be able to strengthen local authorities' resolve when applications for renewal are made. Perhaps huge compensation need not be payable to the inheritors of the land when the local authority can prove that the application is unsuitable. There should be a further requirement: if a proposal has not been entirely developed within a certain period, it fails, and a new application is required. The nonsense of digging a trench or laying a bit of tarmac on a site should no longer be accepted. There is a loophole, and I urge my hon. Friend the Minister to respond to these concerns as soon as possible, if that is appropriate.

Greater consideration should be given to the issues that I have raised. Local authorities are being stymied in their attempts to provide the most sustainable solutions within their own neighbourhoods and communities.

4.48 pm

Mr. Anthony Steen (Totnes): This is an important debate. I pay tribute to the Select Committee for its work on an important subject.

We are told that 4.4 million new houses are to be built by 2016. That is such a large figure that none of us can grasp what 4.4 million houses would look like. Is that equal to the whole of London or Reading? I wonder whether the Government are planning an exhibition on the Upper Committee Corridor to give us an idea of what 4.4 million houses would look like on the ground.

The Minister for the Regions, Regeneration and Planning (Mr. Richard Caborn): Those were the hon. Gentleman's Government's figures.

Mr. Steen: The Minister says that they were our Government's figures, but his Government have adopted them. I want to know how the Government came up with 4.4 million houses. Did the boffins in Kingsway think up that figure? What science do the officials profess to practise? Do they stick pins into lists of figures? What are their qualifications? Is there a special science for working out how many houses are needed?

Mr. Bennett: Does the hon. Gentleman accept that the process has gone on for many years? The interesting point is that officials have got the figures right over time.

Mr. Caborn: Thirty years.

Mr. Bennett: They have got the figures right for 30 years. It is dangerous to poke fun at the figures. We are keen that there should be more background information about the figures so that people can analyse them, but their track record is extremely good.

Mr. Steen: I would hate to argue with the hon. Gentleman, who was my pair many years ago and whose

interest in and illustrious track record on the environment and housing is well known in the House, but the fact that figures have been allegedly proved right over 30 years does not mean that the projected figures are correct. The process has worked only because it has become a self-fulfilling prophecy—we go on building houses and people move into them. That does not mean that the figures are right, or that the science is right. The Select Committee could do the House a great service by inquiring in detail into the science and deciding whether it is flawed.

Dr. Alan Whitehead (Southampton, Test): I draw the hon. Gentleman's attention to a document published in 1997 entitled "The Economic Determinants of Household Formation—A literature review", which the previous Government commissioned in 1996. It contains a great deal of information about the variables used in the prediction of future household growth and need. The figure has not, as the hon. Gentleman suggests, been plucked out of thin air. It was defended yesterday by the right hon. Member for Suffolk, Coastal (Mr. Gummer), who shared a platform with me at a meeting. The right hon. Gentleman is well apprised of the fact that a great deal of work has gone into calculating the figure and the hon. Gentleman should understand—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael J. Martin): Order. The hon. Gentleman's intervention is far too long.

Mr. Steen: It was not only far too long but unhelpful. It would be wise if I did not give way again because of the danger of spurious remarks distracting the House from the important points that I shall make. *[Interruption.]* It is good to hear that those on the Government Front Bench are particularly verbal and volatile today—that always means that one is dealing with points that worry them. Clearly they are concerned about what I shall say and they are trying to stop me saying it, but I shall not be deterred.

I have challenged the acceptance of the figures regardless of which Government proposed them. I am not afraid to say that I would challenge a Conservative Government if we were in office. Unfortunately we are not, so I am challenging the Labour Government to question the figures. I will not dwell on that point.

If we accept the figure of 4.4 million homes, it will be a self-fulfilling prophecy and we should consider how it will affect the south-west, where 438,000 houses are to be built. The Devon structure plan, which includes my constituency, proposed 90,500 homes. That was not enough, and after a public inquiry, the figure was raised to 95,000.

The South Hams, which comprises the majority of my constituency, will have 13,500 additional new dwellings by 2011. That is curious because the House of Commons Library concluded that my constituency is one of the most beautiful in Britain. It did so by examining the number of environmental beauty categories into which the Totnes and South Hams area falls. It has the heritage coastline, areas of great landscape value, areas of outstanding natural beauty, sites of special scientific interest, the Dartmoor national park, conservation areas and so on. How could 13,500 houses be built in such an area without destroying green fields or eating into special environmentally protected areas? Furthermore, it is said that a further 300 acres is needed for employment land and, within the area covered by Devon county council, 3,000 acres is needed for employment land.

It is argued that new homes will be required to house the existing population. I challenge that. We are told that the vast increase in the number of houses is simply necessary to provide for a larger number of individual households, mainly because of divorce, which will create a need for 40 per cent. of the new homes. In addition, 30 per cent. of the new homes are needed because people live longer and another 30 per cent. are needed for young people who leave home and move around the country for work purposes.

I was told that the housing projection for the South Hams is intended to rehouse people who already live there. I hope that the Minister will listen carefully to this point. In 1981, the population of South Hams was 69,993. By 1997, the number had risen to 80,200—an increase of about 18 per cent. By contrast, the population in the whole county of Devon increased by 5 per cent. only. It cannot be that more than 90,000 new houses are needed to redistribute the existing population if there are dramatic increases in population numbers. The population increase in the South Hams has been out of all proportion to that in the county and in the south-west. In no way is that redistribution; it is plain inward migration.

More houses are needed because people come from other places with their families, pets and motor cars to live in Devon, not because overcrowded households need more space. In the three months ending March 1998, 8,233 additional people moved into the county. Since 1988, 8,000 people have been moving into the county every three months. Only during the economic crisis in 1991 did the figure drop. That means that 32,000 people move to Devon every year. That is why the new houses are needed—not to rehouse local people, which is entirely another matter. The county council says that 90,000 new houses are required for local people. That is not true; it is a figment of the planners' and statisticians' imaginations.

My experience supports that. On Saturday afternoons when I have little else to do, I knock on doors at random. That is one of my hobbies, and I should declare it as an interest. Oddly, I find that most of the people whose doors I knock on are newcomers, not people who have moved from other parts of Devon.

Adding to the population rather than redistributing it creates enormous pressure on the local infrastructure. For example, the building of new houses has been banned in Dartmouth because the sewerage system cannot cope. In Ivybridge, the sewerage system is backing up because so many people use it and the facilities are not sufficient.

The Government's housing projections, if implemented, would destroy tens of thousands of acres of green-field land, but in the South Hams they will eat into the special categories of beauty that the House of Commons Library has highlighted as particularly important.

One of the greatest ironies is that the very beauty that attracts people to my constituency will be destroyed by the buildings that they are intending to occupy. Who is running the county council? I am afraid that it is the Liberals. Who is running the Torbay unitary authority that governs part of my constituency? Again, it is the Liberals. Who is running the South Hams district council? I am afraid that it is the Liberals.

[Mr. Steen]

On 30 July, the Liberal county council whipped in all its councillors to attend a debate on the structure plan. They approved the Government's structure plan for the building of 90,000 new houses, despite strong opposition from the Conservatives. That occurred on the afternoon of 30 July. In the evening of 30 July, the Liberals launched a campaign opposing the 90,000 figure that they had approved that afternoon. They are now running around Devon organising meetings and campaigning against the proposal that they passed on the afternoon of 30 July. That is a good Liberal story, is it not? The Liberals talk about sustainable development, but those 90,000 houses are unsustainable. They talk about environmental sensitivity, but they are not the least bit sensitive to the environment.

I must now conclude. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear".] I am glad that Labour Members have enjoyed my comments and are ready to respond to them.

I propose a solution to the problem. The Government could ask the local authorities in Devon to agree on a sustainable figure. The Liberals on the Devon county council said that they passed the Government's structure plan because they feared that, if they did not, the Government would increase the figure. If the Government would tell Devon county council, "We will not increase the number of houses, so go back to the other local authorities and come up with a figure that you think is sustainable", the Government would not have to call in the plan. That outcome is inevitable, as the plan would have disastrous consequences in a county as beautiful as Devon—and certainly in the South Hams.

My proposal amounts to a more democratic way of handling the matter. When the Minister replies perhaps he could consider what I believe is a very sensible approach: asking the local authorities to provide a more sustainable figure. I am most grateful, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and I hope that my comments have been helpful to the House.

5.1 pm

Ms Hazel Blears (Salford): I welcome the report of the Environment, Transport and Regional Affairs Select Committee and the recommendations contained therein. I compliment Committee members on the huge amount of work that they have undertaken in compiling the report. I understand that they have seen at least 30 sets of witnesses and received more than 200 memorandums. It has greatly assisted those hon. Members, like myself, who do not serve on the Committee to see the depth of consideration that Committee members have given to these important issues.

Contrary to the assertions made by the hon. Member for West Chelmsford (Mr. Burns), I consider the report to be an example of joined-up thinking and joined-up government. It raises issues regarding not just housing but the sustainable development of communities. It will ensure that new housing developments take account of environmental and transport factors. A key recommendation in the report is that housing should be located close to people's places of employment so that they do not have to travel great distances to work. That recommendation is essential to regenerating our towns and cities.

The report is a good example of cross-departmental thinking and it begins to touch on many important issues. It also echoes many of the recommendations in the report of the social exclusion unit, "Bringing Communities Together". We must tackle some very serious issues, not simply housing matters, if we are to regenerate and renew many inner-city areas.

In the limited time available, I shall concentrate on the Committee's recommendations regarding urban areas and inner cities because my constituency is one of the poorest and most deprived inner-city areas in the country. In inner cities our problems are not about a shortage of land, but more about the breakdown of families and communities and the wholesale migration of owner-occupiers, leaving behind dereliction and decay. That is a very difficult issue to tackle in the long term.

I believe that housing must play a major role in urban regeneration. Housing constitutes 80 per cent. of development and is the key to improving our communities. We must bring empty properties back into use. The report's recommendations regarding harmonisation of value added tax on renovations and conversions are crucial. We must ensure that, as far as possible, there is a level playing field for new developments and conversions.

There are several problem areas in Salford which illustrate some of the difficulties that the report tries to tackle. I shall touch briefly on some of them. The Broughton area has a huge problem with small terraced housing. There has been an influx of private landlords, and owner-occupiers have moved out of the city. Indiscriminate letting policies of housing associations and private landlords have produced nuisance tenants who have driven out the majority of good, decent people who formerly lived in those communities.

We are beginning to regenerate the area. A joint single regeneration budget project with our neighbours in Manchester is working well, but it is difficult to encourage private developers to help us. I am delighted that the report highlights the action by English Partnerships to provide incentives and gap funding for developers to encourage them into our inner-city areas. Their assistance is crucial if we are to stabilise our communities and give local people some hope that things will change and improve. We must convince them to stay in our inner cities.

The recommendation for sequential planning consideration, whereby developers must show that they have considered using previously developed land before they are allowed to develop new sites, will be incredibly helpful in inner-city areas. However, we must question the future of small terraced housing. I received a letter only this week from a constituent in Kersal, which is an area of such housing. It is just one example of the hundreds of letters that I receive on this subject. My constituent explains that she is the owner of a two-bedroom terraced property which she cannot sell. She believes that the main problem lies with builders and property developers who are flinging up estates of semi-detached homes with carpets, curtains and gardens which cost about the same as her terraced property. Many first-time buyers are opting for those new starter homes rather than the traditional terraced housing. That leaves us with the real problem of how to encourage occupation in many such areas. Wholesale slum clearance is clearly not an option: it is too expensive and it destroys communities. However, in many parts of the north there is a real question about the relevance of terraced housing.

Another part of the city that has suffered huge problems in recent years is Seedley and Langworthy, where all of the problems of our inner cities—crime, unemployment and poor education—coalesce. We have produced a Seedley and Langworthy action plan which is designed to tackle those problems. Housing is a key regeneration factor and relies on the concept of a partnership of local people. That partnership is led by the community and involves business, voluntary groups, housing associations and a private developer. We have also almost persuaded a building society to join us to talk about how it can contribute to housing regeneration. Building societies are notoriously reluctant to become involved in regeneration, and I am particularly proud that we have been able to secure that assistance.

The action plan for Seedley and Langworthy is not just about housing; it is about education, health and jobs. It proposes the establishment of a community housing company so that local people can determine who lives in the area and how best to achieve regeneration. It is a 10-year plan because we recognise that many problems will not be solved overnight: we will require improvements, year on year. However, local people are determined to tackle the existing problems.

There are just 3,000 homes in the area, and 600 of them are empty. They have been boarded and bricked up or torched and left derelict and in decay because good, decent families have been driven out by crime and other inner-city problems. We must bring those properties back into beneficial use: that is the key to sustainable regeneration.

We must also tackle the problem of private landlords. The report says that the private rented sector has acted as a safety valve. That might be true in some areas, but the private rented sector in Salford is the source of much deterioration and decay. My heart sinks whenever I see a "For Rent" sign in my constituency because I know that it signals that another area is in decline. The owner-occupiers have gone and the absentee landlords and nuisance neighbours have arrived. I know that they will drive people out and that we will see properties boarded up, bricked up and torched. It is almost a logical progression. We must break that cycle of decay that is apparent in so many inner-city areas.

I have written to Ministers requesting regulations governing licensing. I would like to see housing benefit sanctions applied to some absent landlords—there is nothing more effective than hitting them in the pocket. Absentee landlords receive housing benefit and they do not care to whom they rent their properties. They do not manage their properties properly and they are not responsible landlords. I am not referring to every private landlord, but in many parts of my constituency a great deal of that goes on.

The city has a voluntary registration scheme for landlords and about 50 per cent. of them have signed up, but it is the good ones who sign up, the bad ones do not want to be involved. They do not want to be responsible for their properties. The issue must be tackled. Housing benefit sanctions, although difficult to impose, would concentrate minds wonderfully and I urge Ministers to consider them seriously.

We have a lot of hope in Salford. Although there are many problems, we are tackling them together. There is a long way to go, but the provision of decent, safe, warm, affordable and high-quality housing will be the key to our city's renewal and the urban renaissance that is categorised in the report. I welcome the prospect of an urban White Paper which will bring together our thinking across a range of Departments and provide a key and catalyst to urban regeneration.

Cities can be exciting and vibrant places. It is not true that the countryside is the rural idyll and that cities are bad places to live—they can be full of life, the arts and culture. They can have a real buzz. I want my city to have that buzz and to come up from the bottom. We have reached rock bottom and there is only one direction in which to go. We are coming up and fighting back, and I know that the Labour Government will give us the best chance that we have had for the past 20 or 30 years to regenerate our city and make Salford a better place to live, work and bring up families. We are determined to work on it together.

5.10 pm

Mr. Tom Brake (Carshalton and Wallington): I welcome the topical nature of the housing report and part if not all of the Government's response to it. However, I should like to highlight some issues on which I feel that the Government's response is weak or possibly unhelpful.

First, let me turn to the housing projection figures. The report calls the estimate of 4.4 million new homes

"the best one there is",

yet in a report in *The Guardian* on Monday, senior Government sources are quoted as saying that 5 million new homes would be a more realistic estimate. If that is the view of senior Government sources, and given that it will be significantly harder to identify sites for that increased number of new homes, it should be out in the open and not hidden away in the inside pages of *The Guardian*.

Secondly, on the national target for development on brown-field sites, and perhaps anticipating the contribution from Conservative Members, who no doubt will be calling for a target that is higher than 60 per cent., it is worth reminding the House of their record in government. Under the Tories, an average of about six in 10 homes were built on green-field sites, so the shadow Minister was right the first time when he said that the Tory Government were intent on developing more homes on green-field sites. It is a pity that they have discovered only recently that there is more to be gained by defending the countryside than by building all over it.

The Liberal Democrats do not consider a 60 per cent. target for development on brown-field land to be particularly ambitious. If the right policies were in place, more could be achieved. For instance, the Council for the Protection of Rural England argues that the capacity of cities and towns for new housing is a matter of policy rather than physical constraint. The 60 per cent. target should be an interim target, a stepping stone to a tougher target of 75 per cent.

Thirdly, there is the problem of defining brown-field land. The Government need to refine their definition and make a distinction between sites previously used for housing or industrial developments and ex-MOD land, such as abandoned airfields, which may mostly comprise of green fields. Establishing a new category of land in the development hierarchy, which we have dubbed

[Mr. Tom Brake]

taupe-field, would enable such sites to be considered for development after consideration of recycled land. The definition could include, for instance, land adjacent to an out-of-town development or situated by a road of at least B status or used for specific purposes. The development hierarchy would then prioritise conversion of old buildings; then development on brown-field sites; then taupe-field sites; and, finally, green-field sites.

That might help to defuse the controversies surrounding proposed developments, such as the proposal for 50,000 new homes on ex-MOD airfields near Cambridge. The new definition would also address some of the Select Committee's concerns that,

"by promoting Brownfield land, regardless of its location, we continue to encourage unsustainable forms of settlement."

Fourthly, a new planning policy guidance note 3 must be issued without delay. It is the simplest means of ensuring that the desired changes to planning policy are implemented forthwith. Otherwise, building on green-field land will continue apace. The Government must provide a firm date by which it is to be published. The Department's best estimate today was that it would be some time early next year. I encourage the Minister to give a more precise date.

Fifthly, one must consider the role of the regional planning conferences which are to spearhead the Government's approach to the provision of future housing. I agree with the CPRE that there is no demonstrable commitment to move away from the policy of "predict and provide". The regional planning conferences have apparently received no advice on how to plan other than according to that policy. They are under-resourced and lack any statutory basis, so they are ill-equipped to deliver the Government's strategy of "plan, monitor and manage".

Sixthly, other hon. Members have mentioned the need to reduce migration. I agree with the Government that strong urban development is needed to slow down or stop net out-migration and that there is a key role for the regional development agencies. I support the policy, but we need a clear statement from the Government on whether the improvements to health, education and transport will be delivered regardless of the economic downturn and its effect on Government spending plans. The provision of better hospitals, schools and transport in urban areas would help to stop that migration.

There is one last area to consider that has been touched on today—tax reform and financial incentives. Tax changes could influence dramatically developers' choice of green-field or brown-field sites, but I fear that the Government have yet to take action. For instance, on the green-field development levy, the Government

"is considering the use of economic instruments to further our planning objectives"

but no decision has yet been taken as to whether to proceed. I find that response disappointing.

Mr. James Gray (North Wiltshire): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that if a levy were charged on building a house on a green-field site, the price of those houses would go up to take account of the tax? That would provide an incentive to those who wish to build executive-style homes in out-of-town development areas, so a green-field levy would have the opposite effect to the one the hon. Gentleman describes.

Mr. Brake: That is not necessarily the case, particularly in locations where there is direct competition between building on green-field sites and building on brown-field sites. The competitive nature of the market will ensure that those house prices remain broadly the same.

The figures supplied by the Civic Trust suggest that some £200 million per annum could be raised by a 10 per cent. levy on green-field land values. If 75 per cent. of that money were spent on cleaning up contaminated land, the remaining £50 million per annum would purchase nearly 15,000 acres of arable land, which I understand from the Library is the equivalent of 53 Hyde parks. Each year we could purchase that quantity of land on the back of the green-field development levy and provide green lungs in urban and rural areas.

There is also the VAT anomaly. Why should people pay 17.5 per cent. on the conversion of properties and no VAT on new build? The Government's response is mixed. In response to an Adjournment debate, Helen Liddell commented that the VAT issue is complex, and a reduced rate could only be applied to social housing, not all housing.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Hon. Members should be referred to by constituency.

Mr. Brake: The then Economic Secretary to the Treasury, now the Minister of State, Scottish Office, with responsibility for education and industry, said that in March. She felt that the move would result in taxation loss and was not convinced by it. A few months later, in May 1998, a junior Environment Minister said that a refurbishment VAT cut was under consideration. In their response to the report, the Government say that

"unifying VAT would help to provide a more level playing field for conversions".

There is clearly a need for a statement from the Government on their stance in relation to the VAT anomaly, and whether they intend to remove it. There are almost 800,000 empty homes and 800,000 potential homes in England situated in buildings suitable for redevelopment. That underlines the importance of evening out the anomaly as soon as possible.

There is also the matter of roll-over capital gains tax. As hon. Members may be aware, there is a loophole that allows farmers to purchase additional land and thereby to escape capital gains tax. That encourages building and tax evasion.

Site value rating is a subject close to Liberal Democrat hearts, which we like to mention when the opportunity arises. Will the Government consider replacing the uniform business rate with site value rating, a system that taxes the value of land rather than the use made of it? That would encourage landowners to make use of their land, rather than leaving it derelict.

Finally, I accept that limited progress is being made on maximising development on brown-field sites, but the Government must move further and faster. With 110 sq km of countryside disappearing under concrete every year, every week's delay in implementing the Government's new

policy means that a further 2 sq km of countryside are lost for ever. If they continue to procrastinate, the Government's legacy to future generations will be row after row of identikit homes marching across down and vale. They will never be forgiven.

5.21 pm

Mrs. Louise Ellman (Liverpool, Riverside): The Select Committee's support for the Government's proposal that at least 60 per cent. of new homes should be provided on brown-field sites arises from a view of housing as a critical part of regeneration, and of regeneration as linked to jobs, training, transport, environment and the provision of social amenities. The key question is whether we have the mechanisms and policies to achieve that in the shortest possible time.

We are in a period of great change. We are embarking on a policy of integrated regional strategies. We are doing that through the creation of regional development agencies—which, I remind the Opposition, were strongly opposed by them—and through the development of regional chambers. In the draft guidance to regional development agencies published earlier this week, they are asked to adopt an integrated approach to the economy, employment, social exclusion and physical decay. The strategy is to be drawn up in co-operation with the regional chambers. For the first time there is a clear statement, guidance and structure for a regional policy on integrated development, to improve housing, the economy and the environment.

I must, however, express concern about the regional planning conferences, which are to assume increasing importance. Can the Minister assure me that the guidance given to regional planning conferences will ensure that they act in harmony with the regional economic strategies to be developed by the agency in co-operation with the elected regional chamber?

Mr. Laurence Robertson (Tewkesbury): Will the hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. Ellman: I am sorry, but, in view of the time constraints, I cannot.

Exciting regeneration is currently under way in Everton, a deprived part of my constituency—an area where there is much dereliction, male unemployment stands at 37.5 per cent., and 80 per cent. of pupils in the partnership area involved are eligible for free school meals. Hope university college is spearheading a multimillion pound investment, transforming the disused area of the listed St. Francis Xavier school and the site around it into a major centre for arts, drama and economic development, together with accommodation. Nearby, the private sector is converting the listed disused Collegiate school into flats for sale, and near there the Riverside housing association is converting a disused listed Georgian terrace into a mixed-use development—shops, offices and flats—for a combination of rent and shared ownership.

The result of all that activity is the provision of much-needed homes on brown-field sites, educational opportunities, jobs and an improved environment, giving hope to people currently living in an abandoned and largely derelict area. Achieving that development has been a complex task. A wide variety of funding sources have been called on—for example, English Partnerships, European funding, the Housing Corporation, the college and private sector funding.

Much has been achieved, but how much more could be achieved there and in similar areas if we had a comprehensive policy, with the mechanisms available for that policy to be used for inner-city regeneration? The steps that could be taken include reducing the 17.5 per cent. VAT on conversions, recognising the need to plan for and provide affordable housing, dealing with land assembly and contamination, recognising the new regional development agencies as an important resource for the locality, and harnessing public and private sector funding.

I see much that is encouraging in recent Government policy statements. The document "Fair deal for communities" and the report on a new approach to deprived neighbourhoods advocate joined-up thinking in situations of social breakdown. I am encouraged by the announcement of a new urban White Paper by the Secretary of State earlier this week, which shows that we are ready to adopt such thinking as part of mainstream policy. In that way we can meet housing need to its maximum on brown-field sites, regenerate the inner cities and build a new future for communities in an economically and environmentally sustainable way.

5.26 pm

Mr. James Gray (North Wiltshire): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Liverpool, Riverside (Mrs. Ellman). Several other colleagues who have served with me on the Environment Committee over the past 18 months have spoken in the debate.

May I pay particular tribute to the hon. Member for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett), who puts up with our personal foibles and our use of hyperbole on some occasions with remarkable good humour and tolerance? All members of the Committee are grateful to him for it. It must be a particularly difficult job to be the Darby to the formidable Joan supplied by the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody), who is sorry that she cannot be in the Chamber today for the debate, but who approaches the issues that we discuss in the Select Committee with a refreshing robustness of mind.

That is reflected in the report, which goes to such great lengths to criticise—fairly heavily in some parts—what the Government have done. The hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich would be the first to acknowledge that she was ready to do so, were she in her place this afternoon.

The criticism in the report is slightly unusual, as most of our discussion tends to achieve virtual unanimity. The report was agreed unanimously by the Committee. Despite the cross-party banter that we have heard this afternoon, the issues that we are discussing are issues which we as a nation must examine, and are not essentially party political.

On the number of houses that we will require between now and 2016, I do not agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Totnes (Mr. Steen), who went to great lengths to rubbish—a rather unpleasant word—the figures. In Committee, I went to some length to try to find holes in the figures produced by my former colleagues, the excellent civil servants in the Department of the Environment, but no amount of effort on my part could

[Mr. James Gray]

produce an argument to show that 4.4 million was necessarily wrong. Indeed, I was horrified to discover that the likelihood was that the figure might even be higher than 4.4 million new households, based on the statistical projections which were being used. It is probably not all that sensible at the start of the debate to assert that the figures are wrong. They appear to be correct, as far as statistical projections can be correct.

A more interesting question is why there will be 4.4 million new houses. The answer, as my hon. Friend the Member for Totnes said, is primarily the breakdown of families, which is accelerating at such an alarming rate, and because children are tending to wish to leave home earlier than they did when I was a youngster. My experience was that one stayed at home until 21, as I did when I was at university; I stayed at home to begin with in Glasgow and thereafter moved to a bedsit for a number of years. I would never have contemplated having a flat or a house probably until I was well married and into my 30s. Indeed, I did not own any property until I was 35.

That frame of mind has perhaps changed. People nowadays tend to leave home much earlier and then to demand from the nation some form of accommodation at the age of 16. I do not believe that that is right. I do not necessarily believe that society should provide enough houses to accommodate all of the tragedies that come about as a result of family breakdown. If we were to restrict to a degree the availability of new housing in the places where people wanted to be, youngsters might be encouraged to stay at home for a little longer. That might even help some families to stay together which otherwise would fall to pieces, given the availability of somewhere else to go.

Leaving aside the number of houses that are required, we must make better use of the houses that are currently available. At April 1997, there were 767,000 empty homes in Britain, most of them in the private sector. Of that total, 81,000 were local authority homes, a large proportion being controlled by the Labour party, which must look to its own front gardens before it does anything else. There were 27,000 empty housing association homes and 19,000 empty homes belonging to other public sector bodies, mainly health authorities and the armed services.

Most of that accommodation—767,000 homes—is usable. The previous Government produced targets to reduce that total stock of usable empty housing by 3 per cent. per annum. I challenge the new Government, who are so proud of what they are doing in areas such as housing, to better the previous Government's targets. If they believe that they can do that, let us see them doing it. For example, what about 5 per cent? Perhaps they might start with some of their socialist friends. For example, my Labour-controlled local authority in Swindon has a significant number of empty homes. It is important that the Government look first to their own laurels.

In that context, is it not extraordinary that in Newcastle recently permission was given for 2,500 new houses to be built on green-field sites despite the fact that in the centre of the city 4,000 lettable properties were empty? Why do we not fill empty lettable properties in Newcastle first before we give planning permission for 2,500 homes to be built on the green belt surrounding the city?

Making better use of existing stock will not happen by chance. We can force local authorities, housing associations and private owners to make better use of existing stock only if we restrict the availability of new stock. If developers are constantly providing new stock in addition to the nation's current stock of housing, people will go to live in the new stock. If we say to developers, "Look, you have a choice; you can either build on a green-field site or in the inner city", they will build on green-field sites. After all, it is so much cheaper and the homes will sell so much better.

People want—wrongly, I think—to live in suburban Britain on a green-field site. The only way in which we shall persuade developers to redevelop inner cities is physically to restrict the amount of green-field land that is available to them. As long as that land is available to them, they will use it. We must find ways of restricting much more heavily the use of green-field land that surrounds our cities.

In my constituency, there is a proposal—it has been put up by the socialist local authority in Swindon—for 17,500 new houses to be built on the land between Swindon and Wootton Bassett. However, the centre of Swindon—an old railway town—is entirely run down and a huge amount of redevelopment is necessary. People will go into the centre of the town if we say that the rural buffer zone that currently surrounds Swindon is as powerful as the green belt would be and developers may not build within it. I welcome the Government's response to rural buffer zones and other local designations. It would seem that the Government may move towards giving such zones and designations the same power in law as green belt land.

I issue a word of caution on brown-field land. It seems that there is a slight pre-supposition that all brown-field sites may be built upon. The hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Mr. Brake) mentioned Ministry of Defence sites, and in my constituency I have several redundant Royal Air Force and Army sites. It would be wrong to build houses on those sites because they are green-field sites. They are in the middle of the countryside and there is no infrastructure attached to them. There are no shops, pubs, schools or roads. There is no nothing. They are, to all intents and purposes, green-field sites. The fact that they were used for something else should not be a presumption that they should be built upon.

The Government have not responded to the points made in the Select Committee's report about villages. At risk of being called a NIMBY, I shall refer to my village of Slaughterford in Wiltshire. It is a tiny hamlet within which there are 30 residents. It is proposed to build 14 executive-style homes in the village.

Mr. Caborn: It is amazing how we all live in these places.

Mr. Gray: The hon. Gentleman says that from a sedentary position. It is indeed amazing how we all live in these places, and I am delighted that I live in one. The Minister must come to visit me at Slaughterford. I shall try to lay on the best hospitality that I can when he does so. If the Minister comes to Slaughterford he will find a hamlet which has been untouched for 100 years. There are 30 people living in it. However, there is a proposal to build 14 executive-style homes at a cost of £600,000 each on a disused mill site in the village. Slaughterford has no

roads save two miles of single track needed to get there. There is no public transport and there is no school, no pub and no shop. There is nothing at all. There are a few tiny properties and there is the proposal to build the new houses on the mill site.

The developers are using the Government's response to the Select Committee and their talk about brown-field sites as a possible excuse to build the new homes. I say that villages should be built on only when local people have the need of somewhere to live. I think particularly of the children of agricultural workers, who need to stay in the villages. They are local people and they need to live locally. That is fine. Let us have a little bit of infill. Against that background, £600,000-worth of executive-style homes in a remote Wiltshire hamlet ain't what the Government should be encouraging.

Other than that, I wholly endorse most of what the Government have said about their preference for brown-field sites. However, like most of my hon. Friends, I regret that the Government have been so timid in going for 60 per cent. They should have endorsed our target of 66 per cent. if possible. I have slight worries about how genuine the Government are being in their preference for brown-field sites. They give lip service in favour of these sites, but, at the same time, they allow building in Stevenage, West Sussex and Newcastle, and who knows where else. The decision to build 17,000 houses round Swindon will be an interesting touchstone for the Government's attitude towards new housing in country areas.

It seems that the Government have the right ideas. The report says that they probably have the right ideas—vague but nevertheless the right ideas. In the immortal words of the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, the right hon. Member for Hartlepool (Mr. Mandelson), they need to sharpen up their act and save our countryside from the bulldozer.

5.37 pm

Mrs. Ann Cryer (Keighley): I thoroughly enjoyed the contribution by my hon. Friend the hon. Member for Salford (Ms Blears). Many of her comments apply almost equally to my constituency although perhaps to a lesser degree.

I welcome the Select Committee's report. The conclusions and recommendations are much in line with my own thinking. The statement by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and the White Paper, which was produced earlier this year, are also to be welcomed, particularly the commitment to a 60 per cent. brown-field and 40 per cent. green-field future for housing land allocation. My anxiety is about how that policy is to be implemented. I am therefore pleased to note the recommendation in the Select Committee's report, which goes a long way to addressing the dilemma. I refer to the Select Committee's comment at the end of paragraph 245 on page xvii, which reads:

"We strongly agree with those witnesses who argued that there must be a restriction on the amount of greenfield land available for development if developers are ever to make full use of the brownfield land available."

I could not agree more.

The Bradford unitary development plan, like others, makes far too much green-field land available. In a beautiful part of the Aire valley near Silsden in my constituency, it could allow 1,500 additional houses in green belt. The development would almost double the size of that mainly Victorian industrial village, remove for ever its character, urbanise yet further that green and pleasant part of our Aire valley, and leave schools, roads and other facilities unable to cope without massive injections of public money. The Silsden town action group, with support from me and the parish council, will oppose any detailed planning applications as they arise.

I want to touch on two other green-field sites in my constituency's part of Bradford's UDP. Manor Garth, which has always been regarded as common land in Addingham in the Wharfe valley, was designated in the UDP as village green space. Unfortunately, the owners saw a sizeable profit coming their way if it was zoned for housing. They appealed, and the Department's inspector under the previous Government agreed that their land should be available for housing. In the teeth of opposition from the parish council, the civic society, the local authority and me, there is a strong possibility that eventually, this much cherished field, which allows views of some interesting ancient buildings, will be lost for ever.

An almost identical situation prevails at Leeming, a hamlet close to the village of Oxenhope. Again, the landowner, on appeal to the inspector, was able to change a field from village green space to housing land and, at a stroke, enhance the potential size of his bank balance. I and Oxenhope village action group, the parish council and local councillors oppose any development on the site.

The UDP review is starting to roll again. I hope that my constituents will take a much more careful and critical view of it than they and their councillors took four and a half years ago. I also hope that the next plan will be under the guidance of the Department, which will be implementing the recommendations of the Select Committee report.

To show that all is not doom and gloom in my constituency on the planning and housing front, I shall mention a few minor triumphs. My hon. Friend the Minister for Local Government and Housing visited us during the recess and saw two schemes funded by the single regeneration budget. The one in Keighley town centre is now complete, with family homes available at affordable rents. The other is at Oakworth road, where Hillworth lodge, the old and much detested workhouse, will be converted and enhanced to form a mixture of maisonettes and houses for older people and families. Plans to create a living-over-the-shop scheme of apartments in the town centre are being explored. I hope that they will eventually take shape. Those schemes will help regenerate and enhance Keighley town centre and the quality of life of those living there. Unlike the three green-field developments that I mentioned earlier, they are made up of homes that local people on low incomes will be able to afford.

Many brown-field sites and unused buildings could be used for housing if there were incentives for developers to consider them instead of the rich pickings of green-field sites. Keighley has many former mills standing derelict, and there are the unused warehouses on the Leeds-Liverpool canal, which British Waterways is anxious to offload.

Nearer the centre of Bradford, in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Bradford, West (Mr. Singh), lie the historic Lister's Manningham mills,

[Mrs. Ann Cryer]

where once the finest velvets were manufactured. The Victoria and Albert museum had thought of moving its south-east Asia collection there, which would have been welcomed by the local community, but, alas, that will not happen. What better way to use the building than to create hundreds of well-designed flats at affordable rents? Such a development has taken place at Saltaire in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Shipley (Mr. Leslie) in the old mending and burling shed of Salts mill, alongside imaginative conversions of other parts of Salts to health authority offices, a Hockney art gallery and various attractive shops. It is a well-thought out conversion and use of what was becoming another derelict mill.

There is so much that can be done to provide homes without losing vast areas of our countryside. Our Government are moving in the right direction. Where there is a political will, a practical way can usually be found. The report points us in the direction of that practical way. I congratulate the Committee on its thorough work and excellent ideas.

5.44 pm

Mr. Andrew Hunter (Basingstoke): The Committee has produced a report and made recommendations that contribute significantly to the housing debate, and I welcome the opportunity to discuss them.

In Hampshire, as my hon. Friend the Member for Aldershot (Mr. Howarth), and, perhaps, the hon. Member for Southampton, Test (Dr. Whitehead) know, we are facing a nightmare scenario. According to regional planning guidance, we are threatened with 56,000 houses. More than 25 per cent.—15,000—are destined for Basingstoke. Borough officials tell me that 76 per cent. of those must be built on green-field sites because of the lack of brown-field sites in the town of Basingstoke.

There was an interesting variation of view between my hon. Friends the Members for Totnes (Mr. Steen) and for North Wiltshire (Mr. Gray). I agree that 4.4 million may be the best estimate. I, too, have spent some time studying the various statistics that make up that estimate. I, too, find puzzling points which I shall tell the House about and ask my hon. Friends to contemplate. One is that in the period considered, there is a phenomenal anticipated increase in the number of European Union citizens working in the United Kingdom. The figure rises to 850,000, which means that we will have immigration not equalled even at the height of West Indian immigration in the 1950s and 1960s. However, the estimate does not take into account UK citizens who go to work in other EU countries.

Another puzzling feature is the extraordinary slow-down assumed in the number of cohabiting unmarried couples. We know from the census that in the 10 years before 1991, cohabiting unmarried couples increased from 2.9 to 6.4 per cent. of households, more than double, but for the 15 years covered by this estimate, the increase is only 0.3 per cent. It is very puzzling to think what social reason will lead to that extraordinary change. In those two respects, I believe that the estimate is likely to be suspect.

There is common ground on at least one aspect in this debate: priority must given to brown-field site development and urban regeneration. I regret that the hon. Member for Sunderland, South (Mr. Mullin) is not in his seat. He and I seldom agree. This time we do, and I regret that he is not at hand to share the moment. His evidence to the Committee was telling and was closely reflected in the speech by the hon. Member for Salford (Ms Blears). His testimony laid great emphasis on the urban dereliction in his constituency and he wrote of the imperative of creating penalties to deter green-field development and incentives to promote inner-city development.

I take seriously the warning by my hon. Friend the Member for North Wiltshire about green-field tax, but I believe that the Government should look positively on incentives to make inner cities habitable again. For that reason, I share the Committee's concern that Lord Rogers's task force should not be used as a means of causing delay. As the House-Builders Federation advocated in a helpful note that I received this morning, measures should be introduced long before we see Lord Rogers's report next year.

I regret that to date the Government have gone for a rather miserly proposed target of 60 per cent. of development taking place on brown-field sites, to be achieved over 10 years. I welcome the Committee's recommendations that the target should be at least 60 per cent., and should be applied during the coming round of regional planning guidance rather than over 10 years.

I noted with interest that the Committee said that there would be regional variations, and that in some regions brown-field development could be close to 100 per cent. but that in all regions it should be at least 40 per cent. If that became Government policy it would be good news for the people of north Hampshire. If borough officials are right in saying that brown-field sites to accommodate even 40 per cent. of the proposed development cannot be found, such a target would require either a significant lowering of the county's requirement for new housing, or a fundamental redistribution of new housing within the county. I suspect that even with that, 40 per cent. could not be achieved. The county council is right to urge the Government not to force the 56,000 houses on us but to look for a lower figure; 42,000, which is itself a considerable number, is the target it advocates.

I share the Committee's conclusion that most new homes should be built in suitable urban areas, that brown-field sites or converted buildings should be used, and that the provision of green-field sites for development must be severely restricted.

I shall throw out a word of caution about edge-of-town development. There are two dangers associated with it. West of Basingstoke there is an outline proposal to build 5,000 or so houses, and the provisional plans show an uneconomic use of land. It is imperative that if we go in for significant amounts of edge-of-town development, the land must be used economically. The example of Poundbury, with an accommodation density of 15 or 20 units per acre, shows that it is not necessary for excessive quantities of land to be used. That should be borne in mind when edge-of-town development is being considered.

The second danger associated with edge-of-town development is that people may be encouraged to think that it will not generate traffic. That is not so, and it will not be so in the north of Hampshire, in the greater M4—Thames corridor.

We have high employment, at least at the moment, and a highly skilled work force. High employment encourages job mobility, and people are prepared to drive 30 or even 50 miles to their places of work. If the current plans proceed, and about 15,000 houses are built around Basingstoke, it will be wrong to imagine that most of the people living in them will necessarily work in the town of Basingstoke. Traffic will be generated as they travel to their employment in various parts of the greater area.

I welcome the fact that the report has raised these issues, and I hope that the Government will reflect the Committee's recommendations in their policy decisions. I also hope that their wider response on housing and planning will extend to reversing damaging decisions that have already been made and giving unqualified protection to the green belt, and that they will commit themselves to a target of at least 60 per cent. for brown-field development.

5.54 pm

Mr. Graham Stringer (Manchester, Blackley): I am grateful, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to have been called in this debate as well as in the previous debate on the future of the countryside. What characterised both debates, and the considerations of the Select Committee, was an increasing consensus among the political parties, the professionals giving evidence to the Committee, and even the Government in their response to the report, that the future protection of the countryside is intimately related to the protection of cities and towns. Urban renaissance depends on keeping the countryside as the countryside.

My only quibble with my right hon. and hon. Friends in government is over the speed at which things should happen. I know the north-west better than the areas that Opposition Members have talked about, so I shall use it as my example. At a stroke—I hate using that phrase, because of its political pedigree—one could, by announcing that there would be no future housing developments on green-field sites, give Manchester, Liverpool and the other towns in the north-west the biggest boost imaginable.

There is an alternative to an urban renaissance, and it is the urban dark ages. The future of our cities is on the cusp, on the edge, and immediate action is needed to make the developers who have invested their money in turnip fields and grass in the areas around our cities dedicate that money, and their creative resources, to the cities.

Fields are bought up by the big housing developers as land banks for programmes that will go on for 30 years. While those resources are tied up in the countryside, the developers are not bringing their ingenuity and their contributions into the cities. Eventually, if they are allowed to concrete over the countryside, they will severely damage it. We want what people who watch American football call a "hurry up" offence.

I associate myself with the comments made by my hon. Friend the Member for Salford (Ms Blears). My constituency is in almost exactly the same socio-economic category as Salford, and I would like to deal in detail with the mechanisms that lead to the problems in the terraced streets. If we understand those mechanisms, some solutions can be applied fairly quickly.

One of the housing facilities in my constituency is not voluntary; it is called Strangeways. It is possible for somebody to come out of Strangeways, collect his money and set up as a private landlord. He will buy a house in a terraced street and get somebody—preferably, from his point of view, an undesirable neighbour—to rent it.

The landlord will get a capital return on the house within two or three years, sometimes less. If he puts his anti-social friends in, he can drive property prices down so that eventually nobody wants to live on either side of the whole of a terraced street. Such people can drive the prices of houses that cost £30,000 or £35,000 in the late 1980s down to £3,000 or £4,000. They then buy up the street. Nobody wants to live there, but housing benefit pays for the people who do live there. The local authority then has the problem of compulsorily purchasing the houses at values three or four years out of date.

There must be a solution that stops public money being used to destroy parts of our inner cities. I do not believe that any other service comparable to the private rented sector is so completely deregulated. People can come out of prison and do what I have described. They are providing a service, and there is no recourse for tenants apart from the courts.

We need a body like the one that oversees housing associations to regulate landlords and stop undesirables, as we do with publicans. To sell us a pint of beer somebody has to be of good character, but anybody can make people's lives miserable by becoming a private landlord. We need regulation and bodies for people to go to that will stop all that.

I do not want to pretend that all private landlords are bad; they are not. However, there are some operating in my constituency and other constituencies in Manchester and Salford, such as Madina, who make real efforts to drive house prices down.

Adjacent to terraced houses in my constituency—which are becoming increasingly difficult to let and which need Government action—there are council houses which are also difficult to let for similar reasons. Manchester city council is considering a proposal to knock down an estate where, only three or four years ago, families were living happily, and some families had been there for 22 years, since the estate was built. What happened? About three years ago, a group of drug dealers got on to the estate, and all who could move out did so. The local authority is considering demolishing the whole lot. I hope that it reconsiders.

One of the reasons why the families moved out was that it took the local authority—which is good on these matters, and is better than many others—18 months to get the people out. There is no mandatory right for a local authority to get rid of the worst tenants, and we need a change in the law to provide that right. The proposals from the housing department in Manchester and from my colleagues when I was on the city council—to have provisional or probationary tenancies—have been unpopular in the housing world. We sponsored that idea for housing associations, and we want it for council tenants.

I never thought that I would stand up in this Chamber to ask for less security of tenure for council house tenants. However, in estates in my constituency and most other inner-city constituencies one will find that tenants want the security of having the ability to evict those people who make their lives miserable, either by selling drugs or by other forms of anti-social behaviour. We need to change the rules; that will make a big and immediate difference in the city.

[Mr. Graham Stringer]

I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Salford and other hon. Members that cities are the future of this country. It will grow and thrive economically only if we make the cities work. If we neglect them, as we have done in the past, the whole economy and the whole of our society will fall into decline. We have to start, and there are things that we can do immediately. I hope that my Front-Bench colleagues will take action as soon as possible.

6.1 pm

Mr. Howard Flight (Arundel and South Downs): I was privileged to serve on the Committee and I pay tribute to the Chairman, the hon. Member for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett), and other colleagues with whom I worked. This is an important report which I hope receives better coverage in the media. The report is about an absolutely crucial subject to all of us and, as many have commented, the view reached was largely bipartisan. I do not think that this is fundamentally a party political issue.

I wish to refer to some issues which, perhaps, were not greatly focused on in the report. The first is the rather crude macro-point that putting one third of all new housing and further economic concentration in the south-east is not acceptable in the long term. However, anyone who takes that view must accept that the market must be allowed to operate to some extent to make it more attractive for business to go elsewhere. Simply, if we restrict supply, house prices will rise, and that will have an economic impetus in terms of what companies do and where they locate. As the Committee Chairman pointed out, there is a lot of trying to have one's cake and eat it. Local authorities want economic development, but not the housing. The other side of that is that one must allow the market to operate if we are not to restrict supply.

I am in the camp that is somewhat sceptical about the numbers. We are talking about a long time ahead to be predicting. The figures are trend-based, and who is to say that trends will stay the same? There are many other areas of activity where trends have changed dramatically. My hon. Friend the Member for Basingstoke (Mr. Hunter) referred to the growth in cohabiting and the assumptions of massive net immigration to this country. Some 80 per cent. of the growth is projected to be made up of single-person households. However, a recent important survey of young people showed that 84 per cent of 20-year-olds want to get married and have a normal family unit. If anything, they were reacting against some recent trends.

The Government are laying down the figures too much—it is all slightly "1984". It is convenient for bureaucrats and developers to have plenty of scope—say, five years forward—to organise. I believe that supply is, to an extent, creating demand. It is interesting that the hon. Member for Salford (Ms Blears) made that point in referring to the destruction of the value and usage of perfectly good traditional terraced houses.

I hope that we are not changing the buzz words from "predict and provide" to "plan, manage and monitor". I welcome the White Paper, but I have seen nothing that amounts to a fundamental change. We are still playing the old game of "predict a number" 20 years forward. We will need more flexible management of the numbers if we are to fine-tune the system.

I had a long conversation with the executive of Redland who is responsible for the company's derelict land. There are hundreds of thousands of acres of urban land for redevelopment. The company wants to sell the land, but there is a planning nightmare because it is still a zone for industrial usage. Many authorities do not have their structural plans in place, and there is a five-year agony in trying to get planning permission. The system needs a bomb under it. There is masses of such land and there are willing sellers. However, many of the inefficiencies of the planning process stand in the way of getting the land used.

In my constituency in West Sussex, we suffer from the green belt—it restricts building, as it were, in Surrey and tips it over the border into West Sussex. There is a pull-push between the two counties. One might suggest that, for larger cities in the south, the answer could be to extend the radius of the green belt from 35 miles to 80 miles. At present, we have had an explosion of far-distant dormitory rural suburbia—almost the worst possible result for the future.

Architecture is terribly important, and Poundbury has been cited. The report was critical of new settlements, but if one goes to Bath, one cannot criticise a "new settlement" which was built 200 years ago. How is it that, 200 years later, we are not capable of building a beautiful, substantial new city? Surely we must be able to do that. Design and architecture matters should not completely rule out new settlements.

In my part of the world, there is an extremely competent county council—both its civil servants and its political representatives—and I am extremely sceptical and concerned lest power move even further from the county councils and cities with which people identify to regional development agencies and Government regional offices.

I do not believe that the Deputy Prime Minister really intended to approve those extra houses for West Sussex. I believe that the Government office for the south-east took the decision because it was concerned that it would set a dangerous precedent for other counties. I suspect that the Deputy Prime Minister may not have been fully aware of all the implications when he gave his approval. I make a plea to the Government to try to find a face-saving way of reviewing the decision. The Government know that the courts rejected the judicial review on a matter of law concerning the Government's power, not on whether it was a good decision.

The report found six important territories contravening the decision. It rightly recommends that a detailed environmental sustainability appraisal should be at the centre of planning policy before starting. West Sussex has been a pioneer of that, as we know. One has to have proper consideration, consultation and examination in public to support the structural plan, with full cross-examination. West Sussex was the only authority to do that.

The report calls on central Government to support local authorities and not to undermine them in restricting development on green-field sites. West Sussex has moved from 60 per cent. brown to 60 per cent. green, on the increase in the figures—an area that has already more than doubled its population in the past 25 years. Also, West Sussex has a huge water supply problem. In the summer, we have water rationing and water levels are sinking, with many lakes drying up. Long term, there is no evidence that we will have sufficient water.

The report cites the bottom-up approach. As the Minister knows, 45,000 people in West Sussex have signed four or five petitions—people of all political parties. Is not that approach in line with getting the in-depth views of the community?

Finally, on travel, what is known as the Cinderella line runs down to Arundel, and long may it so remain as it has preserved the southern half of West Sussex from being a commuter area. Only in the east of the area do we have such a travel facility.

Let us forget the party politics. I ask the Government to find a discreet way to review the decision. We do not want pious words and good intentions. Let us really try to make it happen.

The report highlights six key issues. As the Chairman of the Select Committee pointed out, there is an urgent need for intermediate Government guidance on the redemption of contaminated land. I happen to know of some land in Somerset that was banned because it was contaminated, even though the metal found was in fact from the Stone age.

Another issue is the importance of getting a move on and implementing the 60 per cent. target now rather than over 10 years. Let us copy the French and get a move on to redefine conversions for value added tax. It cannot be that difficult. Let us also allow local authorities' structural plans to restrict migrants. Finally, there is no need to be in a hurry ahead of Lord Rogers' report. Those are the key issues on which we should get a move on, and they have cross-party support.

6.11 pm

Mr. Vernon Coaker (Gedling): We are discussing one of the most crucial issues to confront Members of Parliament. I feel sorry for the Minister in some ways when I consider what we are trying to do. We have to regenerate our cities and stop the degeneration that is taking place. We must protect our green fields and countryside. However, at the same time we must meet housing need. Looked at in that way, it is a challenging task.

Alongside that task, policies on transport, crime prevention, public service provision, the environment in general and employment must be developed. That is the nature of the task and without such associated policies the urban regeneration that we want simply will not take place. It cannot take place in a vacuum—the Select Committee Report, which is good, made that important point.

The report builds on the guidelines in the Government's paper, "Planning for the Communities of the Future", recognising that new policies are necessary. The Government recently published their response to the Select Committee report, which demonstrates that they are not static, but are responding to the arguments with fresh thinking and a willingness to move forward. The new policies, when fully in place, will represent a truly radical change in planning—I think of that famous phrase, "joined-up policies"—and will be a tribute to the Government.

However, as the Minister knows, the transition from one set of planning policies to another is the problem and it is causing many of us to receive a significant number of letters in our post bags. The Minister knows Nottinghamshire well and I thank him for coming there to talk to local authorities and Members of Parliament about our problems. Our structure plan dates back to 1996 and was agreed according to the policies of the past. Having been allocated housing figures, the districts are busy identifying land to meet them.

Gedling borough council is running a public consultation exercise to explain the process, but people in such areas as New Farm and Stockings Farm in Redhill are concerned that inappropriate development on green-field sites will take place despite the changed approach reflected in the Select Committee report and the Government's new policies. My constituents often tell me that they hear that policies have changed nationally, but that the change is not having the impact that they want locally. In fact, some of the old policies and guidelines are still being used, which makes little sense to them—or sometimes to me, either.

The Minister has responded to such concern by telling Nottinghamshire local authorities that they can reallocate some of the housing between themselves if they can reach agreement; I thank him for doing so. However, it is difficult for them because the new policies are not in place. For example, Nottingham city council wants to build new houses, reclaim derelict land, convert offices and old factories to housing, use space above shops and so forth, as I am sure councils in Manchester, Glasgow and all our other cities wish to do. Under the existing financial regime, that is difficult. There must be changes in taxation so that we can regenerate Nottingham and our other cities and, at the same time, protect green-field sites where appropriate. Furthermore, in Nottinghamshire the changes that we need in taxation and grant policies have a bearing on some of the old coalfield and industrial areas. Without the changes, 4.4 million five-bedroom houses will be built to meet the need for 4.4 million households; and houses that would meet people's needs in city areas will not be built.

The Select Committee report draws attention, at page 83—it is actually written in roman numerals and I had to look it up to ensure that I did not make an idiot of myself—paragraph 278 to the fact that the Department has always wanted to ensure

> "that sufficient land is available at all times at the expense of so many of its other policies, for example on sustainable development, transport, the environment and the use of recycled land."

The Select Committee and the Government are saying that we need a phased release of land to ensure that an adequate amount of brown-field and, where appropriate, green-field land is available. Sequential planning is crucial to ensure that the brown-field sites are developed first and that developers do not take the easy option of using green-field sites—that is what they will do if we leave it to them.

The central problem, particularly in Gedling and in Nottinghamshire in general, is speed, which is of the essence. While I understand the difficulties of moving from one set of policies to another, we are in the transitional phase and the old policies seem to be grinding on. Paragraph 270 of the Select Committee report states:

> "There is no need to hurry into granting planning permission for greenfield development before Lord Rogers' Task Force has reported on the scope for using recycled land before PPG3 and PPG13 have been revised and before the implications of the Integrated Transport White Paper are taken into account."

All those matters are crucial if we are to meet our policy objectives.

[Mr. Vernon Coaker]

I know that the Minister is doing all he can and that he is aware of the problems. Our policies are changing and moving forward. As I said, we must ensure that all the joined-up policies are working together. In some ways, it does not matter who is in government—this is a difficult issue. However, we have a new Government bringing in new thinking and new policies to meet the challenge. If that challenge is met, our cities will be regenerated, our green-field sites will be protected, and there will have been a truly radical change on which the Government can look back with pride.

6.19 pm

Mr. Andrew Lansley (South Cambridgeshire): I do not want to rehearse what has been said, but I shall add one or two points. The report is extremely valuable and the debate is timely. The question is not so much the number of new homes—we have yet to find out how far future trends will be a reflection of the past—as what, in planning terms, a bottom-up approach means in practice.

On the old predict-and-provide approach, there would be 71,000 additional commitments in Cambridgeshire, but only 25 to 30 per cent. of that number can be provided by using recycled land and windfall opportunities. If the minimum commitment is 40 per cent., we shall not, on the example of Cambridgeshire, be able to build 4.4 million new homes.

On the bottom-up approach, South Cambridgeshire district council rightly responded to the draft regional planning guidance by undertaking an environmental capacity study, which considered those matters mentioned in the report—environmental sustainability, transport infrastructure, water resources and the infrastructure of public services. It makes little sense to propose, over the 20 years from 1995, a 40 per cent. increase in the number of new homes in a district that is already the fastest growing in the country. A bottom-up approach is not only about who makes the decisions, although that is important, but about the method by which one arrives at the numbers and decides where the new houses should be built.

Even if there were nil growth in the area and no net migration, the affordable housing proposals would give rise to 13,000 extra commitments. If we constrain supply, we must find a more consistent way in which to sustain affordable housing so that local people are not driven out. What is the point of social housing if not to reinforce people's opportunities to stay in their familiar community structures?

I am unhappy at the thought that the green belt should be pushed further out to prevent the creation of dormitory communities. In my area, the green belt exists not only to protect the rural villages outside Cambridge; it protects the city itself. If the green belt is pushed out as a result of new building on its inner edge, the historic city centre will be destroyed. The Committee's recommendation that we should focus on building in urban areas does not always apply. For example, Cambridge's historic characteristics would be destroyed if we were to allow urban sprawl or excessive urban density.

We must consider other mechanisms, which will vary from place to place. In Cambridgeshire and parts of East Anglia, we may have to look constructively at the role of market towns. Where development is proposed, we shall have to consider the public transport options.

I am concerned about the decision-making mechanisms, despite the Government's talk about decentralisation and taking decisions closer to the people. The draft regional planning guidance from the Standing Conference of East Anglian Local Authorities will be put forward for public examination in February—it will be the first such public examination. However, as we shall not have the new draft PPG3—the Minister will correct me if I am wrong—what is the point of the public examination? How can we know how the new tests are to be applied?

I do not agree with everything in SCEALA's draft guidance, but it is better that such documents should be agreed by locally elected representatives than be comprehensively second-guessed by independent panels. We may know who is on the panel, but what is the rationale behind having a panel that overturns the decisions of locally elected representatives only to hand back its structure plan to the county council that did not subscribe to it in the first place?

We must apply the bottom-up approach to ensure that local democracy generates the answers and that factors other than predict and provide are taken into account. We must take on board all the integral factors to find out how many new homes can be accommodated without destroying the environment of the area for which the planning was intended to provide a solution.

6.25 pm

Dr. Alan Whitehead (Southampton, Test): I fail to recognise the green-crusader credentials of the hon. Member for West Chelmsford (Mr. Burns). I remember desperately attempting, as a local authority leader during most of the time in which the Conservatives were in government, to combat out-of-town shopping developments, only to find that the then Secretary of State for the Environment was giving out planning permission like confetti, with the results that we see today. I hope that the Conservative party has changed its tune, but I fear that, in the long term, it has not.

I also failed to recognise Conservative Members' descriptions of the report as an attack on the Government. The report strongly supports much of what the Government are doing. Indeed, I was delighted at the Government's response, which endorsed and took further much of what the Committee said.

The projection of 4.4 million extra households between 1991–2016 is robust. As the hon. Member for North Wiltshire (Mr. Gray) confirmed, members of the Committee looked up to the figures—they may not be entirely accurate and there may have to be changes, but, essentially, we believe that they are robust. When the Government said that they wanted to end predict and provide, the response from some quarters was that the 4.4 million figure was no longer important and that people could do their own thing regardless of any overall effect on housing need. That response was misplaced.

Our understanding of how the figures work has changed—for example, we know that windfall sites are much more important than was thought. Nevertheless, it is important that figures on future housing need retain some shape; if they do not, we shall all live to regret it.

The 4.4 million houses should, ideally, be built on brown-field land—the Government's target is that 60 per cent. should be built on recycled land. In the early 1990s,

30 per cent. of completions on brown-field sites were outside urban areas, so we must be wary of the figures—brown field is not simply, as the Government know, an alternative to green field. We should add another dimension to the concept and specify that the brown field is urban—we should be looking at brown field sites in urban areas. As we have heard, there is a case for different targets in different parts of the country.

Mr. John Hayes (South Holland and The Deepings): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Dr. Whitehead: I am sorry, but, because of the lack of time, I will not give way.

What do we mean by urban? A local authority boundary does not determine what is urban. The real footprint of a city is often outside its local authority boundaries. Local authorities must collaborate in deciding how housing should be placed in urban areas. People cannot point to a city centre and say that that local authority should build all the houses. It needs collaboration between authorities and I regret that, in certain parts of the country, that collaboration on decision making does not seem to be present.

On social housing, our report mentions our concern that there appears to be a considerable gap between likely provision and likely need. I am disappointed by the Government's response to the issue of social housing. We shall not be able to build new social housing by relying only on the private sector and private letting, or by relying on planning gain or local authorities overwhelmingly putting money into keeping their housing stock going—important though that is. We need more social housing to be built and we need an accurate understanding of the figures in order to understand how the Housing Corporation can be funded and how local authorities can respond.

I know that the Government are currently reworking the research figures. I ask them to ensure that those figures are produced shortly so that we have an accurate fix on what we need for social housing. It needs to be dealt with urgently. If we get the figures wrong, the people involved cannot just go somewhere else in the market; they will have nowhere to live. We all have a responsibility to get that part of the equation right, together with all the other parts.

6.30 pm

Mr. Gerald Howarth (Aldershot): Even if the Select Committee regarded the Government's paper as being somewhat vague, nobody could accuse the Committee of having produced a vague report. I believe that both sides of the House feel that the Committee has produced a comprehensive and interesting report with a number of thought-provoking ideas.

Like my hon. Friend the Member for Basingstoke (Mr. Hunter), I am extremely concerned about the implications for Hampshire of the dispute between the county's view, which proposes 42,000 houses as the requirement to meet the county's domestic need, and the belief of the unitary authorities in Portsmouth and Southampton that 56,000 houses, as proposed by the Government, are necessary to meet the needs of incomers as well as the county's domestic requirements. I understand that there is to be a meeting with the Secretary of State next week. I hope that he will be able to resolve the matter so that we can get on with it. It is clear that it would be much better for Hampshire if any proposed new planning policies could be introduced quickly. If they are not, the loss of green-field sites will continue and the resulting chaos will be regretted in the rural areas of Hampshire that are currently under threat. I hope that the Minister will take that on board.

The report talks about the concept of environmental capacity. I understand that the Government are reasonably receptive to that concept, but there is no real guidance on what that means and how it can be applied. We have to consider whether we can regard an area as being full up. The hon. Member for Castle Point (Mrs. Butler) mentioned the pressures in her area. All of us in the south-east are subject to enormous pressure. There will come a time when we have to decide whether an area is full up.

The recent experience of West Sussex is not very inspiring in that respect. The county council lost its judicial review in the High Court because the Secretary of State has discretionary powers. Although the county council had prepared an environmental capacity study, the Secretary of State said that it was flawed. How do we know that it was flawed? The county also claimed that further housing growth would seriously jeopardise its rural environment, and designated areas received much sympathy from the presiding judge. However, he held that the law was on the side of the Secretary of State and that he could do nothing to help. The county has had to appeal to the House of Lords.

The time has come when we have to decide that an area is full and that its services and environment cannot take any further expansion. I agree entirely with my hon. Friend the Member for Arundel and South Downs (Mr. Flight) that this is a case where the market really can apply. If prices rise to a sufficient level, people will be forced to go elsewhere. That will be of benefit to other parts of the country, that are looking for economic and social development, which will not happen if we continue to concrete over the whole of the south-east and those areas that are currently under pressure. If that were to happen, the point made by the hon. Member for Manchester, Blackley (Mr. Stringer)—he made some interesting comments about the inner cities—would be met as well. The inner cities would become much more attractive because the developers would not be able to place their money anywhere else and the cities would become somewhere to invest and make a useful return.

That brings me to an important point that the Committee made in paragraph 246. It said that local authorities

"should also adopt a helpful and imaginative approach to proposals for urban developments, particularly in respect of their density, layout and the number of car parking spaces they require."

I endorse that strongly. Rushmoor borough council in Aldershot has done a tremendous job and put that into practice already. A big site by the railway station could have been used for a supermarket, but, instead, 200 flats and houses were built there. The number of car parks allocated for those units was half that applied elsewhere. That is one practical suggestion from the Committee that is being put into practice and which should be put into practice elsewhere in the country.

6.36 pm

Mr. David Drew (Stroud): Given the shortage of time, I shall be brief. I congratulate the Select Committee on taking on such a challenging topic and producing such a comprehensive report. Despite what the Opposition spokesman said, I believe that the Government produced a full response, which follows on from the White Paper by explaining how Government policy will take things forward.

I want to talk about housing numbers. Some of us on the Labour Benches continue to challenge the numbers, but we realise that there are problems in so doing. We would like to see the Government's proposal for a six-stage scheme as an alternative to the trend-based forecast put into play as soon as possible. It gives an alternative a chance and gives people who want to see bottom-up planning some confidence that alternatives can be put in place.

There are some people who believe that circular projections—the self-fulfilling prophesy that people will move into the houses that are being built—cannot be tracked nationally, but they can operate locally. I support the emphasis on a regional approach. We have not yet seen the competence of real regional emphasis. There will be a need to provide proper guidance and the proper level of support for that to operate effectively.

The Select Committee report makes much of the difference of opinion between those who see the problem as being one of too much housing land and those who think that there is too little. That is simply due to a dysfunction in the provision of housing. We cannot pretend that there is much in common between the market for housing and the provision of affordable and, more particularly, social housing. We must face up to those problems. They are not two sides of the same problem.

I now want to deal with phasing sequential planning and brown-field development. I urge the Government to be a little braver. Rather than saying that they are just looking at the ending of a five-year land supply, they should accept that there are considerable merits in protecting green-field sites and forcing the sequential principle forward.

There is much that we can do to look at alternative places to build in rural Britain. The "Planning and Affordable Housing" document does not get much publicity, but I am pleased to see it. It ends the threshold, which means that in small village communities, social housing can be provided as part of the overall number of houses. We no longer have to have a minimum of 20 or 25 houses before insisting on a developer taking some interest.

Economic measures are important. The proposal for a green-field levy is worth investigating and testing properly and I was interested to note that a report by the Civic Trust suggested that the concept had merit. As my hon. Friends have pointed out, hypothecation could allow urban regeneration and, at the same time, we could deal with council tax anomalies, not least of which is the second home problem. Although Members of Parliament gain from the current position, it has an appalling effect on many rural areas. We have had a good debate and the issues have been well aired. The report is timely and I commend the Government on their response to it.

6.40 pm

Mr. Laurence Robertson (Tewkesbury): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Stroud (Mr. Drew), who is my neighbour in Gloucestershire. I endorse his comments about predictions of the number of houses that will be required, because I also have doubts about them. Trends change, including the divorce rate, the number of people living alone, the age at which young people leave home and other factors affecting mobility, which makes the figure questionable to say the least.

To address the need for houses is to ignore the need to protect the countryside. I am as aware as anybody of the need to provide homes for people, because, before I entered the House, I carried out a large project for the homeless. They were homeless not because they could not find homes to buy, but for other social reasons. As my hon. Friend the Member for Aldershot (Mr. Howarth) said, if we continue to build at the current rate, the countryside will fill up. When that happens, will we then try to provide homes in a more sustainable manner? If so, why not address the problem now?

The word "sustainability" is over-used and under-obeyed, but the Government should interpret it to mean providing for the needs of today's generation without prejudicing or compromising the needs of future generations. To protect future generations, we must take a radical approach now and not merely pay lip service to sustainability. Destroying the countryside—and creating increased traffic and social problems—while ignoring the needs of inner cities and town centres, is not sustainable.

The pressure to build more and more houses causes many problems in Tewkesbury, which has been forced to accommodate far more than its fair share of housing recently. That has led to the destruction of several attractive villages. Part of the reason is the difficulty that some districts have in providing brown-field sites. Pressure to build in Tewkesbury has led to land that had been declared unsuitable being reconsidered. For example, people's allotments and green-field sites have been built on, and other land, which if built on would lead to villages coalescing, is now being considered for the same fate. I endorse the comments made by the Council for the Protection of Rural England that the local environment must be taken into account when building in rural areas. Sustainability means developing brown-field sites and derelict sites and empty and old buildings, not destroying the countryside and ruining lives.

I do not wish to be party political, but I believe that the Government's policy is inadequate. The Government adopted the previous Government's projected figure, but they did not need to do so. The Government have set up regional agencies without giving them the full responsibility to protect the environment and have also set a worryingly low target for building on brown-field sites. Regardless of party politics, the planning of the building of new houses needs a radical rethink if it is to be sustainable.

6.44 pm

The Minister for the Regions, Regeneration and Planning (Mr. Richard Caborn): I congratulate members of the Select Committee on their useful and timely report. I am delighted that the Government are able to agree with many of the Committee's conclusions; that is reflected in our response to the report. I also

congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett), the Chairman of the Committee. As the former Chairman of the Trade and Industry Committee, I know how difficult it can be to obtain unanimity—I say that from experience and with some bruises—but only unanimous reports carry real weight. This report is unanimous, and must be taken seriously.

The underlying message from the Committee is clear: we must face the fact that people must have an opportunity to live in decent homes. Not before time, we have a growing cross-party consensus on how to plan future house building in a sustainable way that drives the urban renaissance agenda. A clear consensus on that has emerged tonight.

It is not a matter of green-field versus brown-field sites, urban versus rural or country versus town. The Government's response makes it clear that we must rise above NIMBYism, although some hon. Members have tried to draw the drawbridge up tonight to protect their villages. The contribution by the hon. Member for West Chelmsford (Mr. Burns) for the official Opposition did not show much consensus, and there were a couple of other exceptions, but I hope that we can take the political opportunity to stop urban decay and the urban flight. If we can do so, we can solve many of the problems that have been highlighted tonight.

Mr. Flight: The rural flight.

Mr. Caborn: No, I mean the urban flight to rural areas. The hon. Gentleman should think about the situation.

The Government accept the key recommendation by the Select Committee, that we should publish an urban White Paper. We share the view that, by revitalising and regenerating our towns and cities, and creating an urban renaissance, we will take the pressure off the countryside and bridge the housing gap between the haves and the have-nots.

The household projection figures have been one of the main topics of discussion tonight. The Committee last looked at the issue in 1995-96, when it broadly accepted the methodology, and I welcome the fact that the confidence in it has been reaffirmed. I hope that we can put to bed for good the fruitless arguments about the figures. The Government have tried to be as helpful as possible about the next set of projections. The Committee recommended that

"the Government publish with the next national household projections an analysis which shows the effect of small changes in the assumptions underlying the projections."

In response, the Government state:

"The Department notes the recommendation and will publish suitable sensitivity analyses alongside the next set of household projections."

It is in everybody's interest to ensure that the figures are understood, and the analysis accepted.

I welcome the Committee's support for our national land recycling target of 60 per cent. I do not know where some hon. Members have been for the past 18 years, but if we hit 60 per cent., it will be 10 per cent. better than the Conservatives did in their 18 years. The Opposition Front-Bench spokesman has attacked us, although we have been in government for 18 months, but the analysis of brown-field utilisation that we shall publish in a few days' time will prove acceptable.

We accept that there is more to be done. We intend that the regions should establish their own targets through regional planning guidance. I expect them to engage in that process with some urgency. I agree with much of what has been said. That problem will be resolved not in Whitehall, but in the regions and local towns.

The Government are trying to introduce innovatory ideas. The millennium village is on a contaminated site at Greenwich, and my hon. Friend the Minister for London and Construction tells me that that site received an award last night for the decontamination work done there. We are looking into the problems left at Allerton Bywater by the rundown of the mining industry. We are trying to increase the size of that village to give it some economy of scale. We want to resolve the problem without people having to move out. We are trying, in innovative ways, to bring brown fields back into use and to introduce better planning. We will genuinely try to hit the 60 per cent. target.

I welcome the Committee's support for our approach to the provision of regional housing. The regional planning conferences have an essential role to play. We intend to set out a timetable for production of regional planning guidance, and we expect the regions to stick to it and to produce responsible and realistic plans for accommodating housing requirements in their areas. There must be certainty. Everyone says that certainty is needed in the planning regime. Central to that certainty will be having everyone in the planning system adhering to the timetables that we shall evolve after consultation with the parties involved.

We are keen to maintain momentum towards decentralisation of power. As the Committee's report stresses, power comes with responsibility. We genuinely want to devolve powers to the regions so that we can have a bottom-up process. The same is true of local plans. We must respond to the challenges to the Government and to society.

Let me turn to the way forward. Our policy statement last February made it clear that our first choice for new development is that it should be on previously developed land, preferably in urban areas. That sequential approach is long overdue, and we want authorities to explore options fully before they propose urban extensions or the release of other green-field sites. That will be covered more extensively by the revised PPG3.

The Select Committee rightly posed more detailed questions about how we will deliver. Let me fill in some of the gaps. As our response to the Committee makes clear, we have embarked already on an extensive programme of policy initiatives, as set out in "Planning for the Communities of the Future" and "Modernising Planning".

The urban task force, under the guidance of Lord Rogers, is examining the difficulties of redeveloping our urban areas, which have been graphically described, particularly from my side of the House. The task force contains a broad range of expertise drawn from all the professions involved in the debate, from developers to environmentalists. We look forward to receiving Lord Rogers's report in the first half of next year, but he has made it clear this week that he will produce an interim report at the turn of the year.

Work on compiling the national land use database—the equivalent of a Domesday register for the 21st century—is already well under way. The initial results are due next

[Mr. Caborn]

March. It is gathering on-line data about every previously developed site in the country, and I assure the House that that is no mean feat. We will soon know how many previously developed sites there are, and we shall be able to keep that information up to date. Rather than speculate about the ability to reuse brown-field land, we shall shortly have factual information to inform our land recycling policy.

We have a full programme of revision for planning policy guidance. Our response to the Select Committee refers a number of times to the updating of the guidance note on housing, known as PPG3. We are grateful for the Committee's proposals on that document, and we shall factor them into our considerations. The hon. Member for South Cambridgeshire (Mr. Lansley) will be the first to have a public examination. I intend to produce PPG3 before that, hopefully by the turn of the year. I have no doubt that the hon. Gentleman will appear at the public examination, and I will ensure that he has the revised PPG3 in his hands.

We are working on other planning guidance, such as the notes on transport, spatial planning and regional planning. We are also working on issues such as compulsory purchase and the use of economic instruments. We need a comprehensive approach, so that we can answer serious structural weaknesses in this part of society.

It has been made clear this evening that we need an holistic approach to urban housing policy. The problems will not be solved through the planning process alone. I am delighted that my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister was able to announce on Tuesday that the Government have accepted the Select Committee's recommendation to publish an urban White Paper. We expect to do so next year.

It is 20 years since there was an urban White Paper. My right hon. Friend remembers it well, because he was parliamentary private secretary to the then Secretary of State, Peter Shore—now Lord Shore—and he was deeply involved in that paper. Regrettably, the Conservative Governments of the 1980s and 1990s failed to advance many of the ideas that flowed from the White Paper.

Debates on Select Committee reports must be kept above party politics, but we have heard a little hypocrisy in the debate. Lord Tebbit used to say, "Get on your bike, come to the south-east and go to where the jobs are." People came, but now the Conservatives complain because we have to house them. Lord Tebbit has not spoken tonight, but he spoke volumes years ago, and we are grappling with the problems he left us. The overheating of the south-east arises from the type of economic policies pursued by previous Administrations.

The Labour Government have a new vision for a new set of urban issues. We seek thriving communities that provide jobs and provide homes that are attractive and pleasant to live in. We are determined to drive an urban renaissance. We are determined to turn our cities back into places where people want to work, live and play. The urban White Paper will link key strands of Government vision for an urban renaissance. It will embrace our programmes for education, employment, health, housing, the problem of social exclusion and transport. It will be the most comprehensive and far-sighted programme of urban renewal since our last White Paper in the 1970s.

It has always been Labour Governments who have addressed the real problems of land use planning. It is 50 years since a Labour Government put the Town and Country Planning Act 1947 on to the statute book. It was a Labour Government who introduced the national parks. It was a Labour Government who introduced the green belt. All that the previous Administration did was to take concrete mixers to build out-of-town shopping centres, and allow more development on green belt and green-field sites than any other Administration ever allowed.

I welcome the report.

6.57 pm

Mr. Bennett: With the leave of the House, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Traditionally, at the end of debates such as this, the Chairman of the Select Committee responds to fill up a bit of time. However, there is virtually no time left over, so I will just thank the Minister for his responses, both in writing and at the Dispatch Box.

I thank, too, all those who participated in the debate, particularly those hon. Members who did not serve on the Committee. Too often, debates on Select Committee reports involve the members of the Committee talking about their own report. It was refreshing to hear that so many other hon. Members had taken the trouble to read the report and to participate. I regret that there was not enough time to allow everyone to speak who wanted to.

European Structural Funds

[Relevant documents: Seventh report from the Trade and Industry Committee, Session 1997–98, on Reform of European Structural Funds (HC 697), and the Government's response thereto of 11 September.]

6.59 pm

Mr. Roger Berry (Kingswood): It is a pleasure to open this debate on the Trade and Industry Select Committee's report on the reform of European structural funds. I do so only because my hon. Friend the Member for Ochil (Mr. O'Neill), who chairs the Committee, is unable to be present this evening. He asked me to convey his apologies to the House.

First, I wish to place on record the Committee's thanks to the Clerk and his colleagues, Professor Iain Begg of South Bank university, who has provided us with expert assistance and lots of statistics, and all those who gave written or oral evidence. I am mindful of Madam Speaker's earlier request for brevity, and I am aware that many hon. Members wish to speak in this debate, so I shall confine my remarks to a few key issues in both the report and the Government's response.

It is important to see the current renegotiation of the structural funds in context. The funds are the principal instrument of EU regional policy whereby it seeks to reduce regional inequalities, or, as we tend now to say, to promote economic and social cohesion, which seems to me to be essentially the same thing. The current negotiations on the structural funds, the cohesion fund and, indeed, the Community initiatives, are part of the overhaul of EU finances that was initiated by the publication in July last year of Agenda 2000.

The most significant feature of the current discussions about the reform of the structural funds is that they are taking place in much more difficult circumstances than the negotiations on previous reforms. For example, the EU is facing a difficult economic environment, not least characterised by high levels of unemployment. It is embarking on enlargement to the east, with potential EU members being significantly less well off than current members, so more likely to need structural fund assistance.

There is a growing reluctance by net contributing states to continue contributions on the same scale, so there will be only modest increases in resources to promote economic and social cohesion—roughly rising in line with EU GDP. Yet, at the same time, there is a growing awareness of the availability of European funding, so there is increased demand. In the past, structural funds have increased substantially, both in scope and in scale, as the EU has evolved. That will no longer be the case. Therefore, the current re-evaluation of structural fund policy is no easy task, as I am sure the Minister will advise the House.

The Commission's most important proposals are of concern to all of us. The aims are to reduce the number of objectives from seven to three; to reduce Community initiatives from 14 to three; to concentrate funds by greater geographical targeting; in relation to objective 1, to apply the current criterion based on per capita GDP of below 75 per cent. of the European average, but without the existing flexibility; for regions facing major restructuring needs, to set a new objective 2, amalgamating current objectives 2 and 5b and incorporating a number of Community initiatives with particular account being taken of the unemployment rate as the key criterion; and finally, to ensure that the budget for structural and cohesion policies is maintained at the planned 1999 level of 0.46 per cent. of EU GNP.

Allowing for funds committed for enlargement, this will mean an increased spending in real terms of from about 28 billion euros per annum in the current planning period to about 30 billion in the next. There is an increase in real terms roughly in line with GDP, but not a substantial one. It is not like past increases, when we saw the renegotiation of European structural funds. The circumstances are therefore difficult.

Before we consider the Commission's proposals in more detail, we need to address a basic question, which the Committee considered: what is the value of the process whereby member states contribute to a common pool and then get either less or more from that pool, with strings attached by Brussels? That question needs to be asked, and the Committee sought to answer it. Obviously, it is a form of redistribution in the right direction—from rich to poor—and is to be welcomed warmly. It is an important function of the exercise. It is a practical expression of economic and social cohesion at European level. However, the greater the subsidiarity, the more the involvement of European mechanisms must be justified.

The Committee considered that issue in our report, and identified a number of reasons why European funding of this kind has conferred many benefits. As we discovered from travelling around the country listening to people involved in partnerships using European funding, it has led to the growth of many extremely productive partnerships at local level, such as between local authorities and the private and voluntary sectors, the benefits of which should not be underestimated.

Nevertheless, the Committee was impressed by the general indifference of those we met who seek and spend funds as to the source of funding. Whether we were in Merseyside, Stockport or Chorley, the cause of concern was not so much where the money came from as that there should be money available. We made that modest observation in our report.

The Government's response was perfectly fair, reminding us that they believe, rightly, that allocations should be redistributive, and that member states with lower per capita GNP should get more than those with higher per capita GNP. I wholly support that. Redistribution is an important political objective. But with respect, the response slightly side-stepped our point—that those involved in coming up with programmes, projects and schemes that confer enormous economic and social benefits on their communities, and those who have developed partnerships between the local authority and the private and voluntary sectors, often feel that what matters is not the source but the availability of funding. It would have been inaccurate of the Committee not to note that point.

Concentration is a key issue, and is identified at a number of levels. I have already said that the proposal is to concentrate on three rather than seven objectives, and on three rather than 14 Community initiatives. There is to be concentration on areas of priority assistance. There is to be geographical concentration, so that the eligible population in new objective 1 and new objective 2 areas should be reduced from 51 per cent. of the EU population

[Mr. Roger Berry]

to between 35 and 40 per cent. There is also a proposal for greater financial concentration, which effectively means giving greater priority to objective 1 regions.

The Committee's main concern, which I share, is the proposed increased geographical concentration. There is no obvious reason why increased geographical concentration is a good thing. If relative disadvantage or inequality happens to be widely spread in a spacial sense, there is a good reason to spread the resources to deal with it; so we on the Committee had some difficulty in understanding the emphasis on geographical concentration. Therefore, while we welcome more effective targeting of funds, we share the Government's concern that the current proposals would remove about 10 per cent. of EU citizens—37 million or 38 million people—from structural fund eligibility. We could find no justification for that.

The cohesion fund has taken on a life of its own. It will not be doing what it was intended to do. It was introduced following the Maastricht treaty to help the less prosperous member states with programmes designed to assist them to meet the convergence criteria for entry into economic and monetary union. Now, despite the fact that three of the four countries concerned—Ireland, Portugal and Spain—are to be in the first wave of EMU, having met the convergence criteria, it is proposed that the cohesion fund should continue for those countries for which it was originally set up. That is plainly absurd—probably the strongest expression that I am allowed to use in this Chamber.

The Committee shares the Government's view and that of a number of other member states that continuation of substantial funding from the cohesion fund for those joining the single currency simply cannot be reconciled with the original objectives of the fund. I look forward to the Minister advising the House what the Government, the House or anyone else can do about that extraordinary state of affairs.

As hon. Members will be aware, the Commission proposes that objective 1 will continue to assist regions where per capita GDP for the last three years for which figures are available is less than 75 per cent. of the EU average. Current objective 6 regions—those that are sparsely populated—will also be covered. It is proposed that objective 1 regions will continue to receive roughly two thirds of the funds.

The difference is that it is now suggested that no more than 20 per cent. of the EU population should be covered by objective 1, compared with about 25 per cent. at present, and that the previous flexibility around the 75 per cent. threshold should be eliminated. At the time of writing the report, the Committee understood that that was likely to mean that Merseyside would retain objective 1 status, that South Yorkshire would gain it, and that the highlands and islands and Northern Ireland would lose it, although we anticipated that the highlands and islands would regain it under the sparsity criteria hitherto used for objective 6, and that Northern Ireland would be regarded as a special case.

To eliminate the existing flexibility would in our view cause the United Kingdom particular difficulties. We are the fifth poorest member of the European Union in terms of per capita GDP, but we could lose because we do not have the regional inequalities that exist, for example, in Italy or Germany. This is not special pleading: it is an important matter of principle. The Committee's concern was that the Commission's proposals could penalise poorer countries that had been relatively successful in reducing regional inequalities. For poorer countries to be penalised for achieving greater economic and social cohesion simply does not make sense; nor does the rigid application of the 75 per cent. threshold.

There is no correct statistical methodology for defining the boundaries of EU regions, drawing a line at those with per capita GDP of 75 per cent. of the average, and saying that those below lag behind and those above do not. This is not a statistical exercise; it is a matter of judgment.

I am not talking about the margins of error in a statistical sense, although they exist. The point is that it is simply not possible to replace judgment with an arbitrary statistical device. Therefore, the Committee strongly supports the Government's view that flexibility around the 75 per cent. threshold should continue. In our view, the Government must continue strenuously to question the strange attachment that the European Commission seems to have here, as elsewhere, to rigid and arbitrary criteria. There must be flexibility—a grey zone, as we have referred to it—to give potential but not absolute eligibility to a small number of regions that are on the margin, so that judgment can be exercised rationally.

The Office of National Statistics data were published today. The separation of Cornwall from Devon as a level 2 area is warmly to be welcomed. My hon. Friend the Member for Falmouth and Camborne (Ms Atherton) is sitting here, so I have to refer to Cornwall. I was going to refer to the NUTS—nomenclature of territorial units for statistics—level 2 area, but perhaps sticking to level 2 is more appropriate. My hon. Friend the Minister will bring the House up to date, I know, but it looks as if Cornwall will obtain objective 1 status, as will the new west Wales and the valleys level 2 area. That is to be welcomed.

Mr. Rhodri Morgan (Cardiff, West): Although my constituency is not in the objective 1 designated area, it is fair to say that there is an enormous welcome throughout Wales for the prospect that a substantial chunk of Wales will for the first time get objective 1 status. However, there is a specific problem, which I think is unique to Wales.

After devolution, working within the Barnett formula, any additional matching funds for the objective 1 bit of Wales could have to be provided by the new Welsh Assembly. It will have to borrow from Peter—the areas outside the objective 1 area—to pay Paul, unless the Treasury agrees to provide additional funds as the matching funds for the new objective 1 area. Did that matter come within the Select Committee's purview?

Mr. Berry: We did not consider that matter. The Minister may wish to comment on it. If I hurry up and finish my comments, other hon. Members will be able to make similar points, perhaps at more length.

Whatever happiness there is about the ONS data published today and what we believe to be their implications for objective 1 status, I hope, and the Committee hopes, that the Government still feel strongly about flexibility around the 75 per cent. threshold. It is an important matter of principle.

For new objective 2, the emphasis on unemployment as a principal measure of need is not unreasonable. Unemployment is perhaps the EU's greatest problem, so we welcome the emphasis on it. However, it makes no sense to rely exclusively on recent local unemployment rates. It is well known that member states do not exhibit identical economic cycles. That has a number of implications. One is that it is absurd to rely on a three-year snapshot of unemployment to determine fund distribution. The Select Committee is therefore of the view that objective 2 funding should be allocated broadly on the basis of per capita GDP, and that member states should have great freedom to identify the areas to be assisted.

Mr. Paddy Tipping (Sherwood): Coalfield areas have gained substantially from European funding—£200 million a year. Does my hon. Friend agree that it would be strange if the South Yorkshire coalfield got objective 1 status while north Nottinghamshire, which has the same conditions but just misses objective 1 perhaps on unemployment and GDP data, were excluded? Is that not an example of where flexibility ought to be applied?

Mr. Berry: My hon. Friend makes an important point. I shall come to the issue of boundaries.

One issue that local authorities, among others, raised with the Committee was the setting of boundaries for the new objective 2 areas. It is clearly important that areas most in need should receive the funding. The Minister told the Committee that the Government would be looking for an outcome on objective 2 where there would be

"the flexibility to delve down into areas of real need",

even if those areas were concealed in areas of relative prosperity.

In their response to the report, the Government warned that there were many hurdles to overcome, but said that they were committed to the principle of flexibility. Are the Government willing to continue to seek to have objective 2 areas defined below NUTS level 3—at least to ward level 5, if not below? I think that that takes on the point that my hon. Friend has just made.

There has been a broad welcome in principle for the Commission's proposal to reduce the number of community initiatives from the current 14 to three. It has been argued that many activities pursued under community initiatives could as easily be carried out under objective programmes. However, that can be done only in areas enjoying objective status. In Lancashire, the Committee was briefed on community initiative projects of real worth outside objective areas—the Royal Ordnance site at Chorley and a former cotton mill at Stockport spring to mind.

Moreover, the local authority associations were cautious about reducing the number of community initiatives. The Local Government Association sought the continuation of the urban initiative, which provides concentrated assistance to a few selected urban areas. The Convention of Scottish Local Authorities supports the campaign for a fourth initiative, Restruct, which would bring together the current industrial change initiatives.

The Committee's view is that serious consideration should be given to the continuation in some form of the urban initiative and to the introduction of the proposed Restruct initiative. In light of the Government's response to the Committee's recommendations, may I press the Minister to tell the House how far the Government will back the Restruct initiative and seek transitional funding for urban projects just begun, which the Committee feels is important?

The Government's response agrees with almost all the Committee's conclusions and recommendations, which means that only limited disagreement is to be expected this evening. However, I have raised several issues that require further clarification from the Minister. Because of the time available, the list has not been exhaustive, but I am sure that other hon. Members will now add many more items to that list.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): Order. A great many hon. Members are trying to catch my eye and it is already evident that, unless some self-restraint is exercised, many people will be disappointed.

7.21 pm

Mr. Colin Breed (South-East Cornwall): The broad principles underlying the reforms are to be welcomed. They are, to some extent, overdue. The full implications of enlargement of the European Union, many of which have yet to be recognised, will certainly have concentrated minds, since to do nothing to the current rules relating to structural funding would certainly hugely increase budget contributions. In addition, inequities between certain member states and regions would be created, and tensions within the Union might be aggravated.

The provision of structural funds has clearly been of great importance to all member states, not least the United Kingdom. The funds provide a tangible benefit, and enable people to see how Europe is of assistance to them and how it works constructively for them. That aspect of our membership has not been given the profile it deserves.

The reforms have had to address two sharply conflicting aims: on the one hand, to achieve greater fiscal restraint over a budget and individual contributions that are ever increasing; and, on the other hand, to continue to assist existing poorer regions and cope with future post-enlargement demands from new regions.

Many existing members want their overall contribution to fall in real terms and there have been calls for greater abatements and refunds. However, demands are increasing as awareness of what can be funded increases. Therefore, to reduce the number of initiatives, restrict the range of community initiatives and undertake an exercise in concentration to target assistance in a more focused manner, with the additional benefit of simplifying the system generally, are welcome measures which we should support.

The strict application of the criteria for objective 1, based on per capita gross domestic product of 75 per cent. of the EU average, is understandable from the EU's point of view. As the hon. Member for Kingswood (Mr. Berry) said, it makes for clear-cut, black-and-white decision making. However, it could lead to conflict over the boundaries used for the purposes of statistical data to support new applications. Common sense must prevail, and some flexibility should be retained.

It appears that the total share of structural funds received by the UK would actually fall, and many regions currently enjoying objectives 2 and 5b status only might

[Mr. Colin Breed]

in future receive only transitional funds under the new objective 2 status. That might have a major effect on some of the regions currently obtaining support, forcing them to draw up new economic plans.

The proposed timetables are, on the face of it, extremely tight, but they must be adhered to if the reforms are to be well embedded prior to the first wave of any enlargement. There will obviously be a danger, emphasised in the report, of putting off difficult decisions—indeed, it appears that some EU members put off a rather difficult decision today. However, that must not be allowed to happen, as procrastination would clearly invite greater difficulties in future. It might also delay opportunities for new members to join: it must be remembered that the peoples of those aspirant member states might lose some of their enthusiasm for enduring the very strictures imposed on them to enable their countries to meet the accession criteria. The EU must maintain the momentum of reform to ensure that enlargement can and does come about.

The Committee's recommendation to concentrate funding on the poorest 20 per cent. of regions is based on a desire to reduce the gap between richer and poorer nations, but it would also reduce the number of objective 1 regions and so be difficult to implement, especially as some of those regions will have only just received that status—I am not necessarily referring to Cornwall in that context. However, the suggestion that each member state should undertake to reduce the population covered as a means of sharing the burden of geographical concentration has some merit. It would be a fairer system that allowed each state to decide how to implement the policy within its own boundaries.

I should like to make a few remarks as a Member of Parliament from Cornwall. As the Minister knows, the whole of Cornwall was pleased—nay, delighted—when the county became a NUTS 2 region in its own right, with the result that its case for objective 1 status was much enhanced. Cornwall is clearly on a par with places such as Greece and Spain in terms of GDP per head, and I, along with nearly half a million other people, am looking forward hopefully to the confirmation of objective 1 status for Cornwall in the not-too-distant future.

The county of Cornwall has benefited from objective 5b status, the experience of which is pertinent to my final point: that the process of seeking funding is far too complex. In addition, it is too unco-ordinated with other programmes, and too vulnerable to delays in decision making. All that often results in carefully assembled packages falling apart at the wrong moment. The bureaucracy and over-elaborate administrative procedures must be examined and overhauled so that, when dealing with the private sector, which is vital in respect of matched funding, we can keep pace with its timetables.

Such reform will not result in any lessening of the quality of accountability, or of ensuring that proper control is maintained. It is unacceptable to allow impediments to such critical funding packages, especially those relating to objective 1 areas, to persist. Some subsidiarity must be applied to that area of EU operations.

Mr. David Heath (Somerton and Frome): I am glad that my hon. Friend has touched on subsidiarity. Having read the Committee report and the Government's overall response, does he agree that the weakest part of that response relates to recommendation 13, which deals with subsidiarity? Does it not bode rather ill for the forthcoming informal European Council on subsidiarity if, at that conference, the Government are not going to promote the case for subsidiarity beyond national level?

Mr. Breed: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend. There has been much talk about subsidiarity, but little action to enable it to take place. That is perhaps the most frustrating aspect of the over-bureaucratic administration of funding packages.

The reforms will modernise the structural funds in advance of enlargement, and reduce the total funds available, which should ensure some restraint on funding. However, I suspect that, as with other funds, demand will always exceed the available resources.

I hope that there will be a fervent desire to tackle the bureaucracy and over-elaborate administration. If the red tape were cleared away, that would do much to ensure that economic development was quickly achieved in the regions of the EU, in all the objective statuses, and we know that time is critical to many parts of the UK and other EU countries.

7.30 pm

Mr. Bill O'Brien (Normanton): It is pleasing to be able to take part in this debate. The contribution of my hon. Friend the Member for Kingswood (Mr. Berry), who fully explained the national and European dimensions, means that my speech will be shorter because I can concentrate on local issues and plead with the Minister to take note of the problems suffered by coalfield areas.

Research shows that European funding is the largest source of finance for economic regeneration in many areas of the United Kingdom. For the five years from 1994 to 1999, the assessed total that we could obtain is about £3.2 billion for objective 2 funding to assist rundown industrial areas. Those include my constituency and the Wakefield area, where mining, textile and engineering jobs have been lost in their thousands. They were well-paid jobs which contributed substantially to the economy of the Wakefield area and the surrounding towns and cities.

European Union funding could contribute to the securing of 340,000 jobs nationally, which would help to create jobs for redundant mineworkers and provide job opportunities for our young people. The UK is the fifth-largest contributor to the EU budget, so we make a substantial contribution for the return that we obtain.

My fear is that the redrawing of the EU map for objective 1 and objective 2 areas which determines the availability of European grants will mean that my constituency loses out. I am concerned that areas such as West Yorkshire, and Wakefield in particular, will not qualify for either objective status if the negotiations currently taking place do not recognise their economic problems. Wakefield, which has lost its traditional industries, including coal, engineering and textiles, would suffer substantially.

I want to impress on the Minister and the European Commissioners the fact that the present criteria for awarding objective 2 status are narrow and sometimes inaccurate. They work against regions such as Yorkshire

and the Humber. It would be cruel and dishonest to change the formula without taking into consideration the current economic conditions of regions such as mine.

The gross domestic product per head in former mining, textile and engineering areas is less than the EU average. The nature of jobs has changed: well-paid permanent jobs have been replaced by low-paid part-time jobs; and skilled jobs have been replaced by non-skilled work in retailing and catering. My area is becoming a supermarket jungle—out-of-town shopping is killing off town and city centres.

Training for skilled employment is a mere token in our area. High-tech jobs are difficult to find; high-tech industries are not attracted to the area, mainly because of the dereliction and closure of our traditional industries. Our damaged environment acts as a deterrent and a disincentive to investment. Local authorities that represent those rundown areas are working hard to combat that dereliction, but they have limited resources. That is a significant reason why areas that now qualify for objective 2 status should continue to do so.

The legacy of over-dependency on a few traditional industries is enduring, and local authorities are working hard to encourage industries and businesses to locate in their areas, but the going is hard and we need the support of EU structural funds. We also need the European Commission to take note of the problems in those areas. I ask that, in any redrawing of the structural maps, note be taken of all the economic conditions.

My constituents ask for fairness, not favours. I support the Government negotiators in pressing the European Commission to consider all economic and social aspects in our regions. In my lobbying for objective 2 status for the Wakefield area, I point out that it has a high proportion of derelict land, high levels of economic inactivity, a high level of dependency on income support, high levels of ill health, low life expectancy and declining male employment. On behalf of my constituents, I therefore plead with the House to be unanimous and impress on the European Commissioners the need to maintain objective 2 status in our area.

7.37 pm

Miss Anne McIntosh (Vale of York): I welcome the report and I am pleased to be able to participate in the debate. I congratulate the Minister on her generous and open-door policy and thank her for her generous replies to correspondence and my requests for meetings with her.

I join other hon. Members who have made special pleadings for their areas. As the Minister knows, there is concern in North Yorkshire that has not yet been allayed, particularly about the fact that two initiatives will be discontinued. The first is the Konver programme, which has had a positive impact on areas in my constituency. I am not convinced that those areas will continue to benefit under the new arrangements for objective 2, which is worrying.

I also make a plea on behalf of the farming community, which receives generous benefits from the 5b proposals. I do not need to remind the House of the present plight of farmers. Never before in my lifetime have I witnessed all sectors of the farming industry in such a crisis. Farmers in lowland areas such as the Vale of York, who would normally admit privately to being reasonably well off, have desperately low incomes this year. I make a special plea that those areas covered by the 5b provision not be forgotten.

I am pleased that the Select Committee's report refers to some programmes specifically. However, I am concerned that, in the tussle for funds between rural and urban areas—such as those represented by hon. Members who have spoken this evening—places such as the Vale of York will lose out because the initiatives and the population number criterion are being reduced. I issue a plea on behalf of the rural community that it should continue to benefit from European funding.

Under the new proposals, the existing arrangements will obviously cease from 2000. Tourism, particularly in North Yorkshire, has suffered this year as a result of the strength of the pound and competition from package holidays to attractive parts of Europe and other world destinations. That crisis in the tourism industry must be recognised. Under the current proposals, most service sectors do not qualify for funding because the emphasis is very much on the decline in the manufacturing industry. I do not know whether the Government—even during the United Kingdom's EU presidency, when a vigorous campaign was fought over the transitional arrangements—have made a special case for funding tourism and other service sectors, including port-related activities. I hope that the hon. Lady will put my mind at rest this evening by assuring the House that tourism will benefit from the revised proposals.

I was struck by one important point in the Committee's conclusions: whether the Government have faced honestly the real impact of the proposals on the whole of the United Kingdom. I refer to new objective 2. Several million people currently qualify for funding under the former objective 5b and Konver provisions, and it is regrettable that there will be a dramatic fall in the number who will benefit under the new arrangements. The United Kingdom receives 9 per cent. of the total EU structural funds, but the amount will fall dramatically from 2000. There is no guarantee that people will continue to benefit to the same extent under the transitional arrangements. Will the hon. Lady confirm that the request for an extension of relevant objectives 1 and 2 to six or seven years will be agreed by the other member states?

The new arrangements will, rightly or wrongly, give more say to the national administration and the local Government offices for the regions on how the funds will be administered. We seek an assurance this evening that there will be a certain continuity in the allocation of moneys, which should not be jeopardised in the future.

I met the Minister in about May this year and I was struck by her reference to the new concept of pockets of rural deprivation. However, the Minister's replies in correspondence of 18 June were rather open-ended. She said, for instance, that the negotiations were still at an early stage. However, I understand that the Prime Minister has said that the new arrangements must be agreed by March next year. That is a very ambitious timetable. Will the Minister elucidate on the concept of pockets of rural deprivation and the other outstanding matters on which we touched earlier?

7.44 pm

Mr. Gerry Steinberg (City of Durham): I shall be very parochial in my speech tonight—and I make no apologies for that. As chairman of the northern group of Labour Members of Parliament, I speak on behalf of the north-east as well as my constituency. I stress the

[Mr. Gerry Steinberg]

immense value of structural funds to that region. Those funds have been worth more than £1,000 million to the north-east since 1989 and have created tens of thousands of jobs. At more than £100 million per annum, they are worth more than the proposed budget of the regional development agency. The funds have assisted areas suffering major economic and social hardship and the disiocation of the local work force, and rural areas suffering from a combination of sparse population and a continued dependence on agriculture.

The funds have secured enormous achievements for the north-east. Structural funds have allowed the region to cope with massive structural change and have been a huge boost to the north-east's economic, social and environmental regeneration. They have encouraged considerable private investment. The funds have raised regional competitiveness and have been used effectively and imaginatively. The north-east has been cited by the Commission as one of the best performers in applying and directing resources.

All that is under threat, as the European Commission is recommending the reform of structural funds and a reduction by up to a third in the population level that they cover. Special support to the coalfields and to specific sectors, such as textiles, steel and shipbuilding, will be scrapped. I stress that the north-east needs continued assistance. The task of restructuring the economy is not yet complete and the north-east continues to face severe social and economic problems of a deep-rooted structural nature.

First, per capita gross domestic product in the north-east is the lowest of any region in the country. Secondly, the north-east has the highest unemployment claimant count of any English region. More than one in three unemployed people have been unemployed for more than 12 months. Real unemployment—that is, joblessness—is more than twice as high as the claimant count. Thirdly, average weekly wages in the north-east are the lowest of any English region. The north-east has the lowest disposable household income in the whole of the United Kingdom. Some 37 per cent. of those in work earn less than the Council of Europe's decency threshold—that is the highest rate in the United Kingdom.

Fourthly, business start-up and survival rates are among the lowest in the United Kingdom. Economic activity rates for both men and women are the lowest in England and the second lowest in the United Kingdom. Unfortunately, recent large-scale job losses have exacerbated the problem and highlighted the fragility of the region's economy. I assure the House that that is not a price worth paying.

Although structural funds have cushioned the region from further decline, its relative competitiveness has slipped as other regions have improved their economic performance. A reduction in structural funds would hinder the process of restructuring. It would constitute a major setback in rebuilding confidence and the diversity and strength of the region's economy. Such a reduction would cause a rapid decline in competitiveness and widen the gap between the region and other parts of the United Kingdom and Europe.

The north-east needs the maximum level of financial assistance.Parts of the region—notably the former coalfield and rural areas—have a gross domestic product of less than 75 per cent. of the EU average, which is the selection criterion for objective 1 funding. Northumberland and Durham have not been included as a level 2 region in the agreement reached between the Office for National Statistics and Eurostat. The designation of Northumberland and Durham as a level 2 region would have given us a good chance of obtaining objective 1 status, which would bring up to £150 million in European grants to the area.

The decisions on the revision of level 2 area status are supposedly based purely on statistical arguments rather than political decisions. However, on close examination, that does not appear to be the case. Eurostat has accepted some changes to the level 2 lists. They are in Cornwall, west Wales, London and Scotland.

Before anyone gets up in arms, let me make it clear that it is absolutely not my intention to argue that those areas should not have redesignation—far from it. I agree with the Council of Ministers and the European Commission that decisions should be taken as close to the people as possible. My argument is that there appears to be a double standard in that some areas are accepted while others are rejected.

Let me take Cornwall as an example. If there is supposed to be a statistical adherence to size basis, why should Cornwall, with a population of just 400,000, become a level 2 area?

Ms Candy Atherton (Falmouth and Camborne): The figure is 480,000. Let us get this absolutely clear. Let us be honest and say that Cornwall is a cultural region in its own right.

Mr. Steinberg: I was coming to that. As I said at the beginning of my speech, I am not arguing against Cornwall's redesignation. I am simply making a comparison, and I am entitled to do that. If one area gets level 2 status and another does not, there must be a reason. I want to find out what that reason is. I do not begrudge Cornwall getting redesignation. I am delighted, so my hon. Friend should not get herself in a twist.

Cornwall has been allowed to split off from Devon because of a

"recognition of the very different economic conditions of the counties and Cornwall's sparsity of population, geographic peripherality and distinct cultural and historical factors reflecting a Celtic background."

That was a quote from Eurostat.

As Cornwall is a county, on the general rationale it should be a level 3 area and, as such, be eligible for objective 2 rather than objective 1. The specific points allowed by Eurostat in accepting the case for level 2 designation include the "different economic conditions" between Devon and Cornwall, which in gross domestic product terms is 15 per cent. The discrepancy in GDP terms between Northumberland and Tyne and Wear is also 15 per cent. Therefore, economic conditions are just as different between Northumberland and Tyne and Wear as they are between Devon and Cornwall.

It is also worth pointing out that Cornwall is part of the south-west region, which has an overall GDP of 95 per cent. of the EU average while the northern region has only

85 per cent. of the EU average. We are a poor part of a poor region, whereas Cornwall is a poor part of a much richer region.

Cornwall's population sparsity is specifically referred to as part of the rationale for accepting level 2 review. However, in Northumberland and Durham, sparsity is worse, at 123 people per sq km compared with 136 people per sq km in Cornwall. Emphasis is placed on Cornwall's geographical peripherality. Penzance, at the extreme western tip of Cornwall is 282 miles from London while Berwick in the north of Northumberland is further away at 357 miles from London.

I now turn to the

"distinct cultural and historic factors reflecting Celtic background".

How can that possibly be a statistical argument? On that basis, Northumberland should have objective 1 status because we were not conquered by the Romans.

In view of that, what exactly is the rationale for accepting Cornwall for review, but not Northumberland and Durham? I ask that question quite seriously. If anything, the statistical case for Cornwall is rather less robust than that for Northumberland and Durham, reinforcing our view that the decision was political, not statistical.

The north-east is one of the most structurally challenged areas and that is why it needs structural funds. The UK Government have finally recognised coalfield areas as a priority. Now is not the time to disallow access to what will be the last major chance of structural funds going to the UK to help those areas. Europe grew out of the coal and steel community. The coalfields have to be understood in the context of permanent, steep long-term decline. The insistence of Eurostat on ignoring the United Kingdom position and rescheduling those areas as level 2 means that they must now compete as objective 2 regions, although their success is by no means certain. In fact, they are objective 1 regions trying to get objective 2 funding. The designation of objective 1 status should be the subject of open debate by the EU and member states, along with the principles of subsidiarity, transparency, fairness and social justice. The matter should not be cut and dried, with Eurostat overruling member states by the utilisation of a subjective formula.

The Commission has proposed that objective 2 eligibility should be based predominantly on employment and unemployment statistics. Industrial decline in the north-east has been long-term and sustained. Some areas have lost so many industrial jobs that they may not continue to qualify as industrial areas.

In selecting eligible objective 2 areas, the United Kingdom Government and the European Commission must use additional indicators of deprivation and exclusion that are meaningful. I suggest to my hon. Friend the Minister that additional selection criteria for objective 2 status should include some of the following factors.

First, per capita GDP should be recognised by the EC as the single most important factor in determining whether a region lags behind the rest of Europe. Parts of the north-east contain some of the lowest GDP in the United Kingdom, and the region as a whole has the lowest GDP of any region. Secondly, the skills level of the work force is fundamental to their ability to compete effectively. The narrow skills base in the north-east is a direct consequence of traditional structural reliance on heavy industry and agriculture. Thirdly, the north-east suffers from endemic deep-rooted unemployment. Official unemployment statistics underplay the problem of joblessness and the related issue of social exclusion. Fourthly, rural areas continue to suffer acute problems in terms of overdependence on a narrow and inflexible economic base, changing economic structures, remoteness and scarcity of population. Finally, aid should be concentrated on areas suffering structural problems. Allowing small areas with cyclical problems to qualify would reduce the impact of structural funds and fail to recognise real need.

At a European level, the UK Government are seeking a fair distribution of structural funds across member states. Distribution within the United Kingdom should also be on a fair basis, recognising real indicators of need. The economy in the north-east is struggling with huge job losses continuing to occur in manufacturing. The region is still undergoing a major restructuring process. The continuation of structural funds is vital to stabilise the future economy and boost job prospects in the north-east of England.

7.56 pm

Mr. David Prior (North Norfolk): I am pleased to follow the hon. Member for Kingswood (Mr. Berry) with whom I served on the Select Committee for a few months. I am particularly pleased to follow a Labour Member who still believes in the redistribution of wealth, which is something of a surprise these days.

The debate is important because we receive £11 billion a year from the structural fund which represent 45 per cent. of the European budget. We badly need reform, not just because of the enlargement of Europe, but because as everyone agrees—and the Committee certainly agreed—the system has become hugely over-bureaucratic and needs simplification. Let me quote one item from the Committee report:

"Eligibility for Objective 1 status is based on areas defined in Euro-speak as 'NUTS Level 2'. There has for some years been in existence a system of Nomenclature of Territorial Units for Statistics, designed to provide a single uniform breakdown of sub-national territorial units for statistical and other purposes."

Very few normal people can understand a word of that and it illustrates just how complicated and difficult the system has become. I agree with the Committee report when it refers to the results as arbitrary and capricious.

Worst of all is the political horse-trading in the background and we have heard something about it this evening. Even with Agenda 2000 determining the criteria by which parts of Europe should qualify for the new objectives, there is already horse-trading over those criteria.

It is nonsense that the criteria are determined at EU level and I am glad that the Committee recognised that and stated in its conclusions that in future they must include

"delegation to the lowest practicable level, and to non-statutory bodies in suitable cases."

I was also pleased to see conclusion 24 which states:

"The extent to which Objective 2 arrangements allow for wards to be targeted if necessary below local government ward level will be a measure of the Government's success in negotiations."

My own view is that that does not go nearly far enough. It is hard not to agree with Lord Pearson of Rannoch, who asked whether it would be more sensible for us to take

[Mr. David Prior]

control of the whole £11 billion and spend it wisely on our real needs, no doubt saving several billion pounds along the way. The more decisions that can be made locally, the better. If we carry on as we have in the past, we shall merely bring the European Union into disrepute.

Representing a rural constituency, I have a particular concern that objective 5b will be subsumed into the new objective 2, and that the rural areas will be squeezed. They will have to compete directly with industrial and urban areas, and historically they have had far less clout.

The indicators chosen by the European Commission to decide which areas qualify for support clearly discriminate against rural areas. The Commission decided that to qualify, rural areas must have a population density of less than 100 people per square kilometre or a high percentage of agricultural workers. In the United Kingdom that will have a serious effect on our ability to qualify for objective 5b.

Part of my constituency does qualify for objective 5b. It has been successful in attracting new industry and there has been a fruitful partnership between the local authority and private business. Indeed, the Select Committee report includes a letter from my district council which states that it believes that

"the additional funding available under the programme has seen positive effects delivered in the area—particularly in terms of capital investment projects by the public and private sectors in Fakenham".

The loss of objective 5b funding will have a serious impact on Fakenham and the surrounding area.

Mr. Bob Blizzard (Waveney): The hon. Gentleman will know from that section of the report that parts of his district felt that they did not obtain objective 5b funding because Lowestoft in my constituency was granted objective 5b, although it is a town of 60,000 or 70,000 people. The case for help through structural funds for Lowestoft was overwhelming, but it was not large enough to qualify for objective 2. In answer to my hon. Friend the Member for City of Durham (Mr. Steinberg), may I say that there are small areas with structural, not just cyclical, unemployment?

Because the only way to help Lowestoft was through objective 5b, it had to be redefined as rural. Is that not an argument for reform of the funds, so that areas such as Lowestoft can get what they deserve, without having to be designated as rural at the expense of other rural areas?

Mr. Prior: Indeed, the hon. Gentleman presents an argument for ensuring that decisions are taken locally, so that such considerations can be taken into account.

I shall conclude my speech with a further example. Alongside North Norfolk is a coastal strip where there are several fishing communities. They would have qualified under objective 5b, but for the fact that the travel-to-work area in which a number of fishermen were assessed included Fakenham, Cromer, North Walsham and other towns, so there was not a high enough percentage of fishermen to qualify. Along the coastal strip, however, the percentage is sufficiently high.

I hope that when the Minister negotiates the qualifications for objective 2, she will support the submission to her from the North Norfolk district council that the North Norfolk coastal strip should be designated under the fisheries strand of the objective 2 programme.

I believe strongly that the structural funds should be allocated and spent locally, as near as possible to the ground, and that rural areas such as North Norfolk and other parts of Great Britain should be safeguarded.

8.3 pm

Ms Candy Atherton (Falmouth and Camborne): I am grateful for the opportunity to speak in tonight's debate. To us in Cornwall, objective 1 is more than an opaque piece of bureaucratic jargon. To many, it is like the holy grail—a recognition that distinct regions such as ours on the periphery of the European Market need assistance to overcome chronic structural disadvantages. Indeed, I would not be going too far if I said that in Cornwall, European structural funds are exceedingly sexy.

It came as a terrific boost in June to learn that the Select Committee on Trade and Industry had recognised the inherent logic behind Cornwall's case for recognition as a distinct region at NUTS level 2. Whereas most people in less hard hit regions might repay the mention of objective 1 with a glazed expression, in my constituency even the eyes of schoolchildren light up.

I should not want my hon. Friends to think that we have been pleading emotionally for special treatment. The merit of Cornwall's case rests partly on its distinct regional identity. Cornwall has a unique cultural and economic history. In its heyday it was the powerhouse of British industry, but today it could easily be described as a backwater. The Select Committee agreed in its report that

"it would be. . . absurd to describe Cornwall as a bogus entity."

I should welcome a visit to Cornwall by my hon. Friend the Member for City of Durham (Mr. Steinberg), so that I could show him myself the structural problems that we face.

The merit of Cornwall's case also rests heavily on statistics. Recent figures—I believe that more have been published today—show that gross domestic product in the county is only 68 per cent. of the EU average. That is well below the 75 per cent. cut-off for objective 1. I understand that we have come bottom of the table in today's statistics.

For years the truth about Cornwall's problems has been masked by amalgamation with relatively prosperous Devon. We have received objective 5b grants, which are highly constructive. However, they do not offer the fundamental help that the county desperately needs.

The Prime Minister recognised our strong technical case, which also had strong backing in all political parties, in the county and through the wider south-west. The first action of the regional chamber of the south-west was to support unanimously Cornwall's case for objective 1. We were delighted to learn this summer to learn that Eurostat had agreed that Cornwall should be separated from Devon at NUTS level 2.

Cornwall now satisfies all the technical criteria for gaining objective 1 funding. As we approach the next round of objective 1 allocations, we in Cornwall were encouraged that, in discussing the flexibility of the 75 per cent. threshold, the Select Committee suggested that

"it is hard to imagine a region below the threshold being excluded".

I look forward to the county council producing an irrefutable package of proposals, based on widespread consultation throughout the county, which will put the seal on our bid. Next week the movers and shakers of

the county meet to thrash out the first phase of our plans to spend. Over the next few weeks a consultation document will be delivered to every door in the county asking for direct input from the grass roots.

I particularly agree with the Committee's analysis of the complexity of the process. It is indeed complex, and that is compounded by the jargon. We encounter terms such as Eurostat, Leader, state aids, objectives 1 to 6, the European agricultural guidance and guarantee fund, and my favourite term—NUTS. It would be fair to say that most people in Cornwall are becoming comfortable with the terminology, if sometimes a little confused. A man came to my surgery recently and asked me, "Well, then, Candy, are we going to get this objectionable 1?" I hope and believe that we will.

In Cornwall we have a true partnership between the public and private sectors, central and local government, and from voluntary organisations to the health authority, all headed by the county council. If we succeed in achieving objective 1, we shall have the opportunity to redefine our county, create a new university, tackle our infrastructure problems and, perhaps, as a predominantly small and medium-sized business centre, become the leading light across the EU in supporting and developing this sector.

The opportunities are there for the taking, and Cornwall stands at a crossroads. I hope that the county that currently stands on a par with the poorer regions of Portugal and Greece will be able to reorient itself into the future, with all its people pulling together.

8.10 pm

Mr. Alasdair Morgan (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale): The reality is, as the members of the Select Committee on Trade and Industry accepted in their report, that the European Union faces budgetary restrictions at a time of expansion. New nations, which we in the Scottish National party are keen to see joining the EU, are the very nations for which structural and cohesion funding are vital to ensure smooth accession and the subsequent smooth operation of the single market.

On the Scottish National party Benches we strongly hold to the principle—as has already been mentioned, it is somewhat out of fashion—that those who have a little more should in the best interests of society, or in this instance the best interests of the EU, contribute to those who have a little or a lot less. Equalising economic development and creating a stable union is in all our interests. We shall all benefit from the new partners who are in a position to participate fully in the single market but the political reality is that there is no endless pot of Euro-gold. If we are to have new members, the cake will have to be divided differently. It is important that the criteria that we adopt in cutting up that cake is not inflexible. We must take a wider view than the current criteria propose.

As for the proposed new objective 1, there must be great doubt over the accuracy of some of the regional gross domestic product figures that are being used as the main criteria for the objective. These figures are partly based on sample surveys. Even the Office for National Statistics itself says that the

"estimates cannot be regarded as accurate to the last digit shown."

Yet on that basis a member of the cabinet of Commissioner Monika Wolf-Mathies, who obviously must be a very important person as he was asked before the Select Committee in another place, said—[HON. MEMBERS: "She."] No. I am talking about the cabinet member representing the commissioner. He said before the Select Committee in another place that 75.1 per cent. shared gross domestic product was enough to exclude a region from objective 1. That means an exclusion based on the first decimal point of an inaccurate statistic.

On that basis, the highlands and islands would technically fall outwith the new criteria based on gross domestic product alone. If we take the original reasoning for objective 1, the highlands and islands would clearly benefit from the sort of structural support that is envisaged for objective 1 areas.

The arguments for the highlands and islands getting objective 1 have been well rehearsed, but they should certainly be repeated with force by the Government during the ensuing negotiations. I would expect the hon. Member for Inverness, East, Nairn and Lochaber (Mr. Stewart) to rehearse the arguments in some detail if he catches your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker. In terms of peripherality, population density, composition and general geography, there is an overwhelming case for the highlands and islands to be treated in the same way as the northern rim regions of Sweden—these are regions that have a higher gross domestic product than the highlands and islands—and Finland.

The case for the highlands and islands is strong, but less attention has been given in Scotland to the position of new objective 2 or current 5b areas. My constituency currently falls within the 5b area, but much of coastal rural "lowland" Scotland is also covered. Population density, unemployment and depopulation are all useful indicators, but they often fail to show the real picture of need.

The Government must press for objective 2 to take more fully into account all the possible indicators of low economic activity. For example, we must consider the amount of casual, seasonal or part-time employment. We must consider also the incidence of low earnings or low household incomes. We must take account of remoteness and lack of access to services and opportunities. We must consider not only population density but population composition—for example, is there an aging population or is there a substantial incidence of emigration of young people?

We must be concerned also about the arbitrary drawing of boundaries. I must say, given the remarks of the hon. Member for City of Durham (Mr. Steinberg), that I have no claim to include Berwick within any of the Scottish areas. However, gross domestic product and unemployment statistics conceal vast differences within areas. For example, the GDP of the highlands and islands is skewed by the inclusion of Inverness. The area of the islands is greatly skewed by the inclusion of Shetland.

Unemployment is also a variable statistic. Male unemployment based on claimant count within the region in which my constituency is situated—that is Dumfries and Galloway—is 7.4 per cent. Yet male unemployment in the Newton Stewart travel-to-work area within my constituency is 14.6 per cent., which is almost double. We must have a system that is flexible enough to cope with these discrepancies.

I am concerned that my area of Dumfries and Galloway may not qualify under the current proposed criteria. However, the issue is not about looking after our own

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backyard and that alone; it is about delivering though objective 2 the aims of economic development. It is about ensuring that communities elsewhere in Scotland, the United Kingdom or throughout the European Union do not have the door closed on them because we have rigidly applied some statistics that have been dreamt up in some bureaucrat's office. So objective 2 should be about providing opportunities for the best programmes in areas of genuine need and not simply, as the hon. Member for Kingswood (Mr. Berry) said—

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Inverclyde): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that areas of great need could include, or should include, fishing communities and fisheries dependent areas?

Mr. Morgan: I would certainly agree with that. That is something that we should bear in mind when we are considering the composition of an area. We should take into account the reliance of that area on declining industries such as fishing and, unfortunately, agriculture. I was saying that we should not simply be throwing all the money at a chosen few. Instead, we should be focusing on the best programmes for areas of genuine need.

In the area that I represent the net income from structural funds is dwarfed by contributions from the common agricultural policy. We are faced with not only the reform of structural funding but complete reassessment of the CAP. There is a growing feeling that European assistance under the CAP should move away from subsidy towards a programme of rural investment. That has a crucial bearing on our debate on structural funding.

At a time when rural areas across Europe and the United Kingdom are facing the possibility of reduced structural support, we must ask ourselves whether there are ways of refocusing other moneys to promote economic development in these areas. We need to find ways of more closely integrating the aims of both funding strands—that is the structural funds and the CAP—to ensure that maximum benefit goes to the areas in greatest need.

Finally, I want to focus briefly on the mechanisms for delivering structural funds within Scotland. We have a structure of local programmes and partnerships, which in many instances have been effective in building community structures and in disbursing structural funds. However, with the creation of a new streamlined structure of three objectives and four funds we have a good opportunity to consider the delivery mechanisms. There has been much criticism of existing structures that centre on levels of bureaucracy, endless meetings, seminars, forums, consultants and little true democratic accountability.

That being so, we must ask ourselves whether there is an opportunity to streamline delivery, to make greater use in Scotland of local enterprise companies along with local authorities and community partnerships and to improve scrutiny through a dedicated Committee of the Scottish Parliament. I would expect the new Scottish Parliament closely to examine this area to ensure that our structures are the most efficient at delivering for Scotland.

Transitional arrangements and safety nets will be vital. We must fight to ensure fair criteria for the new objectives. We must ensure that adequate provision is made to cope with any delay in agreeing the new scheme. The successful partnerships now in place must not be allowed to disappear while the bureaucrats and politicians argue about the next scheme.

8.19 pm

Mr. Jon Trickett (Hemsworth): Paragraph 49 of the report refers to the importance of flexibility in the setting of boundaries for the allocation of funds, and states:

"It is clearly important that . . . the areas which are most in need should receive the funding . . . The extent to which Objective 2 arrangements allow for funds to be targeted . . . will be a measure of the Government's success in negotiations."

I agree.

The European Commission's proposals are in danger of causing great injustice, particularly to the coalfield areas, by being too rigid and failing to deal with significant sub-regional disparities. I shall illustrate my point by reference to my area.

Wakefield district, where my constituency is located, has been a significant beneficiary of European funds for many years under objective 2. Since 1989, it has received about £40 million. We have been able to create 2,500 jobs and train about 11,000 of our residents. Local people cannot understand how the district could not qualify for such funding in future. They say that if we fitted the criteria for assistance more than a decade ago, when, admittedly, things in Wakefield were bad, it is inconceivable that we will not have access to the funds when our situation is immeasurably worse after the Thatcher and Major years. Over the past 15 years, the local traditional industries have been decimated. Wakefield had 20 collieries. Now it has one—20,000 mining jobs went. There have been major closures in other local industries such as engineering, textiles and clothing.

According to the recommended criteria, our economy is counted as part of the West Yorkshire region. Our economic and social data are distorted because we are regarded effectively as being part of Greater Leeds. I come from Leeds. I was born, grew up and spent most of my life there. Eventually, I became leader of that great city, but I now live in the former pit villages in the east of the Wakefield district. That is the place I represent. Leeds and Wakefield share almost no economic or social characteristics except for the fact that, for administrative purposes, we form part of the West Riding of Yorkshire, as I insist on calling it.

To qualify for objective 1 funds, it is necessary for a region to have gross domestic product per capita below 75 per cent. of the European Union average. West Yorkshire's figure is well above 90 per cent., but the figure for Wakefield is much lower. It is estimated at 77 per cent., the lowest by far in the West Riding. That statistic alone demonstrates the falsity of the assumption that the population of a region as diverse as ours should be regarded as socially or economically homogeneous.

The same point applies to the objective 2 criteria, but I shall not pursue it because it is self-evident. However, I shall demonstrate the need for European Union structural funds to be sensitive to sub-regional disparities, especially the needs of former mining areas, by reference to my constituency. There are three factors.

First, Hemsworth in the mid-1980s was massively dependent on an industrial base. We were one of the nation's great wealth generators. Two thirds of jobs were

classified as industrial—twice the national average. As a result of what can only be described as an economic cataclysm, two thirds of those jobs disappeared in 14 years. Now only a quarter of the jobs in my constituency can be classified as industrial. Wakefield was the seventh worst hit district in the country in the industrial restructuring of the 1980s and 1990s. The district lost 23,000 jobs, but it covers four constituencies. Half the job losses were in just one constituency—mine. We lost almost 10,000 mining jobs in 14 years. That is industrial restructuring on a colossal scale and we will live for many years with the social consequences.

My second point concerns GDP per capita. We live in a region with slightly more than 90 per cent. of the EU average, but it is estimated that the figure for Hemsworth is substantially less than the 75 per cent., which would allow us access to objective 1 funding. My constituency shares boundaries with Barnsley and Doncaster. Our economic and social structure and the competitiveness of local firms have more in common with the South Yorkshire districts than with Leeds and Bradford. All that separates us from South Yorkshire is a couple of fields and a beck—a stream to those unfamiliar with our Yorkshire language. Wading through the beck on the other side of those fields, it seems that South Yorkshire will benefit from the highest priority objective 1 funds while we lose our access to the lower order objective 2 status.

My third point relates to earned income levels. According to Library estimates, one in four people working in my constituency earns less than £3.50 an hour. That compares with one in 14 in West Yorkshire and one in 20 in the economy as a whole. It is inconceivable to argue on that basis for the trickle-down theory, or to say that we are part of the West Yorkshire economy: we clearly are not.

I recognise that the British Government have a complex and sensitive task in negotiating with Brussels. Many people in my area believe that during the Tory years, a sustained effort was launched to tear the heart out of the villages where I live and which I am proud to represent. Small wonder that a recent university study concluded that many people in Hemsworth feel politically, economically and socially marginalised. The European Union recognised that sentiment as the inevitable corollary of industrial and economic restructuring. The structural funds were established because social cohesion was regarded as a fundamental objective of civilised governance. Its opposite, alienation, was seen as destructive of the social fabric. Social cohesion was one of the fundamental objectives of article 2 of Single European Act.

Over the past 15 years, Westminster has often seemed to be the enemy while the EU, through the structural funds, appeared to be our only ally. There will be great frustration and disappointment should the fund be withdrawn with the task only partially completed, or as I would say, hardly begun. I know that my hon. Friend the Minister will do all that she can to ensure that any changes to the administration of the funds are introduced with the greatest care and delicacy, paying particular attention to the existence of sub-regional disparities and micro-economies such as those in West Yorkshire.

I respectfully remind the Minister of the Deputy Prime Minister's coalfield task force report on this matter. She will recall that the task force was acutely aware of the needs of the coalfields and of the significance of securing continuing assistance from Europe. Its report made three recommendations. I recommend those propositions to the House and to her as she goes to negotiate on our behalf.

8.28 pm

Mr. Tim Collins (Westmorland and Lonsdale): I commend the Select Committee and its staff for producing an admirably clear and constructive report. It is in many ways a model of its kind, both informative and persuasive. I congratulate the hon. Member for Kingswood (Mr. Berry) on his elegant presentation to open the debate. I know that he was filling in for the Committee's Chairman, but, with his magisterial mastery of the overview, he demonstrated that he deserves to be a Chairman in his own right, if greater glory does not beckon before that.

I agree with what the hon. Gentleman said about cohesion funds. If there is a case—and clearly, as many hon. Members have said, there is—for simplification, reduction and co-ordination of the European Union's expenditure in such areas, surely it must arise first and foremost with the cohesion funds.

Here we have public expenditure that was set up for a specific purpose—to prepare four member states for meeting the convergence criteria for joining the EU. Brussels has declared that three of the four have now met those criteria, yet the money is to continue to be paid in large measure. The hon. Gentleman is right to describe that as absurd. To me it is illustrative of a system one of whose acronyms is NUTS. There is a problem there, and it needs to be addressed.

My second point concerns the wider United Kingdom national interest. Whether we are Euro-sceptics, Europhiles or something in between, whether we supported HMS Durham as it shelled HMS Falmouth earlier in the debate, or whether we supported HMS Falmouth as it elegantly shelled HMS Durham back, and whatever our position on the issues, there is a broad United Kingdom national interest in ensuring that we get as much as possible out of the European funds.

We put far more into the European Union than we get out, and we want to make sure that we get out as much as we can. We must all therefore agree that the Government should take a hard-headed negotiating position.

Mr. Tim Boswell (Daventry): Does my hon. Friend recall, and will he remind the House, that the genesis of regional development funds lies back in the days of my right hon. Friend the Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Sir E. Heath), during the negotiations on European accession? It was precisely in order to correct some of the imbalances in European funding that the concept was introduced.

Mr. Collins: I agree. The funds are an important balancing mechanism. The Government must continue to remind our EU partners that the reason the United Kingdom gets a large share of the funds is that the system was, and should continue to be, an attempt to rebalance some of the ways in which funds are redistributed around the Union.

[Mr. Collins]

We continue to put far more into the European Union than we get back, and however the budgetary negotiations turn out, that will continue to be the case. On the evidence of the debate, the Government would be right to believe that there was strong cross-party support for a tough negotiating position. I hope that the Minister has heard that in the debate today; it has been a consistent theme of speeches from both sides of the House.

If the Minister will forgive me for the analogy, I hope that she will—indeed, having read her testimony before the Select Committee, I believe that she intends to—go in to bat for Britain rather as a certain right hon. Lady did a few years ago: thump the table and demand our money. Indeed, I see that the hon. Lady has her handbag beside her on the Bench; no doubt she knows how to use it, and I commend her on her negotiating stance.

Like other hon. Members, I shall talk about an important constituency dimension. Much of my constituency benefits from objective 5b expenditure. It is important to recognise that even constituencies such as mine and that of my hon. Friend the Member for Vale of York (Miss McIntosh), with low unemployment—ours is below 2 per cent., and I know that many hon. Ladies and Gentlemen on both sides of the House might envy that, and want their constituencies to move towards it—are not without their difficulties.

My constituency is very rural. Those in the House who were present last night at a meeting of the Rural Services Partnership heard an interesting presentation by Rita Hale, formerly of the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy, about the fact that people in rural areas have far less access than people elsewhere to public transport and public services, and have to travel much further in terms of both time and distance to get any form of public service, whether that be a leisure centre, a library, the health service, a jobcentre or benefits advice.

In my part of the world we are heavily dependent on two forms of employment. One is agriculture, which, according to local farmers, now faces its worst crisis for 40 or 50 years. The other is tourism, which has also had a bad year, partly because of the strength of sterling, and partly because of the bad weather.

That combination means that many of my constituents feel that this is the worst possible time for any serious debate about taking away large sums in European funding from areas such as ours. So I was delighted to hear the Department of Trade and Industry press office confirm to journalists from Cumbria this afternoon that the Government do not intend to accept a simple crude measure of unemployment as the only criterion on which the funds are distributed.

As many hon. Members have said, there are factors within and behind the unemployment figures that need to be taken into account. If rural Cumbria lost all its European funding, many parts of it would feel that they were being left to bleed to death. The Government would be right to fight hard for a broader, more sensible and more all-encompassing system for the distribution of the funds.

I shall finish now, because I know that many others wish to speak, and tell the Minister that I hope that she will feel that there has been consensus in the debate on the need for a strong negotiating position. I hope that she will be able to take into the discussions with our European partners a belief that the House of Commons wishes the Government to fight Britain's corner hard, that the funds are important and that they should continue to be paid in all parts of the United Kingdom.

The funds should be available in Scotland, in Northern Ireland and in Wales, as well as in all sorts of areas in England, rural as well as urban, some with slow economic development and others that, although they may do better from time to time, do not do well all the time. I hope that the Minister feels that she will now be able to go in to bat for Britain and bring home the bacon.

8.35 pm

Mr. Ian Stewart (Eccles): I, too, welcome the Trade and Industry Select Committee report, which gives a clear and thorough analysis of the implications for the United Kingdom of European Union proposals for changes in structural funds. I also welcome the Government's response to the report.

I am a keen supporter of the benefits of EU membership, and look forward to the enlargement of the Community for the enrichment that it will bring to our political and economic lives. I agree with the Government's premise that a poorer member state or region should receive more than a richer one—in other words, each according to his needs. I also agree with their view that reform of existing regional support must not only be affordable and fair but durable beyond 2006 for enlargement.

The proposed changes in European structural funds mean that while 51 per cent. of the population of the EU now receive assistance, in future only 35 to 40 per cent. of the population will be covered. The Alliance for Regional Aid has shown that funds are already closely targeted. For example, 68 per cent. of the funds go to 25 per cent. of the population.

As the Select Committee has pointed out, the Commission has said that aid should be more focused, although it has not yet made the case for further targeting. The upshot of the Commission's proposals would be that the 92 million people now covered by objective 2 or objective 5b status would be reduced to 74 million. That is a drop—or rather, a plummet—of 20 per cent.

Eccles, my constituency, in the city of Salford within the Greater Manchester area, currently benefits, as do other areas in the north-west region of England, from objective 2 status. The sub-region of Greater Manchester is one of the first and oldest industrial areas in Europe, and has suffered more than most from the widespread decline in traditional manufacturing industries and an aging and crumbling infrastructure.

For example, Salford still has an interest in clearing up the conditions left by mining blight, and one of our local authority members, Councillor Peter Grimshaw, will go to Brussels in December under the auspices of the Alliance for Regional Aid to lobby hard for the maintenance of regional funding that includes mining areas.

Typically, some full-time employment in our area has been replaced by part-time, lower-paid work, which has led to higher male unemployment. Interestingly, female unemployment is less than half the male rate in my constituency. The employment situation clearly would have been worse without European funds.

In the Greater Manchester sub-region, there are many positive points. One of the considerable strengths of Greater Manchester and Salford is its major input into information and communications technologies, research and development. There is further scope for developing this potential for the region's companies through training and advice and the commercial application of research. In the region there are a number of well-developed fibre-optic cable and copper wire networks including the Gemisis 2000 project based at Salford university.

It is ironic that the north-west is faced with the threat of losing EU funding at the very time when the Labour Government are implementing policies that will assist our region, such as the new deal, the minimum wage, the introduction of the regional development agency and chamber, and a single Government office for the north-west. Those measures will improve the efficiency and effectiveness of targeted assistance.

Local authorities in the Greater Manchester area are clear that structural funds have played an essential part in the progress that has been made in the last decade. The funds are vital to ensuring that the progress is consolidated and continued. The Greater Manchester authorities have argued forcefully that, without European support, the gap between the sub-region of Greater Manchester and the other, more prosperous regions in the UK and EU would widen further.

During the 1994 to 1996 programme period, EU structural fund investment in Greater Manchester was about £190 million. More than £80 million has been or will be invested in small and medium-sized enterprises, in which more than 70 per cent. of the work force are employed. Research and development and technological infrastructure projects have received about £25 million. That translates more generally into 52,000 jobs created, 86,000 companies assisted and 13,000 training places.

Between 1994 and 1998, Salford has benefited from £23 million of European structural funds. The local labour initiative was developed by combining European structural funds and European regional development funds, which assisted 275 companies and led to the creation of 221 much needed permanent jobs in the area. Salford is focusing its grant moneys on business support, upskilling the work force and helping the unemployed to access training and employment.

Why should the assistance continue? Greater Manchester and Salford have used their funds well. Funds have been applied as part of a coherent strategy to improve the economic and social position of residents and enhance economic competitiveness. However, the Salford and Greater Manchester economy still has problems which can only be successfully solved through a long-term programme of comprehensive regeneration in which European funding should play a leading and sustained role.

My local authority believes that the review of objective 2 status should not be based solely on the current proposed criteria, and that indices of need should be sharpened and redefined to include, for example, deprivation, local gross domestic product and income levels. Under the index of deprivation, Salford is the 23rd most deprived authority in England, but even that hides the reality. Forty-six of the districts in Salford are among the worst 6 per cent. nationally. It is essential that any revised objective 2 criteria help the UK's traditional industrial and manufacturing areas.

Salford has gained national pathfinder status for its innovative approach to regeneration and is working closely with the Government to share best practice. The loss of objective 2 status would undermine work currently under way. In my constituency, the Barton strategic employment zone—one of the largest undeveloped sites available for economic development in the north-west—has just received EU funding to enable it to be brought forward quickly. The zone is likely to be the engine for growth for the sub-region in the future. Without European funding, it would be difficult to get it started.

The Lowry centre in the neighbouring Salford constituency is an innovative national landmark millennium project which would not be built without EU support. Salford and Greater Manchester's priorities for support in a new objective 2 programme would include integrated business support packages, growth sector-specific support, capital for businesses to grow, access to accommodation for expansion and customised training and development packages.

Like other hon. Members, I welcome the Select Committee's recommendations for transitional support, at paragraph 30, and its suggested seven-year duration. I would like to record my support for objective 1 status for Northern Ireland, parts of Wales, South Yorkshire, Cornwall and Merseyside.

Without continued access to EU structural funds, the ability of the various partners—such as local authorities, training and enterprise councils, the voluntary sector, trade unions and businesses—will be severely hampered from meeting not only our own local and regional regeneration aspirations but those aspirations of the UK Government and the EU. Therefore, I urge the Government, in their negotiations with the European Commission and the Council of Ministers, to press for a package of reforms that will maintain the maximum level of aid to Britain's traditional industrial areas, and to look favourably on us when deciding the allocation of discretionary funds made available to national Governments.

The job of regeneration in the regions and sub-regions is not complete. To reach completion, we need the stability brought about by the maintenance and fair distribution of European structural funds.

8.46 pm

Mr. David Stewart (Inverness, East, Nairn and Lochaber): I welcome the opportunity to add my brief remarks to this vital debate. I wish to concentrate on two matters. First, I wish to refer to the future of objective 1 funding within Europe generally and the UK specifically, particularly in the light of the Commission's well-known statement about strictly applying the criterion for objective 1—per capita gross domestic product being below 75 per cent. of the EU average. Secondly, I wish to refer to the special case for the highlands and islands in terms of sparsity of population.

The highlands and islands is perhaps unique as the last unspoilt area of Europe—that was perhaps reflected by the visit of the Chairman of the Select Committee to my constituency, a visit which I very much welcomed. I endorse the comments of the hon. Member for Galloway and Upper Nithsdale (Mr. Morgan) who perhaps stole my thunder by arguing very competently about sparsity and

[Mr. David Stewart]

low wages in the highlands. Perhaps that shows that peace has broken out tonight between Labour and the Scottish National party—not in other debates, but certainly in this one.

As a highlander, I am familiar with the issues of sparsity and low pay. The area is peripheral to the rest of Europe, but forms part of the northern rim of Europe, along with Finland and Sweden. It has high transport costs and unemployment. It is an area larger than Belgium, but has a population less than one third that of Brussels.

The impact of structural funds in the highlands and islands can be traced back to the 1970s, when the area had objective 5b funding status and then, latterly, objective 1. Over the past nine years, more than £240 million has been pumped into the highland economy—from the Mallaig harbour development to the dry dock at the Barmac oil fabrication yard, which will allow the oil fabrication industry in my area to compete in Europe in the manufacture of floating production vessels.

Objective 1 funding is a vital factor in the development of the funicular programme, which will allow a new rail link in the Cairngorms and 12-month-a-year tourism—a great boost to the area. The two main goals for objective 1 within the highlands and islands are, first, the achievement of external cohesion—that is, to pull up the economic performance of the area compared to the EU average—and, secondly, the achievement of internal cohesion, or reducing the disparities throughout the highlands and islands. Objective 1 funding has been a powerful catalyst to stimulate additional investment in the highlands and islands. It has been a great success and hon. Members need not merely take my word for it as independent assessment of all the projects has shown that more than 90 per cent. had either high or medium effectiveness. It has created more than 1,800 jobs in my area, which has been a particular boost to vulnerable and fragile rural areas.

I must touch on some of the threats and opportunities facing the highlands and islands, which will be familiar to many hon. Members with rural areas in their constituencies. The first is food prices, which are 8 per cent. higher in rural than in urban areas—in remote island communities, they can be as much as a quarter higher than in urban areas. Petrol and transport costs are also a great burden and can be up to 20 per cent. higher than in the central belt in Scotland, which reflects the limited competition and a lack of economies of scale.

Unemployment is another big threat. For example, 50 per cent. of those unemployed in the western isles are long-term unemployed. The new earnings survey recently showed that earnings in my area are 14 per cent. below the Scottish average and 23 per cent. below the UK average.

We have, therefore, a combination of a higher cost of living and low incomes. It is a double whammy and it is a recipe for poverty, poor housing and depopulation. However, there are also great opportunities, which I must briefly stress. We have a first-class environment. Two thirds of the sites of special scientific interest are in my area and one third of the highlands and islands is a national scenic area. We have a high-quality environment, which is a key factor in the promotion of the area. Also, we have new technology—that great weapon to defeat the problems of distance. We have the university of the Highlands and Islands, which will offer higher education to all, from the crofter in Barra to the chartered accountant in Inverness. We have the beauty of tele-medicine, so doctors in Inverness can interview patients in Skye. We have tremendous opportunities in the resource base: forestry, fresh water and hydro-electricity. Inverness in my constituency is the world centre for the development of wave power. The area has the opportunities; it merely needs the economic wherewithal to exploit them.

I welcome the recommendation of the Trade and Industry Select Committee that the highlands and islands should be treated on a par with other sparsely populated areas within the northern rim. I also welcome the Government's report on that issue. The highlands and islands are doubly disadvantaged. The area has a low gross domestic product. The figures announced today by the Office for National Statistics show that it is below 78 per cent. of the average GDP in the UK. If that were factored into a European context, I estimate that it would be around 76 per cent. of the European average.

The area also has a sparse population—less than 10 people per square kilometre. Apart from Finland and Sweden, no other area in Europe touches that figure. In addition, we have 90 inhabited islands, and that adds extra social and economic difficulties. That has been reflected in a wider context as article 299 of the treaty of Amsterdam refers to the problems of islands. I understand that the European Parliament will be discussing sparsity in a debate on Monday.

Finally, I warmly welcome this first-class report. It advances a strong case about the range of flexibility, the threshold of objective 1 eligibility and the broader criteria for the new objective 2. The next six months of negotiation in Europe will be tough. The report provides a thorough, thoughtful and welcome addition to the debate.

8.52 pm

Dr. Desmond Turner (Brighton, Kemptown): Perhaps you may be wondering, Mr. Deputy Speaker, what a nice boy representing a south-coast seat is doing in this debate, which has been so heavily dominated by the north. The answer is simple. If my hon. Friend the Member for City of Durham (Mr. Steinberg) has visited Brighton—perhaps he has been there for the conference—he will have seen the elegant Regency facades and might have assumed that it is a fairly prosperous place. However, if one looks behind the facades, one finds tremendous poverty. The truth is that Brighton and Hove is a poor place.

I will not enter into a competition, saying, "I'm poorer than thee, lad." That would be silly. However, I want to establish that all the indicators put the area on a par with just about every area whose representatives have spoken tonight and which enjoy objective 2 funding. The difference is that we have never had a penny piece of European structural funding although we have the same difficulties. There are several reasons for that, the major ones being the inflexibility of the present set of statistical criteria that govern European structural funds, which the previous Government never seriously questioned, and the fact that no one made a case for Brighton and Hove. We had three Tory Members of Parliament. My opponent at the general election, who lost his seat to me after 27 years, woke up a year before the election to the fact that Brighton had an unemployment problem. I do not remember him uttering a squeak about it for years before.

Brighton has never been a recognised manufacturing centre, but it had manufacturing industry and now has virtually none. We used to build railway engines—I do not expect that many people know that. In the past 20 years, we have lost thousands of engineering jobs. That is a sector of our employment which has been wiped out and it is why we have some of the worst long-term male unemployment in the country. That is why we are one of the 17 pathfinder areas for the new deal in communities. I have not checked the list, but I strongly suspect that the other 16 currently enjoy either objective 1 or 2 European structural funding. We have had nothing, so we have been unable to create new jobs to fill the spaces on our brown-field industrial estates where the jobs have simply gone. We are claiming not to be poorer than thou, but to be in the same league and we want an opportunity to access similar support.

I shall give a few statistics to justify my case. Unemployment in Brighton and Hove is 7 per cent. compared with a national average of 5 per cent. and a regional average of 3 per cent. However, it is up to 30 per cent. in some wards of our city. The unemployment is concentrated in estates, which is why we have the new deal for communities. Our long-term unemployment puts us sixth out of the 354 local authorities in the United Kingdom—I will bet that not many people knew that, but it is important to us. Our poor housing and rough sleepers put us 35th out of the 354; on poverty we are 60th; and, for the numbers dependent on income support, we are 35th. Our crime levels are high and our wages low. The average wage is £30 less than in Liverpool, which is an objective 1 area, and £55 less than the average for the south-east. However, our cost of living is not low but among the highest in the country outside of London. So, we think that, in principle, we have a good case for being included in European Union structural funding. That has been denied us because we have slipped through the statistical net. Under NUTS 2, we were lumped with the whole of Sussex and Surrey. As an objective 3 area, we were still lost.

Despite the criticisms that we have heard tonight of the proposed criteria and regulations for structural funding, I congratulate my hon. Friend the Minister on her work to secure increased flexibility. That has enabled HMS Falmouth to line up for objective 1 status and has allowed Brighton and Hove to be recognised as an objective 3 area in its own right, so that we can bid for objective 2 funding.

I shall not press the case for that now, as one has already been prepared—the Minister will receive a copy of the document very soon, if she has not already—and it stands on its own merits. Provided that in the final negotiations for the new regulations we do not slip back and lose any flexibility, I am confident that Brighton and Hove has a very good case—which is not to say that I am confident of securing the funding.

With the new flexibility, many urban areas, including Brighton and Hove, will meet the objective 2 criteria, such as whether the rate of long-term unemployment is higher than the Community average and whether there are high levels of poverty, a particularly damaged environment, a high crime rate or a low level of education among the population. Under the proposals, an area has to meet only one of those criteria, and we score on four out of the five. If that is not flexibility, I do not know what is; I suspect that if hon. Members read the small print of the regulations, they will find greater flexibility than they had imagined.

I am grateful to the Minister for her work to date. I hope that she will be able to complete it on the same lines, to ensure that, at the end of the process, we who have never previously had any help can put in our bids.

9.1 pm

Mrs. Janet Dean (Burton): Hon. Members have concentrated on their own areas, whether urban or rural, and I shall be no exception. Burton upon Trent, the largest town in my constituency, has objective 2 status, and the most northerly ward—Weaver ward—receives help under objective 5.

I wholeheartedly support the Committee's view that the new objective 2 arrangements should apply at or below ward level. It is essential that structural funds can be targeted on real need, which is often hidden in pockets of apparent affluence—unemployment and deprivation may be hidden when the statistics apply to county, district or travel-to-work areas.

Before I deal with the severity of the problem in Burton upon Trent, I shall reflect on Staffordshire as a whole. It has been said that Cornwall is an exception, but there were strong arguments that, with a population of more than 1 million, Staffordshire should have become a NUTS 2 area. The county's average GDP per head over the three years from 1993 to 1995 was 77.3 per cent., a figure that seems to be falling. Staffordshire, therefore, provides a good example of why the strict application of the 75 per cent. rule is wrong.

There is, naturally, disappointment that Staffordshire has not qualified for objective 1 status, but it is important that we look at the needs of individual areas, both urban and rural, in the county. The current state of agriculture makes it essential that every effort is made to secure structural funding for the affected areas of need. The Weaver ward in my constituency is part of the Staffordshire-Derbyshire objective 5b area, demonstrating the case that areas that are below county level or that cross administrative boundaries should continue to be eligible for such funding.

Burton upon Trent is a traditional manufacturing town best known for its brewing industry. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, Burton saw high job losses in its traditional employment base of brewing, engineering, rubber, mining and energy industries. Sadly, Burton has never been included in an assisted area, although neighbouring, more affluent areas, have been included because of their travel-to-work areas. Since Burton has a free-standing travel-to-work area, it has never benefited. I hope that in the review of assisted areas, the Government will look at real need and that Burton upon Trent will be accepted for inclusion.

Although it does not benefit from assisted area status, the difficulties that face the area were recognised and objective 2 status was awarded for the 1994–99 period. That, together with money from the single regeneration budget granted for the inner wards of the town, has helped regeneration to begin. For example, we are proud of the Centre of Productivity and Efficiency that is designed to help business, both locally and regionally, to develop. There is a great need for the good work that has already started to be allowed to continue.

Burton upon Trent continues to have one of the highest rates of unemployment in the west midlands. The current level is 7.4 per cent. However, the unemployment rate in

[Mrs. Janet Dean]

a number of inner wards is still in excess of 10 per cent. Burton has a higher rate of long-term unemployment than the rest of Staffordshire, with 21.4 per cent of all the unemployed having been out of work for over a year.

Industrial employment in the area has fallen by one third from 1984 to 1995, but the percentage of the work force employed in industry remains well in excess of the United Kingdom average. Therefore, there are concerns that there may be a continuing fall in the jobs for industrial workers. Reduction in industrial employment has been only partly matched by an increase in service jobs, many of which, as other hon. Members have said, have been part-time.

There needs to be more diversification of employment opportunities. Burton has the largest single grouping of deprived wards in Staffordshire and within the west midlands shire counties as a whole. Eight of the town's 11 wards have more deprivation than the national average. Over a quarter of households in one ward have an income of less than £5,000 a year. Just under a quarter of all school children in Burton receive free school meals. One of the most frightening indicators of deprivation is the infant mortality rate, which is three times greater than the national average. On most measures, Burton shows high levels of deprivation. A recent survey of private sector housing stock showed that 14 per cent of dwellings in Burton were unfit for habitation.

We often hear of problems in our inner cities and, of course, there is much to be done there, but there are problems in some of our inner towns such as Burton upon Trent, which are hidden by the wider statistics. Structural funds have acted as a catalyst. They have triggered investment and already created over 1,000 jobs in the Burton area. Many people have worked hard. Local government, with its partners in industry, has worked hard to regenerate the area and Burton is beginning to be transformed into an attractive place to relocate business. I must emphasise that because, when one expresses the deprivation of an area, one can sometimes give the impression that it is not a good place to live and work. I believe that Burton and the Burton constituency in East Staffordshire district is a good place, but it needs help.

In order to build on the achievements of recent years, it is essential that Burton retains its objective 2 status. Therefore, I welcome the Select Committee's report and the Government's commitment to arguing that structural funds should be targeted at the pockets of deprivation such as there are in Burton upon Trent.

9.8 pm

Mr. David Lepper (Brighton, Pavilion): I am grateful for the opportunity to supplement the arguments already advanced by my hon. Friend the Member for Brighton, Kemptown (Dr. Turner) about the particular needs of the Brighton and Hove area. Before I do so, I welcome the comments about simplifying the bureaucracy involved in bidding for European funds, especially in their delivery.

As my hon. Friend said, Brighton does not yet receive structural funds, but we receive funds through community initiatives—Interreg, the safer cities programme, the urban initiative, and the European structural fund. There is great rejoicing in the streets when the announcement of those funds first appears in the local press, although probably not as great as the rejoicing in the streets of Falmouth and Camborne. However, we then face a long wait before we see any signs of the funding for the youth club or community centre, whatever it might be, and disillusionment begins to set in.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Kemptown said, we are not currently eligible for structural funds. The community initiative money has proved beneficial, but it has not helped to solve the structural problems of deprivation and unemployment in our area. I welcome the flexibility that is given to member states in deciding the criteria for the new objective 2, and I can offer my hon. Friend the Minister any number to choose from, all of which I am confident that Brighton and Hove would satisfy.

I shall not repeat points already made by my hon. Friend, but I wish to point out that we come top of the list for homelessness and numbers of rough sleepers. We have 22,500 houses in multiple occupation; Birmingham, which is four times our size, has 5,000.

High levels of unemployment have already been mentioned. In the depths of the most recent recession, in the central ward in my constituency—the Regency ward—male unemployment reached 33 per cent., and it is still in double figures. That ward will be known to any hon. Member who has visited Brighton for a conference, because it contains the conference centre. We have the third highest level of long-term unemployment outside London. Only Liverpool and Birmingham surpass us.

We have not been able to address certain structural weaknesses in our economy through the support that we have received from central Government—although that is becoming better targeted through the new deal for communities—or from European funding. More than a third of the population in the Brighton and Hove area live in wards that are among the most deprived 10 per cent. in England on the indices of local deprivation. More than a quarter of our primary and secondary school children are eligible for free school meals.

Those are some of the indications of the poverty in what many people still regard as a prosperous part of the south-east. Indeed, even in the most prosperous, suburban and leafy ward in my constituency, 25 per cent. of the households are eligible for housing benefit.

I do not wish to dwell only on the reasons why our case for the new objective 2 structural funds should be considered sympathetically, because I wish to draw attention to the potential of the Brighton and Hove area. We have high levels of unemployment, poverty and deprivation, but we also have two universities and a college of technology. Despite the image that is sometimes presented of south-coast towns as places to which people retire, more than 60 per cent. of the population of the Brighton and Hove local authority area are under 45, so we have a relatively young population.

We now need help to help ourselves to realise the potential of our area. Before I entered the House, I chaired—with my hon. Friend the Member for Hove (Mr. Caplin)—the local Brighton and Hove regeneration partnership, which played a key role in bringing together business, the local council and the voluntary sector to address the problems that have been described tonight.

We are beginning to make progress with the aid of city challenge funding, and the town is increasingly becoming wired up. In fact, we claim to be the most wired town in

the country. We have developed an innovation centre at the university of Sussex to help new, high-tech businesses. We want to extend that centre, which has a 100 per cent. occupancy rate, but, as firms develop, they need somewhere to move to. Too many business premises in our area are old-fashioned, and do not meet the needs of modern high-tech industry. We need help to provide places in which new young industries can grow, so that they can stay in the area in which they first began to grow.

We need help to develop our transport infrastructure. My hon. Friend the Member for Hastings and Rye (Mr. Foster) will—if he is called to speak—have more to say about the need to develop that infrastructure for our part of the coastal strip. The Brighton and Hove area also contains what is probably the largest brown-field site in the south-east of England—Shoreham harbour. The lack of central or European funding to help us to develop that area has left it undeveloped. Its huge potential for creating jobs remains unlocked.

I hope that, when the Minister receives the document that has been drawn to her attention by my hon. Friend the Member for Kemptown, she will carefully consider the case it makes. I hope that she will help Brighton and Hove, and Hastings further along the coast, to help ourselves to overcome the deprivation from which we suffer.

9.16 pm

Mr. Michael Jabez Foster (Hastings and Rye): When I introduce myself as the Labour Member for Hastings and Rye, the usual reaction, even from Ministers, is, "How amazing. How did you do that?" In a sense, that is a compliment, but it is also rather worrying. What people are saying is that they think of Hastings as a genteel, well-heeled, south-coast town, living off a Victorian splendour, where families flock for balmy days on the beach. It is that sort of town, when people can get there, which is another problem in itself. It is a unique town, and I am addicted to it. I have always lived there, and I go back every night, which shows how addicted I am.

However, there is another side to Hastings, and that side replicates much of what my hon. Friends the Members for Brighton, Pavilion (Mr. Lepper) and for Brighton, Kemptown (Dr. Turner) have said about Brighton. They said that they would not claim, "We are more hard up than you." I, however, am going to say that Hastings is more hard up than the constituency of almost everyone who has spoken in the debate. I scanned the unemployment figures as my hon. Friends were speaking, and I have not yet found an area in which unemployment is higher than in Hastings. Our 9.6 per cent. unemployment is devastating, and it is the 87th highest level of unemployment for males in the whole country.

That is not the image that people have of Hastings. Yet we also have deprivation and poor housing. I stood outside a hotel in Hastings this morning holding up "Turning the Tide" for the press. That document contains the objectives of Hastings and Brighton, and we need the Government to take notice of it. We need extra assistance.

Perhaps it was the decades of neglect by previous Governments that made Hastings decide last year to have a Labour Member of Parliament. This year, it has for the first time decided to have a Labour council. The people of Hastings also look across the channel, believing that the town's importance in European history might be reflected by the benefits that European Union membership could bring through structural funding. That is why the restructuring of structural funds may prove a lifeline to my constituency.

Although it is only 60 miles from London, the rail journey is close on two hours, and the road journey is often longer. Our hopes for an electrification of the Hastings-to-Ashford line were dashed when Connex failed to gain an extension of its franchise. Only a few weeks ago, we were dealt a body blow when the integrated transport review denied us the A21 improvements and the bypass which is so essential to the regeneration of our town. What other seaside town has the main road along its seafront, choking both visitors and residents alike? We must wait, and I am sure that we shall do so optimistically, for the Government to decide to go ahead with that important bypass.

In the past few weeks, the town's largest employer, Philips, closed up shop. Although it is fair to say that Philips made it clear that neither Government policy nor the strong pound determined that decision, the fact is that several hundred jobs have been lost in an already impoverished economy. Hastings now has about the highest unemployment and lowest wages in the south. Wage levels are little above half the regional average. That is a fair argument for saying that the minimum wage should have no ill effects.

The area is rich in human resources. Voluntary organisations are paramount in assisting with the problems that exist. In partnership with the statutory agencies and the commercial world, they work hard in planning economic advance. The Hastings Trust led by Christine Goldschmidt, the 1066 Enterprise spearheaded by John Cossen, and the new Labour council led by Richard Stevens, are working tirelessly and single-mindedly to bring about regeneration.

We are grateful for the help received through the assisted area status and through successive successful single regeneration budget bids. Full advantage has been taken. Indeed, assisted area status has brought some £3 million to the town since 1993, and that has locked in a further £37 million of industrial investment. The single regeneration budget has produced £14 million, which has generated £90 million from other sectors. About 1,000 jobs have been created as a consequence. Therefore, we make good use of investment. Despite all that, there remains a structural weakness in the economy, just as there is in Brighton along the coast.

The purpose of this speech is not to hold out a begging bowl. Hastings is a proud town. It is to say that poverty exists, not just in northern towns, but in southern climes such as Hastings, Brighton and elsewhere. When three of the wards in my town have household social security claimant rates of 52 per cent., 49 per cent. and 48 per cent., that is real poverty. When we hold the record for the highest number of suicides in young men in the country, that suggests that the area is close to despair. There may be a north-south divide; there is certainly a south-south divide between prosperous Surrey, which is included in our GNP figures, and impoverished Hastings and Brighton. We are the poor relations of a rich family.

Shortly, Hastings, together with Brighton and Hove, will make a joint bid, entitled "Turning the Tide", for objective 2 status. I hope that these comments will help the Minister to understand why the claims of

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southern towns such as Hastings and Brighton are equally, if not more, valid than those of other parts of the country for this special status. The new urban strand within the objective 2 now gives an opportunity to aid not only areas that have faced traumatic industrial decline, but areas that have slipped into an abyss of poverty through decades of neglect. I am confident that the Government will listen to these pleas. The inhabitants of Hastings and St. Leonards must not be ragged-trousered philanthropists any longer.

9.23 pm

Mr. Bob Blizzard (Waveney): Last but not least comes Lowestoft—a long-standing pocket of high unemployment and deprivation at Britain's most easterly point.

There is every sense in amalgamating objectives 5b and 2, because, under the current system, at the last round Lowestoft applied for objective 2 and ended up with 5b as the only way of meeting the overwhelming case that was presented. How can a town of 70,000 be a rural area? Strange things happen in the European Union. Of the East Anglian 5b areas, Lowestoft has the best record of submitting projects and accessing funds. However, as so many hon. Members have said this evening, the job of regeneration is far from complete, and it is essential that the designation for structural funds continues for Lowestoft.

I am pleased with the strands that have been identified for objective 2. I am pleased that fishing is still one of them. The decline in fishing was the reason why Lowestoft received 5b funding last time. If Lowestoft, as the second largest fishing port in England, with all the problems that face fishing communities, does not fit the criteria, I do not know where the criteria can apply.

I hope that the strands can be considered in combination, because Lowestoft is also an urban area facing economic and social restructuring. We have lost all our shipbuilding, our food canning factories, a coach works and a shoe factory. The oil and gas industry, which has seen us through in recent years, is now downsizing in a dramatic way. None of those industries has been replaced.

The Select Committee in its report, and the Government, oppose the Commission's proposal for consistency or coterminosity between the structural fund areas and our national assisted area status. It is right to reserve that flexibility. However, in some areas there will be a good case for coterminosity. Lowestoft and its neighbour Great Yarmouth have only five miles of countryside between them; but the previous Government awarded assisted area status to Great Yarmouth, not Lowestoft. Lowestoft but not Yarmouth was awarded European status, possibly as an admission of the mistake in not giving Lowestoft assisted area status.

Any review must take Lowestoft and Great Yarmouth together. They are of a similar size. They are close together. They are a long way from anywhere else, out on the east coast, surrounded by a rural area. They both have high, long-term, structural unemployment, much higher than the unemployment in the hinterland. They are both ports with poor transport links, and they both have involvement in the oil and gas industry. Many of the businesses are interlinked. Many businesses have a presence in each town. People travel to work between the two communities. There has to be a single strategy for both.

We need flexibility, so that objective 2 can cover relatively small areas, as the existing objective 2 cannot. I went to Brussels and lobbied for objective 2 for Lowestoft last time. It met every criterion for objective 2 status, but it was not big enough. We were told that objective 2 had to be awarded to larger areas, and that East Anglia was considered relatively prosperous. Yet within that relatively prosperous area there are unemployment black spots, Lowestoft being the main one.

Last time, the Commission did not favour a black spots approach. It did not believe that regional assistance could be that precise or benefit specified areas. Lowestoft and Great Yarmouth are isolated from the rest of the country and any other areas that might benefit. People ask how else a town such as Lowestoft is to be helped. How are pockets of long-standing unemployment to be dealt with unless we use the structural funds to which we believe we are entitled? The report is right to argue on page 47, as the Government do, that the Commission should not take raw unemployment figures, but should consider other measures of economic difficulty.

The key statement in the report is that regeneration requires continuity. So many of us have argued tonight that we need that continuity. Lowestoft continues to need the European structural funds.

I wonder whether the Minister can take up an important point that has made life difficult in making the best of structural funds. Quite properly, when one submits a project, one has to be specific about the job outcomes. It is difficult to create jobs unless the private sector is involved, yet private sector money cannot be matched by European money. That is a problem for us when it comes to transport. We want to improve our port and our rail links. Railways and ports are almost all private. Associated British Ports is a private company. Railtrack is a private company. It is difficult for those companies to provide their money as match funding for Europe.

Because in this country transport systems, including ports, are largely privatised, we are at a disadvantage compared to other European countries, which can use structural funds for transport infrastructure improvements. We cannot reverse the privatisation, and have no plans to do so, but we need to argue in Europe that, because those privatised companies fulfil a public function—an essential transport function—when bids are put together, the money that those companies can bring to the project should be able to be matched by European funding.

I shall end on that point. I have made my plea for Lowestoft, but I hope that it will help other constituencies if we can tweak those regulations.

9.29 pm

Mr. Tim Boswell (Daventry): The Select Committee's report is extremely helpful. The subject was clearly introduced by the hon. Member for Kingswood (Mr. Berry) and it has spawned an interesting debate. As my hon. Friend the Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Mr. Collins) said in his helpful contribution, we are all basically on the same side. We are all informing the Minister and encouraging her to go out and negotiate for Britain's interests, which include getting the largest possible chunk of resources for this country, in some recompense for imbalances elsewhere.

Of course, there were differences of emphasis, for which no apology is needed. It is right that, under our constitution, Members of Parliament have the duty to represent their constituents, to express their pride in their constituency and to explain the needs of their constituency. That was done by hon. Members on both sides of the House, and rightly so. Their speeches revealed not only some of the tensions that are bound to pass into the debate and that will have to be brokered into and through Europe, but some of the underlying concerns that serve to unify us.

I found it instructive to hear the serious speeches made by hon. Members representing constituencies on the south coast of England, those representing urban areas and those representing rural areas. The House knows that I come from a rural background. I am closely involved with Action with Communities in Rural England, and I see that as part of the debate. It would be a foolish member of any party who came to the House and boasted of having no pockets of deprivation in his constituency—to some extent, all our constituencies contain such areas. The question is how we organise their interests and balance them against each other under a principle.

It appears to me that the concern expressed by many hon. Members related as much to issues of relative deprivation and poverty in the middle of affluence as to objective measures. That concern was clearly expressed by hon. Members representing south coast constituencies, and the conditions which they described can be seen in wards in my own constituency. It is uncomfortable to live in such areas, cut off from ready access to higher education, transport links and jobs.

How do we put our concerns together into a policy, bearing in mind the fact that Europe has to change its policy under extremely severe constraints? Let us start with those constraints and with a health warning. It is accepted by hon. Members on both sides of the House, as it was by the Select Committee, that there are important constraints on the EU budget and that they are closely linked to the mounting requirement for the EU to take seriously the issue of enlargement and to finance it as it develops.

It is worth pointing out that any problems of deprivation experienced in our constituencies, wherever they may be, pale into insignificance in comparison with the real poverty and deprivation that characterise most of the countries applying for membership. If we think that some areas in this country should have objective 1 status, those countries should be objective zero. Interestingly enough, when Germany was shattered after world war two, the catch phrase used was "hour zero". That betokens a degree of hope, because, from that shattered state, Germany rebuilt itself and became a successful industrial nation.

There are constraints, which it is necessary coherently to broker and resolve. Nobody has seriously argued that we should not try to target the European funds available better. One point which was not sufficiently stressed is that not all public funding is necessarily distributed at a European level. We are discussing European structural funds, but there is the possibility of public funding from outside Europe. We can debate at another time how that should be balanced and where it should come from. The Select Committee suggested—I agree with it—that we should not use the same template for the state aids map and the European assisted area map because we would deprive ourselves of flexibility, which is what everyone wants the Minister to secure for us.

Continuity is also important. We do not want those who have had support or who have reached different stages in developing schemes—even if they are not included in the current programme—to be cut off at the knees and suddenly to find that they have no support at all.

The final general criterion is common sense. There is no point in pushing a doctrine derived from Brussels beyond the bounds of political acceptability—that is why the concept of the safety net is so much to be welcomed—or practicability. That is why it is important that the criteria are defined reasonably flexibly. I welcome the tone of the debate and—if I may anticipate her—the Minister's readiness to take those messages aboard.

My next remarks are less congenial but need to be made. They particularly concern the rural areas of England. We welcome the fact that political support is clearly developing on all sides for the maintenance of aid for the Scottish highlands, on the analogy of northern Europe, and for Northern Ireland, for important political and objective economic reasons. However, there is a danger that there will be a significant withdrawal of support for the rural areas of England through the winding up of the separate 5b objective.

Before the change of Government, I was the Minister responsible for the agricultural portions of 5b, and I realised its ability to target precise, small-scale and wider rural problems. That was at a time when agriculture was doing relatively well. In or near the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale, I toured the camping barns scheme. In the constituency of the hon. Member for Falmouth and Camborne (Ms Atherton), I went to see the work of the South-West Horticulture 2000 initiative, which was trying to bring together the wonderful production of her county and Devon. There is tension, not only because of the suggestion that Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales may benefit, but because English rural areas under severe pressure may lose out. In addition, despite the hon. Lady's welcome for objective 1, which I understand, there is a danger that Cornwall and Devon, which have not traditionally worked together but were integrated in the South-West Horticulture 2000 project, may now be given separate objective statuses.

Ms Atherton: The hon. Gentleman is aware that, if Cornwall achieves objective 1 status, Devon would be well placed to achieve objective 2. We are working with our colleagues in Devon because we want to pull together as a peninsula. What is good for Cornwall will, in the long term, be good for Devon.

Mr. Boswell: I welcome that. I want merely to identify a potential cause of friction through differential treatment. If that can be resolved, so much the better.

We may be able to learn the lessons of flexibility and the virtues of comparatively small-scale, targeted interventions, partnerships and local initiatives. Those are important points which have been stressed by Members on all sides of the House. We hope that we can include them in the new structures and regulations.

Another point which came across strongly—I reiterate it from my own experience—is the need to streamline decision making on the one hand and bureaucracy on the

[Mr. Boswell]

other. We had much difficulty launching 5b in the south-west. It generated a lot of ill will initially because it was very slow to get off the ground and people had to become familiar with the provision. It was complicated and, as challenge funding, was not guaranteed in the traditional manner of agricultural grants; we had to come to terms with that difference. Anything that can make the process simpler, within the bounds of accountability, is very welcome.

We wish the hon. Lady and Her Majesty's Government well in supporting British interests during the negotiations. We are fortunate in having had this constructive report and debate. However, it will be impossible to satisfy everyone—even all hon. Members—and, in fairness, I think that both the House and the Government should accept that constraint on their achievements.

9.40 pm

The Minister for Small Firms, Trade and Industry (Mrs. Barbara Roche): I agree with the hon. Member for Daventry (Mr. Boswell), who speaks for the Opposition on these matters, that this has been a very good debate. Hon. Members on both sides of the House have made contributions of an enormously high standard which have really taken the issue forward. I thank all hon. Members who have participated in the debate for their words of encouragement. Such a united view will strengthen the Government's hand in the negotiations.

The hon. Member for Daventry and practically every hon. Member who has spoken this evening commended the Select Committee on producing an excellent report. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Kingswood (Mr. Berry) on the elegant and thorough way in which he presented the Select Committee's report and case. The House is indebted to the Select Committee for the way in which it has produced the report and the opportunity that it has presented to have this debate this evening.

My hon. Friend the Member for Kingswood outlined the importance of the structural funds and what they mean. My hon. Friend the Member for Falmouth and Camborne (Ms Atherton) also spoke passionately on that subject. For many people in our country, the structural funds and how they are used in their areas are a manifestation of the European Union. I am very pleased that the Committee's report broadly supports the Government's position on several key points. For example, the report refers to the need to contain the cost of the funds, the need for some flexibility for member states in selecting eligible areas under objective 2, and the treatment of sparsely populated regions in the United Kingdom.

Very importantly—this has been a theme of the debate—the report highlights the need for increased simplification, which is a key area of negotiation. We made considerable process in that direction during our presidency of the European Union. The hon. Member for South-East Cornwall (Mr. Breed) and my hon. Friend the Member for Brighton, Pavilion (Mr. Lepper) made that point when they spoke about the need for simplicity. It is important that the reforms should lead to fewer objectives, less bureaucracy, a broader partnership and a much simplified system of payments. Hon. Members also referred to cohesion funding, and I agree with the comments by my hon. Friend the Member for Kingswood.

The Committee researched the report thoroughly. It took evidence from a wide selection of those with an interest in this reform, including several local representative organisations such as the Local Government Association, the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities and some local partnerships. A great strength of the report is that it is so comprehensive.

I gave evidence to the Committee in May in order to set out the Government's view. The Government replied to the Select Committee report by way of a memorandum, and I want to cover a number of those points today. Since the publication of the Agenda 2000 communication in July 1997, we have said that the reform of the structural and cohesion funds must be affordable and fair to all existing and future member states, including the UK and its regions. It must deliver an outcome that is durable, sustainable and capable of applying in the next programming period and beyond that into 2006 without increasing costs unmanageably or introducing inequalities.

Affordability must be set in the context of current levels of spending and of the prospect of an enlarged union, which was a point raised by the hon. Member for Daventry. That inevitably means that, at some point, the present 15 member states must expect to sustain reductions in both coverage and receipts.

Miss McIntosh: Given that Britain receives 9 per cent. of the structural funds and the fact that, although we are a net contributor, we are now the fourth poorest member state and have been described in one report today as bottom of the league, does the Minister accept that there should be a limit to the reduction that we are prepared to accept?

Mrs. Roche: Let me explain to the hon. Lady—I am aware of her experience in these matters—that that is why the Government are taking such a rigorous view in the negotiations. We accept that reductions will have to be made, but our position is that they will have to be on the basis of fairness to the United Kingdom. The Committee takes a very sensible view that it is probably better done sooner than later and that the programming period after 1999 should prepare member states for eventual enlargement. It also makes the important point that it must be fair. Cuts in population coverage must be proportionate across member states, everything else being relatively equal, and no member state should receive more per capita than it does now.

We agree that the Commission's proposals, which would increase funding in real terms are difficult to reconcile with other principles within the proposals such as concentrating or reducing the areas that receive funding. The Select Committee also covered such issues. That is the basis for our insistence on the structural and cohesion funds element of the budget being kept well below 0.46 per cent. of EU gross national product to avoid the possibility, pointed out quite correctly by the Select Committee, of more money for fewer people. We must absolutely avoid that outcome.

Conceivably, there could be a case for objective 1 if we had to accept a position where two thirds of the structural funds' coverage—and possibly the money—

went to objective 1 areas or if, following the Select Committee's suggestion, objective 1 was limited to the poorest 20 per cent. of regions. If it meant that the budget was reduced commensurately, that would be welcome, but we could not support a situation that led to increased intensities of support.

The Government support the Select Committee's view that strict application of the 75 per cent. GDP criterion might cause the UK some difficulties, but that is not what the Commission proposes. The draft regulations already specify some exceptions, such as ultra-peripheral regions and objective 6 sparsely populated areas whether or not they meet the 75 per cent. GDP criterion. In our view, that shows that GDP is not the only indicator of genuine need, and we need to look very carefully at the totality of objective 1 and its eligibility criteria. This is our basis for arguing, as we have done consistently, for a sparsity of population criterion to address the needs of areas such as the highland and islands. We welcome the Committee's support for them to be treated on a par with member states in a similar position, such as Finland and Sweden. We heard powerful speeches in this regard from my hon. Friend the Member for Inverness, East, Nairn and Lochaber (Mr. Stewart) and from the hon. Member for Galloway and Upper Nithsdale (Mr. Morgan).

We welcomed the Cardiff Council's commitment to assisting the peace process in Northern Ireland, particularly its recognition that the European Union

"should continue to play an active part in promoting lasting peace and prosperity in Northern Ireland".

Much of the discussion this evening has been on objective 2. The Committee identified correctly the difficulties in interpreting the Commission's proposals for objective 2. Unifying the industrial, rural, urban and fisheries areas within a single objective 2 would advance the aim of simplification. That point has been made. Unfortunately, however, it could also impose complex and apparently artificial distinctions that would automatically exclude from consideration some areas of need. We are working hard to ensure that all strands are dealt with properly. The rural strand was rightly discussed by the hon. Members for Vale of York (Miss McIntosh), for North Norfolk (Mr. Prior) and for Daventry. The fisheries strand was mentioned by the hon. Member for North Norfolk and by my hon. Friend the Member for Waveney (Mr. Blizzard), who both made important points.

In the negotiations, the Government continue to emphasise the importance of flexibility to target areas of need, even if those are concealed within relatively prosperous areas. That was a recurrent theme of this evening's debate, powerfully expressed by my hon. Friend the Member for Burton (Mrs. Dean). The need for flexibility was emphasised by hon. Members on both sides of the House, including my hon. Friends the Members for Eccles, for Brighton, Kemptown (Dr. Turner), for Hastings and Rye (Mr. Foster), for Hemsworth (Mr. Trickett), for Normanton (Mr. O'Brien) and for City of Durham (Mr. Steinberg). It is important that we make it clear that in the UK we need the flexibility to target funds where they are most needed.

I am grateful for the Committee's recognition of the value of the safety net. It limits the loss of coverage for objective 2 and 5b areas to no more than one third and is an important achievement for a number of UK areas. As we gain a better understanding of the process, the benefits of the Government's achievement in establishing the safety net will become apparent.

One of the strengths of the past few months has been the contribution of local partnerships and organisations in shaping the proposals and the negotiations. We have worked together to present a united and coherent case in Brussels. I thank all hon. Members, Members of the European Parliament and members of local authorities throughout the country who have worked so hard with me and my officials. I take this opportunity to thank all my officials too, who have worked tremendously hard in the Department and in our permanent representation in Brussels. I am grateful for all the work that they have done. The importance of delivering for the UK as a whole was pointed out by the hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Mr. Collins).

In developing UK policy and the positions for the negotiations, we have held a number of local, regional and national consultations since the publication of the Commission's proposals and have sought to reflect the views gathered along the way in the on-going discussions. I am grateful for all the participation that has taken place. We must make sure that the united front continues.

The Government agree with the Committee that bureaucracy surrounding the funds should not be a bar to access for any organisation, however small. In the negotiations to date—initially this was under the United Kingdom presidency—we have been able to secure agreement to some of the general principles that support the universally agreed aim of simplification of the funds: making them more effective and, most important, better value for money. That was an important first step in a reform proposal as radical as the one that we are discussing. We should not underestimate the scale of the task and of this particular achievement, given the divergent views across member states on the detail of the proposed negotiation.

The focus of the presidency earlier this year was primarily to simplify the administration of the funds. In this, we achieved a high level of consensus among member states. The informal meeting of EU Regional Policy Ministers in Glasgow in June achieved several important levels of agreement on a number of principles: the importance of job creation and employability and of regional competitiveness; the values of effective partnership between the Commission, national Governments and regional and local organisations, and of a clear definition of role for all of them; and the need to bring decision making as close as possible to the people it affects—that was very much a recurring theme of our debate this evening—in other words, more regional and local control over the structural funds delivery.

All of us want to protect the good name of the structural funds. We want the system to operate as democratically as possible. That is why the negotiations and discussions on simplification are so important. All those involved in the funds want to develop a less burdensome and more efficient system for their administration from the year 2000 onwards. It is clear that everybody wants to do that.

It is clear also that complex negotiations are ahead if we are to reach agreement on a fair and transparent system. A great deal more work has to be done, particularly on objective criteria, eligibility issues and finance, if we are to get the system right. There has been discussion this evening about the Community initiatives, which we know have led to some useful partnerships and have provided funds outside the objective areas. However, they have proved complicated to administer and they are not always

[Mrs. Roche]

the best way to address strategic issues. We have supported a reduction in their numbers. The mainstream objectives should be sufficiently flexible to accommodate activities currently included under Community initiatives. At present, there is still very little detail from the Commission about the three initiatives that are proposed, but they clearly must add value to the main objectives in terms of the structural funds.

The Cardiff Council set a deadline of March 1999 for agreement to be reached in the Council on the Agenda 2000 package, which of course goes wider than the structural funds. The deadline is important. As I have said, we recognise that much work will need to be done to achieve it. We will need to make every effort to ensure that it is met.

I am grateful to the Select Committee for its work and to all hon. Members on both sides of the House who have lent their support in such a positive and constructive way. It is clear that, in the months that lie ahead, we need to continue to work together so that a strong UK voice is heard. In that way we can get the right result for the United Kingdom as a whole.

9.58 pm

Mr. Berry: With the leave of the House, I first thank my hon. Friend the Minister for Small Firms, Trade and Industry for her comments and for the evidence that she and her officials gave to the Select Committee during its hearings. That evidence was extremely helpful and useful. I am naturally grateful, on behalf of my colleagues, for the kind remarks that all hon. Members have made about the Select Committee's report. More important have been the comments that individual Members made on specific aspects of this important issue.

In the final sentence of the first paragraph of the report, we said that the report was the Committee's first, but not necessarily its final, word on reform of the European structural funds. Whether hon. Members regard that as a promise or a threat is entirely up to them. It was a brief inquiry following concerns that arose at a meeting in Brussels this February. We may well return to the issue.

I was encouraged by the unanimity of hon. Members. It was of some significance that no one argued that his or her constituency should get less resources. All argued that there should be more, or at least the same, because of important social needs and the need for regeneration and tackling poverty. I will mull over that observation as I go home, because when there is unanimity on such an important point—

It being Ten o'clock, the motion for the Adjournment of the House lapsed, without Question put, pursuant to the Standing Order.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Ordered,

That for the remainder of the present Session of Parliament the House shall not sit on any Friday and the provision of paragraphs 3 and 4 of Standing Order No. 12 shall apply to all such Fridays.—*[Mr. Allen.]*

Disabled Access

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Allen.]*

10 pm

Mr. Don Touhig (Islwyn): I welcome this debate because it is another chance to highlight the problems faced by people with a physical or learning disability. Since I became president of Caerphilly Access, I have been impressed by the commitment and innovation showed by disabled and able-bodied members determined to raise public awareness of the problems that disabled people face. Like most people, I can walk unaided and I am not impaired, but the fact is that in Wales one in six people are impaired in some way. In the United Kingdom, it is one in eight. Access for the disabled is thus a matter of considerable importance to a significant number of people.

Like many people who work with, and on behalf of, disabled people, I welcome the initiatives that the Government have taken so far, notably the setting up of the disability rights task force. Steps are being taken to create a disability rights commission; and there is the planned implementation of part III of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 next October. However, the fact remains that many of the rights that able-bodied people enjoy and take for granted are denied to those who have an impairment.

Access to trains for those confined to wheelchairs is woefully inadequate in many parts of the country. At my nearest railway station at Pengam on the Valleys line, only one platform is suitable for wheelchair access. A disabled passenger who wanted to go to Cardiff by train would have to join the train travelling north to Rhymney and stay on it when it travelled all the way back to Cardiff. At another station on the same line, there is a ramp leading to the platform but there are steps at its top and bottom. My two examples are all too commonplace. On that line, only one station has full facilities for disabled people. The situation is unacceptable to every disabled person and it should be unacceptable to every able-bodied person.

I do not want to limit my remarks to transport, important though that is, but I want to touch on the implementation of regulations that affect buses and coaches. The time scale means that existing single-decker buses will not have to be wheelchair accessible until 2015. The date for double-deckers is 2017. If bus and coach operators are not required to make their vehicles fully wheelchair accessible sooner, the emphasis that is being placed on park-and-ride schemes will have a damaging impact on disabled people. Similarly, the proposed two-mile parking exclusion zone around the millennium dome will make the experience inaccessible to disabled people unless the transport network is fully accessible to them.

Even in our schools, disabled pupils are caused further distress by the lack of proper access. Local education authorities have a responsibility to provide facilities for disabled staff, and even for parents with physical disabilities, but astonishingly, there is no requirement to ensure that schools are properly accessible for disabled pupils.

I am told that LEAs often say that they will provide facilities for disabled pupils when the need arises, but experience often shows that when need is established, the combination of a lack of funds and a lot of red tape means that very little is done.

Rightly, the education of our children is at the core of the Government's agenda, and I know that my hon. Friend the Minister will use her considerable influence to ensure that no child misses out on education because of a physical impairment.

Our disabled fellow citizens have conscientiously battled for years to gain the same rights as able-bodied citizens take for granted, but they have been, and continue to be, denied that equality because of lack of access—to transport, to education, to buildings, to public parks, to open spaces and in some cases to basic services.

For example, access to a telephone box may be denied because the telephone is out of reach or the booth is too narrow for a wheelchair. Access to buildings is denied because there are too many steps, no ramps, narrow doorways or no toilet facilities suitable for disabled people. Access to democracy too—access to the vote itself—is denied because of inaccessible polling booths and lack of adequate facilities in polling stations.

The disabled groups whose members I have talked to recognise that improving access is often a technical issue, and that technical solutions and financial resources are needed to put things right. Those solutions will be achieved only if local authorities become more proactive in devising and developing policies that will improve and promote greater access.

It is because local councils are the major providers of services in the community that they must not be allowed to ignore the crucial role that they have to play. I do not suggest for one moment that councils willingly ignore the problems faced by physically disabled people and those with learning difficulties. However, because of the many demands on them, unless we in the House and as a Government place responsibilities on them by statute, we will have only piecemeal solutions, different in different parts of the country.

For that reason I argue that it should be the duty of each local authority to enter into a contract with disabled people—a form of citizens charter that will guarantee that disabled people's needs are recognised and addressed. Local authorities must work in partnership with voluntary organisations and local disability groups.

A good example of that partnership approach—indeed, a role model for others—is the access group in my borough that I have already mentioned. Caerphilly Access, which has been working on behalf of disabled people for the past 10 years, has been innovative in bringing home to planners, engineers and architects the impact that their work can have on people with a physical disability. It has encouraged able-bodied people from local authorities' highways, planning and architects departments to sit in wheelchairs and try to get from, say, a major supermarket to a local bus or railway station.

The people involved have gained first-hand experience of how to negotiate all the obstacles that disabled people alone have to contend with when they try to journey through a busy town centre. That approach has helped those who have the responsibility for designing and constructing new buildings and for maintaining and developing our infrastructure to see the impact of their decisions on someone confined to a wheelchair.

Those people now have a better understanding of some of the problems that plague disabled people every day of their lives, which the able-bodied usually do not even realise exist. More importantly, the objective of such an exercise is to ensure that access issues are taken into account by local authorities when policy decisions are made.

Caerphilly Access members regularly arrange site meetings with officials from the local council's highways department to look at such things as high kerbs, poorly installed dropped kerbs, and lamp standards set in the middle of pavements which prevent anyone in a wheelchair from passing by with safety.

Those initiatives underline the importance of partnership between voluntary groups campaigning for disabled people's rights and their local authorities. I therefore hope that my hon. Friend will examine ways in which all local authorities might be required to appoint an officer working in partnership with the voluntary sector, whose brief would be to ensure that the issues vital to the quality of life of disabled people were recognised and tackled. Additionally, all councils should be required to have a mission statement setting out their vision, and making it clear that improving the quality of life for disabled people in their community is as important as providing nursery education or caring for the elderly. That mission statement would underpin a council's contract with its disabled citizens.

When I was a councillor, and chairman of my local authority's finance committee, we ensured that every report from every committee had a paragraph setting out the financial implications of every recommendation in the report. Why cannot we have exactly the same, but covering the impact of recommendations on disabled people?

Mr. Tom Levitt (High Peak): My hon. Friend is making a positive and valuable contribution. I am sure that in talking about the needs of physically and learning-impaired people, he does not wish to exclude visually and hearing-impaired people, because everything he has said applies to them as well.

Does my hon. Friend agree that the major barrier that disabled people face is in the perception and awareness of other people as to their needs? Central and local government therefore have an obligation to set a good example, and my hon. Friend has cited a good case from his area. He may not be aware that I was in the United States last week, but I can assure him that a change in culture and attitude can and does happen, and that there is evidence from that country that it can be done.

Mr. Touhig: There is much that we can learn from the United States, which has been progressive and encouraging in showing the pattern that we can follow.

I have stressed the role of local councils because, most often, they are the first point of contact a disabled person turns to for help, and here a one-stop-shop approach would be welcomed. Local councils are taking part in best practice initiatives sponsored by the Government, but the needs of disabled people are being ignored in this exercise. Why are we not covering the important needs of disabled people?

One invaluable aid to identifying the problems of disabled people is the access audit. Recently an audit of every library in my borough revealed that all the fire

[Mr. Touhig]

alarms gave an audible warning of danger, but not a visual one. That is not much use if one is deaf or has a hearing impairment. That example demonstrates that the need to improve access goes much further than simply improving the physical access to buildings. Experience has shown that many access audits conducted by local councils are often carried out in a hurry and without the person responsible possessing any relevant experience.

Following the general election, many councils carried out access audits of their polling stations, and I very much welcome that. However, there is no statutory requirement on local authorities to carry out access audits for parks, open spaces and buildings. I took my twin granddaughters to a park last Sunday. They had a wonderful time, and I enjoyed the quality time that I spent with them. However, if I had been in a wheelchair, I would not have been able to get into the park because the only access was up a large flight of steps. I hope that the Government will consider making it a duty for local authorities to carry out access audits for parks and open spaces.

I said at the outset that the Government's decision to implement part III of the Disability Discrimination Act was very welcome, but it is essential for every local authority to meet the target for 2004, when they and all other service providers will have to make reasonable adjustments to the way in which they provide their services. So far as local councils are concerned, they should be instituting a rolling programme of work to meet the deadline—they should not come up to the deadline and then try to do the work in a short period of time.

I recognise that many authorities are taking action, but many are not. Improving access is not just about removing physical barriers. The problem facing people with learning disabilities stems not from physical barriers or the absence of reasonable adjustments, but rather from an unwillingness on behalf of providers of services to treat disabled people on equal terms. Mencap told me recently that 10 adults with learning disabilities were refused admission to a pre-booked party in a pub because the landlady considered that they would constitute a breach of the fire regulations and disturb the comfort of her regular customers.

Access for people with learning disabilities depends on much more than providing ramps. In another case, a Mencap employee with a learning disability who travelled to work daily by bus found that the bus turned into a garage one morning. Passengers were asked to disembark and find their own way out. The person with the learning disability was left abandoned on the bus, feeling confused and lost.

Often people with learning difficulties need no more specialised help than a positive and enlightened attitude on the part of those working in the public sector, the service industries and, yes, from us, their fellow citizens. Access for a person with a learning disability can be improved in a number of relatively straightforward ways. For example, transport can be made more accessible, not merely for the disabled but also for the elderly, by the use of large-print timetables, clearer signs at stations and bus stops, and clearer spoken announcements. Too often, a person with a learning disability will be confused by a sign reading, "Please use another route", when it should read, "Please use another bus". If service providers—in short, staff—receive the necessary training to enable them to respond to a person's specific needs, significant strides will be made towards improving access.

In health care, we must guarantee that a learning disability will not be a barrier. Worryingly, Mencap's recent report "Health for All" revealed that health authority inequality is very much a reality for people with learning difficulties. Despite the high incidence of hearing and visual impairment, Mencap's survey showed that few of them have regular hearing and eye tests. To access the health service, people with learning disabilities need information that they can understand and services that can understand them—in terms of knowing how to communicate and being able to work in a way that accommodates the extra time that it might take to deal with the problems of a person with a learning disability.

We must ensure that people with learning disabilities do not miss out, by providing health promotion information that they can understand. All our citizens must be given the chance to make the most of their lives. The new deal for the disabled is a good example of how partnership between Government, local authorities and the voluntary sector can significantly help to break down barriers to employment for disabled people.

Members of Parliament have a duty to enable all people with impairments to take a full and active part in their communities and in society as a whole. Only by removing the barriers that restrict access, both physical and conditional, can we make equality of opportunity not merely a dream for people with disabilities, but a reality.

In this House, we are privileged. We can make things happen. We have an opportunity to help to build a Britain in which all our people feel equally valued, involved and included, instead of ignored, isolated and excluded. For me, that is the true meaning of inclusivity.

10.16 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (Ms Glenda Jackson): First, I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Islwyn (Mr. Touhig) on securing this debate on a topic that is not only of particular importance but that, as his contribution illustrated, is so wide ranging, affecting every aspect of our national life. I also thank him for his generosity in affording our hon. Friend the Member for High Peak (Mr. Levitt) an opportunity to contribute to the debate. This Government are committed to achieving comprehensive and enforceable civil rights for disabled people in both the workplace and society at large.

In October 1997, we announced our strategy. First, we set up the disability rights task force to consider how best to secure comprehensive, enforceable civil rights for disabled people and to make recommendations on the role and functions of a disability rights commission—a major strand in our strategy. The task force, chaired by my hon. Friend the Minister for Disabled People, is due to report on its wider considerations no later than July 1999 and submitted its recommendations on the commission before Easter. We hope to legislate for the establishment of a DRC at an early opportunity. Finally, we announced our commitment to implement fully part III of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995, which deals with rights of access to goods and services.

Since 2 December 1995, part III has placed duties on those providing goods, facilities and services—defined as "service providers"—not to discriminate against disabled

people. From 1 October 1999, service providers will be required to make reasonable adjustments to policies, procedures or practices that exclude disabled people and to provide auxiliary aids and services to facilitate access. From 2004, where there is a physical barrier to service, service providers will have to take reasonable steps to remove, alter or avoid it.

On 30 July, the Department for Education and Employment, which leads in this area, launched a public consultation covering new requirements to make goods, services and facilities more accessible to disabled people. Access to transport is not only a civil rights issue, but a matter of social justice. We want high-quality transport designed for everyone—that means transport that is not only affordable but accessible.

A recent audit carried out by the Royal Association for Disability and Rehabilitation on disabled people's perception of the Government's achievements had transport ranked very high in the list of priorities. It is, of course, a priority for us all—our daily lives depend so much on our ability to get from place to place.

Some improvements—which have been based on research carried out by my Department and advocated by our statutory advisers, the disabled persons transport advisory committee—have already been made, including the introduction of low-floor buses, which offer step-free access. Many of those buses also have facilities for wheelchair users. All inter-city trains are accessible to wheelchair users, and many other services are now able to offer that facility. Accessible taxis, too, are more generally available, particularly in the larger towns and cities.

My hon. Friend the Member for Islwyn was concerned about access to the millennium dome site. I reassure him that there will be dedicated parking spaces for orange badge holders. Indeed, the Jubilee line extension, which we expect to carry the bulk of visitors, will be fully accessible.

We have the opportunity with the Disability Discrimination Act to create a fully accessible public transport system that will significantly improve the independent mobility of millions of disabled people. Specific technical standards will be set in regulations covering buses, coaches, trains—including underground, light rail and tramways—and licensed taxis. The technical standards will include means to travel in a wheelchair and facilities for those with low vision, hearing impairment, walking difficulties, poor balance and so on. I have been privileged to witness several innovative schemes that deal with the problems that people with learning difficulties frequently experience in their attempts to use public transport.

Discussions with DPTAC and relevant transport industries have developed the framework for the regulations. Consultation documents on our draft proposals for taxis, buses and coaches were circulated for wide public consultation last year. They included detailed technical standards and proposed implementation dates. For full-size single-deck buses, we proposed a start date of 1 January 2000, with an end date of 1 January 2015 for all such vehicles to meet the requirements. On taxis, we consulted on the basis of a start date of 1 January 2002 and an end date of 1 January 2012. For double-deck buses, we proposed a start date of 2002 and an end date of 2017, but I am happy to inform the House that the industry has told us that all new double-deck buses may meet the requirements by 2001.

The next stage for buses and coaches, as for taxis, will be to draw up draft regulations and carry out a further round of public consultation before the final regulations are introduced. An implementation date of 31 December 1998 for all rail vehicles was written into the primary legislation, but it became clear when we came into government that the consultation process would have to be accelerated if we were to provide industry with sufficient time to meet the requirements.

Consultation on draft regulations was carried out in the late spring of this year and the final regulations have been laid before Parliament. Subject to completion of the parliamentary procedures, the regulations will come into force on 1 November.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Islwyn pointed out, accessibility is not only about having the right vehicle. We must also ensure that the whole journey is seamless, which means that the infrastructure must be right. The provisions of part III of the Disability Discrimination Act, which deals with access to goods, services and facilities, will apply to railway and bus stations as to any other building to which the public have access.

In the meantime, we will be issuing guidance to transport operators and local authorities on the steps that they should be taking now—in advance of part III of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995—to examine every aspect of their service provision. That also includes pavements, roads and so on and I hope that my hon. Friend will take some reassurance from that.

My hon. Friend also touched on the issue of access to buildings. That is dealt with by part M of the building regulations, "Access and Facilities for Disabled People", which covers new buildings and extensions including a ground floor. At present, part M covers non-domestic buildings, but later this month regulations will be laid before the House extending the requirements to all new housing.

The statutory requirements require reasonable provision to be made for disabled people to gain access to and to be able to use the building. The provisions cover facilities for people with mobility difficulties, sight and hearing difficulties, areas to which both my hon. Friends the Members for Islwyn and for High Peak referred. Guidance on how the requirements may be met are set out in an approved document. This guidance is not prescriptive and alternative ways of satisfying the statutory requirements may also be acceptable.

The extension to new housing will require access to the principal entrance storey of the dwelling, movement within the principal living storey, and accessible toilet facilities. The object of these requirements is to enable disabled people to visit the homes of friends and relatives and to enable older people to remain in their own homes longer. The requirements do not expect to provide full living conditions for disabled people as these will vary according to the nature of the disability. The approved document for part M will be republished in early November. Separate guidance is also being prepared on how to meet the technical aspects of providing an accessible threshold to the entrance of new dwellings.

[Ms Glenda Jackson]

The requirements for access to new housing will take effect 12 months after the laying of the regulations, affording time for housebuilders to adjust to the new requirements.

Part M of the building regulations does not apply to existing buildings, but the duties on employers and service providers in the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 require reasonable steps to be taken to remove physical obstacles to access. Those duties already apply in the case of employers and will apply to service providers from 2004.

My hon. Friend the Member for Islwyn referred to access audits. They are one way in which employers and service providers may assess what alterations may be required to their premises. There is no statutory obligation to carry out such audits, nor do we believe it reasonable to impose one. We believe that access audits are best advocated as good practice. Both the Access Committee for England and the Centre for Accessible Environments offer guidance on how such audits may be carried out, and the Centre for Accessible Environments has a panel of experts for carrying out such work.

I am sure that we all agree that, regrettably, this is still a developing scene. The form that an audit takes needs to be tailored to the particular circumstances of each case and building. A broad-brush statutory requirement for such audits could well be, in the present emerging state of the art, a charter for cowboy practices in an area where it is overwhelmingly important to establish confidence in the credibility and realism of such audits and those who perform them.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Islwyn pointed out, most local authorities have appointed an access officer and there is an Access Officers Association which affords support for its members. However, it is possible to combine that role with other duties, normally within the building control or planning departments. We believe that this matter should be left to the discretion of individual local authorities.

I hope that I have been able to demonstrate to my hon. Friends that the Government are fully committed to ensuring that disabled people do not face discrimination in accessing employment, housing, transport and the built environment. We have already made progress towards that and the plans that I have outlined this evening will take us further towards that goal, which, as my hon. Friend the Member for Islwyn pointed out, will be achieved only be everyone working in the closest and most detailed, sympathetic and sensitive of partnerships.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twenty-nine minutes past Ten o'clock.

Written Answers to Questions

Monday 27 July 1998

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

India

Mr. Streeter: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will list recipient projects of the United Kingdom aid budget to India in *(a)* 1997–98 and *(b)* 1998–99; and if she will make a statement. [52468]

Mr. Foulkes: A list of UK development projects for India in 1997–98 and 1998–99 follows. (Where a project was supported in only one of these years, the appropriate date is indicated). Total expenditure on the India bilateral programme in 1997–98 was £68.9 million. A new Country Strategy Paper for India is under preparation. This will reflect the priorities set out in the White Paper on International Development. It will also consider the implications, including the economic and financial implications, of the recent nuclear tests when assessing prospects for partnerships and poverty reduction.

Natural Resources

Eastern India Rainfed Farming
Western India Rainfed Farming
Karnataka Watershed Development Project
Watershed Impact Evaluation Consultancy
Pathology of Oil Seed Crops (1997–98)
Plant Germplasm Conservation and Utilisation
Transfer of Molecular Biological Technologies
Forage Production Research
Soil Salinity and Breeding for Salt Resistant Crops
Bay of Bengal Post Harvest Fisheries
Oxfam Watershed Project
Integrated Coastal Zone Management
Western Ghats Sustainable Forest Management
Himachal Pradesh Forestry Project

Environment/Coal/Power

Calcutta Environmental Management and Strategy Action Plan (1997–98)
Environmental Training 1997–98 (50 awards)
Indira Gandhi Conservation Monitoring Centre
Assistance to Jhanjra Coal Mine
Hirakud Hydro Rehabilitation
Andhra Pradesh Energy Efficiency
Orissa Power Sector Reform
Dry Ash Disposal
High Voltage Direct Current Link—Chandrapur and Ramagudam
Haryana Power Sector Reform (1998–99)
Environmental Issues in the Power and Coal Sector

Finance/Fiscal Reform

Banking Supervision

Health

Urban Community Based Rehabilitation
National Institute of Health and Family Welfare: Health Policy
Community Ophthalmology
Spastics Society of Eastern India
Partnerships for Sexual health
Malaria Control and Research, Surat
Sexual Health Project
West Bengal Reproductive Health
Inter-City Truck Drivers—Sexually Transmitted Disease Prevention
Reproductive Health
Polio Immunisation programme
Social Marketing of Contraceptives
Revised National TB Programme
Orissa Health and Family Welfare

Education

Andhra Pradesh District Primary Education Project
West Bengal District primary Education Project
Regional Engineering Colleges

Water and Sanitation/Urban Development

Maharashtra Rural Water Supply and Sanitation
Gomti River Pollution Control
Kalahandi Water and Development Project (SCF)
UNICEF Control of Diarrhoeal Diseases
Rural Water Development
Urban Water Development
UNDP Rural Water and Sanitation
Maharashtra Emergency Earthquake Rehabilitation
Indore Slum Improvement Project
Calcutta Slum Improvement Project
Vijayawada Slum Improvement Project
Chinagadili Habitat Improvement
Cochin Urban Poverty Reduction Project
Cuttack Urban Services Improvement Project
Bharatiya Yuva Shakti Trust—Small Enterprise Promotion

Gender/Public Administration

Enterprise Development by Women
Gender and Law
Credit and Micro Enterprise
Indian Professional Officers Scheme (1998–99)
Development Policy and Planning Management (1997–98)
Management of Change
Total Quality Management (1998–99)

Aid Statistics

Mr. Streeter: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will list the organisations which received more than £500,000 from the Overseas Development Administration in 1996–97. [52769]

Mr. Foulkes: The information is available in British Aid Statistics 1997. The table lists those UK Non Governmental Organisations (NGO) which received more

than £500,000 from the Overseas Development Administration in 1996–97, and details the amount they received:

NGO	£000
ACORD	1,953
Action Aid	2,414
Afghan Aid	878
Aga Khan Foundation	2,590
AHRTAG	798
Association of Commonwealth Universities	2,378
BBC Marshall Plan of the Mind	562
BESO	1,364
British Red Cross Society	15,869
CAFOD	2,597
CARE	11,549
Catholic Institute for International Relations	2,279
Charities Aid Foundation	792
Christian Aid	6,136
Concern Universal	1,487
Concern Worldwide	1,010
Farm Africa	830
Halo Trust	1,443
Health Unlimited	1,030
Help Age International	555
Institute of Development Studies	3,005
Intermediate Technology Development Group	3,140
International Family Health	762
IPPF	8,197
Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine	1,579
London School of Hygiene	3,647
Marie Stopes International	3,202
Medecins Sans Frontieres	1,410
Medical Emergency Relief International	1,564
Medical Research Group	4,027
Mines Advisory Group	1,079
Overseas Development Institute	1,713
OXFAM	10,201
Plan International	1,037
Population Concern	806
Save The Children Fund	13,660
Scottish Agricultural College	780
Silsoe Research Institute	613
Skillshare Africa	1,848
Tear Fund	1,072
UNAIS	1,076
Voluntary Services Overseas	22,029
Water Aid	1,420
World University Service	696
World Vision of Britain	2,383
Worldwide Fund for Nature	2,299

China

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on her visit to Lanzhou during her official tour of China. [52349]

Mr. Foulkes: Gansu province is one of China's poorest. During her visit in June, the Secretary of State held constructive discussions with representatives of local government (at county and provincial levels) about a proposed basic education project, the emphasis of which will be on access to and the quality of education for minorities and children, especially girls, in the poorer counties. The Secretary of State also took the opportunity to visit an EU-assisted irrigation project in the province.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on the environment agreements with China, entered into during her recent official visit. [52350]

Mr. Foulkes: During her visit in June, the Secretary of State signed a memorandum of understanding on environmental cooperation with the Chinese State Environment Protection Administration (SEPA). The memorandum provides a framework for cooperation between Britain and China on a number of China's highest environmental priorities including water pollution, urban air pollution and toxic and hazardous wastes. The Secretary of State also left with SEPA an outline proposal for a substantial new project to assist the local authorities in Yunnan Province with planning for environmentally-sustainable development. SEPA have welcomed the continued emphasis on the environment within the Department for International Development's new country strategy for China and the introduction of a strong poverty focus.

PRIME MINISTER

Lobbyists

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Prime Minister what is his role in determining who will participate at meetings arranged by lobbying organisations where members of his Policy Unit speak under Chatham House rules. [50463]

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 14 July 1998]:* I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave him on 16 July 1998, *Official Report,* column *254.* I have today published guidance for all civil servants setting out the basic principles which should be followed in any contacts with people outside Government including lobbyists. Wherever and whenever such contacts take place they should be conducted in accordance with the *Civil Service Code* and the principles of public life set out by the Nolan Committee. I have placed a copy of the guidance in the Libraries of both Houses.

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Prime Minister on how many occasions on 25 June telephone calls were made from No 10 Downing Street to the mobile phone number supplied to him in the letter from the hon. Member for Pendle of 22 July. [52479]

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave him on 23 July 1998, *Official Report,* column *624.*

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Prime Minister when he plans to give a substantive answer to the question from the hon. Member for Pendle concerning the business relationships notified to him by Mr. Roger Liddle (Ref. 49655). [52395]

The Prime Minister: Shortly.

ENVIRONMENT, TRANSPORT AND THE REGIONS

Housing (Rateable Value)

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many residential properties, by number and percentage per region, have a rateable value. [50441]

Angela Eagle: No rateable values have been set or updated for residential properties since 31 March 1990 when the domestic rating system was abolished. The following table estimates the dwelling stock in each region at the end of December 1997, less the number of those dwellings built since 31 March 1990.

Government office region	*Dwellings (000)*	*Percentage of dwelling stock*
North East	1,047	95
Yorkshire and the Humber	1,999	95
East Midlands	1,614	93
Eastern	2,066	92
Greater London	3,136	96
South East	2,807	93
South West	1,940	93
West Midlands	2,047	94
North West	2,168	94
Merseyside	580	95
England	19,406	94

Airports (South-east England)

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what percentage of slots at Heathrow Airport are used for regional air services. [51150]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The Government do not collect this information themselves, but according to a report prepared by Airport Coordination Ltd. for the current summer season about 15 per cent. of slots are allocated to domestic services (plus Isle of Man and Channel Islands). This compares with 17 per cent. for the winter 1997–98 season.

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what percentage of the slots at Gatwick Airport are used for *(a)* regional air services and *(b)* charter services. [51151]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The Department does not collect this information itself, but according to a report prepared by Airport Coordination Ltd., for the current Summer season at Gatwick Airport approximately 11 per cent. of slots are used by regional air services (including Isle of Man and Channel Islands) and approximately 26 per cent. of slots are used for charter services. For the previous, Winter 1997–98 season, the comparable figures were 15 per cent. and 18 per cent. respectively.

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will list the percentage of slots (i) used for regional services at Heathrow airport and (ii) used for charter services at Gatwick airport in each of the last five years. [51152]

Ms Glenda Jackson: Information is readily available only for the last three years. The following figures have been provided by Airport Coordination Limited:

Percentage of slots at Heathrow airport used for regional (i.e. domestic, plus Isle of Man and Channel Islands) services

	Percentage
Summer 1995	17
Winter 1995–96	17
Summer 1996	17
Winter 1996–97	17
Summer 1997	16
Winter 1997–98	17

Percentage of slots at Gatwick airport used for charter services

	Percentage
Summer 1995	32
Winter 1995–96	20
Summer 1996	26
Winter 1996–97	18
Summer 1997	26
Winter 1997–98	18

Road Safety and Congestion

Mr. Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will discuss with the Home Secretary the inclusion within the objectives for the police service of new targets for *(a)* reducing road accidents and *(b)* improving the operation of buses in congested areas. [51812]

Ms Glenda Jackson: We regularly discuss the full range of road safety and road policing issues with Home Office Ministers. We have given a commitment in the White paper, *A New Deal for Transport: Better for everyone,* to set a new target for the reduction of road casualties by 2010 (para 3.219) and the police are ready to play their role in helping meet that target. We have also said (para 3.101) that a different approach to traffic management would be adopted whereby more space would be given to pedestrians, cyclists and public transport. Local authorities will set out their proposals for delivering integrated transport in the new 'local transport plans' (paras 4.73–4.77). Local authorities will need actively to involve a wide range of organisations—including the police—in drawing up these plans.

Southern Water

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will instruct Ofwat to review Southern Water's site selection procedures for sewage-treatment plants; and if he will make a statement. [51874]

Angela Eagle: No. The location of sewage treatment plants and other development by water companies is regulated through the development control system.

Mesothelioma

Ms Oona King: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will list the number of deaths from mesothelioma in each of the last 10 years by health authority, region and nationality. [51898]

Angela Eagle: The Health and Safety Executive maintains registers of deaths in Great Britain for which mesothelioma is mentioned on the death certificate. The number of mesothelioma deaths in each of the last ten years by region is shown in Table 1. The latest year for which data are available is 1996. Although information mesothelioma deaths is not available by health authority or nationality, an analysis by country district based on deaths in the period 1976 to 1991 was published in *Health and Safety Statistics 1995–1996*. More recent figures for the years 1993 to 1995 by country district were given in a reply to a question from my hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley, West and Penistone (Mr. Clapham) on 12 February 1998, *Official Report*, column *318*.

Table 1: Mesothelioma deaths in Great Britain by region

Year	North	Yorkshire and Humberside	North West	West Midlands	East Midlands	South West	East Anglia	South East not Greater London	Greater London	Wales	Scotland	Overseas	Total
1987	91	54	94	32	43	73	29	171	111	23	93	0	814
1988	109	69	97	34	43	80	20	190	105	14	107	4	872
1989	85	80	93	48	45	78	27	187	120	26	119	1	909
1990[1]	73	61	91	46	51	90	26	204	115	23	106	0	886
1991[1]	100	94	122	49	44	106	44	201	108	34	109	0	1,011
1992[1]	92	85	122	55	68	100	33	236	113	43	133	2	1,082
1993[1]	114	91	111	74	70	103	39	228	140	51	122	0	1,143
1994[1]	112	120	128	82	58	93	38	297	134	51	128	0	1,241
1995[1]	119	120	127	83	79	96	50	298	138	53	151	4	1,318
1996[1]	118	130	121	84	76	116	57	291	137	49	122	0	1,301

[1] Data for 1990–1996 remain provisional until the completeness of the register can be checked against details recorded by cancer registries

Combined Universities (Cornwall)

Ms Atherton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement on the co-operation between his Department and the Department for Education and Employment on the combined universities in Cornwall. [52206]

Mr. Caborn: I welcome the close cooperation between my Department and the Department for Education and Employment that has helped to foster the new joint approach to the development of higher education in Cornwall through the Combined Universities in Cornwall initiative.

Workplace Parking Charges

Mr. Denzil Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if local authorities will be able to levy the proposed new parking charge on workplace parking on employees of *(a)* Government departments, *(b)* non-departmental public bodies, *(c)* executive agencies, *(d)* NHS health authorities and trusts, *(e)* local authorities and *(f)* TECs. [52231]

Ms Glenda Jackson: In the White Paper "A New Deal for Transport: Better for Everyone" (Cm 3950), the Government said that it proposed to legislate to enable the parking charge to apply to all types of workplace parking. We shall consult in due course on any possible exemptions.

Road Construction and Maintenance

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how much his Department has spent or will spend on road construction and maintenance in each of the years from 1997–98 to 2005–06; and if he will break down the total for each year to account for (i) strategic motorway and trunk road construction, (ii) bypass schemes and (iii) motorway and trunk road maintenance. [51948]

Ms Glenda Jackson *[holding answer 23 July 1998]:* In 1997–98 the Highways Agency spent £1,457 million on national road expenditure of which some £528 million was spent on strategic motorway and trunk road construction, £157 million was spent on bypass schemes and £582 million was spent on maintenance. We plan to spend £1,349 million in 1998–99 of which £363 million is for strategic motorway and trunk road construction, £82 million is for bypass schemes and £651 million is for maintenance.

Future resources for expenditure on motorway and trunk roads are being determined in the light of the Chancellor's announcements of 14 July. We shall announce figures in due course.

Quarrying

Mr. Levitt: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what proposals his Department has to improve the environmental performance of the quarrying industry. [52051]

Mr. Caborn: The quarrying industry itself has an essential part to play in improving its environmental performance and demonstrating its commitment to sustainable development in its current operations and in framing proposals for new or extended quarries. It is for planning authorities to determine individual application, attaching appropriate conditions, within the framework of national planning policy and guidance issued by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions. The Department commissions research and issues guidance on a range of issues associated with minerals extraction eg noise, dust, traffic and blasting to ensure that new planning permissions are implemented and operated in accordance with the latest

standards. In addition, legislative procedures and guidance are in place to ensure the updating of old mineral permissions to modern standards.

Looking ahead, the Department is proposing further research in the environmental costs and benefits of quarrying in order to inform the decision to be taken by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer on whether or not to introduce an aggregates tax. This would benefit the environment by reducing the demand for new materials and encouraging the use of recycled materials and quarrying waste. The position on the tax remains exactly as I made clear at a meeting I had with the Quarry Products Association on 29 April and at their seminar on 12 May. There are two options. Either the Government proceed to introduce a tax—subject always to the discretion my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer has in matters of taxation—or they find that the industry collectively can offer a deliverable package of alternative measures which will secure equivalent or better environmental benefits when taken in the round.

Fair Rent Cases

Ms Buck: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will list the number of pre-1988 protected tenants whose bi-annual rent reviews fall due in *(a)* 1 January to 31 March 1999 and *(b)* 1 April to 30 June 1999. [52125]

Mr. Raynsford *[holding answer 24 July 1998]:* The Rent Officer Statistics published by my Department for the first and second quarters of 1997 suggest that the number of fair rent cases in England which would fall due for bi-annual review in the first 6 months of 1999, if the tenancies still exist, are as follows:

1 January 1999 to 31 March 1999—17,106 private regulated tenancies and 24,477 secure lettings by Registered Social Landlords

1 April 1999 to 30 June 1999—19,848 private regulated tenancies and 29,797 secure lettings by Registered Social Landlords

Garden Hedges

Mr. Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when he expects to reach a decision on legislation to deal with the height of leylandii trees and other high garden hedges in domestic gardens. [52256]

Angela Eagle: We are considering whether there is a need for Government intervention in relation to leylandii trees and other high garden hedges. We will announce our conclusions in due course.

Gas-powered Vehicles

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will change the formula for standard spending assessments to encourage local authorities to operate vehicles powered by LPG. [52323]

Ms Glenda Jackson: We are already providing financial assistance to local authorities to purchase vehicles operating on LPG through the Energy Saving Trust's Powershift programme. This refunds up to half of the additional capital cost of vehicles designed to run on alternative fuels such as LPG. Standard Spending Assessments are not a suitable mechanism for dealing with such a specific and detailed matter as this.

Area Cost Adjustments

Mr. Charles Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has to introduce further changes in area cost adjustments. [52336]

Ms Armstrong: We are examining with local government a wide range of possible changes in the way area cost adjustments are calculated. We expect to announce our conclusions early in December.

Standard Spending Assessments

Mr. Charles Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (1) what assessments he has made of the SSA per head of population allocated to Norfolk relative to other counties in the eastern region in each year since 1992–93; and if he will publish them; [52331]

(2) if he will list *(a)* the SSA per head of population and *(b)* the annual percentage increase in SSAs for each of the counties in the Eastern Region for each year since 1992–93. [52356]

Ms Armstrong: The information requested is set out in the tables.

Table 1: SSA per head of population in the Eastern Region 1992–93—1998–99

Local Authority	*1992–93*	*1993–94*	*1994–95*	*1995–96*	*1996–97*	*1997–98*	*1998–99*
Bedfordshire (old)	673	654	672	624	645	n/a	n/a
Bedfordshire (new)	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	631	669
Cambridgeshire (old)	605	568	589	558	586	588	n/a
Cambridgeshire (new)	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	573
Essex (old)	636	605	635	592	617	625	n/a
Essex (new)	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	653
Hertfordshire	624	594	623	610	635	641	681
Norfolk	594	557	581	547	572	592	612
Suffolk	580	553	578	554	583	592	616

n/a = not applicable

Notes:

1. "Old" refers to the area served by the County Council before Local Government Reorganisation; "New" refers to the area after reorganisation.

2. The SSA per head of population is calculated using the mid-year population used in that year's SSA calculations adjusted for boundary changes.

3. Some of the differences between years reflect the changing range of activities for which local authorities have been responsible.

Table 2: The annual percentage increase in SSAs for each county in the Eastern Region 1992–93—1998–99

Percentage

Local Authority	*1992–93 against Adjusted 1991–92*	*1993–94 against Adjusted 1992–93*	*1994–95 against Adjusted 1994–95*	*1995–96 against Adjusted 1995–96*	*1996–97 against Adjusted 1996–97*	*1997–98 against Adjusted 1996–97*	*1998–99 against Adjusted 1997–98*
Bedfordshire (old)	9.1	4.6	2.1	-0.5	2.3	n/a	n/a
Bedfordshire (new)	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	2.1	4.2
Cambridgeshire (old)	7.6	2.6	3.5	1.2	3.7	1.8	n/a
Cambridgeshire (new)	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	2.6
Essex (old)	8.1	3.8	3.9	-0.5	2.7	1.6	n/a
Essex (new)	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	4.0
Hertfordshire	8.4	1.9	4.1	1.6	2.5	1.9	3.8
Norfolk	6.7	2.3	2.5	-0.4	4.2	2.1	1.5
Suffolk	5.9	4.0	0.6	0.5	3.6	2.5	2.3

n/a = not applicable

Notes:

1. "Old" refers to the area served by the County Council before Local Government Reorganisation; "New" refers to the area after reorganisation.
2. Adjusted SSAs are SSAs for the previous year, adjusted to allow like-with-like comparisons. They have been adjusted for changes in function and for Local Government Reorganisation.

The information supplied has been provided for those counties within the area of the Government Office for the Eastern Region.

Mr. Charles Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will list those services provided by county councils which his Department denotes as incurring greater costs in sparsely populated areas. [52357]

Ms Armstrong: Standard Spending Assessments include a measure of sparsity of population in relation to all services provided by county councils, other than Personal Social Services, the Fire Service, and Highway Maintenance. In the case of Highway Maintenance, the formula takes account of the length of road which is the responsibility of the council, thereby reflecting the greater needs of rural authorities which have a greater length of road per head of population than urban authorities.

Mr. Charles Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will list in order of sparsity the counties of England and Wales using *(a)* the definition of settlement size used by the Scottish Office and *(b)* the definitions of sparsity and super-sparsity used in the SSA formula for England and Wales. [52354]

Ms Armstrong: A list based on the definition of sparsity and super-sparsity used in the SSA formula for England will be placed in the Library of the House. A list giving the information based on the definition of settlement size used by the Scottish Office will also be placed in the Library, if it proves practical to produce the figures.

Figures relating to Wales are a matter for the Secretary of State for Wales.

Mr. Charles Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has to ensure that the 1999–2000 SSA settlement does not penalise counties which historically have spent at relatively low levels. [52337]

Ms Armstrong: We shall ensure that the SSAs are as fair as can be achieved for all types of authorities.

Mr. Charles Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will list those indications of need in the standard spending assessment formula which measure *(a)* population characteristics indicating eligibility for benefits and *(b)* actual take-up of benefits. [52360]

Ms Armstrong: The following indicators in the Standard Spending Assessments formulae are either direct measures of actual take-up of benefits or are closely linked with take-up; children of income support claimants; elderly on income support; payments to those aged 18–64 on income support; all claimants on income support; claimants on attendance allowance; claimants of unemployment benefit; long-term claimants of unemployment benefit; young males claiming unemployment benefit; rent allowance payments; and housing benefit claimants.

The formulae include other measures of population characteristics which would tend to be associated with entitlement to benefits; but these measures are not defined in terms that indicate the numbers eligible for benefits.

A complete list of the indicators used in the Standard Spending assessment formulae is set out in the Local Government Finance Report (England) 1998–99, which the House approved on 5 February 1998.

Mr. Lansley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when his Department will publish the results of further research into the specific cost approach to the area cost adjustment within the standard spending assessment. [52405]

Ms Armstrong: The research which the Department commissioned on a specific cost approach to the area cost adjustment was completed in May. Its reports have been discussed in detail with local government representatives reflecting the range of views on area cost adjustment. We expect to announce decisions on the SSA formulae early in December.

Rural Transport

Mr. Charles Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what definition of rural sparsity is currently applied by his Department for rural transport purposes. [52355]

Ms Glenda Jackson: "Rural Sparsity" has not been defined by my Department for rural transport purposes. However, the £32.5 million Rural Bus Special Grant recently approved by Parliament, will be distributed in proportion to the rural population in each eligible local authority area. 'Rural population' is defined as those living outside built-up areas of 3,000 people or more as shown by the 1991 census.

Air Pollution

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (1) what assessment he has made of his Department's audit entitled, "Local Authority Progress on Implementing the Local Air Pollution Control Regimes"; and what action he proposes to take based on the report's findings; [52530]

(2) what assessment he has made of his Department's audit entitled, "Remedying the failures of local air pollution"; and if he will make a statement. [52531]

Angela Eagle: My Department commissioned an independent audit of the Local Air Pollution Control regime earlier this year and a preliminary assessment has been made of the auditors' report: "Local Authority Progress on Implementing the Local Air Pollution Control Regime". The auditors were asked to take into account a report by the Environmental Industries Commission "Remedying the Failures of Local Air Pollution Control".

Our preliminary assessment was that the report showed that considerable progress had been made in reducing air pollution from the wide range of regulated sources, but that there were areas where improvements were needed. The report's 30 recommendations were addressed variously to the Government, local authorities and local authority organisations, and relevant professional bodies.

A detailed joint response and action plan covering all the recommendations is now being prepared.

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make it his policy that the issues of Antarctic Ocean pollution and sanctions against heavy polluters of the atmosphere are put on the Buenos Aires Summit agenda; and if he will make a statement. [52489]

Angela Eagle: The Buenos Aires Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Climate Change will develop the rules and procedures for implementation of the Protocol to reduce greenhouse gases which was adopted at Kyoto. As such it will not cover pollution of the oceans or deal with other forms of atmospheric pollution.

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what action he plans to take to ensure that local authorities publish the reasons for the non-enforcement of pollution control standards at particular industrial sites. [52532]

Angela Eagle: This is an issue we will be considering carefully when implementing EU Directive 96/61/EC concerning integrated pollution prevention and control.

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how the Government intend to achieve a 20 per cent. reduction in carbon dioxide emissions. [52491]

Angela Eagle: We aim to issue a consultation paper this summer on policy options to deliver our legally binding commitment from Kyoto to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 12.5 per cent. over the period 2008 to 2012, and move towards our domestic aim of a 20 per cent. reduction in carbon dioxide emissions by 2010. We will be building on the outcome of other reviews and looking at the scope for savings from improved energy efficiency by business and in the home; lower transport emissions; and an increase in the electricity generated from renewables and combined heat and power.

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what estimate he has made of the role of Nuclear Energy in the proposed reduction of carbon dioxide emissions. [52488]

Angela Eagle: Nuclear power currently contributes significantly to United Kingdom electricity supply needs and also plays an important part in helping the UK to meet its commitments on reducing greenhouse gas emissions. Provided the nuclear industry can maintain high standards of safety and environmental protection, the Government believe that existing nuclear power stations should continue to make this important contribution.

Figures published in the UK's second national communication on climate change, showed that nuclear power generation was projected to lead to savings in carbon emissions of about 3 million tonnes per year by 2000. The Department of Trade and Industry is working on a new set of energy and carbon dioxide emission projections which the Government hope to publish later this year.

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what are the implications of Her Majesty's Government's policy on the future of the coal mining industry for future emissions of carbon dioxide; and if he will make a statement. [52486]

Angela Eagle: The preliminary conclusions of the Government's Review of Energy Sources for Power Generation reaffirm the Government's determination to meet their climate change targets and state that the proposals are consistent with a decline in carbon emissions from the electricity generating industry.

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make it his policy to ensure at the forthcoming Buenos Aires summit the implementation of the measures agreed on carbon dioxide production at the Kyoto Summit in 1997; and if he will make a statement. [52490]

Angela Eagle: The Kyoto Protocol established legally-binding targets for developed countries requiring an overall reduction in their emissions of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases to 5.2 per cent. below 1990 levels in the period 2008 to 2012: but it left a number of matters to be further developed. It is indeed my right hon. Friend's policy to ensure that the Beunos Aires Conference in November makes substantive progress on these matters, with a view to maintaining the momentum of Kyoto and achieving early entry into force and implementation of the Protocol.

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what proportion of local authorities do not have an inspection policy or do

not routinely inspect polluting factories in connection with air pollution control laws; and what measures he proposes to improve enforcement of air pollution control laws by local authorities. [52535]

Angela Eagle: My Department issued guidance to local authorities in 1995 on types and frequency of inspection under the Local Air Pollution Control regime. Information is not obtained centrally on whether local authorities have an inspection policy, but data held by my Department show that 9,400 routine/programmed inspections were carried out by local authorities in 1996–97 in relation to this regime. The recent Local Air Pollution Control audit raised concerns about local authority inspection and action to address this and to improve enforcement of the Local Air Pollution Control system is being drawn up in response to the auditor's report.

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has to publish local authorities' enforcement policies with regard to the air pollution control laws. [52533]

Angela Eagle: Guidance issued in 1994 by the former Association of District Councils recommended that local authorities produce and publish an enforcement policy on air pollution control. My Department is in discussion with the Local Government Association concerning the re-issue of that guidance.

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what proportion of local authority authorisations in respect of air pollution control laws have not been reviewed to take account of new pollution concerns or technologies. [52534]

Angela Eagle: The finding of the recent audit of the Local Air Pollution Control regime was that, from the sample of processes examined, upgrading had been completed in 90 per cent. of the authorisations by the relevant deadline contained in statutory guidance.

Rural Bus Challenge

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (1) what plans he has to consult rural bus customers about the Rural Bus Challenge; and if he will make a statement; [52484]

(2) if he will undertake to consult parish councils on the Rural Bus Challenge; and if he will make a statement. [52485]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The criteria and arrangements for the rural bus challenge have been the subject of recent consultation with the Local Government Association and other organisations. We will shortly be issuing guidance to local authorities which will suggest consultation with appropriate individuals and bodies, which could include parish councils, in preparing bids for the challenge competition.

Motor Cycle Licences

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has to amend current arrangements for granting provisional motor cycle licences within a two year validity period. [52829]

Ms Glenda Jackson: My Department has today issued a Consultation Paper about a range of possible options for amending the current two year rule. A copy of the paper has been placed in the House Library.

Sites of Special Scientific Interest

Mr. Lansley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what estimate he has made of the annual cost of protecting sites of special scientific interest at risk from water abstraction, water pollution and groundwater contamination. [52403]

Angela Eagle: In its May 1998 submission to the Government entitled *A Price Worth Paying* the Environment Agency, in consultation with English Nature and the Countryside Council of Wales, identified sites of special scientific interest at risk due to water companies' abstractions and discharges. The cost of dealing with these sites, as estimated by the water companies, was given in the Director General of Water Services' open letter to the Secretaries of State of 30 April 1998. We shall take the costs into account together with the Agency's advice in determining the guidance we give the Director General later this summer on the environmental obligations which water companies will be expected to meet through the Periodic Review of water prices. Copies of *A Price Worth Paying* and the Director General's open letter are in the Library of the House.

Planning Inquiries

Mr. Lansley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what target he sets for the length of time he takes to reach a decision after receipt of an inspector's report on a planning inquiry. [52398]

Mr. Raynsford: Where the Secretary of State takes the decision on appeals, he aims to decide 80 per cent. of cases within eight weeks of receiving the Inspector's report. This is stated in paragraph 59 of Planning Policy Guidance Note 1, 'General Policy and Principles'. In those cases where the Secretary of State calls in applications for planning permission, he aims to issue 80 per cent. of decisions within 13 weeks of receipt of the Inspector's report.

Concessionary Fares (Pensioners)

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what consultations he will conduct with district and parish councils about the implementation of his proposals for nation-wide concessionary fares for pensioners; and if he will make a statement. [52648]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The matter will be considered when the necessary primary legislation is being prepared.

Water Extraction

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what discussions he has had with representatives of the agricultural industries about his proposals for water extraction; and if he will make a statement. [52645]

Angela Eagle: The Government published a consultation paper on the Review of the Water Abstraction Licensing System in England and Wales on 19 June. The paper takes account of the wide range of submissions we received, including contributions from all the major bodies with an interest in agricultural issues. We are inviting responses to the detailed proposals contained in the consultation paper by 7 September. Representatives of the National Farmers Union discussed the Review when they met my right hon. Friend the Minister for the Environment on 2 July.

Building Regulations (Disabled Access)

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what steps he intends to take to ensure an effective transfer to the application to new dwellings of Part M of the Building Regulations (access and facilities for disabled people). [52764]

Mr. Raynsford: I am today issuing a consultation paper on the transitional arrangements for the Building Regulations amendments which I announced in March this year. These amendments will extend access requirements to new houses from October 1999.

I am proposing that the transitional provisions should ensure that new buildings where construction work starts on or after the coming into force date of the regulations will in general be subject to the new Part M requirements. However, new buildings begun after the coming into force date in accordance with full plans deposited with a local authority at least two months before that date, or in accordance with plans covered by an approved inspector's plans certificate accepted by a local authority before the coming into force date, will not have to comply with the new requirements.

In this way the transitional provisions will distinguish between cases where detailed design work has been completed and submitted to the relevant building control body before the coming into effect of the regulations, and other cases. This will prevent developers from giving premature building control notices simply in order to gain exemption from the new requirements for houses that have not been designed and could not be built until long after the coming into force date.

The Department's consultation letter sets Wednesday 9 September as the deadline for receipt of responses. After assessing the responses, and subject to the outcome of the separate process of notifying the technical changes to the European Commission, I intend to make and publish the new regulations, and a revised Approved Document, in October.

Copies of the consultation letter are being placed in the Library.

Disability Discrimination Act

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has to extend the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 to cover (i) domestic and (ii) international air travel. [52461]

Ms Glenda Jackson: Our priority is to implement the provisions of Part V of the Act dealing with access to trains and trams, buses and coaches and to licensed taxis. These modes are fundamentally important to day to day mobility for many disabled people.

We will be considering whether it is appropriate to apply any of the requirements of the Act to air travel and other modes of transport not currently included.

Genetically Modified Organisms

Mr. Paice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 21 July 1998, *Official Report*, column *467*, if he intends to seek further advice on the legality of already approved trials of genetically modified crops. [52475]

Mr. Meacher: My Department is considering whether there are any implications for consents for trials of genetically modified crops already issued under Part VI of the Environmental Protection Act 1990 as a result of the recent judgment in the case of R v the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, *ex parte* Watson.

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what measures and precautions were taken to avoid genetic pollution through cross-pollination to adjacent crops when the ACRE committee was approving licences of all the GMO trial plots that are currently licensed. [52494]

Angela Eagle: Each application for consent to release GM plants for experimental trials must provide the information set out in the schedule to the Genetically Modified Organisms (Deliberate Release) Regulations 1995 and includes a detailed environmental risk assessment. This must address the potential for cross-pollination of adjacent crops and sexually compatible flora in the vicinity of the trial site. On the basis of this risk assessment the applicant must state what risk management procedures will be implemented to minimise cross-pollination. Examples of these procedures include specific isolation distances, borders of non-GM plants to act pollen traps and, in some cases, removing the flowers of the GM plants.

The Advisory Committee on Releases to the Environment reviews applications for release consent on a case by case basis to determine whether the proposed management procedures are sufficient. In each case where the Committee judge that the management procedures are inadequate they give advice on the additional precautions to be taken. These additional measures are then made on condition of the consent.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Civil Servants

Mr. Garnier: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many women are employed in the Lord Chancellor's Department at each Civil Service grade. [52642]

Mr. Hoon: For the Lord Chancellor's Department, including the Court Service and the Public Trust Office, the information is set out in the table.

Grade	*Number*
Senior Civil Service	14
Grade 6	18
Grade 7	101
SEO	128
HEO	541
EO	1,429
AO	2,980
AA	201
Support Grade	1,275
Total	6,687

Judicial Appointments

Mr. Garnier: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many women magistrates have been appointed since 1 May 1997. [52654]

Mr. Hoon: Of the 1,664 magisterial appointments made in the period between 1 May 1997 and 30 June 1998, 851 were women.

Mr. Garnier: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many judicial appointments there have been since 1 May 1997 to *(a)* the Judicial Committee of the House of Lords of Lords of Appeal in Ordinary, *(b)* the Court of Appeal, *(c)* the High Court, *(d)* the County or Crown Court Bench, *(e)* the Queen's Bench Mastership, *(f)* the Chancery Division Mastership and *(g)* the District Judiciary. [52643]

Mr. Hoon: The table gives the numbers of judicial appointments in the categories mentioned since 1 May 1997:

Judicial appointments	*Number*
Lords of Appeal in Ordinary	1
Lords Justices of Appeal	5
High Court Judges	9
Circuit Judges	39
Masters of the Queen's Bench Division	0
Masters of the Chancery Division	3
District Judges (excluding District Judges of the Family Division)	37

Circuit Judges may sit in the county courts, the Crown Court or both. It is not therefore possible to provide separate figures.

Mr. Garnier: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many women have been appointed to the County and Crown Court bench since 1 May 1997. [52653]

Mr. Hoon: Eight women have been appointed as Circuit Judges since 1 May 1997.

Circuit Judges may sit in the county courts, the Crown Court or both. It is not therefore possible to provide separate figures.

Magistrates' Courts (Closures)

Mr. David Taylor: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many magistrates' courthouses were closed in each year between 31 March 1994 and 31 March 1998. [51622]

Mr. Hoon: The Lord Chancellor's Department did not collect information on the number of magistrates' courthouses prior to October 1995. The number of courthouses in use as reported by magistrates' courts was 525 in October 1995, 492 in April 1997 and 472 in April 1998.

TREASURY

Correspondence

Mr. Ian Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans his Department has to correspond electronically with *(a)* hon. Members and *(b)* members of the public. [49818]

Mrs. Liddell *[holding answer 13 July 1998]:* HM Treasury is already able to correspond electronically with members of the public, with Government and non-Government organisations and with hon. Members, through its website on www.hm-treasury.gov.uk. All Treasury officials have their own e-mail addresses for corresponding over the Internet. The Department is looking carefully at ways to develop its use of electronic communication. I also refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster on 17 July 1998, *Official Report*, column *315*.

Petroleum Products (Smuggling)

Mr. Moss: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what resources are being deployed by Customs and Excise to counter the illegal importation of petroleum products into Northern Ireland. [51902]

Mr. Geoffrey Robinson: Customs and Excise are currently deploying local anti-smuggling, intelligence, antifraud VAT audit staff, as well as national investigation officers, to tackle the problem of cross-border smuggling of duty paid fuel into Northern Ireland for resale. Customs are also working closely with other authorities, including the Royal Ulster Constabulary.

£2 Coin

Mr. Gill: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the significance of the symbol on the obverse of the new £2 coin; and for what reasons the phrase 'standing on the shoulders of giants' appears on the rim of the coin. [52434]

Mrs. Liddell: The design on the obverse of the new £2 coin traces the progress of technological development, with concentric circles representing the Iron Age, the Industrial Revolution, the Electronic Age and the Internet. The "circular" theme was inspired by the coin's two-colour appearance.

The inscription "Standing on the Shoulders of Giants" on the coin's milled edge comes from a letter written by Isaac Newton in which he acknowledged how much he

owed to the work of others. It was chosen from several suggestions as best encapsulating how the progress of the present has only been possible because of the achievements of the past.

Travel Companies

Mr. Ivan Henderson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will ensure that *(a)* ferry companies, *(b)* scheduled and charter airlines and *(c)* hovercraft operators will be fully consulted before final decisions are agreed between United Kingdom and Commission officials on the successor regime for duty and tax-paid sales after 30 June 1999; and when the consultation process will begin. [52449]

Mr. Geoffrey Robinson: Customs and Excise have been in discussion with UK trade interests on the possible nature of the successor regime and will continue to consult with interested parties on the implementation of the regime. Any interested persons who want to make representations should address them direct to Customs and Excise:

HM Customs and Excise,
Excise Policy Group Branch 4,
Third Floor, Ralli Quays West,
3 Stanley Street,
Salford M60 9LA

High Technology Companies

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 22 December 1997, *Official Report*, column *478*, what recommendations have been made by the group established to examine the financing of high technology companies; and if he will make a statement. [52298]

Mr. Geoffrey Robinson: I am grateful to the Working Group on the Financing of High Technology Businesses for their work in examining the financing issues faced by this important sector of the economy. The Government are now considering how to take this work forward.

Exchange Rate

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the effect of the current sterling exchange rate on *(a)* employment and *(b)* manufacturing in the United Kingdom. [52594]

Mrs. Liddell: The economic effects of the exchange rate are difficult to isolate without assumptions about factors such as the strength of world trade growth and domestic demand. A full assessment of the economic situation including a forecast was given in the FSBR.

Alcohol and Tobacco Smuggling

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the estimated cost to the Exchequer of the smuggling of drink and tobacco from the mainland of Europe in the last year for which figures are available. [52290]

Mr. Geoffrey Robinson: The table sets out Customs' most recent estimate of revenue losses (duty and VAT) to the Exchequer through cross-channel smuggling of alcoholic drinks and tobacco products in calendar year 1997.

Revenue lost to the Exchequer from smuggling in 1997

£ million

Product type	*Excise duty*	*VAT*	*Total revenue lost*
Beer	80	40	120
Wine	35	15	50
Spirits	20	5	25
Total alcohol	135	65	195
Hand-rolling tobacco	430	110	540
Cigarettes and other tobacco products	120	25	145
Total tobacco	550	135	690
Total	685	200	885

Notes:

Figures have been independently rounded to £5 million. Components may not therefore sum to the totals given

Figures are given for the mid-point of the range of possible substitution effects. Customs assumes that 70–80 per cent. of smuggled alcohol (100 per cent. for tobacco products) substitutes for similar purchases in the UK

There are no official estimates for the revenue lost through smuggling in freight consignments or by air passengers, and the estimates given do not include any amounts for these types of supply.

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what has been the impact on UK wholesalers of the smuggling of *(a)* alcohol and *(b)* tobacco from the European mainland. [52293]

Mr. Geoffrey Robinson: I have no information about the consequences of alcohol and tobacco smuggling relating to UK wholesalers in particular. However, the Government are very much aware of the illegal trade in alcohol and tobacco goods and its effect on the legitimate trade. In his July Budget last year my right hon. Friend the Chancellor announced a review to examine the effects of alcohol and tobacco fraud, smuggling and cross-border shopping. The Government will announce the outcome of the review shortly.

Economic Indicators

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assumptions about Non-Accelerating Inflation Rate of Unemployment are incorporated in *(a)* the Treasury and *(b)* the Bank of England model of the economy; and how they have been changed in the last 10 years. [52156]

Mrs. Liddell: The assumptions underlying the determination of the non-accelerating rate of unemployment in the Treasury model are set out in the "The New Treasury Model" by Chan, A., Savage, D., and Whittaker, R., (Government Economic Service Working Paper no. 128), a copy of which is available in the Library of the House. The underlying assumptions have changed little in recent years. The Bank of England model is the responsibility of Bank officials.

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assumptions about the relative shares of GDP going to *(a)* wages and *(b)* profits are incorporated into the Treasury model of the economy; what are the shares presently allocated; and how they have changed over the last 10 years. [52155]

Mrs. Liddell: The assumptions in the Treasury model yield approximately constant shares of GDP going to wages and profits in the long run. The long run shares will largely reflect historical averages.

Housing

Mr. Shaw: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to the answer of 21 July 1998, *Official Report*, column *463*, from the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, if he will estimate the loss of revenue incurred by reducing VAT on the refurbishment of 415,000 dwellings to 5 per cent. [52157]

Mr. Geoffrey Robinson: The average cost of bringing an empty dwelling into good order is £6,500. This figure was given to my hon. Friend in the answer of the 21 July 1998, *Official Report*, column *463*, by the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions. The revenue cost of reducing the rate of VAT from 17.5 per cent. to 5 per cent. on refurbishment costing £6,500 on each of 415,000 dwellings would be approximately £300 million.

European Union

Dr. Vis: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what has been the cost of the United Kingdom's net contribution to the EU since British accession. [52232]

Mrs. Liddell: The total of the United Kingdom's net contributions to the EC Budget for the period 1973–74 to 1996–97 is £28.7 billion. The latest estimate of outturn for the financial year 1997–98 is £2.6 billion.

Insurance Brokers Registration Council

Mr. Caplin: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 7 April 1998, *Official Report*, columns *151–52*, what are the Government's plans for the Insurance Brokers' Registration Council. [53230]

Mrs. Liddell: Following my announcement on 7 April, the Treasury has consulted the insurance industry and its customers on insurance intermediary regulation and on the future of the Insurance Brokers Registration Council (IBRC). Most responses identified weaknesses in the present arrangements for general insurance intermediaries. The existing hybrid framework, using the Insurance Brokers (Registration) Act 1977 supplemented by the Association of British Insurers' General Business Code of Practice, was regarded as incomplete and outdated.

Set up under the 1977 Act, the Insurance Brokers Registration Council regulates the use of the title 'insurance broker' and maintains professional standards among those intermediaries who use it. While there was recognition that the Council had provided a valuable service, there was a consensus that circumstances have changed in such a way as to bring its existence in its current form into question. I have therefore decided that proposed legislation to reform the financial services regulatory structure should include power to repeal the Insurance Brokers (Registration) Act 1977. Repealing the 1977 Act will end the statutory basis of the Council.

I now look to the industry itself to put the desired standards on a soundly established footing from which they will command widespread support. The industry proposals for voluntary standards, initially made in response to the recent consultation, are at an early stage. They now require detailed development. The Treasury would support further consolidation of consensus support from insurers, from insurance brokers and other intermediaries, and from commercial and personal customers. They now need to build on the IBRC's work to generate constructive ideas for a modern flexible body to set standards for the insurance market and to meet the challenges it will face in the future.

Survey Holidays

Ms Lawrence: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what progress is being made by departments implementing survey holidays for small businesses. [53231]

Mrs. Liddell: The Office for National Statistics (ONS) introduced a guarantee in 1997 to firms employing fewer than ten people that, once included in a statistical survey, a business will not have to complete another ONS statistical form for a further three years. The Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions has this year introduced a similar guarantee in respect of transport surveys. An inter-departmental report, which looks at how far the idea of survey holidays could be extended across government departments, has been produced in response to recommendations of the 1996 Osmotherly report "Statistical Surveys, Easing the Burden on Business". A copy of the report on survey holidays and an action plan agreed by department is available in the Library of the House.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Prisoners

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the average prison population per 1,000 population in England and Wales *(a)* in each of the last five years and *(b)* on the last date for which figures are available. [51870]

Ms Quin: The information requested is given in the table. The rate quoted for 1998 is based on the prison population at 30 June—the most recent date for which information is available.

Average prison population per 1,000 population in England and Wales, 1993 to 1998

Year	*Prisoners per 1,000 population*[1]
1993	0.87
1994	0.95
1995	0.99
1996	1.06
1997	1.17
1998[2]	1.25

[1] Includes prisoners held in police cells

[2] Based on the prison population at 30 June 1998

Defamation

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps he will take to eliminate the criminalisation of defamation throughout Europe. [51933]

Mr. Michael: We are doubtful whether such steps are necessary. Freedom of expression is one of the rights guaranteed under the European Convention on Human Rights which all parties to the Convention are bound to respect. We are not aware of any Council of Europe proposals to decriminalise defamation.

Departmental Vehicles

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list for *(a)* his Department and *(b)* bodies listed in the National Asset Register, how many vehicles are currently (i) owned and (ii) leased; if he will indicate their (A) fuel types and (B) engine cubic capacities; and how many vehicles are expected to fall due for replacement in each of the years (1) 1998–99, (2) 1999–2000 and (3) 2000–01. [49231]

Ms Quin *[holding answer 6 July 1998]:* The information requested is given in the tables.

Vehicles owned or leased by the prison service
Cars, vans, minibuses and heavygoods vehicles

Engine c.c.	Fuel type	Owned	Leased	Replacement 1998–99	1999–00	2000–01
1600	petrol	22	8	19	6	4
2000	petrol	15	15	10	7	5
2500	petrol	19	—	11	2	—
3000	petrol	8	—	7	1	—
1800	diesel	37	9	10	8	24
2000	diesel	120	24	28	57	37
2500	diesel	335	3	95	59	50
6000	diesel	129	4	49	11	12
8000	diesel	4	—	2	1	1
10000	diesel	4	—	2	1	0

Vehicles owned or leased by the Home Office
(excluding Prison Service) Cars and vans

Engine c.c.	Fuel type	Owned	Leased	Due replacement 1998–99	1999–00	2000–01
1600	petrol	128	16	108	3	22
2000	petrol	176	1	105	21	42
2500	petrol	53	—	33	7	4
1600	diesel	37	—	4	2	—
2000	diesel	111	—	50	9	25
2500	diesel	23	4	11	5	5

Type and replacement table, H.M. Prison Service Cars, vans, minibus and heavy goods vehicles

Engine c.c.	Fuel type	Owned	Leased	Due replacement 1998–99	1999–00	2000–01
1600	petrol	22	8	19	6	4
2000	petrol	15	15	10	7	5
2500	petrol	19	—	11	2	—
3000	petrol	8	—	7	1	—
1800	diesel	37	9	10	8	24
2000	diesel	120	24	28	57	37
2500	diesel	335	3	95	59	50
6000	diesel	129	4	49	11	12
8000	diesel	4	—	2	1	1
10000	diesel	4	—	2	1	0

Type and replacement table, the Home Office
Cars and vans

Engine c.c.	Fuel type	Owned	Leased	Due replacement 1998–99	1999–00	2000–01
1600	petrol	128	16	108	3	22
2000	petrol	176	1	105	21	42
2500	petrol	53	—	33	7	4
1600	diesel	37	—	4	2	—
2000	diesel	111	—	50	9	25
2500	diesel	23	4	11	5	5

Prisons (Special Managerial Attention)

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prisons are currently under special managerial attention; in each case, how long have such arrangements been in place and if he will give details of the arrangements; and if he will make a statement. [50593]

Ms Quin: Formal arrangements to support establishments requiring special managerial attention were established in August 1997 in a circular issued to governors by the Director General of the Prison Service. Eleven establishments are currently assessed as requiring special managerial attention. These are listed in the table.

The nature of the special managerial arrangements vary according to the circumstances of each establishment. The decision to add or remove an establishment from the list of those requiring closer managerial attention is taken by the Director General, in discussion with the relevant area manager and operational director, and taking into account any view expressed by Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Prisons. Progress is routinely reviewed by the Prisons Board. In each case, an action plan is formulated to address identified difficulties.

Prison establishments under special managerial attention

Establishment	Date formally registered if after August 1997
Brockhill	(August 1997—after issue of circular)
Bullwood Hall	
Chelmsford	
Glen Parva	
Holloway	
Hindley	
Low Newton	
Parc	(April 1998)
Risley	
Wellingborough	
Wormwood Scrubs	(April 1998)

Doncaster Council

Mr. Allan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what are the estimated costs to date of the police investigation into alleged corruption at Doncaster Metropolitan Borough Council. [52339]

Mr. Michael: I understand from South Yorkshire Police that the estimated cost of the investigation to date is £161,417, including £42,030 in accommodation and miscellaneous services costs.

Prison Statistics

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prisoners are currently serving a prison sentence of over five years having been charged with *(a)* violent and *(b)* non-violent offences. [52049]

Ms Quin: The available breakdown, by type of offence, of those prisoners serving sentences of over five years in prisons in England and Wales, is given in the table.

Number[1] of sentenced prisoners serving sentences of over five years,by type of offence England and Wales—30 June 1998

Number of persons

All establishments offence	*Number serving sentences of over five years*
Offences with immediate custodial sentence	14,672
Violence against the person	5,309
Murder	3,096
Other homicide and attempted homicide	856
Wounding	995
Assaults	9
Cruelty to children	9
Other offences of violence against the person	344
Sexual Offences	2,537
Buggery and indecency between males	261
Rape	1,831
Gross indecency with children	125
Other sexual offences	320
Burglary	571
Robbery	2,613
Theft and Handling	109
Taking and driving away	4
Other thefts	72
Handling stolen goods	33
Fraud and Forgery	70
Fraud	64
Forgery	6
Drug Offences	2,650
Other Offences	515
Arson	221
Criminal damage	12
Motoring offences	8
Drunkenness	—
Blackmail	28
Kidnapping	86
Affray	2
Violent disorder	7
Perjury, libel, pervert course of justice	9
Threat/disorderly behaviour	5
Breach of court order	4
Other	133
Offence not recorded	298

[1] Provisional figures

Crime (Care Homes)

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 20 July 1998, *Official Report*, columns *383–84*, concerning the British Crime Survey, what timescale has been set for the feasibility study being undertaken by the Office for National Statistics. [52278]

Mr. Michael: A feasibility study into a possible survey of communal establishments is being undertaken by the Social Survey Division of the Office for National Statistics (ONS). A cross-departmental steering group has been set up to address the structure and content of the survey. A final report of the findings from the consultation process will be presented by ONS to the steering group in autumn of this year. If the report is endorsed by the steering group, ONS will consult with departments about a possible funding partnership. At this point, the Home Office will consider whether the survey can viably cover victimisation and whether it justifies funding relative to other research priorities. If it is decided to proceed, the timing of the initial survey will then be agreed by the steering group and ONS.

Police Manpower (West Midlands)

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will assess the factors underlying the differences between the number of police officers per 1,000 population in Birmingham and Coventry. [52109]

Mr. Michael: I understand from the Chief Constable that there are 2.67 officers per 1,000 population in Birmingham and 2.51 officers per 1,000 population in Coventry. It is an operational matter for the Chief Constable to decide how to allocate officers to the territorial divisions of the West Midlands Police. Population would be only one of a number of factors which the Chief Constable would consider when decisions are taken about the deployment of resources.

Asylum Seekers

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps he is taking to facilitate the further use of *(a)* computers and *(b)* other forms of information technology in the processing of asylum claims. [52061]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to him on 28 April 1998, *Official Report*, columns *95–96*, and to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Sheffield, Hallam (Mr. Allan), on 23 July 1998, *Official Report*, column *620*.

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many and what proportion of asylum seekers made in-country applications for asylum in each of the last 10 years. [52079]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The information requested is given in the table.

Applications[1] received for asylum in the United Kingdom, excluding dependants, in-country 1988 to 1997

Principal applicants

Year	*Number of in-country asylum applications*	*Per cent. of total asylum applications*
1988	3,140	79
1989	5,440	47
1990	17,200	66
1991	35,815	80
1992	16,930	69
1993	15,050	67

Applications[1] received for asylum in the United Kingdom, excluding dependants, in-country 1988 to 1997

Principal applicants

Year	*Number of in-country asylum applications*	*Per cent. of total asylum applications*
1994	22,600	69
1995	29,555	67
1996[2]	17,205	58
1997	15,915	49

[1] Figures rounded to the nearest 5 with the exception of 1988

[2] Included revisions to the number of in-country applications lodged between September and December 1996

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he has introduced revised targets for the length of time taken to complete different stages in the asylum process following the Comprehensive Spending Review; [52082]

(2) what financial support he proposes to make available to asylum applicants who *(a)* make an in country application for asylum and *(b)* appeal against a negative asylum decision; and at what rate of payment; [52066]

(3) what plans he has to change the rights of appeal for asylum seekers who have come through *(a)* EU member states, *(b)* the USA, *(c)* Switzerland and *(d)* Norway; [52065]

(4) what plans he has to introduce changes in the processing of asylum claims and the rights of appeal of asylum applicants from the White List countries; [52084]

(5) if additional benefits will be made available to asylum seekers presently in receipt of benefit as a result of the Comprehensive Spending Review; [52086]

(6) if he will give a breakdown of the support costs for asylum seekers transferred to his Department under the Comprehensive Spending Review; [52087]

(7) what plans he has to change the eligibility of in-country asylum applicants for housing. [52085]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: These and other matters are addressed in the White Paper "Fairer, Faster and Firmer—a modern approach to Immigration and Asylum" (Cm 4018) which is to be published today.

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many (i) asylum caseworkers and (ii) special adjudicators are currently employed in the processing of asylum claims and the determination of asylum appeals; and what assessment he has made of the impact of the Comprehensive Spending Review on these numbers. [52083]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: On 1 June 1998, there were 486 officers in the Asylum Directorate processing asylum claims. There are currently 37 full-time and 118 part-time special adjudicators determining asylum appeals. The impact of the Comprehensive Spending Review on staff numbers will be known when more detailed plans have been drawn up.

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what is the average length of time currently taken to determine an appeal against an asylum refusal; [52093]

(2) how many asylum applicants have appealed against a negative asylum decision in each of the last five years; and what proportion of asylum applicants receiving a negative decision appealed. [52081]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The information requested regarding appeals against refusal of asylum, 1994 to 1997, is given in the table. I regret that equivalent information for years prior to 1994 is not available.

On average, asylum appeals to the Adjudicator of the Immigration Appellate Authority are taking twelve and a half months to reach a determination.

Appeals against refusal of asylum received by the Home Office, 1994 to 1997

Principal appellants

Year of appeal	*Appeals received by the Hone Office*	*The proportion of those refused asylum lodging an appeal[1] (per cent.)*
1997	20,950	83
1996	22,985	78
1995	14,035	73
1994	10,580	78

[1] Reflects the proportion of asylum decisions appealed following refusal after substantive consideration or on the grounds that the applicant had arrived from a safe third country

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the average length of time taken to determine an asylum application from *(a)* a port of entry asylum applicant and *(b)* an in-country asylum applicant, according to the most recent figures available. [52153]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The information requested in given in the table.

Initial decisions on applications received for asylum in the United Kingdom, excluding dependants

Principal Applicants

Location of application	*Average time to decision[1]*
Pre 1993 Act	
In-Country	57 months
Port	57 months
Post 1993 Act	
In-Country	15 months
Port	12 months

[1] Estimated from available data

Holloway Remand Pilot Scheme

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the Holloway remand pilot scheme for women prisoners. [52639]

Ms Quin: The Holloway remand scheme is not run by the Prison Service. It is run by the independent voluntary organisation, Women in Prison, which is undertaking an evaluation of the scheme's effectiveness.

Prisoners (Mandatory Drug Testing)

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the average cost per prisoner of mandatory drug testing; and what impact the programme has had on expenditure on the drug rehabilitation service. [52637]

Mr. George Howarth: In 1997–98, approximately £1.5 million was spent on the processing of mandatory drug tests (MDTs). The precise staffing costs involved in the taking of samples for analysis could be obtained only at disproportionate cost, but we estimate that around £4.5 million is spent annually on this. Based on an average prisoner population through the year of 62,000, the average cost per prisoner of mandatory drug testing through the 1997–98 year is therefore around £96.

The cost of funding the mandatory drug testing programme has had no impact on expenditure on the drug rehabilitation service. While both are important parts of the overall Prison Service Drug Strategy, the costs of MDT and of the provision of treatment services have been met through separate budgeting arrangements.

Women's Prisons

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will ensure that the induction processes for new prisoners in women's prisons distinguishes first offenders from repeat offenders. [52638]

Ms Quin: The induction arrangements for women prisoners are tailored to their individual needs, taking account of any available relevant information, including previous criminal history.

Prisoners (Counselling)

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the use of ex-drug addicts and ex-prisoners in Downview, Pentonville and Coldingley for counselling prisoners; and what plans he has to extend the system to women's prisons. [52659]

Ms Quin: Work with prisoners addicted to drugs and/or alcohol is currently being undertaken by outside agencies in a number of prisons. In the prisons mentioned, treatment is carried out by the Rehabilitation for Addicted Prisoners trust (RAPt), which has a policy of seeking to employ staff with personal experience of addiction. In many cases, these individuals have also experienced custody. RAPt believes that such individuals are particularly able to understand and motivate imprisoned addicts towards treatment. All of the counselling staff are fully trained counsellors and have to adhere to stringent professional guidelines. It is also a condition of their employment that they do not use illegal drugs or alcohol whilst working for RAPt, and have to submit themselves to security checks by the Prison Service.

The RAPt programmes at Coldingley and Downview have recently been evaluated by independent consultants employed by the Prison Service, and that evaluation indicated that the programmes were among the most effective currently operating in the British prison system.

The Prison Service is considering the use of peer support in its development of programmes for female prisoners.

Prisons (Neuroleptic Drugs)

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department for what reasons his Department does not collect the totals of neuroleptic drugs used in prisons; and if he will make a statement. [52241]

Ms Quin: Pharmaceuticals are purchased locally and records about drugs prescribed are also kept within Prison Service establishments using a variety of systems. This makes it difficult to aggregate the information about total usage of neuroleptic or other drugs in a meaningful way.

The Prison Service, in deciding on the range of management information about health care activity that is collected from prisons, tries to strike a balance between the costs involved, including the administrative burden on prison staff, and the possible benefits. However, increasing use of information technology offers the opportunity to broaden the range of statistics that can be readily available and the matter is kept under review.

Women Prisoners (Deaths)

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* suicides and *(b)* deaths from other causes of women prisoners in each of the last five years have been associated with (i) illegal drugs and (ii) medicinal drugs. [52640]

Ms Quin: There have been no deaths of women prisoners over the last five years where it has been confirmed that the death was related to drugs, either legal or illegal.

Criminal Cases Review Commission

Mr. Goggins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how often the Criminal Cases Review Commission reviews the order of priority of cases referred. [51478]

Mr. Michael: I understand that the Criminal Cases Review Commission assesses applications for priority at receipt and at ten-weekly intervals thereafter.

Mr. Goggins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department of cases so far referred to the Criminal Cases Review Commission, how many *(a)* have been reviewed and concluded, *(b)* are currently under active review and *(c)* are still be to investigated. [51480]

Mr. Michael: I understand that, at the end of June, the Criminal Cases Review Commission had completed 422 cases, 281 were subject to detailed review at that time, and 997 were awaiting such review.

Mr. Goggins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the annual budget for the Criminal Cases Review Commission in 1998–99; and how many staff are employed to carry out its work. [51481]

Mr. Michael: The currently agreed budget for the Criminal Cases Review Commission for 1998–99 is £4.017m. The Commission has 14 members, and presently employs 51 staff, of whom 27 are case review managers.

Crime Reduction Measures

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what measures his Department has taken to reduce the incidence of crime against *(a)* property and *(b)* the person since 1 May. [51914]

Mr. Michael: Since 1 May this year, the Crime and Disorder Bill *[Lords]* has been completing its passage through Parliament and should receive Royal Assent shortly.

Following the Comprehensive Spending Review, my right hon. Friend announced on 21 July 1998, *Official Report*, column 913 that £250 million will be spent over the next three years on a new Crime Reduction Strategy and that significant extra money would be made available for the police, probation and prison services.

The Crime and Disorder Bill's provisions add to other measures taken since the Government came to office, including implementation of Part IV of the Family Law Act 1996, the Protection from Harassment Act 1997 and the Sex Offenders Act 1997.

We have also announced our intention to reform the Offences against the Person legislation and we are currently considering responses to consultation which builds on the work of the Law Commission.

Immigration

Ms Oona King: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many over-aged children from Bangladesh who had previously been refused an entry clearance visa on the grounds of not being related as claimed but whose relationship has now been established by DNA testing have since been granted entry clearance under the policy change of June 1989; and in how many cases refusal has been maintained. [52714]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: Statistics have not been kept on the total numbers of grants and refusals made under the over-age re-applicant concession of June 1989. However, we know that, by July 1991, some 550 cases had been considered under this concession, of which 115 were conceded.

Lancaster Castle

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he proposes to renew the lease for the prison at Lancaster Castle when it expires in 2001; and if he will make a statement. [52476]

Ms Quin: The latest prisoner population trends indicate that it will be necessary to keep the prison accommodation at Lancaster Castle in use beyond 2001. However, the final decision will not be made until nearer the time.

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will take measures to allow the public to visit those dungeons at Lancaster Castle which held the Pendle Witches. [52478]

Ms Quin: There are no plans to allow members of the public to visit these particular dungeons, which are within the perimeter of Lancaster prison. It would not be possible to open the dungeons to visitors without undermining the security of the prison. However, members of the public may visit other dungeon cells in the castle which are outside the prison perimeter.

Bahraini Refugees

Mr. Wilshire: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what inquiries were made in respect of criminal convictions in Bahraini courts before the decision was taken to grant refugee status to Sheikh Ali Salman, Hamaz Ali Jasim Kadhem and Sayed Haider Hasan Ali; with what result; and if he will make a statement. [52558]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: When considering the cases of the named individuals, the Home Office was aware of their convictions in absentia by the Bahraini courts for a variety of offences.

Mr. Wilshire: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when the decision was made to grant refugee status to Sheikh Ali Salman, Hamaz Ali Jasim Kadhem and Sayed Haider Hasan Ali; what were the grounds for their applications; what supporting evidence was produced; and what information was sought from the Bahraini authorities. [52557]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: Refugee status was granted to the named individuals on 15 July 1998. As information provided by asylum applicants in support of their applications is confidential, I cannot disclose any details of the basis of the claims they made or the consideration which was given to those claims.

CHURCH COMMISSIONERS

Investment Portfolio

Mr. Baker: To ask the hon. Member for Middlesbrough, representing the Church Commissioners, what changes have recently been made to the Commissioners' investment portfolio. [50809]

Mr. Stuart Bell: During 1997 the Church Commissioners conducted a comprehensive review of their investment and asset allocation strategy, which aims to provide stable long-term support for the Church's ministry. As a result they are rebalancing their assets in favour of securities, primarily UK equities whilst reducing their property exposure. Changes to individual holdings frequently occur in the day to day management of a large and diverse investment portfolio.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Gender Impact Assessments

Jackie Ballard: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, pursuant to the answer of 24 June 1998, *Official Report*, columns *557–58*, prior to 18 May, what mechanisms were used to determine how legislation passed in the current session would affect women; what consultation she had with women's organisations; and if she will make a statement. [49093]

Mr. Paul Murphy: Guidance on Policy Appraisal and Fair Treatment (PAFT) was issued in December 1993 to Northern Ireland Departments and the Northern Ireland Office. Under this guidance policy proposals, including

new legislation, are subject to PAFT appraisal to explore: the potential for differential impact on any particular group; and the justification for any differential impact identified.

Eight different groupings are considered as part of PAFT appraisals, including impacts on women.

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland announced on 10 July 1998 that a new statutory obligation on the public sector would replace existing PAFT guidelines.

Consultations with women's organisations were as follows:—

		Organisation
DED	Deregulation (NI) Order 1997	Women's Forum (NI)
DENI	Activity Centres (Young Persons' Safety) (NI) Order	NI Women's Coalition
	Education (NI) Order 1998	Women's Forum (NI) NI Women's Coalition
	Museums and Galleries (NI) Order	NI Women's Coalition
DFP	Occupation of the Family Homes and Domestic Violence (NI) Order 1998	Women's Aid
		Rape Crisis Centre Women's Support Groups
NIO	The Police (NI) Bill	NI Women's Coalition

Lord-Lieutenants

Mr. Jim Murphy: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, pursuant to his answer of 17 July 1998, *Official Report*, column *329*, if she will list the names of all the Lord-Lieutenants in Northern Ireland and the date when each was appointed. [52012]

Mr. Paul Murphy: The information requested is as follows:

Lord-Lieutenants	*Date of appointment*	*Lieutenancy area*
Colonel James Eliott Wilson OBE JP	25 April 1991	Belfast
Mr. James Thompson Eaton CBE TD JP	15 April 1986	City of Londonderry
The Right Hon. the Earl of Caledon	15 May 1989	County Armagh
The Right Hon. the Lord O'Neill TD	19 April 1994	County Antrim
Mr. William J. Hall JP	10 October 1996	County Down
The Right hon. the Earl of Erne	20 August 1986	County Fermanagh
His Grace the Duke of Abercorn	20 March 1987	County Tyrone
Sir Michael William McCorkell KCVO OBE TD	13 June 1975	County Londonderry

Integrated Schools

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans she has to allow students with statements of special educational needs to have their statements met with appropriate funding in integrated schools in Northern Ireland. [51833]

Mr. Worthington: The needs of those pupils with statements of special educational needs who are placed in grant aided integrated schools are funded in full by either the Education and Library Board or the Department of Education for Northern Ireland.

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans she has to allow students with assessed needs to be allowed free school meals whilst attending integrated schools. [51834]

Mr. Worthington: Where entitlement exists, free school meals are provided to pupils attending grant aided integrated schools, i.e., controlled and grant maintained integrated schools. There is no entitlement to free school meals in the independent sector and decisions as to whether certain pupils in independent integrated schools may be offered free meals is a matter for the school authorities. There are no plans to change these arrangements.

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans she has for the further development of the integrated schools sector in Northern Ireland. [51837]

Mr. Worthington: Government will continue to respond to parental demand for integrated education by supporting robust proposals for new Grant Maintained Integrated schools or for the transformation of existing schools to integrated status. I have also established a working group to examine ways of encouraging and promoting the further development of integrated education.

Springvale Project

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what financial support her Department plans to offer the University of Ulster to support the Springvale Project. [51835]

Mr. Worthington: On 16 April my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State announced Government support of £40 million for the Springvale Project (total costs approx. £70 million).

WALES

Sterile Services

Ms Lawrence: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what assessment he has made of the impact which the provisions made between the University Hospital of Wales Healthcare NHS Trust and Sterile Services International Limited will have on the provision of sterile services and jobs in that sector in other NHS trusts in Wales. [50715]

Mr. Win Griffiths: The agreement with Sterile Services International will provide better value for money for the Trust in obtaining sterile services and enable it to provide a better service for its 43 other customers who

are mainly from the primary care sector in Cardiff. I do not expect there to be an impact on jobs in other NHS Trusts.

Women's Aid

Mr. Edwards: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what level of funding was provided by his Department to Women's Aid in Wales in *(a)* 1996–97, *(b)* 1997–98 and *(c)* 1998–99. [52249]

Mr. Win Griffiths: The Welsh Office provided grant support to Women's Aid in Wales from several sources, including the Children and Families Services Grant Scheme, Housing core grants, and support for local voluntary organisations in Wales. In the years in question the funding provided was as follows:

Year	*Amount*
1996–97	£372,876
1997–98	£386,496
1998–99	£380,611

M4 Traffic Flows

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what changes have been made over the past 10 years in the predictions of traffic flows in the years 2000 to 2010 on the M4 between Tredegar Park interchange and the Coldra. [52196]

Mr. Hain: Traffic predictions made in 1988 were based on the National Road Traffic Forecasts (NRTF) (Great Britain) 1984. From 1989 to 1997 they were based on the 1989 version of NRTF. Predictions from 1997 are based on the 1997 NRTF.

Copies are available in the Library of the House.

Milk Marque

Mr. Charles Kennedy: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the decision by major dairy companies not to submit bids in the Milk Marque July 1998 selling round. [52554]

Mr. Win Griffiths: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to him by my hon. Friend the Minister of State, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food today, *Official Report,* column *78.*

National Assembly

Dr. Marek: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make it his policy not to make appointments which will be the responsibility of the National Assembly for Wales for periods substantially beyond its establishment. [52397]

Mr. Ron Davies: The policy which I shall continue to exercise this year is to make appointments on the normal basis, including advertisement and open competition, to ensure that the public bodies concerned can be led effectively. However I am also reviewing those appointments which fall due next year with a view to ensuring that the Assembly has the opportunity to exercise its powers of appointment as soon as possible. This will mean the extension of some appointments for a short term, rather than my conducting further appointments exercises after the New Year, in order to allow the Assembly itself to conduct the full appointments procedure for the posts concerned.

Dr. Marek: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make it his policy to postpone whenever possible taking decisions on matters which will be the responsibility of the National Assembly for Wales. [52396]

Mr. Ron Davies: No, this would not be appropriate as Wales needs an active government, making progress with delivering its commitments and taking prompt decisions, between now and the time when the Assembly assumes its responsibilities. At the same time there are some decisions where it would not be appropriate to pre-empt the Assembly and I will have that in mind.

DEFENCE

Professor Glyn Lewis

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 29 June 1998, *Official Report,* column *7,* if he will make a statement on the medical career and research background of Professor Glyn Lewis. [52064]

Dr. Reid: Professor Glyn Lewis is the Professor of Epidemiological Psychiatry at University of Wales College of Medicine (UWCM), Cardiff. He is leading a project team which will conduct an independent systematic literature review of worldwide published research relating to Gulf veterans' illnesses. This study has been commissioned by the Medical Research Council (MRC) on behalf of the Ministry of Defence (MOD). The team which Professor Lewis has assembled to conduct the systematic literature review has a wide range of expertise. It comprises experts from both UWCM and other academic establishments, in a wide range of fields including epidemiology, toxicology, cancer research, occupational medicine and clinical statistics.

Professor Lewis holds five degrees. These are: a BA (Oxon) in Physiology and Psychology, an MSc (Oxon) in Neurophysiology, an MB BS (UCL) in Medicine, an MSc (LSHTM) in Epidemiology and a PhD (Institute of Psychiatry, London) in Medicine.

He was appointed to his position at UWCM in 1996. Before that he was a Lecturer and then a Senior Lecturer at the Institute of Psychiatry in London (1986–95). During this period he was also a Research Fellow at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine (1991–95) and worked on secondment for the Department of Health (1991–94).

Professor Lewis is particularly interested in research methods and systematic reviews. This interest and his combined expertise in the fields of psychiatry and epidemiology are reflected in his work. For example, his recent publications include: 'Systematic review and Meta-analysis (Editorial)' in *Psychological Medicine* 27: pp 3–7 (with Hotopf, M. and Hardy, R.); 'Discontinuation rates of SSRIs and tricyclic and antidepressants: a meta-analysis and investigation of heterogeneity', *British Journal of Psychiatry* 170: pp 120–127 (with Hotopf, M. and Hardy, R.); and 'Putting trials on trial: the costs and

consequences of small trials in depression', *Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health* 51, pp 354–358 (with Hotopf, M. and Hardy, R).

Ranges (Income)

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the income achieved by the ranges at (i) Aberporth, (ii) Eskmeals, (iii) Kirkcudbright, (iv) Larkhill, (v) Pendine, (vi) West Freugh and (vii) Shoeburyness during the most recent annual period for which figures are available. [52338]

Mr. Spellar: The income achieved by the ranges in the financial year ended March 1998 was:

Range	*£000*	
(i) Aberporth	37,286	—
(ii) Eskmeals	8,759	(Note 1)
(iii) Kirkcudbright	798	—
(iv) Larkhill	3,978	—
(v) Pendine	5,251	—
(vi) West Freugh	6,957	(Note 2)
(vii) Shoeburyness	14,223	(Note 3)

Note 1: Included in the Eskmeals figure is £600k from the Strategic Pricing Initiative which supported the costs incurred in maintaining the VJ Battery, Depleted Uranium Firing Area.

Note 2: The West Freugh income is for the range activities only and does not include income from the operation of the West Freugh Airfield.

Note 3: The income for Shoeburyness is for the range only. The income generated at the site included support under the Strategic Pricing Initiative towards the costs of the site. The income was generated as follows:

Range	*£000*
Shoeburyness Range	14,223
Environmental Test Centre	2,974
Demilitarisation Facility	3,699
Strategic Pricing Initiative	(6,244)
Net Income	14,652

Air Refuelling Tanker Fleet

Mr. Woodward: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what plans he has to replace the VC10s at Brize Norton with other aircraft; and over what timescale; [48959]

(2) what plans he has to convert the A310 into a multi-role tanker transport; and according to what timescale. [49000]

Dr. Reid *[holding answer 8 July 1998]:* Plans to replace the RAF's air-refuelling tanker fleet are at an early stage. However current planning assumptions are that we will start to replace the fleet early next century. Among other contenders, we would expect a solution based on the A310 to figure in any competition for this requirement.

Mr. Woodward: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence for how long it is planned that VC10s will continue to use RAF Brize Norton. [48960]

Dr. Reid *[holding answer 8 July 1998]:* Under current plans, VC10s will continue to use RAF Brize Norton until they leave service. Plans to replace the RAF's air-refuelling tanker fleet, of which the VC10 is part, are at an early stage. Current planning assumptions are that we will start to replace the fleet early next century.

Animal Experiments

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he last visited the animal experimentation facilities at Porton Down; and what plans he has for future visits. [50637]

Mr. Spellar: My hon. Friend the Minister for the Armed Forces visited Porton Down on 16 July and inspected animal facilities. I visited on 11 March and inspected new facilities in construction including those for animals. No further Ministerial visits are currently planned.

Mr. Savidge: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on his policy on the use of animals in defence research. [53229]

Mr. Spellar: The Ministry of Defence policy on animal experimentation is neither to conduct nor to sponsor experiments on animals for the development or evaluation of weapons for use by UK forces. The MOD research programme involving animals is concerned wholly with providing the UK's Armed Forces with safe and effective protection against hazards they may encounter while carrying out their duties.

Defence research accounts for only a small proportion of all animal experiments conducted in the UK. The MOD is committed to looking at the feasibility of alternatives to animal experimentation and sponsors studies aimed specially at finding other techniques. We also ensure that, as far as possible, research in the defence area that involves the use of animals is not being duplicated elsewhere. There is a rigorous scientific peer review system within MOD. Formal licensing arrangements with the Home Office seek to ensure that any experiments are fully justified and as humane as possible. The MOD complies fully with the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986.

In addition, an independent panel of experts, the Animal Welfare Advisory Committee, monitors programmes of experimentation to ensure that standards are as high as possible. The Committee make a valuable contribution to increasing awareness of animal welfare issues within the MOD. Their second report is published today and a copy has been placed in the Library of the House.

Nuclear Materials

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to paragraph 72 of the Strategic Defence Review, Cm. 3999, if details of nuclear materials withdrawn from safeguards for non-weapons uses will be made public prior to their withdrawal. [51419]

Mr. George Robertson: No. Details of withdrawals of nuclear materials from safeguards will be published on an annual basis.

AWE Aldermaston

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will place in the Library a full copy of the 1986 National Audit Office report into AWE Aldermaston. [51292]

Mr. Spellar *[holding answer 20 July 1998]:* Neither the National Audit Office nor the Ministry of Defence can trace any such report.

Tri-service Appointments

Mr. Keith Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to alter the current system for joint two, three and four star appointments by rotation of service to one of the best qualified officer. [51301]

Mr. George Robertson *[holding answer 20 July 1998]:* My Department does not have a system of rotation by Service for tri-Service appointments at 2-star rank and above. The current system aims to identify the best individual for the job by selection on merit whilst maintaining a broad balance of appointments between the Services.

Defence Statistics

Mr. Bruce George: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when the Defence Statistics 1998 will be published. [51577]

Mr. George Robertson *[holding answer 21 July 1998]:* UK Defence Statistics 1998 is currently being printed and will be published on 28 July 1998.

Revolution in Military Affairs

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the discussions his Department is having with the United States authorities regarding the Revolution in Military Affairs. [51057]

Mr. George Robertson *[holding answer 21 July 1998]:* The "Revolution in Military Affairs" is a term to describe the step change in military capabilities which may, in the future, result from a combination of long-range precision weapons and networks of advanced sensors and data processors. There are discussions between the military and scientific staffs of the UK, US and other allies in various related areas, notably the UK Joint Battlespace Digitisation initiative, which aims to improve operational effectiveness by integrating weapons platforms, sensors and command, control, intelligence and information systems.

Smart Procurement

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects to make an appointment for the head of Smart Procurement. [51928]

Mr. George Robertson: Smart Procurement is an initiative to improve our structures and processes for equipping the Armed Forces, rather than an organisation. The Chief of Defence Procurement, as present head of the Procurement Executive and as its Chief Executive when it becomes a defence agency, will continue to be responsible for delivering the equipment programme efficiently and effectively.

Correspondence

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he will reply to the letter of 5 June from the hon. Member for Christchurch on behalf of a Porton Down volunteer. [52608]

Dr. Reid: I expect to reply to the hon. Member's letter very shortly.

Defence Reviews

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how frequently he plans to undertake defence reviews; and if he will make a statement. [52387]

Mr. George Robertson: Building on the Strategic Defence Review, we are developing a strategic planning process that will enable us to ensure that our defence planning is kept up to date. There are no plans to hold defence reviews at regular intervals. We will, however, keep open the option of undertaking further reviews if there are major changes in the strategic environment or other circumstances affecting the security and defence of the United Kingdom.

Swiftsure Class Submarines

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will hold an investigation into HMS Vanguard's recent training exercise in the Celtic Deep; and if he will make a statement. [52215]

Dr. Reid: Nuclear safety is of paramount importance and it is essential that the Navy conduct realistic exercises to ensure that all submariners remain highly trained. At all times during the recent exercise the submarine operated within normal safety parameters and there was no risk to the reactor or the crew. It is therefore not necessary to conduct a formal investigation.

Mr. Maples: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what discussions he had during the period of the Strategic Defence Review, with local hon. Members concerning *(a)* submarine refit work at Rosyth and *(b)* the refit for HMS Spartan. [51957]

Mr. George Robertson: We had consultations on the Strategic Defence Review with many hundreds of people representing a wide range of interests, and the detailed outcome of the Review was the subject of discussion with Cabinet colleagues. In relation to Rosyth Dockyard and the refit programme, including that of HMS Spartan, I met mye hon. Friend the Member for Dunfermline, West (Ms Squire) with representatives of the Rosyth Royal Dockyard Trade Unions and Fife Council, and, separately, the Chairman of the Babcock International Group and the Managing Director of Babcock Facilities Management Limited.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) sent me representations from the Rosyth Royal Dockyard Trade Unions, and form an individual constituent.

Mr. Maples: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the estimated cost of the refit being undergone by HMS Sceptre. [51956]

Mr. George Robertson: The planned cost of HMS Sceptre's refit is £154 million. HMS Sceptre's refit is due to be completed in 2000 and it is not possible to say

whether the need for additional, unforeseen work may emerge during this time which may affect the final cost of the refit.

Mr. Maples: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the estimated de-commissioning date for each Swiftsure class submarine. [51964]

Mr. George Robertson: HMS Swiftsure was operationally decommissioned in 1992. The scheduled operational decommissioning dates for the remainder of the Swiftsure class submarines are as follows:

Swiftsure class SSN	*Planned operational decommissioning date*
HMS Sovereign	2005
HMS Superb	2007
HMS Sceptre	2008
HMS Spartan	2006
HMS Splendid	2003

Mr. Maples: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence which Swiftsure class submarines have undergone refits in the past five years; how much each cost; and where and when each was undertaken. [51955]

Mr. George Robertson: Two Swiftsure class submarines have undergone refits in the past five years, both at Rosyth Royal Dockyard. The costs of the refits, excluding materials, and relevant dates are as follows:

Vessel	*Cost/Estimate (£ million)*	*Dates of Refit*
HMS Sovereign	192	Aug 92 to May 98
HMS Superb	200	Dec 94, due to complete Autumn 98

The scope and length of both refits were extended to include additional repair work on nuclear steam generators.

HMS Sceptre is currently undergoing a refit at Rosyth, the cost of which is currently estimated to be £154 million.

Mr. Maples: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the estimated cost of the refit planned for HMS Spartan. [51963]

Mr. George Robertson: HMS Spartan's refit package is still under consideration. It will be constrained to the minimum necessary to enable her to continue in service until 2006. It is too early in the planning process to say what the revised refit package will cost.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Fiji

Mr. Öpik: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on UK relations with Fiji. [52058]

Mr. Fatchett: The UK enjoys a warm relationship with Fiji. We welcomed the constitutional amendments implemented by the Government of Fiji in 1997 and Fiji's re-admission to the Commonwealth on 1 October 1997. 3 Fijian Government Ministers have visited the UK in 1998.

Mr. Öpik: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the current budget for the British Consulate in Fiji; what is the proposed budget for the next financial year; and if he will make a statement. [52060]

Mr. Fatchett: The current local budget for the British High Commission in Suva is £351,351 and the estimated budget for the financial year 1999–2000 is £495,187. These figures exclude UK-based staff salaries.

Right of Abode

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what factors underlie the length of time taken to process the issue of a certificate of entitlement to the right of abode; what plans he has to reduce it; and if he will make a statement. [52641]

Mr. Fatchett: Applications at posts overseas for certificates of entitlement to the right of abode are given priority. They represent less than 1 per cent. of all applications received by entry clearance posts. Processing times vary according to the circumstances of each case, but the general aim is to decide certificate of entitlement cases as quickly as possible. Doubtful cases are referred to the Home Office Nationality Directorate in Liverpool. Some applicants are offered DNA testing in order to establish their rights to certificates of entitlement: the average time for this process is 6 weeks. We are satisfied that processing times are generally reasonable.

Civil and Political Rights Covenant

Sir John Stanley: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the United Nations member states which have not ratified the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. [52607]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: According to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), the following UN Member States were non-States Parties to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) at the end of June 1998:

Andorra; Antigua and Barbuda; Bahamas; Bahrain; Bangladesh; Bhutan; Botswana; Brunei Darussalam; Burkina Faso; China; Comoros; Cuba; Djibouti; Eritrea; Fiji; Ghana; Guinea-Bissau; Indonesia; Kazakhstan; Lao People's Democratic Republic; Liechtenstein; Malaysia; Maldives; Marshall Islands; Mauritania; Micronesia (Federated States of); Monaco; Myanmar (Burma); Oman; Pakistan; Palau; Papua New Guinea; Qatar; Saint Kitts and Nevis; Saint Lucia; Samoa; Saudi Arabia; Singapore; Solomon Islands; Swaziland; Tajikistan; Turkey; United Arab Emirates; Vanuatu.

The following UN Member States' signature of the Covenant had not yet been followed by ratification:

Honduras; Liberia; Sao Tome and Principe; South Africa

This information, which is updated regularly, is also available on the OHCHR's Treaty Bodies Database on the Internet (www.unhchr.ch).

Mr. Peter Bleach

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when Mr. Peter Bleach first requested information of Her Majesty's Government, to clarify issues relating to his capital charge in Calcutta; and when the required information was sent. [51879]

Mr. Fatchett *[holding answer 23 July 1998]:* We have no record of a request from Mr. Bleach seeking clarification of his capital charge in Calcutta. The first mention of the capital charge was in the hon. Member's letter of 10 April 1996 to the then Foreign Secretary to which the Minister of State replied on 19 April 1996.

Cyprus

Mr. Corbett: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) what consultations he has held with EU Foreign Ministers over the ban imposed by the leader of the Turkish Cypriot community on meetings between members of both Cypriot communities on the island; [52383]

(2) what steps he is taking to encourage the leader of the Turkish Cypriot community to remove his ban on meetings between members of both Cypriot communities on the island; [52388]

(3) what consultations he has held with Turkey and Greece, as co-guarantor powers, over the ban imposed by the leader of the Turkish Cypriot community on meetings between members of both Cypriot communities on the island. [52389]

Mr. Doug Henderson: We have made clear to Mr. Denktash on numerous occasions that we greatly regret the current suspension on Turkish Cypriot participation in bicommunal activities on Cyprus, and have urged him to lift the current suspension. Bicommunal activities make a valuable contribution to building a foundation of understanding between the two Cypriot communities, which will be essential for the success of a political settlement on the island.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Corporate Tax Bills

Mr. Redwood: To ask the President of the Board of Trade, pursuant to the oral statement by the hon. Member for Makerfield (Mr. McCartney) of 13 July 1998, *Official Report*, column 72, what was the basis of the calculation that the Government will cut corporate tax bills by £4.5 billion. [51415]

Mrs. Beckett: Over the lifetime of this Parliament, the impact of lower corporation tax rates and more generous capital allowances for small companies is to reduce companies' corporation tax bills by about £12 billion. Against this, the short-term impact of replacing advance corporation tax by quarterly instalment payments is to bring forward some of the tax paid by larger companies. The net effect, in cash terms, is to reduce companies' corporation tax bills by around £4.5 billion in total over the five-year period ending in 2001–02. Once the temporary timing effects have worked through, corporation tax bills will be about £4 billion a year lower as a result of this Government's reforms.

The windfall tax and changes to the tax treatment of dividend income do not have any direct effect on the yield of corporation tax.

Mr. Redwood: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what assessment she has made of the impact of *(a)* corporation tax, *(b)* the windfall tax and *(c)* advance corporation tax changes made by the Government on British businesses. [51416]

Mrs. Beckett: The financial impact of each of these changes is set out in the Financial Statement and Budget Report. The cuts in corporation tax to the lowest rate ever in the UK and the lowest of any major EU economy, the Welfare to Work programme funded by the tax on the excess profits of the privatised utilities, and simplification of the tax system from the abolition of advance corporation tax, are all contributing to an environment in which businesses can thrive.

Dounreay

Mr. McWilliam: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what assessment she has made of whether transfers of nuclear material from the UKAEA establishment at Dounreay can explain the historic material unaccounted for; and if she will make a statement. [51807]

Mrs. Beckett: In this context, the term "material unaccounted for" (MUF) refers to the difference between a theoretical book inventory and an inventory based on actual physical measurement. Experience shows that one of the main causes of any such difference is the error inherent in measurement, which is unavoidable. The existence of such a difference, whether negative or positive, is not evidence of an actual loss or gain of nuclear material. It is therefore wrong to suggest that the figure for MUF quoted in the UKAEA's document "The Dounreay Shaft Inventory" must correspond to an amount of material that is actually physically missing.

As previously announced, I have asked the DTI's Safeguards Office (which is responsible for ensuring that the UK complies with its international safeguards obligations) to study the nuclear material accountancy issues raised by the UKAEA document. We shall of course make public the conclusions of that study. It is already clear however what some of the physical causes of 170kg of MUF referred to in the UKAEA report were likely to have been. Some of the material was in fact burnt up in the Fast Reactor. Some was discharged from the site within the discharge authorisations that applied during that period. Exact figures have yet to be determined. They will form part of the published conclusions of the Safeguards Office study.

The existence of MUF at any nuclear site, or the detailed evaluation of the level of MUF, has properly never been regarded by the nuclear industry as the primary indicator of whether or not material is securely held at such a site. The safety and secure custody of nuclear materials are ensured by a range of separate measures, including physical barriers such as fences and robust buildings, systems to detect intruders, and controlled access.

Security is a top priority at Dounreay, and as was made clear on 3 June 1998, *Official Report*, columns 364–65, there is absolutely no evidence that any material has been stolen or fallen into the hands of terrorists or foreign governments.

I can also confirm that the MUF at Dounreay cannot be attributed to diversion of material to other sites for weapons purposes. Any transfers of material between Dounreay and other sites for whatever purpose are fully documented and accounted for. As a result of an audit of the records requested by this Government, however, it is clear that there were in the past documented transfers from Dounreay which related to UK military programmes. Prior to 1973 when AWRE at Aldermaston and Dounreay were both part of the UKAEA, it is probable that some material transferred from Dounreay to Aldermaston will have been used in the UK weapons programme. This is not the case for any transfers which occurred between 1973 and 1987—when all such transfers ceased—since these involved fuel for use in reactors only.

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the President of the Board of Trade on what date she received the proposals prepared by the Atomic Energy Authority on the future of Dounreay. [45871]

Mr. Battle: On 17 March 1998, the UKAEA Board considered the future of reprocessing at Dounreay and recommended that no new commercial work be accepted as part of a phased rundown to a complete cessation of reprocessing. The Chief Executive of UKAEA advised officials in the Department of Trade and Industry of the Board's proposed course of action by letter on 19 March 1998. DTI officials then had a number of discussions with UKAEA to check points in the analysis, and they submitted advice to DTI Ministers on 1 May. The President of the Board of Trade consulted her colleagues by letter on 29 May. The Government made the announcement on 5 June that UKAEA would accept no new contracts for commercial reprocessing at Dounreay.

Millennium Compliance

Mr. David Atkinson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if there is an agreed international standard for year 2000 compliance for computer systems; and if she will make a statement. [51810]

Mrs. Beckett: An agreed international standard for Year 2000 compliance of computer systems has not yet been published. The International Organisation for Standardisation (ISO) has set up an informal working group, on which the British Standards Institution (BSI) is represented, to consider such a document.

Mobile Phones

Mr. Bercow: To ask the President of the Board of Trade which Ministers in her Department have a mobile phone paid for by her Department; and how much money has been spent by her Department in respect of each such mobile phone in the most recent quarter. [52559]

Mrs. Beckett: All DTI Ministers have had mobile phones in their cars for many years.

Office Hours

Mr. Bercow: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what records are kept of the times at which Ministers start work in her Department each day. [52561]

Mrs. Beckett: None.

Key Holders

Mr. Bercow: To ask the President of the Board of Trade which Ministers in her Department have keys to her Department's offices. [52560]

Mrs. Beckett: Keys are available if and as required.

Telephone Prize Winning Promotions

Mr. Breed: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if she will regulate telephone prize winning promotions; and if she will make a statement. [50946]

Mrs. Beckett *[holding answer 17 July 1998]:* Premium rate telephone competitions and games with prizes are regulated by the Independent Committee for the Supervision of Standards of Telephone Information Services (ICSTIS), which is the self-regulatory body for the Premium Rate Services (PRS) industry. ICSTIS supervises the content and promotion of PRS competitions via its Code of Practice to which PRS service providers have to conform. PRS service providers' contracts with telecommunications companies require them to observe the code. This creates an effective enforcement mechanism and ICSTIS has, and frequently uses, powers to fine offenders or order disconnection from their services.

ICSTIS has a good reputation for enforcing its Code of Practice firmly and fairly. Consumers can address complaints to ICSTIS through its Freephone helpline.

Data Protection

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what plans she has to implement the Telecom Data Protection Directive 97/66/EC; what assessment she has made of the likely effect on subscribers' privacy; what assessment she has made of the likely effect of the opt-out options for *(a)* political parties and *(b)* charities; and if she will list the types of organisations which she is considering under the opt-out scheme. [50365]

Mrs. Beckett *[holding answer 22 July 1998]:* The Telecoms Data Protection Directive 97/66/EC contains a number of useful measures which will serve to enhance subscribers' privacy. My Department has carried out a first-stage consultation seeking comments from over 900 telecoms operators and service providers, trade associations, small firms organisations, consumer bodies, direct marketing organisations, directory publishers, and individual subscribers on areas where the Directive allows some discretion on the detail of its implementation. The Directive requires Member States to introduce measures which would allow subscribers either to opt in to receive, or opt out from receiving, unsolicited direct marketing calls. Much of the activity undertaken by political parties and charities is likely to fall outside these provisions. As the next step in the consultation process, the Government will shortly seek comments on draft regulations to implement the Directive.

Animal Experiments

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade on what occasions during the last 12 months she has been consulted by the Secretary of State for the Home Department about the impact on the United Kingdom science base and the competitiveness of the United Kingdom's science-based industries of proposed measures relating to the regulation of research and development projects involving animals. [50702]

Mr. Battle: The President of the Board of Trade and DTI officials have contact with the Secretary of State for the Home Department and his officials on these issues as and when required.

Odometers and Speed Cameras (Blocking Devices)

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what plans she has to investigate advertisements for devices designed to circumvent *(a)* odometers and *(b)* speed cameras. [51288]

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: The investigation of complaints about advertisements is a function of the Advertising Standards Authority, which administers the British Codes of Advertising and Sales Promotion. I have brought examples of advertisements relating to the alteration of odometers to the attention of the Authority, which has undertaken to investigate them. I have also asked the Advertising Standards Authority to consider whether action could be taken against anyone advertising devices designed to circumvent speed cameras.

Energy Review

Mr. Gummer: To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1) to which environmental organisations she has sent requests for comments on the proposals in her energy review announced on 25 June 1998, *Official Report*, columns 1169–85; [51281]

(2) which environmental organisations she has consulted on the proposals in the energy review which she announced to the House on 25 June 1998, *Official Report*, columns 1169–85. [51283]

Mrs. Beckett: The consultation document was sent free to any organisation requesting a copy. A copy was also posted on the Internet. Copies were also sent to those who have outstanding applications or notifications under the Electricity or Energy Acts, and those who submitted representations in response to the original press notice of 22 December 1997, including English Nature, Friends of the Earth, and the Council for the Protection of Rural England.

Mr. Gummer: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what meetings she held with Friends of the Earth during the preparation of her energy review which she announced on 25 June 1998, *Official Report*, columns 1169–85. [51279]

Mrs. Beckett: Friends of the Earth submitted two representations to the Review but did not request a meeting.

Mr. Gummer: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what estimate she has made of the effect on CO_2 emission of the measures announced in her review of energy sources for power generation. [51286]

Mrs. Beckett: The consultation document setting out the preliminary conclusions of the Government's Review of Energy Sources for Power Generation reaffirms (Chapter 5, paragraph 19) the Government's commitment to meet its climate change targets, and states that the proposals in the consultation document are consistent with a decline in carbon emissions from the electricity supply industry.

Mr. Gummer: To ask the President of the Board of Trade which schemes for non-coal fired power generation she has refused during the course of the review of energy sources for power generation; and what is her estimate of the number of such applications refused during that period. [51278]

Mrs. Beckett: No schemes have been refused, either under section 36 of the Electricity Act 1989 or under section 14 of the Energy Act 1976. Consideration of a number of cases has been deferred pending the outcome of the review.

Mr. Gummer: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what advice she requested from *(a)* the Government's Panel on Sustainable Development and *(b)* the Round Table on Sustainable Development in the preparation of her energy review which she announced on 25 June 1998, *Official Report*, columns 1169–72. [51280]

Mrs. Beckett: There was a wide and open consultation on the Review, with representations being received from many different parties. In common with other parties, the two bodies mentioned were not specifically approached for advice. They did not make any representations.

Mr. Gummer: To ask the President of the Board of Trade, pursuant to her oral statement of 25 June 1998, *Official Report*, columns 1169–72, on the Government's review of energy sources for power generation, how many of the independent advisers to which she referred had environmental qualifications; if she will list them; and which of them gave advice on the environmental effects of her proposals. [51284]

Mrs. Beckett: The advice received by my Department from external consultants in the Review was in relation to various technical and market-related matters (as set out in paragraph 4 on page 1 of the consultation document) rather than environmental matters.

London Art Market

Mr. Gibb: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if she will make a statement about the future of the London art market. [50789]

Mr. Ian McCartney: The London art market is a highly successful international market. However, the Government are aware of concerns about its future. Ministers have met representatives of the art trade and understand their fears about the impact of existing, and proposed, European Union legislation. We have established a close liaison with the trade and maintain a regular dialogue with them. It is central to our policies that we should develop partnerships and work together.

We have always made it clear to the trade that the Government are committed to ensuring that London continues to prosper as a leading international art centre and that we will oppose proposals that could damage the international competitiveness of our art market in relation to third country markets. We will continue to ensure that the trade's views are taken account of in Brussels.

Aerospace Industry

Mr. Hancock: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many people were employed by the United Kingdom aerospace industry each year for the past five years. [51932]

Mr. Battle: On the basis used by the Office for National Statistics, the number of people employed in the UK aerospace industry in each of the five years from 1992 are as follows:

Year	*Number*
1992	149,000
1993	126,000
1994	115,000
1995	109,000
1996	104,000

Source:
Office for National Statistics (Annual Census of Production)

Mr. Hancock: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many people within the Portsmouth area were employed by the United Kingdom aerospace industry in each of the last five years. [51930]

Mr. Battle: This information is not available. Although the Office for National Statistics collects data on employment in aerospace businesses in Portsmouth as part of the Annual Employment Survey and Annual Census of Production, the figures cannot be released because they would identify particulars of an individual undertaking, which are confidential under Section 9 of the Statistics of Trade Act 1947.

Directors' Salaries

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what research her Department has evaluated into the proportion of output costs represented by the salaries of company directors in *(a)* the UK, *(b)* other EU countries, *(c)* Japan and *(d)* the USA. [52393]

Mr. Ian McCartney: The Department has not carried out any such comparative research; nor is it aware of any such research carried out by others.

Mr. Winnick: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if she will state the Government's policy towards substantially above the inflation rate salary increases for senior directors, managing directors and chairmen in the private sector. [52466]

Mr. Ian McCartney: It is essential for Britain's competitiveness that companies pay full regard to the fundamental Greenbury principles of accountability, transparency, and performance in setting directors' remuneration. The Government believe that a best practice approach to boardroom pay is preferable to one enshrined in legislation, provided best practice is seen to be working. The President made it clear in her speech on corporate governance in March that she believed that many listed companies were failing to comply with the spirit of the best practice framework. She said that the Government would consider a range of options, including legislation, if there was no evidence of a more positive and responsible approach from companies.

Post Office

Mr. Lansley: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if she will limit the negative external financing limit of the Post Office to a maximum of a figure equivalent to 50 per cent. of the Post Office's post-tax profits. [52404]

Mr. Ian McCartney: As indicated in the Government's memorandum to the Trade and Industry Committee (paragraph 20 of fifth special report published by the Committee on 14 April 1998), the arrangements for setting the Government's financial return from the Post Office are being addressed during the review which was announced by my right hon. Friend on 6 April. We hope to announce our proposals in the Autumn.

Small and Medium Enterprises

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what steps her Department is taking to encourage management and employee training and development in SMEs. [51829]

Mrs. Roche *[holding answer 24 July 1998]:* The Department encourages management and employee training and development in SMEs through its network of Business Links which provide companies with information and advice on management development and other training issues.

In addition, DTI programmes, such as Connect for Better Business, Inside UK Enterprise, and the United Kingdom Benchmarking Index, encourage companies to focus on key business management and training issues. DTI publications, such as Partnerships With People, and Small Business Action Update, also help in this area by disseminating best practice and/or by signposting companies to sources of assistance, such as TECs and other organisations.

Mobile Telephones (Recycling Schemes)

Mr. Levitt: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if she will list the recycling schemes for mobile telephones which have been notified to her Department. [51401]

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: A number of companies, including Alcatel, Ericsson, Motorola, Nokia, and Panasonic are involved in the European Trade Organisation for the Telecommunications and Professional Electronics Industry (ECTEL).

Under the ECTEL take-back scheme, owners of mobile phones can return them to their nearest BT communication centre, where they will be disposed of in an environmentally friendly way.

There are also several companies in the UK which are recovering and recycling mobile telephones.

Utility Regulation

Gillian Merron: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what response the Government have made to representations received during the consultation period on the Green Paper on utility regulation. [52692]

Mrs. Beckett: The Government have received over 250 written representations on the Green Paper, and held discussions with a wide range of interested parties. These indicate strong support for the approach set out in the Green Paper.

In taking the Green Paper proposals forward, I have had three concerns: first, to create a long term, stable regulatory framework which looks ahead to the next decade, in a world where competition and convergence are growing, and multi-utility companies are emerging; second, to secure a fair deal for all consumers, including the disadvantaged; third, to create a climate in which regulated industries can innovate and improve efficiency, and so become increasingly competitive, by ensuring regulation is consistent, transparent and accountable.

Full details of our proposals for the new framework of regulation are set out in the Government response published today. We intend to introduce legislation to implement these proposals as soon as Parliamentary time permits.

We need a regulatory framework which will serve the interests of consumers not only now but over the next decade. Multi-utilities are already a reality. This development has the potential to offer new benefits for consumers. But it also presents new challenges for regulators. We will encourage the regulators to build on the multi-utilities study they prepared in response to the Green Paper. We look to the regulators to set out their priorities and timetable for dealing with the regulatory challenges related to multi-utilities. In addition, the Government will consider further whether legislation is needed to give regulators powers to transfer licences within a group structure to the company which exercises effective control of the regulated activity, and to allow or require joint decision-making for multi-utilities.

It is also vital that the regulation of gas and electricity reflects growing convergence in the market and encourages competition. We intend to merge OFFER and OFGAS under a single energy regulator, and to provide for separate licences for the supply and distribution of electricity. There will be further consultation in the autumn on the options for legislation to achieve this.

We need to ensure that the framework for each sector delivers clear benefits for consumers. We will introduce a new primary duty on regulators to protect the interests of consumers. We intend to establish independent consumer councils to promote the interests of all consumers, including the disadvantaged; and to give all regulators powers to impose monetary penalties if companies breach the service standards set by the regulators.

On the key issue of price regulation, we endorse the three principles set out in the Green Paper that regulators should distinguish between earned and unearned income, that companies should keep profits earned through efficiency savings, and that benefits should flow promptly to consumers when companies benefit from factors outside their control, or have deliberately misled the regulators. On price setting mechanisms, regulators should be able to retain RPI-X as the fundamental system of price regulation. But we look to the regulators to consider the exceptional circumstances where it may be appropriate to refine RPI-X to reflect these principles.

We intend to require regulators to co-operate in developing best practice in this area and to explain publicly how they have applied these three key principles.

On directors' pay, the Government's message is clear. It is not the Government's job to set the pay of utility company executives. However, the Government believe that there should be a clearer link between the prices utilities can charge their customers and the service standards they achieve. And they believe full information should be available on companies' performance in meeting service standards, and on the links between this performance and the remuneration of senior executives.

It is important that regulation takes account of the Government's social and environmental objectives, including energy efficiency. We intend to issue statutory guidance to the regulators on these, following full consultation, including consultation with Parliament.

We also welcome measures in hand by the energy regulators and companies to drive down costs and improve efficiency and choice in gas and electricity, which should benefit disadvantaged consumers. In addition, we are considering the case for further action through the regulatory system to assist disadvantaged energy consumers, such as requiring the distribution networks to make differential charges to supply companies in favour of pre-payment customers. We will act if market developments do not deliver a fair deal for all consumers.

We intend to introduce legislation to build confidence in regulation by making it open, accountable and consistent. For the energy sector and telecommunications, this will replace individual regulators with full time executive boards composed of a chairman and two others. It will give regulators a new duty to address matters of common interest in an open and accountable way. Regulators will be required to give reasons for key decisions, and to consult on and publish a code of practice so that their consultation and decision making processes are clearer. Regulators will have powers to publish information held by them on the utilities in the interest of consumers, subject to tests in line with the general principles set out in the Freedom of Information White Paper.

Further consultation is now required in some areas. We intend to get the detail right. But I am confident our proposed changes will create a truly modern regulatory framework, capable of serving consumers well and taking these industries successfully into the next millennium.

Fiji

Mr. Öpik: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what proposals she has to increase trade between Britain and Fiji; and if she will make a statement. [52059]

Mrs. Beckett: UK exports to Fiji grew by more than 43% in 1997 to £10.56 million. The Government's Overseas Trade Services promote UK trade with Fiji, and plan to run two Australasia Showcases in October 1998

and February 1999 in the UK to promote trade with the Australasian and South Pacific markets, including Fiji. Several promotional events in Fiji itself are also planned.

Margaret Beckett Research and Administration Trust

Mr. Redwood: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if she has now closed the Margaret Beckett Research and Administration Trust. [52335]

Mrs. Beckett: Yes.

Pharmaceutical Pricing Scheme

Mr. Redwood: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if the pharmaceutical pricing scheme for the NHS will be exempted from her proposed competition legislation. [51048]

Mrs. Beckett *[holding answer 17 July 1998]:* The Government are not acting as an undertaking in respect of the Pharmaceutical Price Regulation Scheme, and therefore the Competition Bill is inapplicable.

Ministerial Leave

Mr. Redwood: To ask the President of the Board of Trade when she plans to take leave during the summer adjournment; and who will be in charge in her absence. [52190]

Mrs. Beckett *[holding answer 24 July 1998]:* Normal arrangements for ensuring cover by duty Ministers over the recess will apply.

Gas Industry

Mr. Redwood: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what further steps she is planning to promote competition for gas customers. [52600]

Mrs. Beckett: The domestic market is now fully open to competition. In addition, the Government's response to the consultation on the utilities review Green Paper "A Fair Deal for Consumers" puts the consumer at the heart of our plans for change.

Cycling

Mr. Robathan: To ask the President of the Board of Trade following the Government's announcement of 20 July on measures to promote cycling in the White Paper, A New Deal for Transport, what plans she has to order the removal of the signs on the railings around her Department which forbid the leaving of bicycles. [51935]

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: Secure racks are provided for all my Department's staff who come to work in the Victoria area by bicycle—some 4 per cent. of them do, I am glad to report.

The prohibition on leaving bicycles outside 1 Victoria Street is in place for security reasons—among which is the proximity of the building to this House.

Strategic Exports

Dr. Tonge: To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1) if she will make a statement on the measures she has proposed to impose controls on the trafficking and brokering of strategic goods from the UK; [50696]

(2) if she will make a statement on the suggested measures put forward in the White Paper, Strategic Export Controls, concerning the prior publication of export goods control orders; [50697]

(3) what estimate her Department has made of the costs of the enforcement of controls on trafficking and brokering in the UK. [50695]

Mrs. Roche: The Government's proposals to control trafficking and brokering and to introduce parliamentary scrutiny of Export of Goods Control Orders are clearly set out in the White Paper on Strategic Export Control which was published on 1 July. The hon. Lady will see that the consultation period is underway and is due to be completed on 30 September.

Section 6 of the provisional Regulatory Appraisal, which was published as part of the White Paper, contains an estimate of the cost of enforcing the proposals on transfers of technology by intangible means and trafficking and brokering.

Dr. Tonge: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what representations her Department has received from companies or individuals who engage in trafficking and brokering activities in respect of strategic goods in the United Kingdom; and if she will make a statement. [50714]

Mrs. Roche: In drawing up the proposals contained in the White Paper on Strategic Export Controls, the DTI has received no representations from companies or individuals understood to be engaged in such trafficking and brokering activities.

Export Credit

Dr. Tonge: To ask the President of the Board of Trade when her Department plans to publish the comprehensive review of the procedures by which export credit licence applications are processed. [50698]

Mrs. Beckett: The review to which the hon. Lady refers is an internal review of management and business procedures, leading to a Business Plan for the Export Control Organisation's day-to-day licence processing operations. As this is not a review of export control policy, but concerns details of internal management and efficiency, we do not intend to publish it.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Tourism Strategy

13. **Mrs. Mahon:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what discussions he has had with the Department for Education and Employment about his proposed tourism strategy. [50779]

Mr. Tom Clarke: My Department hosted a conference on the New Deal with the Department for Education and Employment in November of last year. A breakfast meeting was held with representatives of the tourism industry at No. 11 Downing street only last week involving both Departments. Those present heard of the excellent achievements of the tourism industry in the intervening period in implementing the New Deal and aspirations of the future.

25. **Mr. Hanson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what account his Department's tourism strategy takes of sustainable development issues. [50793]

Mr. Tom Clarke: The Government are committed to enabling tourism growth which is economically, socially and environmentally sustainable and our tourism strategy will reflect that commitment. We have recently undertaken a nationwide consultation exercise on sustainable tourism. The responses to the consultation are currently being analysed and will feed into the development of the tourism strategy which we shall publish later this year.

27. **Mr. Amess:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if he will make a statement on the promotion of tourism in England. [50795]

Mr. Tom Clarke: My right hon. Friend and I have been working very closely, for some months now, with members of the Tourism Forum and its Working Groups on the development of a new tourism strategy. The strategy, which will be published later this year, will set out our plans for promoting tourism development which is economically, environmentally and socially sustainable.

National Lottery

14. **Sir Teddy Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what is the total amount of prize money which has been unclaimed from the national lottery since it began its operation. [50780]

Mr. Chris Smith: To date, some £226 million in prize money has been unclaimed. After 180 days prizes still unclaimed, together with the interest earned, are paid to the good causes. £180 million of the unclaimed prize money has been given to good causes.

26. **Mr. Cawsey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what steps the Lottery distributors are taking to make the grant application process easier for small organisations. [50794]

Mr. Chris Smith: The National Lottery Act 1998 will help to ensure that more Lottery money reaches small scale projects in local communities. Distributors in Scotland are working together on a scheme which provides a one-stop shop service to community organisations. Distributors in England plan to pilot a similar scheme in the East Midlands this autumn.

Museums (Access)

15. **Dr. Iddon:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how the Government will extend access to national and designated museums. [50781]

Mr. Chris Smith: Last Friday I announced the biggest increase in cultural funding ever seen in this country. This included £100 million for museums and galleries. Subject to achieving clear targets for efficiency and reform, this will enable Trustees of the major national collections—including those which currently charge—to introduce free access for children from next year, for pensioners in the following year, and universal free entry in 2001.

A £15 million challenge fund will be established to fund new investment in the 43 designated museums around the country which are officially recognised as housing collections of pre-eminent importance.

Arts Funding (London)

16. **Mrs. Laing:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if he will make a statement on the funding of the arts in London. [50782]

Mr. Fisher: Central Government support for the arts in London is channelled through the Arts Council, and London Arts Board. In 1998/99 the arts in London will receive £12.7 million from the London Arts Board. In addition, national London-based organisations will receive £51.1 million and non-national organisations based in London will receive £14.4 million direct from the Arts Council.

From March 1995 to May 1998 1,352 projects in London totalling over £405 million received National Lottery arts funding.

Galleries Funding

17. **Mrs. Virginia Bottomley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what representations he has received on the allocation of funding to galleries. [50783]

Mr. Fisher: Representations have been received from both national, designated and local museums and galleries and others, including the Museums and Galleries Commission, the Museums Association, the Association of Independent Museums, and many other interested organisations and individuals. All of these representations have been carefully considered as part of our Departmental Spending Review.

Many of these submissions point out the continually eroding levels of funding under the last few years of the previous administration, a trend which this Government are finally reversing.

Royal Parks

18. **Mr. Gareth R. Thomas:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what plans he has to introduce an entrepreneurial approach to running The Royal Parks. [50784]

Mr. Tom Clarke: The Royal Parks are a great national asset. I am keen that the Royal Parks Agency makes the most of opportunities to increase its income, for example from events, licences and merchandise, in ways sympathetic to the amenity of the Parks and for the benefit of their upkeep.

Paralympic Sports

19. **Mr. Levitt:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how his Department is supporting Britain's paralympic sportsmen and women. [50785]

Mr. Banks: Our Paralympic sportsmen and women who compete at the highest international levels will be able to benefit from the Lottery funded World Class

Performance Programme. The programme has so far awarded grants worth a total of £3,267,253 to support 200 elite athletes with disabilities.

The United Kingdom Sports Institute will also provide first class training and support services for our elite athletes covering a range of Olympic and other non-commercial sports.

Musical Instrument Teaching

20. **Mr. David Heath:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport when he will publish his proposals for encouraging musical instrument tuition in schools. [50786]

Mr. Chris Smith: In response to widespread and longstanding concerns about the state of instrumental tuition available to young people, on 24 June I announced the creation of a new Youth Music Trust. The Trust will receive £10 million of Lottery funding a year from the Arts Council of England and will also seek to raise additional funds from the private sector. It will have three key objectives; to champion the cause of music for young people; to attract and distribute funds; and to offer strategic advice.

Performing Arts Audiences

21. **Mr. Gerrard:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what action he is taking to broaden the audience range for the performing arts. [50788]

22. **Mr. Soley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what action he is taking to make the arts available to a wider audience. [50790]

Mr. Fisher: It is a core objective of my Department to create access to excellence for the many, not just the few. We are currently doing this through the New Audiences Fund; and on Friday I announced a major injection of new funds for the arts over the next three years which will enable a new contract with the arts sector to deliver our key objectives of access, education and excellence and strengthen the position of the arts as a key part of the creative industries.

Professional Football Clubs

23. **Mr. Coleman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if he will assess the advantages of appointing an industry regulator to monitor and regulate the activities of professional football clubs in the United Kingdom. [50791]

Mr. Banks: My personal preference is for the football authorities to get their own house in order. I have been heartened by the positive response The Football Association has made to Sir John Smith's report on the way football regulates its financial affairs and I will be watching how this is taken forward. I will be considering carefully the forthcoming Task Force report on the commercial aspects of the game.

Arts Councils (Liaison)

24. **Mr. Dalyell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what discussions he has had with the Scottish Office in respect of liaison between arts councils following the establishment of the Scottish Parliament. [50792]

Mr. Fisher: Arts funding has been devolved to national country level since 1 April 1994. The four arts councils of England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland liaise regularly on any issues of common interest. I expect that process to continue following the establishment of the Scottish Parliament.

Channel Four

28. **Mr. Syms:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what recent representations he has received concerning Channel Four; and if he will make a statement. [50796]

Mr. Chris Smith: I have received no such representations.

Minimum Wage

Miss Kirkbride: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what assessment he has made of the impact of the minimum wage on employment in the tourism industry. [50772]

Mr. Tom Clarke: The Government are confident that the National Minimum Wage will improve the quality of service in the tourism and hospitality industry. We share the views of the independent Low Pay Commission; and the Chief Executive of the British Hospitality Association who said that the initial rate recommended by the Commission is

"broadly within the range acceptable to the industry".

BBC Board of Governors

Sir Raymond Powell: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (1) if he will give a breakdown of the total cost of the application process for the BBC Board of Governors; [51521]

(2) how many structured telephone interviews were conducted for the BBC Board of Governors; and for which posts; [51517]

(3) who was on the interviewing panel for the BBC Board of Governors; and what criteria were used to establish membership; [51522]

(4) how many people applied for each of the vacant positions on the BBC Board of Governors; [51520]

(5) how many personal interviews for the BBC Board of Governors were conducted; and for which posts; [51523]

(6) how many *(a)* women and *(b)* ethnic minority applicants there were for the BBC Board of Governors as a percentage of the total number of applicants; [51516]

(7) where and on how many occasions the application process for the BBC Board of Governors was advertised; [51515]

(8) what interviews were held for the BBC Board of Governors; and for which posts; [51518]

(9) how the final decision in the selection for the BBC Board of Governors was reached; and who was responsible; [51514]

(10) what qualifications were sought for successful applicants for the BBC Board of Governors. [51519]

Mr. Chris Smith: The process for appointing the BBC Vice-Chairman and two Governors was based on the principles set down by the independent Commissioner for Public Appointments.

Advertisements for the position of Vice-Chairman of the BBC and for two Governor positions, one to chair the English National Forum, appeared in *The Sunday Times* on 1 March, *The Times* on 5 March, *The Guardian* on 2 and 7 March, *The Glasgow Herald* on 6 March, *The Western Mail* on 4 March and *The Belfast Telegraph* on 6 March.

Candidates had to have, or be able to acquire quickly, the ability to represent the interests of BBC viewers and listeners and of the public at large; an appreciation of the requirements of operating as a board and the management of a large and complex public service and commercial undertaking; sensitivity to and the ability to keep in touch with public opinion on broadcasting issues; and the ability to work in an effective and collegiate manner with other Governors and the senior management of the BBC. Candidates for the position of Vice-Chairman were, in addition, expected to have the qualifications and experience to deputise for the Chairman and possess sufficient influence, experience and weight to act as an effective bridge between the BBC and Parliament. Candidates for the position of the Governor who chairs the English National Forum were expected to have knowledge of the English Regions and be willing to travel extensively within England.

The recruitment process cost £54,246.23. This comprised £40,486.98 for the advertisements and £13,759.25 for the recruitment consultants.

388 individuals applied following the recruitment campaign, but a significant number of applicants applied for more than one position. 66 applied for the Vice-Chairman position, 80 for the chair of the English National Forum and 371 for the third Governor position. 31 per cent. of applicants were female and 10 per cent. were from ethnic minorities (though only 55 per cent. of applicants completed the ethnic minority section of the questionnaire).

The Department's recruitment consultants, Capita RAS, carried out an initial sift of the applications and ranked each candidate against criteria based on the role specifications for the positions. The shortlists of candidates were arrived at following consideration by myself. There were no structured telephone interviews.

The four shortlisted candidates for the Vice-Chairmanship were interviewed by a selection panel chaired by Robin Young (the Department's Permanent Secretary). The panel also included, in accordance with normal practice, two independent member (Sir Christopher Hogg and Sir Dennis Stevenson), as well as Sir Christopher Bland.

The shortlisted candidates for the two Governor positions were considered by an advisory panel for public appointments which included independent membership. A final shortlist of candidates, agreed by me was seen by Sir Christopher Bland and the head of the Department's Broadcasting and Media Group.

My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and I decided, in the light of the advice of the interview panel that Baroness Young of Old Scone should be recommended for appointment as the Vice-Chairman. In the light of interviews for the other positions, they decided that Ranjit Sondhi and Anthony Young should be recommended for appointment to the other Governor positions.

The final decision on all three appointments was taken by Her Majesty The Queen in Council on 21 July.

Regional Theatres

Mr. Rendel: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if he will list the subsidy, per person attending, that Southern Arts provides to each of the producing theatres in their region. [50607]

Mr. Fisher *[holding answer 14 July 1998]:* Precise figures are not available. The following figures are taken from the data received as part of the Arts Council of England's Annual Survey of Regularly Funded Organisations for 1996–97: Southern Arts provided the following subsidy per person attending each of the producing theatres in their region.

£

Theatres	*Subsidy per person*
Southampton Nuffield Theatre	5.64
Salisbury Playhouse	3.13
Basingstoke Haymarket Theatre	1.88
Newbury Watermill Theatre	0.37

'Attendance' includes actual and estimated attendance at all performances and educational events.

Correspondence

Mr. Ian Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what plans his Department has to correspond electronically with *(a)* hon. Members and *(b)* members of the public. [49833]

Mr. Andrew Smith *[holding answer 13 July 1998]:* I and all my Ministers have e-mail addresses through which hon. Members and the public can contact us. These addresses are published on DCMS' website (www.culture.gov.uk). Around 60 members of my staff can also be contacted in the same way.

Millennium Funds

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what proportion of Millennium Commission money has been allocated to *(a)* Staffordshire and *(b)* the West Midlands. [51916]

Mr. Chris Smith: This is a matter for the Millennium Commission. I shall write to my hon. Friend in my capacity as Chairman of the Commission, and place copies of my reply in the Library of the House.

Listed Buildings (Staffordshire)

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many listed buildings there are in Staffordshire *(a)* in total and *(b)* by grade. [51913]

Mr. Banks: The information requested is as follows

Grade	*Number*
Grade I	75
Grade II*	347
Grade II	4,697
Total	5,119

SCOTLAND

Departmental Vehicles

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list for *(a)* his Department and *(b)* bodies listed in the National Asset Register, how many vehicles are currently (i) owned and (ii) leased; if he will indicate their (A) fuel types and (B) engine cubic capacities; and how many vehicles are expected to fall due for replacement in each of the years (1) 1998–99, (2) 1999–2000 and (3) 2000–01. [49233]

Mr. Dewar *[holding answer 6 July 1998]:* The information requested from my Department (excluding the Agencies and Non-Departmental Bodies) is:

(*a*) (i) Vehicles owned—168

(*b*) (ii) Vehicles leased—Nil

(A) fuel types: petrol, diesel and LPG

(B) Engine cubic capacities from 1600cc to 2500cc

The vehicles expected to fall due for replacement are:

Year	*Number*
1998–99	40
1999–2000	46
2000–01	49

Sheep Annual Premium Scheme

Mr. Charles Kennedy: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many (i) farmers and (ii) crofters have been found in breach of maintaining adequate stock level records following the introduction of the revised guidelines and associated penalties in respect of the application of the Sheep Annual Premium Scheme and the Hill Livestock Compensatory Allowance Scheme; what is the total amount of subsidy clawed back and penalties imposed to date; and if he will make a statement. [51185]

Mr. Macdonald *[holding answer 21 July 1998]:* The requirement to maintain an accurate, up to date and continuous flock record has been a fundamental condition of these schemes since 1992. The Sheep and Goats (Records, Identification and Movement) Order 1996 imposed further record keeping requirements on all sheep producers. Administration of these schemes is subject to regular EC scrutiny and successive EC audits have been highly critical of the standard of flock record keeping in the UK generally. The inadequate standards of record keeping displayed by our sheep producers was a major factor in the EC decision to disallow £30.8m of Sheep Annual Premium (SAP) expenditure in the UK in 1994 and additional disallowance on subsequent years' expenditure is anticipated. A further consequence of the audit criticism was the decision to double the number of sheep and records inspections conducted during the schemes' retention period each year. It is essential, therefore, that the schemes' record keeping requirements are strictly enforced if disallowance on current and future schemes' expenditure is to be avoided.

To date, in processing claims received under the 1996, 1997 and 1998 SAP and Hill Livestock Compensatory Allowances (HLCA) schemes (and as a result of our inspection visits in a sample of cases), 116 SAP claims and 126 HLCA (Sheep) claims have been rejected because of inadequate flock records; of those claims identified, recovery action has been necessary in 62 SAP cases and 102 HLCA cases, the amounts involved totalling approximately £98,400 and £61,600 respectively. Under the rules of the schemes no differentiation can be made between crofters and farmers.

Local Authority Debt

Mr. Letwin: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the current level of outstanding debt owed by each local authority in Scotland and the annual cost of servicing this debt. [51756]

Mr. Macdonald *[holding answer 21 July 1998]:* Table 1 shows, for each local authority in Scotland, the total amount of debt outstanding at 31 March 1997 on each of the main groups of accounts.

Authorities record the cost of servicing debt on relevant general fund services as loan charges within the general fund account. The cost of servicing debt on the trading and Direct Labour Organisation/Direct Service Organisation accounts is met from charges on the services provided.

Table 2 shows authorities' provisional estimates of the amount of loan charge payments on the general fund and on the housing revenue account for 1997–98.

Table 1: Outstanding debt of Scottish authorities at 31 March 1997 as reported in authorities' Capital Debt Outstanding returns for March 1997

£ million

Authority	*General fund services*	*Housing revenue account*	*Other services*	*Total debt outstanding*
Scotland	5,224.324	4,152.375	99.586	9,476.285
Aberdeen City	230.525	142.429	3.546	376.500
Aberdeenshire	196.124	157.672	2.036	355.832
Angus	57.429	37.793	1.559	96.781
Argyll and Bute	156.277	54.623	1.003	211.903
Clackmannanshire	39.970	27.399	0.106	67.475
Dumfries and Galloway	166.610	110.710	0.992	278.312
Dundee City	150.947	111.383	4.246	266.576
East Ayrshire	87.920	84.169	2.147	174.236
East Dunbartonshire	77.046	44.016	0.324	121.386
East Lothian	97.602	46.159	0.464	144.225
East Renfrewshire	53.372	26.380	-0.951	80.703
Edinburgh City of	576.881	247.795	7.213	831.889
Eilean Siar	114.276	45.922	3.044	163.242
Falkirk	102.615	98.189	0.240	201.044
Fife	266.032	213.457	6.714	486.203
Glasgow City	933.308	1,088.700	16.666	2,038.674
Highland	289.338	231.124	8.963	529.425
Inverclyde	98.440	106.165	4.026	208.631
Midlothian	73.128	26.407	0.000	99.535
Moray	85.433	49.331	2.394	137.158

Table 1: Outstanding debt of Scottish authorities at 31 March 1997 as reported in authorities' Capital Debt Outstanding returns for March 1997

£ million

Authority	General fund services[1]	Housing revenue account	Other services[2]	Total debt outstanding[3]
North Ayrshire	101.189	89.927	4.686	195.802
North Lanarkshire	248.371	245.349	8.480	502.200
Orkney	6.010	5.580	4.513	16.703
Perth and Kinross	86.478	50.901	0.839	138.218
Renfrewshire	138.583	142.461	3.091	284.135
Scottish Borders	122.159	71.049	1.096	194.304
Shetland	0.000	61.086	0.000	61.086
South Ayrshire	85.664	61.405	0.139	147.208
South Lanarkshire	262.544	249.419	4.393	516.356
Stirling	96.799	50.146	0.904	147.849
West Dunbartonshire	92.762	91.010	2.977	186.749
West Lothian	129.892	84.219	1.834	215.945

[1] General fund services excludes debt on services such as the urban programme, which are not relevant for loan and leasing charges, and includes debt on housing general fund services

[2] Other services includes debt on non-relevant services such as the urban programme, and debt on trading and Direct Labour Organisation/Direct Services Organisation services

[3] Covenant debt is not included table 1

Source:

Capital Debt Outstanding 1997 statistical return from authorities

Table 2: Servicing cost of Scottish Authorities' debt 1997–98

£ million

Authority	General fund services[1]	Housing revenue account[2]
Scotland	704.964	478.546
Aberdeen City	28.535	16.183
Aberdeenshire	25.391	15.268
Angus	9.123	3.978
Argyll and Bute	20.310	5.790
Clackmannanshire	5.583	3.898
Dumfries and Galloway	20.091	10.984
Dundee City	21.891	13.775
East Ayrshire	11.439	7.198
East Dunbartonshire	10.464	5.318
East Lothian	11.572	5.753
East Renfrewshire	7.626	2.599
Edinburgh City of	82.940	34.318
Eilean Siar	19.435	6.504
Falkirk	16.064	14.368
Fife	32.141	20.000
Glasgow City	116.060	129.907
Highland	36.045	25.204
Inverclyde	11.760	10.403
Midlothian	10.082	3.619
Moray	10.537	4.369
North Ayrshire	14.194	8.979
North Lanarkshire	38.452	32.706
Orkney	5.567	0.876
Perth and Kinross	12.987	5.310
Renfrewshire	21.635	15.405
Scottish Borders	16.199	6.882
Shetland	0.000	6.805
South Ayrshire	10.985	6.833
South Lanarkshire	35.733	27.356
Stirling	11.000	6.524
West Dunbartonshire	13.062	11.741
West Lothian	18.061	9.693

[1] Interest payments plus debt redemption recorded on the general fund by local authorities

[2] Interest payments plus debt redemption recorded on the housing revenue account by local authorities

Source:

Provisional Outturn 1997–98 statistical return from local authorities

Scottish Environment Protection Agency

Ms Roseanna Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what submission he received from the Scottish Environment Protection Agency in advance of the Comprehensive Spending Review for Scotland; what level of grant-in-aid was sought for (i) 1999–2000, (ii) 2000–01 and (iii) 2001–02; what grant-in-aid provision there will be for each year under his proposals; and what assessment he has made of the level of grant-in-aid requested by the agency. [51873]

Mr. Macdonald: Officials in the Scottish Office regularly receive information from SEPA concerning current and future levels of funding, and my noble Friend Lord Sewel has recently met SEPA's Chairman and Chief Executive to discuss the outcome of the Comprehensive Spending Review. The detailed allocation of resources to SEPA and the other parts of the Other Environmental Services programme is currently being finalised and will be announced in due course.

Council Tax

Mr. Gorrie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many second homes in Scotland are subject to council tax discount in each council area. [52063]

Mr. Macdonald: The information requested is not held centrally.

Comprehensive Spending Review

Mr. Jim Murphy: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the impact of the Comprehensive Spending Review on provision for Scotland's schools and hospitals. [50526]

Mr. Dewar *[holding answer 23 July 1998]:* Additional investment of £1.8 billion is being made in the NHS in Scotland over the next three years. This extra investment will meet the growing demand for emergency treatment, cut hospital waiting lists well below the inherited levels to 75,000 by the end of this Parliament, reduce the time patients have to wait to be treated and allow the key recommendations to modernise the NHS, set out in the Acute Services Review, to be implemented.

Additional funding for specific initiatives in schools totals £629 million over the next three years on top of other provision also being made through the Local Government Settlement. The new resources will back our initiative to set stretching targets for improvement for all schools by 2001. They will contribute to the tackling of the backlog of school repairs; class sizes will be reduced in the first three years of Primary School and there will be an Excellence Fund which will target support on projects critical to raising attainment throughout Scotland. The Excellence Fund represents the equivalent of £100 for every school pupil in 1999–2000 rising to more than £150 per pupil in 2000–01.

River Tweed

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) if he will place in the Library a copy of the Tweed Commissioners' report on the operation of the River Tweed Protection Order on the River Tweed; [52284]

(2) when he expects to make a final announcement about the proposed revocation of the River Tweed Protection Order; and if he will make a statement. [52285]

Mr. Macdonald: A copy of the report by the River Tweed Commissioners and Borders Angling Federation on the operation of the Tweed and Eye Protection Order will be placed in the Library. The report confirms the steps that have been taken, since my noble Friend Lord Sewel's announcement on 24 April, to restore the areas of access lost to anglers and contains a commitment by the authors of the report, riparian owners, and Tweed Foundation to satisfy the various objectives of the Protection Order (access, management, conservation).

My noble Friend welcomes the steps that have been taken and the recognition within the report of the obligations and responsibility which the Protection Order bestows. The Protection Order for the Tweed and Eye, in common with those elsewhere, will continue to be monitored but, in the light of the progress that has been made, no further revocation action is intended at this time.

Agricultural Schemes

Mr. Charles Kennedy: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if local department officials administering the revised guidelines and associated penalties pertaining to the sheep annual premium scheme and the hill livestock compensatory allowances are eligible for bonus/performance-related payments based on savings achieved; and if he will make a statement. [52551]

Mr. Macdonald: No they are not.

Milk Marque

Mr. Charles Kennedy: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the decision by major dairy companies not to submit bids in the Milk Marque July 1998 selling round. [52556]

Mr. Macdonald: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to him by my hon. Friend the Minister of State, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food today, *Official Report*, column 79.

Fisheries Task Force

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish the terms of reference of the task force appointed to review aspects of the Freshwater and Salmon Fisheries Act 1976 and list its members. [52901]

Mr. Macdonald: The terms of reference are:

"Having regard to the Freshwater and Salmon Fisheries (Scotland) Act 1976 and in particular section 1 to:

a. review arrangements for applications for Protection Orders. This to include contents of applications, consultation arrangements, advertising etc.;

b. examine practical arrangements for ensuring that the proposed additional angling opportunities are delivered;

c. consider what arrangements should be put in place for monitoring and reporting on the operation of POs".

Members of the Task force have been appointed on the basis of the experience and expertise which it is believed they, individually, can bring to the task rather than as representatives. The names are:

G. Thomson (Chairman—SOAEFD

Dr. J. Balfour, CBE, DSc, FRSE

Mr. D. Dunkley—Inspector of Salmon & Freshwater Fisheries

Mr. A. D. Forgan—(Scottish Anglers National Association)

Mr. G. Glen—(Scottish Federation of Coarse Anglers)

Mr. D. Jamieson—(Institute of Fisheries Management)

Mr. D. Keith—(Scottish Campaign for Public Angling)

Mr. B. Davidson (Secretary)—SOAEFD

SOCIAL SECURITY

Departmental Reviews

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list the reviews his Department and its predecessors, initiated in the years *(a)* 1974–75, *(b)* 1979–80 and *(c)* 1992–93. [48516]

Mr. Denham: *[holding answer 6 July 1998]:* Information about reviews for 1974–75 and 1979–80 is not readily available and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

According to published information, the following reviews were initiated by this Department in 1992–93:

Pension Law Review.

Review of National Insurance liability on loan and current accounts.

Deregulation review of earnings and expenses for national insurance and tax purposes.

Women

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if she will list the new policy initiatives she has taken since 1 June 1997 to aid women. [47273]

Ms Ruddock: The Ministers for Women have three policy priorities—family-friendly employment, childcare and tackling violence against women. We have also identified three further areas for priority action—putting women's concerns at the heart of Government, dialogue and representation.

We have taken a range of initiatives to aid women, including:

The first ever National Childcare Strategy, launched on 19 May, to help parents, especially mothers, balance work and family life by providing high quality, affordable and accessible childcare.

Work on a national strategy to tackle all forms of violence against women, to be published in the Autumn.

Support for the family through a commitment to promote family-friendly initiatives, including through the Fairness at Work White Paper and our commitment to implement the Working Time Directive, the Part-time Work Directive and the Parental Leave Directive.

A new initiative to mainstream the women's perspective into policy-making, launched on 18 May.

Opening up a dialogue with women, launching our own Website, running two pilot women's juries and commissioning a survey of 1,000 women to seek their views on childcare, family-friendly employment and maternity rights.

An agreement across Whitehall to the principle that 50 per cent. of public appointments should be filled by women, to ensure their voice is included in decision-making.

We have also established a powerful Cabinet sub-Committee on women, drawing together Ministers from across all major Government departments to put women's priorities at the centre of Government.

We have introduced the New Deal for Lone Parents to help lone mothers move from welfare to work; forthcoming increases in Child Benefit and income-related benefits will help families with children; and we have published draft legislation to allow pensions to be shared on divorce.

Pension Rights (Former German Citizens)

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what representations the Government have made to the German Government concerning the issue of pension rights for United Kingdom pensioners who as children were stripped of German nationality and transported to the United Kingdom prior to World War II. [49751]

Mr. Denham: The Government have not made any representations to the German Government about the level of the German retirement pensions paid to this group of UK retirement pensioners. However, the matter has been raised at official level on several occasions.

Attendance Allowance

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what conditions must apply before people receiving home care are entitled to an attendance allowance; and what is the value of the allowance. [52220]

Mr. Denham: A severely disabled person receiving care in their own home may qualify for Attendance Allowance if they are 65 or over and require help from another person with attention in connection with bodily functions, or they require supervision or watching over. The need for help must have existed for six months prior to the claim. There are two rates of benefit the lower rate, £34.30 and the higher rate £51.30. Detailed conditions of entitlement are set out in the Social Security Contributions and Benefits Act 1992 Section 64.

SERPS

Ms Stuart: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what was the cost of administering SERPS in the last year for which figures are available. [52378]

Mr. Denham: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Islington North (Mr. Corbyn) on 24 July 1998, *Official Report*, columns 725–26.

Pensioners

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what percentage of *(a)* single male pensioners, *(b)* single female pensioners, *(c)* married pensioners and *(d)* all pensioners who are aged (i) 60–64, (ii) 65–69, (iii) 70–74, (iv) 75–79 and (v) 80 years or older are in a household with income below half the national average where income is measured (1) before housing costs and (2) after housing costs. [52386]

Mr. Denham: The information is set out in the table, and should be read as, for example, of all single female pensioners aged 80 or over, 28 per cent. live in households with income below half the national average before housing costs.

Percentage

	Single male pensioners	*Single female pensioners*	*Married pensioners*	*All pensioners*
Before housing costs				
Age 60–64	n/a	(15)	n/a	(15)
Age 65–69	*14	23	17	18
Age 70–74	(16)	22	20	20
Age 75–79	*17	27	28	27
Age 80+	(21)	28	30	27
After housing costs				
Age 60–64	n/a	24	n/a	24
Age 65–69	(21)	33	18	21
Age 70–74	(29)	35	24	28
Age 75–79	(27)	38	30	33
Age 80+	(22)	28	37	30

Notes:

1. Figures in brackets relate to fewer than 100 adults in the sample; cells where the sample size is fewer than 50 adults are marked by *.
2. Figures are for 1995–96.
3. The data come from the Department's Household Below Average Income (HBAI) series, based on the Family Resources Survey (FRS) which covers Great Britain. The FRS data were used to achieve a large enough sample size to provide robust information.
4. The income measure used is weekly net (disposable) equivalised income. The definition of income used follows that in the published HBAI series for FRS based results. The figures may be sensitive to the choice of equivalisation scale used.
5. A single pensioner is defined as a single adult of state pension age or over. There are therefore no single male pensioners aged 60–64.
6. Married pensioners are defined as couples where the man of the benefit unit is of State pension age or over. The age of the man in the couple has been used in the table to define the age of the couple and there are therefore no married pensioners classified as aged 60–64.

Source:

Households Below Average Income (HBAI).

NIRS2

Mr. Rendel: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if the NIRS2 system started operations on 13 July; and what compensation her Department has *(a)* sought and *(b)* received for delays involved. [52341]

Mr. Denham: Controlled operational usage of NIRS2 began on 13 July 1998. The Department has sought and received compensation totalling £3.732 million for delays in implementing the NIRS2 system.

Automated Benefit Payments

Mr. Rendel: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) what progress has been made in automating Social Security benefit payments at post offices by ICL; [52384]

(2) if she will make a statement on the future of the benefit smart card scheme. [52385]

Mr. Denham: At present 204 post offices in the North-East and South-West of England have been automated and are paying Child Benefit by Payment Card as part of a limited trial.

The benefit Payment Card is a magnetic stripe card and not a smartcard. The Department of Social Security, Post Office Counters Ltd. and ICL Pathway continue to work together to plan the next stages of the project to introduce the benefit Payment Card.

Council Tax Relief

Mr. Dawson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to her answer of 23 June 1998, *Official Report*, column *493*, if she will list the specific amounts she calculated for individual elements in computing the total amount of personal allowance for council tax relief. [52527]

Mr. Denham: The amount of Council Tax Benefit depends on the level of council tax liability, less the amount which the individual is expected to contribute. The rates of personal allowance for Council Tax Benefit are based on those for Income Support, which are intended to cover day to day living expenses. However, the Income Support rates are not set on the basis of a "basket of goods", and there are no separate amounts for specific items.

Housing Benefit

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what would be the impact on the housing benefit budget over each of the next five years if registered rent increases were limited to *(a)* the RPI, *(b)* the RPI plus one per cent., *(c)* the RPI plus five per cent. and *(d)* the RPI plus 10 per cent. relative to existing spending plans. [52496]

Mr. Denham: The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is restricted to the next three years because Departmental spending plans only exist for those years and is set out in the table.

The spending plans assumed that these rents will not increase as quickly as they did in the recent past. However, it is possible that Housing Benefit expenditure on registered rents may actually reduce if the Government proposals on limiting fair rent increases are implemented.

£ million

	1999–2000	*2000–01*	*2001–02*
RPI	−15	−25	−25
RPI+1 per cent.	−10	−20	−25
RPI+5 per cent.	−5	−10	−10
RPI+10 per cent.	+5	+10	+20

Disability Living Allowance

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what percentage of the figure of fraud in Disability Living Allowance set out in the Annexe to her report, "Beating Fraud is Everyone's Business", she estimates to result from errors by recipients. [52566]

Mr. Denham: As we have explained in the Green Paper "Beating Fraud is Everyone's Business: Securing the Future", estimating fraud in Disability Living Allowance (DLA) presents particular difficulties. This is because entitlement depends on care and mobility needs which are not easily estimated other than through the formal adjudication process. As a result the estimates of confirmed and strongly suspected fraud for DLA will include errors by customers. It is not possible to quantify these.

Lone Parents (Staffordshire)

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many lone parents in Staffordshire, listed by Benefits Agency district, were in receipt of income support on the most recent date for which figures are available; and how many dependants were in lone parent families on that date. [51911]

Mr. Keith Bradley: The Government are taking action to improve the lives of lone parents on Income Support and their families. The New Deal for Lone Parents is designed to give lone parents the same choice of improving their families' lives through paid work that parents in couples enjoy. All parents will benefit from the increase from April 1999 in Child Benefit and the corresponding increase in family premium in income-related benefits. Parents on income-related benefits with children under the age of 11 will also receive extra help through the increase in the child allowance in those benefits from November 1998.

The administration of Income Support is a matter for Peter Mathison, Chief Executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to my hon. Friend.

Letter from Peter Mathison to Mr. Brian Jenkins, dated 24 July 1998:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question asking for information relating to the number of lone parents and their dependants in receipt of Income Support (IS) in Staffordshire by Benefits Agency District.

The information requested is contained in the attached annex. It is the latest available and is provisional and may be subject to change.

I hope that this is helpful.

Number of lone parents and dependants (in thousands) by Benefits Agency (BA) Districts in Staffordshire—November 1997

BA district	*Number of Income Support customers in receipt of the family premium (lone parent rate)*	*Number of dependants whose parents receive the family premium (lone parent rate)*
North Staffordshire (which includes the offices of Hanley, Longton and Newcastle)	7,000	13,000
Central Staffordshire (which includes the offices of Cannock, Lichfield and Stafford)	5,000	9,000
Derwent and Trent (which includes the offices of Burton on Trent, Derby Beckett Street, Derby London Road and Ilkeston)	9,000	19,000

Number of lone parents and dependants (in thousands) by Benefits Agency (BA) Districts in Staffordshire—November 1997

BA district	*Number of Income Support customers in receipt of the family premium (lone parent rate)*	*Number of dependants whose parents receive the family premium (lone parent rate)*
Wolverhampton (which includes the office of Wolverhampton Temple Street)	6,000	12,000
Total	27,000	53,000

Notes:

1. Numbers are rounded to the nearest thousand and may not sum
2. Data are based on a 5 per cent. sample
3. Lone parents are defined as claimants receiving the family premium (lone parent rate) and will exclude some single parents who receive a higher value premium, such as the disability or pensioner premium
4. Dependants are aged 0–18 years

Source:

Income Support Quarterly Statistical Enquiry, November 1997

Millennium Compliance

Mr. Rendel: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what assessment she has made of the problems faced by small and medium sized companies in the administration of pension schemes in respect of the millennium bug. [52340]

Mr. Denham: Information about pension scheme administration systems is not collected centrally. Many of the smaller occupational pension schemes are, of course, administered by insurance companies or specialist firms of pensions consultants. My hon. Friend the Minister for Small Firms, Trade and Industry is responsible for the Action 2000 programme which is actively promoting awareness among small and medium sized enterprises about year 2000 compliance in the operation of their businesses.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Spongiform Encephalopathy Advisory Committee

Mr. Tipping: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will provide updated details of the commercial and non-commercial interests of the members of the Spongiform Encephalopathy Advisory Committee which would potentially conflict with responsibilities incumbent on a member of the Committee. [53226]

Dr. John Cunningham: Members of the Spongiform Encephalopathy Advisory Committee (SEAC) are not required by law to declare their commercial and non-commercial interests as this is a scientific advisory committee with no trading or financial objectives. However, in the interests of open government, the members of SEAC provide such information and the interests declared by members are listed in the following table.

	Commercial interests		*Non-commercial interests*	
SEAC member	*Name of organisation*	*Nature of interests*	*Name of organisation*	*Nature of interests*
Professor Sir John R. Pattison (Chairman)	None	None	Medical Research Council	Senior Medical Adviser to the Chief Executive
Dr. R. G. Will (Deputy Chairman)	Unilever	Share holding	Department of Health	Grant Holder
	SmithKline Beecham	Share holding	Scottish Home and Health Department	Grant Holder
	Marks and Spencer	Share holding	Medical Research Council	Grant Holder
			European Commission BIOMED	Programme Grant Holder
			Office International des Epizooties Expert Group on BSE and Related diseases (1990-present)	Adviser
			World Health Organisation	Adviser
			European Union	Member of the Multi disciplinary Scientific Committee
Professor Dr. A. Aguzzi	Boehringer Ingelheim	Consultancies on an occasional basis	Swiss National Foundation No. 31-36059.92-3100 040827.94	Principal investigator
	Abbott Laboratories (Chicago)	Support of some laboratory costs e.g. care of mice, instrumentation	Cancer League of the Kanton Zurich	Principal investigator
	Immuno AG (Vienna)	Support of some laboratory costs e.g. care of mice, instrumentation	European Union No BMH1-CT93-1142	Co-investigator
			National Institutes of Health USA No 1-ROI-NS33377-01	Co-investigator
			Swiss National Research Program NFP38 and NFP38+	Principal investigator
Professor J. W. Almond	Medeva	Consultant	Society for General Microbiology	Member of Council

SEAC member	Commercial interests Name of organisation	Nature of interests	Non-commercial interests Name of organisation	Nature of interests
Professor J. W. Almond *(cont.)*	Cobra Therapeutics	Consultant	Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council	Chairman of the Working Group of the Biology of the Spongiform Encephalopathies Programme
	Arpex Biosciences Ltd.	Consultant		
Professor R. M. Anderson	Scientific Advisory Boards:		The Wellcome Trust	Governor
	—Decode	Member of Board		
	—IMS	Member of Board		
	IBHSC Ltd.	Director		
Dr. C. J. Bostock (Appointment as an expert from the Institute for Animal Health (IAH), a Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council sponsored institute)	Marks and Spencer Plc.	Share holding	The U.K. and some overseas Governments	Research contracts with the IAH
	J. Sainsbury Plc.	Share holding	Non-governmental organisations and companies, spanning a wide range of interests including food, agriculture, chemicals and pharmaceuticals. Further details of the customers of IAH can be found on the Institute's Web Site (www.iah.bbsrc.ac.uk)	Research contracts with the IAH
Mr. R. Bradley	Taylor By-Products	Adviser	Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food	Adviser
	European Natural Sausage Casings Association	Adviser	Veterinary Laboratories Agency	Adviser
	Meat and Livestock Commission	Adviser	World Health Organisation	Adviser
	National Dairy Council	Adviser	Office International des Epizooties	Adviser
	Jackson and Walker (Attorneys, Counsellors)	Adviser	European Agency for the Evaluation of Medicinal Products	Adviser
	Kraft, Jacobs, Suchard	Adviser	Food and Agriculture Organisation (UN)	Adviser
	National Renderers Association Inc.	Adviser	European Commission	Adviser
	Fats and Proteins Research Foundation Inc.	Adviser	National Governments and individuals; especially in Africa, Europe and the Americas	Adviser
	Dr. R. Öberthur	Adviser		
	F. D. Bisplinghof and Associates Inc.	Adviser		
Professor F. Brown	None	None	None	None
Professor J. Collinge	None	None	Wellcome Trust	Research Grant Holder
			Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council	Research Grant Holder
			Department of Health	Research Grant Holder
			European Commission BIOMED programme	Research Grant Holder
			Medical Research Council	Research Grant Holder
			Motor Neurone Disease Association	Chairman, Research Advisory Panel
			World Health Organisation	Adviser
Professor A. Ferguson	None	None	Medical Research Council	Grant Holder
			Scottish Home and Health Department	Grant Holder
			Wellcome Trust	Grant Holder
			Marlow Foods	Grant Holder re clinical research
			Norgine	Adviser, collaborations re clinical research
			Astra Pharmaceuticals	Adviser, collaborations re clinical research
			Nutricia	Adviser, collaborations re clinical research
			Shering Plough	Adviser, collaborations re clinical research

SEAC member	*Commercial interests* *Name of organisation*	*Nature of interests*	*Non-commercial interests* *Name of organisation*	*Nature of interests*
Dr. I. N. Goodfellow	SmithKline Beecham Pharmaceuticals	Senior Vice President, Discovery Worldwide, (Head of research worldwide)		
	SmithKline Beecham	Share holding		
	Axys (an American Biotechnology Company)	Share holding		
	Hexagene (A U.K. Biotechnology Company)	Major share holding		
Professor W. Hueston	Mullin, Hoard and Brown (Solicitors)	Consultant	Food and Drug Administration (USA)	Adviser
	Cytotherapeutics	Consultant		
	Datascope	Consultant		
Professor H. Kimbell	Bass Plc.	Small share holding		
	Tesco's Plc.	Small share holding		
Dr. R. H. Kimberlin	Pharmaceutical Industry (world-wide)	Consultant	National Governments in Europe the Americas and Australasia	Adviser
	Meat and Livestock Commission	Consultant		
Dr. M. J. Painter	None	None	None	None
Mr. D. B. Pepper	The Veterinary Defence Society Ltd.	Director and Claims Consultant	None	None
	Pfizer Animal Health (Pfizer Ltd.)	Adviser		
	Intervet International BV (Netherlands) Intervet UK Ltd.	Adviser		
Professor P. G. Smith	None	None	Department of Health	Grant Holder
Dr. W. A. Watson		Farmer	None	None
	ADAS	Adviser		
	Pan Livestock	Adviser		
	Huntings Plc	Adviser		
	Landell Mills Plc	Adviser	None	None

Fisheries Research

Mr. Edwards: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement about the future of the fisheries research laboratory at Conwy. [53227]

Dr. John Cunningham: The laboratory at Conwy is part of the Centre for Environment, Fisheries and Aquaculture Science (CEFAS), an Executive Agency of MAFF. Consistent with the Agency's obligation to provide an efficient and effective scientific service, CEFAS has been reviewing the future requirements for this laboratory. Conwy is the smallest CEFAS laboratory and currently has spare capacity. The Agency has explored whether it is realistic for this to be taken up by new work or whether it would be more efficient to relocate the existing functions to another CEFAS site.

The review has concluded that, in the interests of adapting CEFAS's structure to the longer term needs of its customers in an increasingly competitive market, the programme of work currently carried out at Conwy should be transferred to other CEFAS sites. As a result, the Agency plans to vacate the Conwy laboratory by March 2000. It is intended to move the shellfish and fish cultivation work programme and the majority of staff presently based at Conwy to the CEFAS Weymouth laboratory, and the work on coastal zone management and the environmental effects of fishing to the Agency's laboratory at Lowestoft. CEFAS has initiated a resettlement programme that will allow as many as possible of the science specialists at Conwy to continue their work at the new locations. Redundancies will be kept to a minimum. Recognising local concerns, in disposing of the Conwy site we will be sympathetic to bids that propose to make use of the facilities to support the Welsh fishing industry.

The consolidation of work at CEFAS's laboratories at Weymouth and Lowestoft will improve the utilisation of existing facilities. It will enable the Agency to provide a more cost effective service to its customers and enhance its position as a world leader in the areas of environment, fisheries and aquaculture science.

Milk Marque

Mr. Charles Kennedy: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the decision by major dairy companies not to submit bids in the Milk Marque July 1998 selling round. [52553]

Mr. Paice: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will refer to the Office of Fair Trading the latest round of milk sales by Milk Marque and the decision by major milk processors not to enter bids. [52473]

Mr. Rooker: The supply of raw milk in Great Britain is currently the subject of an inquiry by the Monopolies and Mergers Commission (MMC), which will be able to take into account the latest round of milk sales during its investigations. The MMC is due to report to my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade in the Autumn.

Mr. Paice: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what representations he has received concerning the latest round of milk sales by Milk Marque. [52472]

Mr. Rooker: We have received representations from various milk industry interests.

Mr. Luff: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what plans he has to intervene in the current dispute between the dairy industry and Milk Marque. [52647]

Mr. Rooker: None. This is a matter for the competition authorities.

Action with Communities in Rural England

Mr. Gray: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, pursuant to his answer of 7 July 1998, *Official Report*, column 399, on his address to Action with Communities in Rural England, what other titles for the address were discussed *(a)* by Ministers and *(b)* with officials. [52401]

Mr. Rooker: Earlier this year my right hon. Friend accepted an invitation to address the annual ACRE conference. At that time no final decision had been made by ACRE about the title of the conference. ACRE considered entitling their conference "Towards a Ministry of Rural Affairs" but finally decided to entitle it "Towards a new Government strategy for Rural Affairs". The speech which I delivered was entitled 'An Integrated Strategy for Rural Affairs'; alternative titles for the speech were not discussed with Ministers or officials.

Seeds Regulations

Mr. Baker: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) what steps he intends to take following appeal court judgment (Regina v Secretary of State for the Environment and MAFF ex parte Watson) in respect of current national seed listing trials deemed to be in breach of current regulation; [52492]

(2) following the Appeal Court judgment (Regina v Secretary of State for the Environment and MAFF ex parte Watson), what is the earliest date he expects genetically modified plant varieties to be available for commercial planting. [52493]

Mr. Rooker: I do not expect genetically modified plant varieties to be commercially available in the UK before the 1999 growing season at the earliest. As regards the action I propose to take in respect of varieties currently in trials, the Court of Appeal took the view that the position ought to be resolved speedily across the board. I am therefore seeking urgent legal advice as to how this can be done most effectively for all plant varieties currently in National List tests and trials, where those varieties are of a species to which Regulation 11(3) of the Seeds (National Lists of Varieties) Regulations 1982 (as amended) applies.

Rural England White Paper

Mr. Jack: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, pursuant to his answer of 9 July 1998, *Official Report*, column *628*, if he will list where the *(a)* seminars and *(b)* other meetings on the Rural England White Paper took place; and which organisations and individuals attended on each occasion. [51477]

Dr. John Cunningham *[holding answer 23 July 1998]:* Attendance at the seminars on the Rural England White Paper was by invitation only. A list showing the dates and locations of the seminars, along with lists of delegates invited, including details of the organisations they represented, have been placed in the Library of the House.

Numerous other meetings were held in relation to the White Paper, "Rural England". These were attended by a range of organisations representing a cross section of rural interests. It is not possible to provide the detailed information requested about the attendance and location of these meetings without disproportionate cost.

Pig Offal

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will take measures to prevent the import of pig meat produced using rendered pig offal. [52013]

Mr. Rooker: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to the right hon. Member for Haltemprice and Howden (Mr. Davis) on 16 July 1998, *Official Report*, column *307*.

Sheep Annual Premium

Mr. Jack: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he expects to be able to make each of the three payments under the sheep annual premium scheme; and for what reasons no first payments have yet been made of the premium for 1998. [51926]

Dr. John Cunningham: Payment of the first advance of the 1998 Sheep Annual Premium is underway (in line with the normal timetable of recent years) and will be completed next month. The second advance should be paid during November and the final balances in April 1999. The European Commission sets the rates for each of the three payments and individual payments to farmers cannot be made until those rates have been published in EU Regulations.

Set-aside Land

Mr. Cox: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what was the total acreage of land in set-aside in the United Kingdom on 1 July 1998. [51852]

Mr. Rooker: The total acreage of land set aside in the United Kingdom under the Arable Area Payments Scheme for 1998 will not be known until all the applications under the Scheme have been checked and collated. I will write to my hon. Friend when the information is available.

Correspondence

Mr. Sanders: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is his Department's average

response time to correspondence from members of the public; and how such response times are monitored. [48635]

Mr. Morley: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to him by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary, Office of Public Service on 14 July 1998, *Official Report*, column *159*. The Ministry and its agencies monitor all relevant correspondence from the public, but keep records only of the number of letters received and whether they were answered within published targets. Information on average response times is therefore not available.

MINISTER WITHOUT PORTFOLIO

Millennium Dome (Employment)

32. **Mr. Sheerman:** To ask the Minister without Portfolio what assessment he has made of the effects of the Millennium Dome on employment in the London area. [50800]

Mr. Mandelson: The New Millennium Experience Company has provided £1 million to establish the Greenwich Local Labour and Business scheme to provide training and employment for local people. The latest figures show that through this scheme more than 550 people have found employment, including over 200 people working on the Dome site. More than 650 people have taken up training courses.

The economic benefits of building the Millennium Dome reach far beyond Greenwich and London. Specialist construction contractors throughout the country are creating and protecting jobs as a direct result of their work on the Dome. In all more than 2,000 jobs have been created in the construction phase of the project.

Millennium Dome (Architects' Fees)

33. **Mr. Dalyell:** To ask the Minister without Portfolio if he will make a statement on the cost to date of the architects' fees for the Millennium Dome. [50801]

Mr. Mandelson: The architects' fees are calculated on the basis of a percentage of the construction costs which are very tightly controlled. The contractual arrangement regarding the fees is commercial in confidence.

Millennium Experience (Young People)

34. **Mr. Rammell:** To ask the Minister without Portfolio if he will make a statement on his estimate of the level of involvement by young people in the planning of the Millennium Experience. [50802]

Mr. Mandelson: The New Millennium Experience Company (NMEC) has established 12 Youth Councils for the English regions, Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales to consult young people throughout the UK on the Millennium Experience. Members were nominated by headteachers, local authority education directors and youth organisations from around the UK. The Company has also set up a UK wide Youth Council to advise the Company on how the Dome and its associated Learning Experience will impact upon young people. The first meeting of the UK Millennium Youth Council was held in London on 16 July.

Millennium Experience (Regions)

35. **Mr. Ben Chapman:** To ask the Minister without Portfolio what recent representations he has received about replicating the experience of the Millennium Dome in the regions. [50803]

Mr. Mandelson: I have received no representations about replicating the experience of the Millennium Dome in the regions. The Dome is the centrepiece of a UK wide celebration of the Millennium. There will be projects, events and activities all round the country in the year 2000. For example in my hon. Friend's region there will be the National Discovery Park in Liverpool and the National Wildflower Centre on Merseyside. There will also be a wide range of sporting events which will form part of the Millennium Festival.

38. **Mr. Blizzard:** To ask the Minister without Portfolio what plans he has to link the Millennium Experience with Millennium events in other parts of the country. [50806]

Mr. Mandelson: The New Millennium Experience Company is organising a dedicated national programme of events and activities throughout the country related to the Dome. The NMEC is also discussing with the Millennium Commission the possibility of collaboration between the Dome and the flagship projects funded by the Commission.

Millennium Dome (Sponsors)

37. **Sir Teddy Taylor:** To ask the Minister without Portfolio if he will make a statement on progress in attracting private sector sponsorship for the Millennium Dome. [50805]

Mr. Mandelson: I refer to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow) earlier today.

Mr. Baker: To ask the Minister without Portfolio what undertakings he has given to sponsors of the Millennium Dome. [50804]

Mr. Mandelson: As shareholder of the New Millennium Experience Company (NMEC) I have offered no undertakings to sponsors. Whilst retaining overall editorial control to ensure the integrity of the Millennium Experience the NMEC are offering sponsors a range of benefits depending on the level of sponsorship involved.

Mr. Baker: To ask the Minister without Portfolio what ethical criteria he applies in selecting potential sponsors for the Millennium Dome. [49152]

Mr. Mandelson *[holding answer 7 July 1998]*: In identifying potential sponsors, the New Millennium Experience Company (NMEC) are determined to maintain the integrity of the project as the focus for the nation's millennium celebrations, and to ensure that any sponsorship arrangement does not diminish the inclusive nature of the Experience. These broad considerations underpin the Company's decisions in respect of its commercial income target.

Millennium Experience (Budget)

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Minister without Portfolio what is the current budget for each of the zones in the Millennium Experience. [45132]

Mr. Mandelson: The budget for each zone is commercially confidential. To reveal it would damage the New Millennium Experience Company's (NMEC) negotiating position with designers, sponsors and contractors.

Millennium Experience (Logo)

Mr. Spring: To ask the Minister without Portfolio what plans he has to make a large-scale model of the figure in the New Millennium Experience logo. [45563]

Mr. Mandelson *[holding answer 15 June 1998]:* The New Millennium Experience Company (NMEC) is currently considering this idea.

Millennium Dome (Power Supply)

Mr. Ottaway: To ask the Minister without Portfolio what contingency plans have been made to maintain the supply of power to the Millennium Dome in the event of a collapse of the power supply system. [46457]

Mr. Mandelson: The New Millennium Experience Company (NMEC) has designed a degree of resilience into the supply to the Dome site and the site infrastructure such that minor power failures would not disrupt the running and operation of the Millennium Experience. In the event of a total and sustained power failure, the NMEC will be able to maintain safety systems.

Millennium Dome (Human Figure)

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Minister without Portfolio (1) what will be inside the giant human figure in the Millennium Dome; [47278]

(2) what is the estimated cost of the giant human figure in the Millennium Dome; [47277]

(3) if he will publish the tender document for the giant human figure in the Millennium Dome; [47281]

(4) if he will make a statement on the sex of the giant human figure in the Millennium Dome; [47282]

(5) which firms will be responsible for creating the giant human figure in the Millennium Dome; [47279]

(6) if he will make a statement on the proposals for a giant human figure in the Millennium Dome; [47283]

(7) how many giant human figures there will be in the Millennium Dome. [47276]

Mr. Mandelson: *[holding answer 23 June 1998]:* In order to ensure adequate visitor flow, proposals for the Body Zone now involve two large human figures, one male and one female, brought together as a single structure. Visitors will be able to walk inside the figures and explore and experience the wonders of the human body: how it works, how it has developed; and what the future holds. The overall Body Zone will also address wider issues such as genetics, lifestyles, and medical discoveries.

The designers of the Zone are HP:ICM. The cost of the figures within the Body Zone is commercially confidential at this stage. To reveal it would damage the New Millennium Experience Company's (NMEC's) negotiating position with potential sponsors and contractors. There will be a range of tenders for different works in all the exhibit zones such as heavy structural work, IT equipment, and sound and lighting systems.

Millennium Dome (@ Now Zone)

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Minister without Portfolio what changes he has made to plans for the @ Now Zone since May 1997. [48826]

Mr. Mandelson: Plans for all the exhibit zones within the Millennium Experience are a matter for the New Millennium Experience Company. The exhibits are the subject of ongoing development as part of an interactive creative process to ensure that come 31 December 1999 and throughout the year 2000, the Experience will excite, entertain and educate in a way which will be the envy of the world.

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Minister without Portfolio if the body deciding the contents of the @ Now Zone includes representatives from the Yorkshire and Humberside Region. [48831]

Mr. Mandelson: The New Millennium Experience Company (NMEC) is responsible for deciding the content of all zones in close liaison with other relevant parties, including sponsors. The Company aims to ensure that views from across the country inform the development of the UK @ Now Zone.

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Minister without Portfolio who will provide the exhibits and plan the theme of the @ Now Zone. [48823]

Mr. Mandelson: The New Millennium Experience Company (NMEC) is responsible for the delivery of each zone and has editorial control over the content, story line and theme of each exhibit, including the UK @ Now Zone.

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Minister without Portfolio if the @ Now Zone will include exhibits relating to regional cultural identities. [48832]

Mr. Mandelson: The New Millennium Experience Company is currently considering the nature and scope of the exhibits within the UK @ Now Zone. Regional cultural identity is one of the many issues which the Company, with the sponsors and other relevant groups, will address in taking forward the development of the zone.

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Minister without Portfolio if sponsors in the @ Now Zone will be exclusively British. [48824]

Mr. Mandelson: It is likely that the sponsors will be British based companies. As already announced, Marks and Spencer are part sponsoring this zone.

Millennium Dome (Fourteenth Zone)

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Minister without Portfolio what will be the theme of the fourteenth zone of the Millennium Dome. [49178]

Mr. Mandelson: The theme of the fourteenth zone will be "Mobility". This zone will examine how we will travel in the future, locally, nationally and internationally.

Millennium Dome (Air Conditioning)

Mr. Baker: To ask the Minister without Portfolio, pursuant to his answer of 17 March 1998, *Official Report*, column *602*, what special technical measures are being taken, at what extra cost, to ensure the proposed air-conditioning system for the Millennium Dome does not leak HFCs into the environment in excess of 1 per cent. [49240]

Mr. Mandelson *[holding answer 7 July 1998]:* The New Millennium Experience Company (NMEC) will employ a number of methods and techniques in order to ensure that the target of less than 1 per cent. emission is met. These include regular inspections by technicians together with automated detection and alarm systems. All costs will be met from within the existing budget for the project.

Millennium Dome (Athletics Facilities)

Mr. Stringer: To ask the Minister without Portfolio what are the funding arrangements for the proposed athletics facilities in the Millennium Dome. [49653]

Mr. Mandelson: There are no proposed athletics facilities in the Millennium Dome.

London City Airport

Mr. Spring: To ask the Minister without Portfolio what insurance costs are being borne by the New Millennium Experience Company in respect of London City Airport. [50742]

Mr. Mandelson: The presence of the Dome structure has implications for the alternative take-off and landing routes for London City Airport in certain rare weather conditions. The New Millennium Experience Company (NMEC) reimburses London City Airport for the insurance policy which covers the cost of redirecting aircraft in those rare circumstances. The costs of that policy are £22,000 until the end of 1998 and £17,500 per year thereafter.

Millennium Dome (Serious Play Zone)

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Minister without Portfolio what consultations his Department has had regarding the content of the serious play zone of the Millennium Dome. [47394]

Mr. Chris Smith: I have been asked to reply.

Officials in my Department provide support to the Minister without Portfolio in his capacity as sole shareholder of the New Millennium Experience Company (NMEC) and are in regular contact on all issues relating to the Millennium Dome, including its content. My officials will continue to monitor the Dome's progress and will consult with other interested parties as and when necessary.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Departmental Reviews

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will list the reviews his Department and any predecessors, initiated in the years *(a)* 1974–75, *(b)* 1979–80 and *(c)* 1992–93. [48517]

Mr. Kilfoyle *[holding answer 6 July 1998]:* The information requested is not readily available. However a search of the Parliamentary Questions' database (which holds information from 1979 onwards) has revealed during 1979–80 (in the then Civil Service Department) a review of the Government statistical services; and during 1992–93 (in the then Office of Public Service and Science) a review of open government.

Government Staff

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what proportion of those in employment are employed by central Government or agencies of central Government in terms of *(a)* numbers and *(b)* percentages for (i) full-time and (ii) part-time employment. [50630]

Mr. Kilfoyle: The numbers and proportions of full and part time UK employees and Civil Servants at the start of 1998 are set out in the following table:

	All employees	*Civil Servants*	
		Number	*Per cent.*
Full-time	17,564,000	446,000	2.5
Part-time	5,816,000	59,000	1.0
Total	23,380,000	505,000	2.2

Notes:
1. Civil Servant figures are on headcount basis and include both permanent and casual employees
2. Approximately 10,000 Civil Servants are located outside the United Kingdom. They are included in the Civil Service figures above
3. The Northern Ireland Civil Service is not included

Channel Tunnel

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if the operations of the company managing the Channel Tunnel will be covered by the proposed Freedom of Information Act. [51213]

Mr. Kilfoyle: The proposed Freedom of Information Act is intended principally to cover the public sector but it will also extend to private sector companies where these companies are carrying out functions conferred on them by statute. The two companies which form Eurotunnel, the Channel Tunnel Group Ltd and France-Manche SA operating under the Channel Tunnel Concession Agreement are commercial organisations whose management of the Channel Tunnel does not fall into this category. Eurotunnel itself will not therefore come within the scope of the proposed Freedom of Information Act, although information relating to Eurotunnel held by the relevant public authorities will be within scope.

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what assessment he has made of the consistency of Clause 33.3 of the Treaty of Canterbury with the Government's policy of open Government. [51373]

Mr. Kilfoyle: Clause 33.3 of the Channel Tunnel Concession Agreement signed in 1986 states that each of the parties to that Agreement and the Intergovernmental Commission and the Safety Authority,

"shall hold in confidence all Documents and other information whether technical or commercial supplied to them by or on behalf of any other party hereto relating to the Fixed Link and shall not save as required by law or procedural practices publish or otherwise disclose the same otherwise than for the purposes contemplated by [the Agreement]".

The reference to "law or procedural practices" ensures that the provision is consistent with the requirements of the current Code of Practice on Access to Government Information and, when it comes into force, our proposed Freedom of Information Act.

Departmental Insurance

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster which Government departments and agencies are self-insured and which have insurance cover through the insurance market in respect of compulsory employers' liability insurance. [50632]

Mr. Kilfoyle: Government departments and agencies are not bound by the Employers' Liability (Compulsory Insurance) Act 1969. Therefore departments and agencies are not statutorily required to insure the risks which may arise under the Act. Departments and agencies may decide to insure or not to insure on value for money grounds. That is a decision for each department and agency and no central record is kept.

Departmental Claims (Injury and Illness)

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what was the total amount for each of the last three years paid by each Government department to Government staff in respect of claims brought by them for personal injury or occupational illness by way of *(a)* damages and *(b)* legal costs. [50629]

Mr. Kilfoyle: This information is not held centrally.

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

Training

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what steps he is taking to minimise the bureaucratic burden on private sector employers participating in New Deal programmes, with particular reference to training contracts. [52346]

Mr. Andrew Smith: New Deal was designed following consultation with a wide range of organisations including private sector employers. The administrative arrangements for employers participating in the New Deal are straightforward. Their obligations and the level of service they can expect from New Deal are set out in the Employer Agreement. Employers are free to make their own arrangements for securing the training the young people they recruit under New Deal are entitled to. Alternatively that training can be arranged on behalf of the employer by the Employment Service (ES). No contract with the employer, beyond the Employer Agreement, is involved in either case.

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what further support he will offer to New Deal trainees in support of their Gateway activities after their initial period has elapsed. [52347]

Mr. Andrew Smith: Throughout their time on New Deal young people will receive the support of a Personal Adviser. During Gateway, each young person will in addition have access to independent careers advice and specialist help to overcome the particular barriers to employment that they are facing. When a young person's difficulties are particularly serious or far-reaching or when a particular difficulty does not come to light until they have started on an option, then the young person can continue to have access to specialist Gateway services while they are on their chosen Option. The over-riding aim is to help young people into sustained employment through specialist services, counselling, advice, time on a New Deal Option, and, if necessary, further help as part of the Follow Through arrangements.

Schools (Extra-curricular Opportunities)

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what steps he is taking to instruct schools to incorporate in their prospectuses a statement of the extra-curricular opportunities offered by that school; and if he will make a statement. [52650]

Ms Estelle Morris: My Department has recently issued revised guidance to schools on the content of school prospectuses. All schools must include in their prospectus a statement on the ethos and values of the school. The guidance recommends that schools cover their main extra-curricular activities in the statement on ethos and values. The guidance also recommends that schools include in their prospectus a statement on the school's arts policy and provision.

Sex Education

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will issue advice to secondary schools about informing pupils of the dangers to health of unprotected sex. [52345]

Ms Estelle Morris: All maintained secondary schools are already statutorily required to provide sex education, including education about HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted infections. We intend to disseminate existing good practice more widely. We are, with the Department of Health, considering sex and relationships education in the context of the Government's health strategy.

Student Funding

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what level of per capita funding the Government plan for further education students in each year from 1998–99 to 2001–02. [51836]

Dr. Howells: The planned public funding per full-time equivalent student in Government-funded further education in 1998–99 is £2,840. The figure for 1999–2000 will reflect the planned one per cent. efficiency saving for that year announced in the White Paper "Comprehensive Spending Review: new public spending plans 1999–2000" (Cmnd 4011). Further details about our plans for 1999–2000, and the provision that we intend to make for 2000–2002, will be announced in the autumn.

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what level of per capita funding the Government plan for higher education students in each year from 1998–99 to 2001–02. [51831]

Dr. Howells: Publicly planned provision for higher education for 1998–99, including contributions to tuition fees from public funds and from students, implies funding of £4,704 per student. In 1999–2000, there will be an extra £280 million for universities, colleges and students, a 5.7 per cent. cash increase for higher education. Further details of funding for 1999–2000, along with later years, will be announced in due course.

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what was the level of per capita funding provided by the Government for students in higher education in each year from 1992–93 to 1997–98. [51830]

Dr. Howells: The level of public funding per student in higher education in each of the financial years 1992–93 to 1997–98 is shown in the following table:

	£
1992–93	5,760
1993–94	5,422
1994–95	5,278
1995–96	5,027
1996–97	4,705
1997–98	4,572

Note:

Figures are in real terms at 1997–98 prices. Research funds were transferred from DfEE to the Research Councils in 1992–93 and 1993–94 (leading to high unit costs in these two years), and they reflect changes in the way students were counted to include continuing education students from 1995–96

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what was the level of per capita funding provided by the Government for students in further education in each year from 1992–93 to 1997–98. [51832]

Dr. Howells: The public funding per full-time equivalent student in Government-funded further education from 1993–94 to 1997–98 is shown in the following table:

	£
1993–94	3,080
1994–95	3,040
1995–96	2,930
1996–97	2,920
1997–98[1]	2,900

[1] Estimated

Notes:

1. The figures are given in cash terms and rounded to the nearest £10

2. No figure is available for 1992–93 on a comparable basis with the above series

Key Stage 1

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will make it his policy to publish Key Stage 1 results together with average class sizes for all primary schools. [52563]

Ms Estelle Morris: We have in hand an extensive programme of improvements to both the secondary and primary performance tables. We will continue to keep this matter under review.

Dance and Drama

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many places at dance and drama schools are being supported by the interim funding scheme; and if he will make a statement. [52649]

Dr. Howells: 540 students in interim funding scheme places have so far received support during 1997–98.

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment when he expects to announce long-term arrangements for the funding of students of dance and drama; and if he will make a statement. [52651]

Dr. Howells: An announcement on the long-term arrangements for funding students of dance and drama is planned for the Autumn, subject to continued successful development work.

Information Technology

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what funding is provided for in-post IT training and updating for education professionals in *(a)* primary schools, *(b)* secondary schools and *(c)* further and higher education; and if he will make a statement. [52102]

Ms Estelle Morris:

IT training in primary and secondary schools

Content of in-service training for education professionals in primary and secondary schools is for schools and LEAs to decide. Separate figures are not available on amounts spent on IT training.

Funding for specific initiatives to ensure that all teachers are confident and competent in ICT use is as follows:

- £230 million to be available through National Lottery funding in the period up to 2002, to train 450,000 teachers in the effective use of ICT;
- £100m Standards Fund available 1998–99 to support the establishment of the National Grid for Learning (to cover networking; Internet connection; hard-and software, basic training not covered by the lottery initiative);
- £23 million this financial year for the Multimedia Laptop Portables Scheme, to enable teachers to gain hands-on experience of computers.

IT training in further and higher education

The Further Education Funding Council is promoting a new staff development initiative, the Quality in Information and Learning Technology (QUILT) programme, with an injection of £1.9m over a five-year period from 1997.

Colleges themselves invest considerable funds in developing their staff, but figures are not held for the amounts spent on IT training.

Higher education institutions are autonomous bodies responsible for the management of their own academic and financial affairs. They train their staff through internal development programmes. Figures are not held centrally for amounts spent on IT training.

Trainee Doctors

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many *(a)* men and *(b)* women are currently training at medical schools to become doctors. [51853]

Dr. Howells: In 1997–98, the latest year for which figures are available, the numbers of students studying medicine at undergraduate level in those universities in the UK with medical schools were 11,528 men and 12,457 women.

Alcohol and Tobacco Smuggling

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what estimate he has made of the impact on UK employment of the smuggling of *(a)* drink and *(b)* tobacco from the European mainland. [52294]

Mr. Geoffrey Robinson: I have been asked to reply.

I have no information about the consequences of alcohol and tobacco smuggling relating to UK employment in particular. However, the Government are very much aware of the illegal trade in alcohol and tobacco and its effect on the legitimate trade. In his July Budget last year the Chancellor announced a review to examine the effects of alcohol and tobacco fraud, smuggling and cross-border shopping. The Government will announce the outcome of the review shortly.

HEALTH

Pharmaceuticals

Mrs. Ellman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what criteria will be taken into account in the re-negotiation of the Pharmaceutical Pricing Scheme. [49283]

Mr. Milburn: The approach taken in the negotiations on the Pharmaceutical Price Regulation Scheme is governed by the principles which drive all of our programme for the National Health Service—promoting the nation's health and providing comprehensive, high quality health care for patients. Within that framework we have a responsibility to see that public money is spent effectively, and to encourage the pharmaceutical industry to produce new and improved medicines at reasonable prices.

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what action she is proposing to take to ensure a fully competitive market in supplying drugs to the NHS. [51047]

Mr. Milburn: A number of factors impede the operation of a fully competitive market in some parts of the pharmaceutical sector. Intellectual property protection, necessary so that research and development can be carried out, means that there is often only one medicine appropriate to a particular condition. A competitive market flourishes where patents have expired and generic medicines are available; where this does not occur, alternative arrangements like the Pharmaceutical Price Regulation Scheme are needed.

Hospital Services (Vale of York)

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what additional money was made available for *(a)* additional beds, *(b)* orthopaedic operations, *(c)* oral surgery operations and *(d)* cataract operations in the Vale of York area in 1996–97. [50756]

Mr. Milburn: The information is not available in the form requested.

Melanomas

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much Government funding has been provided for the Medical Research Council trial on the use of alpha-interferon in the treatment of melanomas. [50917]

Ms Jowell: None. This is not a Medical Research Council trial and no MRC funding goes towards it. As a commercial trial, no National Health Service funding would be used in support of the trial.

Artificial Resuscitation

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he is taking to encourage the education of the public in artificial resuscitation techniques. [50947]

Mr. Milburn *[holding answer 17 July 1998]:* We are working across Government to promote awareness of the ABC of resuscitation—Airway, Breathing, Circulation. This includes for example the recent announcement that the Government are to extend Value Added Tax relief to resuscitation models used by charities for first aid training.

Medical Records

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will take steps to ensure that patients are not charged more than £10 to see their medical records. [51044]

Mr. Milburn *[holding answer 17 July 1998]:* The Access to Health Records Act 1990 already provides that an application fee of no more than £10 can be charged for sight of a patient's records. However, the Act also allows record-holders to recover the costs of producing copies of the records if these are required, but record-holders should not seek to make a profit when calculating these charges.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the potential for breaching of the confidentiality of patients' personal medical information if the Department of Trade and Industry's proposals on regulating the use of encryption on public networks lead to the escrow of encryption keys for clinical data. [51651]

Mr. Milburn: We are awaiting proposals from the Department of Trade and Industry on the conditions and procedures which would govern the escrow of encryption keys where personal medical information is involved. Our concern to safeguard patient confidentiality has been relayed to the Department of Trade and Industry, and an assessment of the impact of the detailed proposals will be made when they are received.

Cateracts

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many cataract operations were performed in NHS hospitals in the Greater London area in each of the last three years. [51539]

Mr. Milburn: The information for in-patient treatment in National Health Service trust hospitals is based on Finished Consultant Episodes (FCEs), which represent the number of episodes of care under individual consultants. The total number of FCEs recorded for cataract operations for Greater London trusts is as follows:

1996–97: not available

1995–96: 24,856

1994–95: 24,781

The data are grossed for both coverage and unknown/invalid clinical data.

Residential Care

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 21 July 1998, *Official Report*, columns *530–31*, concerning backdating financial assistance for residential and nursing home placements, with which organisation his Department has consulted in drawing up the guidance to accompany the Community Care (Residential Accommodation) Act 1998. [52276]

Mr. Boateng: We consulted the Local Government Association, the Association of London Government, the National Association of Finance Officers, and these voluntary organisations: Age Concern, Help the Aged, Anchor Housing Trust, Abbeyfield, the Community Care Trust, Hanover Housing, the Alzheimers Disease Society, Mencap, the National Association of Citizen Advice Bureaux, Carer's National Association, the Relative's Association, the National Council for Voluntary Organisations, and MIND.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 21 July 1998, *Official Report*, columns *530–31*, concerning his Department's guidance, LAC (98)B, if he will make it his policy to amend the National Assistance Act 1948 to allow a resident placed by a local authority to fund the difference between what the authority is able to pay and more expensive placement. [52277]

Mr. Boateng: The terms of reference of the Royal Commission on long-term care of elderly people ask them to look at how the cost of long term care should be apportioned between public funds and individuals. The commission is due to report by the end of the year.

Continence Services

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 21 July 1998, *Official Report*, column *529*, concerning continence services, what advice or instructions he expects to issue to inform the next commissioning round. [52274]

Mr. Milburn: The guidance "Continence—an agenda for action for continence services" which was issued to the National Health Service in 1991 already provides advice on continence services.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 21 July 1998, *Official Report*, column *529*, concerning continence services, when his Department commenced its review of continence policy; and when he will publish his conclusions. [52275]

Mr. Milburn: The work to develop the review of continence policy started in April 1998 and a research and development seminar was held on 12 June. It is envisaged that the results of the review will be reflected in guidance that will be issued in due course.

Asylum Seekers (Children)

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many children of asylum applicants were taken into care or otherwise became the responsibility of local authorities in the last year for which figures are available. [52062]

Mr. Boateng: The information requested is not collected centrally.

Transplant Surgery Waiting List

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health on what date the waiting list for transplant surgery exceeded 6,000. [52363]

Mr. Boateng: The total number of patients (active and suspended) awaiting solid organ transplants first exceeded 6,000 in December 1995 with the number standing at 6,003 on 31 December 1995. At 12 July 1998 the total (active and suspended) was 6,494.

An active patient refers to someone who is well and awaiting their transplant. A suspended patient is someone who is not well enough to have a transplant and has been temporarily removed from the waiting list.

Xenotransplantation

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the work of the Committee on Dangerous Pathogens in relation to Xenotransplantation. [52352]

Ms Jowell: The Advisory Committee on Dangerous Pathogens (ACDP) considered the risks of infectious disease associated with xenotransplantation in 1996 and jointly hosted a workshop on 'Infectious Disease and Xenotransplantation' with the Advisory Group on Ethics of Xenotransplantation. The report of this workshop was published in January 1997 as part of the advisory group's report 'Animal Tissue into Humans'. Additionally the ACDP have advised the Medicines Control Agency and Gene Therapy Advisory Committee on the infection risks posed by a gene therapy trial.

The ACDP is currently convening a meeting of experts to assess the risks of various types of xenotransplant and will provide advice on these issues to the United Kingdom Xenotransplantation Interim Regulatory Authority.

Millennium Compliance

Mr. Hammond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 21 July 1998, *Official Report*, column 526, regarding the cost of ensuring

millennium computer compliance in the NHS, what factors underlay the length of time taken to answer the question tabled for answer on 22 June. [52562]

Mr. Milburn: Estimating the cost of Millennium compliance in the National Health Service is a complex issue and I wanted to be fully confident that the figures given in the reply were accurate and up to date before answering.

Osteoporosis

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what research his Department is supporting into the treatment of osteoporosis. [51959]

Ms Jowell: The Medical Research Council (MRC) is the main agency through which the Government support medical and clinical research. The MRC is an independent body which receives its grant-in-aid from the Department of Trade and Industry. The total value of current MRC grants for research related to osteoporosis is £5.6 million. Work being carried out at the MRC's own establishments includes:

- a study currently being undertaken by the MRC Dunn Nutrition Unit entitled *Micronutrient research: role of calcium and other factors in the development of peak bone mass and osteoporosis.* The MRC Environmental Epidemiology Unit is undertaking a study into Risk Factors for cardiovascular disease, osteoporosis and cognitive decline in people born in the Jessop Hospital;
- the Department of Health/MRC Nutrition Programme (Phase II) is undertaking three studies linked to osteoporosis and diet. These are Dietary and other determinants of bone health and fracture in men and women. Assessment of nutritional, physical activity and genetic factors influencing perimenopausal bone health, and Interventions to maximise bone mineralisation in adolescents: benefits of calcium and exercise for 16–18 year olds.

Announced by the MRC in October 1996, the Women's International Study of long Duration Oestrogen after Menopause (WISDOM) will be co-ordinated in the United Kingdom by researchers at the MRC Epidemiology and Medical Care Unit, London. One of the main objectives of WISDOM is to establish how hormone replacement therapy (HRT) affects the incidence of bone fractures caused by osteoporosis.

The Department's Policy Research Programme (PRP) recently completed funding of a study entitled *HRT in the menopause: a cost-effective analysis.* The research was undertaken at the University of Oxford.

The National Health Service research and development programme's Standing Group on Health Technologies has identified research proposals for osteoporosis as a priority area and two projects have been commissioned: one on the treatment of established osteoporosis and the other on evaluation of methods for identifying and monitoring the treatment of osteoporosis.

There are also other projects being undertaken on a regional basis.

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will list the health authorities in *(a)* Staffordshire and *(b)* the West Midlands which have an osteoporosis strategy in place; [51958]

(2) if he will estimate for the last year for which figures are available, how many NHS patients suffered from osteoporosis, the number of fractures attributable to osteoporosis and the number of beds being used for osteoporitic fractures in *(a)* Staffordshire and *(b)* the West Midlands. [51960]

Ms Jowell: Information on individual health authority strategies is not collected centrally. Data on neither the number of beds being used for osteoporosis nor all fractures specifically attributable to the condition are available. Specific numbers of sufferers are not available, but the table lists finished consultant episodes with a diagnosis of osteoporosis for National Health Service trusts in Staffordshire and the West Midlands region.

	Staffordshire	*West Midlands*
Number of first FCEs with diagnosis of osteoporosis (ICD10 M80-M82)	161	1,204
Number of first FCEs with diagnosis of osteoporosis with pathological fracture (ICD10 M80)	53	309

Source:
WMRO Regional Information System 1996–97

Health Services (Worcestershire)

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he has received all papers relevant to the restructuring of health services in Worcestershire; and when he expects to reach a decision on the issue. [52646]

Mr. Milburn: The formal submission to Ministers on Worcestershire Health Authority's strategic review has been made by officials at the West Midlands Regional Office of the National Health Service Executive. Ministers will be making a final decision, based on that submission, in due course.

Social Services (Worcestershire)

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations he has received from carers and their representatives in Worcestershire about funding for social services; and if he will make a statement. [52644]

Mr. Boateng: A number of representations have been received from carers and users of personal social services in Worcestershire about funding for social services. In recognition of the vital role carers fulfil in helping relatives or friends, I am leading a government-wide review of measures to help carers as part of a carers national strategy. The objective is to bring together a range of initiatives designed to address carers' concerns and give them support.

Primary Care Group

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Health from which budget the cost of employing the chief executives of the new Primary Care Group will be met. [51915]

Mr. Milburn: The costs of employing Primary Care Group staff will be met from health authority unified budget allocations.

NHS Funding Allocation

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what account will be taken of rurality in the allocation of funds to the NHS. [51917]

Mr. Milburn: A weighted capitation formula is used to determine each health authority's fair share of available resources and to enable them to commission similar levels of health services for populations in similar need.

In 1998/99 we introduced a new adjustment to the formula for emergency ambulance services, which includes a rurality factor. This was on the advice of the Advisory Committee on Resource Allocation following a review of the cost of providing services in rural areas. The formula takes account of the health needs of populations, both rural and urban.

Comprehensive Spending Review

Mr. McWalter: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement about the implications of the Comprehensive Spending Review for health authorities which have in 1998–99 a significant deficit on their current account, with particular reference to West Hertfordshire. [51454]

Mr. Milburn: The extra resources of £21 billion (United Kingdom) announced as the outcome of the Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR) for the years 1999–2000 to 2001–2002 will be used to modernise and reform services.

We have already made an additional £1.7 billion (UK) available for the National Health Service in 1998–99. The NHS Executive has issued firm guidance that the need for financial balance is critical; and the majority of health authorities in England with financial problems are expected to achieve a balanced financial position by the end of 1998–99. In certain specific cases, where there are deep seated structural problems, this may not be achievable by the end of the current year and a health authority may be allowed to regain financial balance over a number of years. The regional offices of the NHS Executive have developed recovery plans for those NHS bodies with significant deficits. The plan for West Hertfordshire aims to achieve financial balance as soon as possible.

Hepatitis B (Devon)

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will issue guidance to the Director of Education in Devon concerning the advice that should be given to those families affected by the current hepatitis B health alert at Paignton Community College, Devon. [52348]

Mr. Boateng: We understand that South and West Devon Health Authority and Torbay Council have already agreed a joint approach to the management of this incident.

A joint letter and hepatitis B factsheet was distributed to children from a local community college and their parents on Friday 17 July. The letter provided information about the means of transmission of the disease and its potential risk to health. Individuals who may have concerns that they had contact with an infected adult in the community were invited to contact a health authority advice line.

The health authority is offering testing and immunisation against hepatitis B to any individual who feels that they may have had high-risk contact with this person. This includes any child attending the local community college.

Ambulance Ages

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 22 July 1998, *Official Report*, column *570*, regarding ambulance ages, *(a)* on what date he initiated his informal assessment of ambulance ages, *(b)* how many ambulance trusts were involved in his informal assessment and *(c)* what was the cost of conducting his informal assessment. [52529]

Mr. Boateng: The informal assessment of ambulance ages was initiated on 26 June 1998 and all 37 ambulance National Health Service trusts in England were contacted. The estimated cost was £2,267.

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 13 May 1998, *Official Report*, column *149*, regarding ambulance ages, what estimate he made of the cost of providing the information which was requested. [52571]

Mr. Boateng: It is estimated that the cost of providing the information requested would exceed the disproportionate threshold of £500.

Hospital Deaths

Mr. Gill: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients died in hospitals, and from what causes, in the latest year for which figures are available. [52248]

Mrs. Liddell: I have been asked to reply.

The information requested falls within the responsibility of the Chief Executive of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Tim Holt to Mr. Christopher Gill, dated 27 July 1998:

I have been asked to reply, as Director of the Office for National Statistics (ONS), to your parliamentary question on deaths of patients in hospital.

The information requested is published in Table 36 in *Mortality Statistics: general 1993, 1994 and 1995 Series DH1 no. 28* (Office for National Statistics, 1997), a copy of which is available in the House of Commons Library.

Written Answers to Questions

Tuesday 28 July 1998

HOME DEPARTMENT

Domestic Violence

Mr. Edwards: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what estimate he has made of the number of women subjected to domestic violence in Wales in the last year for which figures are available. [52247]

Mr. Michael: Recorded crime statistics relate to offence type, not to the relationship between the victim and the offender. There are therefore no overall statistics for the number of violent crimes which are domestic in nature across the United Kingdom.

Currently, the most reliable nation-wide estimate is provided by the British Crime Survey (BCS). This suggested that in 1995 there were one million incidents of domestic violence in England and Wales. The BCS sample size does not permit a reliable estimate of the number for Wales alone.

Mr. Lepper: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the progress of pilot schemes based on the Duluth model for dealing with domestic violence; and if a timetable has been set for reporting on the outcome of such pilot schemes. [52229]

Mr. Michael: The Duluth model for dealing with domestic violence provides a range of measures for addressing the issue and promotes a co-ordinated response from the interested agencies. We recognise the success achieved by this approach in the United States of America and welcome initiatives such as that in the London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham where the local Domestic Violence Forum is planning a pilot of the model. It is for the forum to decide how to report on the outcome of this work, but I would certainly read any report with interest.

Wrongful Convictions

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people whose convictions have been quashed over each of the last five years have *(a)* applied for and *(b)* received compensation. [52096]

Mr. Michael: Applications for compensation may be made by persons whose convictions have been quashed, but may also be made by persons who have spent time in custody following a criminal charge which is subsequently withdrawn or of which they are acquitted at trial. Information relating to the number of applications made is not available in respect of the full period requested. The information available (which does not distinguish between applications which arose from the reversal of a conviction and those which did not) is as follows:

	Applications	*Decisions in principle to pay compensation*
1993	...	9
1994	...	55
1995	...	39
1996	102	25
1997	111	20

Figures include cases stemming from the quashing of a high number of drink-driving convictions in Greater Manchester, following the discovery that swabs contaminated with alcohol had been used to take blood samples for analysis.

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how much has been paid during each of the last five years in compensation to persons wrongly convicted; and what was *(a)* the highest, *(b)* the lowest and *(c)* the average sum awarded. [52099]

Mr. Michael: The total amount paid in compensation to persons who have been wrongly convicted or charged for each of the last five financial years is as follows:

	£ million
1993–94	1.506
1994–95	1.543
1995–96	1.549
1996–97	2.701
1997–98	6.652

In the past, no central record has been maintained of the amount of compensation awarded in individual cases so that information concerning the highest, the lowest and the average sum awarded is not available. Arrangements have now been put in place for the information to be collected in future.

In the past, records have been kept of the number of cases each year where a decision in principle to pay compensation is taken, but the administrative procedures involved in determining the amount of an award and the time taken to complete them are such that there is little, if any, correlation between the number of decisions in principle and the total amount awarded in any given year. The Home Office still awaits the receipt of claims in some cases where a decision in principle to pay compensation was taken as long ago as 1991. Moreover, the total awarded in any given year will include interim payments made in cases where the final amount of the award has yet to be determined. Consequently, it would be misleading to calculate the average sum awarded by dividing the total amount awarded or paid in any year by the number of decisions in principle taken in the same year.

I have placed copies of a general guide to compensation for wrongful conviction and supporting papers in the Library.

Young People (National Recognition)

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will assess the advantages and

disadvantages of introducing a central system of national recognition for young people; and what plans he has to introduce such a system. [52095]

Mr. George Howarth: The benefits and disadvantages of various national identity card schemes were discussed in the 1995 Green Paper "Identity Cards: A consultation document" (CM 2879) and the 1996 Home Affairs Committee Fourth Report on Identity Cards (HC 172). We are considering the options, but have no current plans for such a scheme, either generally or for particular age groups.

Prisoners

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will identify the oldest *(a)* man and *(b)* woman, now held in prison in England and Wales; for how long they have been in prison; and for what offence were they convicted. [52296]

Ms Quin: As at 30 June 1998, the oldest male held in a Prison Service establishment in England and Wales was aged 87. He has currently served 28 months of his sentence after having been convicted of rape. The oldest woman was a 71 year old who has been in prison for 15 months following a conviction for cruelty to children.

Prisons (Drug-free Wings)

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list those prisons that have drug-free wings: [52295]

Mr. George Howarth: The Government are committed to providing access to voluntary testing for all prisoners wishing to prove they are drug-free.

Prisoners in the following establishments currently have access in varying degrees to voluntary testing:

Altcourse
Ashwell
Aylesbury
Blakenhurst
Blantyre House
Blundeston
Bristol
Brixton
Bullingdon
Channings Wood
Chelmsford
Coldingley
Dartmoor
Doncaster
Dorchester
Downview
Drake Hall
Elmley
Erlestoke
Everthorpe
Featherstone
Feltham
Foston Hall
Frankland
Gartree
Glen Parva
Grendon
Guys Marsh
Highdown
Highpoint
Holloway
Holme House
Hull
Kirklevington Grange
Latchmere House
Leicester
Lewes
Lindholme
Lowdham Grange
Manchester
The Mount
North Sea Camp
Norwich
Nottingham
Parkhurst
Pentonville
Portland
Ranby
Risley
Stafford
Stocken
Styal
Swaleside
Swansea
Swinfen Hall
The Verne
Wandsworth
Wayland
Wealstun
Weare
Wellingborough
Whatton
Whitemoor
Wormwood Scrubs.

Criminal Cases Review Commission

Mr. Goggins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what criteria are used to determine the order of priority for cases referred to the Criminal Cases Review Commission. [51479]

Mr. Michael *[holding answer 27 July 1998]:* In determining the priority of the applications it receives, the Criminal Cases Review Commission (CCRC) takes into account the date of receipt and such factors as the age and health of the applicant and witnesses to the case; any evidential or operational considerations; whether or not the applicant is in custody, and the impact of the case on public confidence in the criminal justice system. The weight attached to each of these criteria will vary case to case. The decision in each case is an operational matter for the CCRC.

Mr. Goggins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the total number of cases referred to date to the Criminal Cases Review Commission. [51482]

Mr. Michael *[holding answer 27 July 1998]:* Cases reach the Criminal Cases Review Commission (CCRC) when an application is made to the Commission by, or on behalf of, an individual who claims that he or she has been the victim of a miscarriage of justice. In addition, some 284 cases which were pending when the CCRC was set up have been transferred to the Commission by the Home Office. The total number in both categories is now slightly over 1,700.

Police Authorities (East Midlands)

Sir Richard Body: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the per capita expenditure by the police authorities in East Midlands. [53079]

Mr. Michael: Information about police expenditure per head of population is published by the Audit Commission in their reports "Local Authority Performance Indicators". The most recent of these reports is for expenditure in 1996–97 and was published in January 1998. The per capita spend for police forces in the East Midlands is set out in the table.

Force	*Expenditure (£) per head of population 1996–97*
Derbyshire	94.12
Leicestershire	100.98
Lincolnshire	100.19
Northamptonshire	98.74
Nottinghamshire	107.65
National average (England and Wales)	109.11

Pepper Sprays

Mr. Lansley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) on how many occasions in the last year, police forces have used pepper sprays; [52464]

(2) what guidance is issued to police officers in respect of the use of pepper spray at close quarters. [52463]

Mr. Michael *[holding answer 27 July 1998]:* Police officers in England and Wales do not carry pepper sprays, and no guidance has been issued to them on the subject.

Either-way Cases (Defendants)

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will publish the consultation paper on the question of whether defendants in either-way cases should continue to be able to elect Crown Court trial. [53552]

Mr. Straw: In the consultation exercise on the report of the Review of Delay in the Criminal Justice System last year, the responses to its recommendation that defendants in either-way should no longer be able to decide to elect Crown Court trial demonstrated sufficient support to warrant further consideration. I therefore announced that the Government would look at the proposal in longer time with a view to publishing a separate consultation paper on it.

I am publishing such a paper today. It describes the current arrangements whereby defendants can be tried summarily for indictable offences only with their consent, and discusses two possible options for change: the abolition of election, as recommended by both the Review of Delay and the Royal Commission on Criminal Justice, and reclassification of minor theft, which is often put forward as an alternative. The paper is concerned not with the merits of jury trial, but only with whether defendants should be able to choose to be tried by a jury in cases which magistrates have indicated that they would be content to hear. In forming a view on this question, the Government will take account of responses to the paper, which are invited by the end of September.

Women's Prisons

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what estimate he has made of the number of women who entered prison as non-users of illegal drugs and left as users in each of the last three years. [53107]

Mr. George Howarth: The report of the Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs published in 1996 found that, although some misusers take drugs for the first time inside prison, the numbers leaving prison who misuse drugs is lower than the numbers entering.

No study has been conducted specifically concerning women prisoners.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to increase the support infrastructure in women's prisons in cases where probation departments have been reduced. [53106]

Ms Quin: It is for individual governors to decide on the appropriate level of provision to meet the needs of the establishment and to enter into a contract with the local probation service to provide the necessary staff. Probation departments form one part of a multi-disciplinary team, and the needs of prisoners and the development of the regime will be the governor's main consideration in making any changes in the team. Over the last two years, most women's prisons have in fact increased their probation departments.

The Prisons and Probation review is looking at ways of improving working and contact between the two services, and the Prison Service's Assistant Director for Women is responsible for developing women's regimes.

Compliance Cost Assessments

Mr. Lansley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the compliance cost assessments published by his Department since 1 May 1997. [52931]

Mr. Straw: The following Compliance Cost Assessments (recently renamed Regulatory Impact Assessments) were published by the Home Office between 1 May 1997 and 30 June 1998:

Date	*Title*
July 1997	The Fire Precautions (Workplace) Regulations 1997
August 1997	The Police and Firemen's Pension Act 1997; the Firemen's Pensions (Provision of Information) Regulations 1997; and the Police Pensions (Provision of Information) Regulations 1997
September 1997	The Lotteries (Gaming Board Fees) Order 1997
October 1997	The Licensing Fees (Variation) Order 1997
January 1998	The Data Protection Bill
January 1998	The Deregulation (Licence Transfers) Order 1998; The Licensing (Fees) Amendment Order 1998
March 1998	The Gambling (Bingo) Fees (Amendment) Order 1998; The Lotteries (Gaming Board Fees) Order 1998; The Gaming Act (Variation of Fees) Order 1998
June 1998	The Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986 (Amendment) Regulations 1998

Mr. Lansley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list those compliance cost assessments since 1 May 1997 in which there is a net reduction in compliance costs resulting from a legislative proposal. [52973]

Mr. Straw: The following compliance cost assessments published between 1 May 1997 and 30 June 1998 show a net estimated reduction in compliance costs totalling £4 million per annum:

The Deregulation (Licence Transfers) Order 1998

The Licensing (Fees) Amendment Order 1998.

There is at present no requirement on Departments to carry out compliance cost assessments where legislative proposals are expected to be cost neutral or result in a saving to business.

Mr. Lansley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what cumulative net increase in compliance costs has been estimated in compliance cost assessments published by his Department since 1 May 1997. [52932]

Mr. Straw: The cumulative net increase in compliance costs estimated compliance cost assessments published by the Home Office between 1 May 1997 and 30 June 1998 is as follows:

Non-recurring costs: £1,179,286,250

Annually recurring costs: £742,114,500.

Of this, the compliance costs assessment for the Data Protection Bill shows estimated non-recurring costs of £1,150 million and annually recurring costs of £742 million.

Visible Policing

Mr. Lansley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department for what reasons he has not retained visible policing as a key policy objective. [52795]

Mr. Michael: The Government are committed to the effective use of police resources to cut crime and to keep the peace. Our major reforms, set out in the Crime and Disorder Bill [*Lords*], will create a new and dynamic partnership, led by the police and the local authority, to cut crime and disorder locally. Police activity can help to promote community safety and reassure the public. However, we also believe that high visibility policing, which is not targeted or intelligence-led, can lead to an inefficient deployment of resources.

In setting the national objectives for the police for 1998–99, the Home Secretary decided to reflect the Government's top law and order priorities of tackling youth crime and drug-related crime and reducing local problems of crime and disorder through a partnership approach. Tackling crime and disorder has a crucial role to play in promoting community safety and reassuring the public. Where appropriate, high visibility policing will form part of the response to local crime and disorder problems.

Performance indicators for the police published by the Audit Commission and reported on by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary, include public satisfaction with the perceived level of foot and mobile patrol.

Witness Protection Programmes

Mr. Lansley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will undertake a review of the comparative effectiveness of witness protection programmes in the regional crime squads of England. [52927]

Mr. Michael: The regional crime squads amalgamated to form the National Crime Squad on 1 April 1998. The protection of witnesses involved in investigations carried out by the Squad is an operational matter for the Director General of the National Crime Squad.

Football Hooliganism

Mr. Jim Murphy: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list in order of frequency the 20 towns and cities of residence given by those English football fans *(a)* arrested, *(b)* detained and *(c)* removed from France by the French authorities during the World Cup. [51997]

Mr. Michael: Full details of the places of residence of those arrested are not presently available. I will write to my hon. Friend as soon as further inquiries to obtain the information are completed.

Mr. Jim Murphy: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many football supporters were arrested or detained by police at each football ground for the last three years for which figures are available for the Premiership and each of the Nationwide League clubs. [51998]

Mr. Michael: The information on the number of arrests has been collated on a club-by-club basis only since season 1997–98. Collation of these figures is a matter for the Football Unit of the National Criminal Intelligence Service (NCIS) and it is expected that these figures will be available shortly.

For previous seasons, the data have been collated by NCIS on a divisional basis and the information for the past three years is as follows:

	1994–95	1995–96	1996–97
Premier League			
Attendance (millions)	11.2	10.5	10.8
Arrests	1,713	1,697	1,759
Division One			
Attendance (millions)	6.0	6.6	6.9
Arrests	1,[illegible]	945	891
Division Two			
Attendance (millions)	3.0	2.8	3.2
Arrests	674	506	626
Division Three			
Attendance (millions)	1.6	2.0	1.9
Arrests	226	289	301
FA Cup			
Attendance (millions)	2.0	2.0	1.9
Arrests	914	549	509

Mr. Jim Murphy: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many members of each official English Premiership or Football League supporters clubs were *(a)* arrested, *(b)* detained and *(c)* removed by French authorities during the World Cup. [52000]

Mr. Michael: Information on how many of these individuals are members of official English Premiership or Football League Supporters Groups is not available.

Mr. Jim Murphy: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many supporters of each participating nation were *(a)* detained and *(b)* arrested during Euro 96 in England. [52001]

Mr. Michael: The total number of people arrested for football-related offences during Euro '96 was 1,107. The country of origin is as follows:

Australia: 1
Croatia: 10
England: 916
Ireland: 6
Mexico: 1
Norway: 1
Scotland: 66
Switzerland: 7
Wales: 5
Bulgaria: 1
Czech Republic: 1
France: 17
Italy: 4
Netherlands: 17
Romania: 2
Spain: 2
Turkey: 7
Unknown: 10
Canada: 2
Denmark: 8
Germany: 13
Malta: 2
New Zealand: 1
Russia: 4
Sweden: 1
United States: 2.

Mr. Jim Murphy: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how much was spent by each league club in England on policing of football grounds *(a)* on average per game and *(b)* for each of the last three years for which figures are available. [52004]

Mr. Michael: This information is not held centrally. I am placing in the Library copies of the tables, taken from a survey conducted by the Football League Limited, which show comparative policing costs of non-premiership football league clubs in seasons 1994–95 and 1995–96.

Muslim Women

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what guidelines have been issued to Customs officials in respect of the treatment of Muslim women wearing veils. [53080]

Mr. Geoffrey Robinson: I have been asked to reply.

Guidance to Customs officials says that, where it is necessary to remove and examine head-dresses, the maximum tact should be exercised where the head-dress is of religious significance. This type of personal search would be conducted by an officer of the same sex as the person to be searched, and would be carried out only where there are reasonable goods to suspect that the person concerned is carrying smuggled goods.

ENVIRONMENT, TRANSPORT AND THE REGIONS

Seat Belts

Mr. Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when vehicle inspectors received full guidance on checking procedures under regulations 46, 47 and 48 of the Road Vehicles (Construction and Use) Regulations 1986, on seat belt installation standards in vehicles of eight or more passenger seats; when inspectors started checking such seat belt installations; and how many such vehicles have been inspected in line with the regulations since 1 July. [51872]

Ms Glenda Jackson: I have asked the Chief Executive of the Vehicle Inspectorate to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Monica Newey to Mr. Tom Brake, dated July 1998:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your question about the training given to Vehicle Examiners on seat belt installations, when Examiners started checking seat belt installations, and how many vehicles have been inspected since 1 July.

Regulations drawing on the provision of section 100(1) of the Road Vehicles (Construction and Use) Regulations 1986 requiring the inspection of seat belt installations in addition to the mandatory requirements in the annual test for large passenger vehicles (that is with 9 or more passenger seats) come into force on 1 August. All Vehicle Inspectorate Testers and Vehicle Examiners received full guidance on the standards applicable to, and checking procedures for, seat belt installations in large passenger vehicles initially during February and March this year and again in May and June.

The Vehicle Inspectorate began providing advice on seat belt installation standards on vehicles presented on a voluntary basis from March. Up to the end of June, 722 vehicles had been seen. The number of vehicles seen since 1 July is not yet available.

Auto LPG and CNG

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what discussions he has had with the petrol companies to encourage the sale of Auto LPG and CNG in petrol station forecourts. [51862]

Ms Glenda Jackson: Ministers have regular discussions with the oil companies and the use of road fuel gases has featured in several of these. As detailed in my reply on 5 June 1998, *Official Report*, columns *629–30*, in response to a question from the hon. Member for Taunton (Jackie Ballard), steps taken by the Government to encourage the use of gas powered vehicles are significantly reducing their operating costs and making them a viable alternative to conventional petrol and diesel fuelled vehicles. The Cleaner Vehicles Task Force, which includes representatives from the oil and motor industries as well as Government, is also looking at ways of expanding their use. As a direct result of these initiatives, there are now about 12 CNG refuelling sites in the UK, the numbers of which are expected to increase significantly in the next few years, and one oil company has recently announced plans to establish a network of some 200 LPG sites on forecourts across the UK by 2001.

South West Trains (Bicycles)

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make representations to South West Trains not to reduce the spaces available for passengers' bicycles. [52014]

Ms Glenda Jackson: Franchise Agreements require train operators to make appropriate facilities available on their services for bicycles so far as reasonably practicable and subject to the availability of space; they do not specify particular provisions. We gave the Franchising Director new Objectives, Instructions and Guidance in November last year which require him to discuss bicycle space with franchise operators ordering new rolling stock. I understand that South West Trains have refurbished their existing class 442 Wessex Electric trains. They have allowed five spaces per five car train for bicycles. The Franchising Director has accepted SWT's provision as striking a balance between the needs of bicycle users and other passengers. In his statement on transport policy on 20 July 1998, *Official Report*, columns 784–88, my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister announced our plans to set up a Strategic Rail Authority which will have stronger powers and seek more demanding standards of performance by train operators.

Recycled Land

Mr. Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what research he has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated into the use of economic instruments to make it more attractive to develop new housing on recycled land. [52265]

Mr. Raynsford: The Department has commissioned research from Oxford Brookes University to inform decisions about the possible reform of the planning obligations system. The research project involves a series of seminars with local planning authorities, the building industry, and others. These seminars have involved discussing some other options and mechanisms which might better meet the Department's objectives including the development of new housing on recycled land. Officials are also working in-house to examine alternative options for using economic instruments to help meet our planning objectives.

Household Projections

Mr. Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what research his Department has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated into future trends in cohabitation; and how such trends will be taken into account in the next set of household projections. [52263]

Mr. Raynsford: The Government's Actuary's Department (GAD) are responsible for producing marital status projections, both for legal marital status and for cohabitation status. GAD's 1992-based projections of marital status were used to compile the 1992-based household projections. GAD are currently developing 1996-based marital status projections to be used in the next set of household projections. In carrying out the revision to the marital status projections, GAD are consulting a number of other Government departments, including my Department, as well as a number of leading academics.

The effects of marriage, cohabitation and divorce are inter-related. Data on marriages and divorces are obtained from civil registration and the census. As well as the 1991 Census, data on cohabitation are collected by the General Household Survey, and the Labour Force Survey, both of which are undertaken by the Office for National Statistics. All this information is currently being considered by GAD in its work.

Aldermaston (Emissions)

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what guidance he has issued on the protection to be provided to sewage workers at Silchester in respect of emissions from Aldermaston. [52214]

Angela Eagle: I am not aware of any guidance specifically relating to Silchester, although Thames Water Utilities Ltd. would be expected to follow general guidance issued by the Health and Safety Executive which was relevant to their employees. The Environment Agency authorises Hunting-BRAE Limited to discharge low level radioactive waste to the sewer. The authorisation is currently being revised and as a normal part of its consideration of this revision the Environment Agency will specifically be considering the potential impact on sewerage workers. Thames Water will be consulted as part of this process.

Maritime Rescue Services

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what assessment he has made of the cover offered by the

Coastguard Maritime Rescue Centre at Liverpool in the event of a major emergency occurring off the Cumbrian Coast. [52224]

Ms Glenda Jackson: Contingency arrangements to deal with major emergencies which affect persons and/or the environment have been in place for many years, around the UK coastline.

The Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA), through its Coastguard Co-ordination Centres, liaises very closely with the other Emergency Services, Local Authorities and those organisations both in the private and public sector which may be affected by any major emergency.

MCA is represented on the planning committee of the Cumbria General Emergency Plan and the Cumbria Pollution Plan which dovetail into the National Contingency Plan. The Plan is exercised regularly and there is no intention that these arrangements should change.

Water Quality

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (1) what is the estimated cost up to 2002 of complying with water quality standards *(a)* which are required by United Kingdom and EU statutes and *(b)* which are outlined as desirable in the Environment Agency's paper, A Price Worth Paying; [52210]

(2) what assessment he has made of the Environment Agency's paper, A Price Worth Paying. [52211]

Angela Eagle: The price limits set by the Director General of Water Services in 1994 allowed for a capital expenditure programme of £24 billion by water companies in England and Wales over the period 1995–2005, £11 billion of which was for quality improvements to sewage treatment and drinking water quality. Most of those improvements are required under EC Directives. Figures for actual capital expenditure are contained in OFWAT's annual reports on the financial performance and capital Investment by water companies, copies of which are in the Library.

The price limits for 2000–2005 are currently under review by the Director General. As part of that process, he published on 30 April an open letter to the Secretaries of State, "Setting the Quality Framework", which includes cost information based on water company estimates for possible water quality improvements arising from European and domestic initiatives, many of which are discussed in "A Price Worth Paying". The Government are considering all the representations received in response to "Setting the Quality Framework, including the views expressed by the Environment Agency, in the light of cost information available through water company estimates. They plan to issue guidance to the Director General later in the summer.

A copy of "Setting the Quality Framework" is available in the Library of the House.

Cancelled DBFO Projects

Mr. Norman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will list the total compensation payments paid to construction consortia involved in Design, Build, Finance and Operate road schemes postponed as a result of the Integrated Transport Review. [52091]

Ms Glenda Jackson: Tenderers were invited to prepare claims for compensation for three Design, Build Finance and Operate projects which were cancelled following the accelerated roads review in July 1997. The projects are Weald and Downland, Cumbria to Bradford and South Midlands Network. The total of the on-account payments already made for the three projects is £6 million.

Weald and Downland DBFO Project

Mr. Norman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 29 June 1998, *Official Report*, column 77, if he will list the consortiums involved in the Weald and Downland Design, Build, Finance and Operate Project indicating the nature of the compensation payments still under consideration. [52090]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The four tenderers (consortiums) are: the Modern Highways Group, Road Management Group, UK Highways and Express Route. Each tenderer has submitted a claim for his tender preparation costs to be reimbursed. However, there are a number of instances where the tenderers have not submitted sufficient information in support of their claims to explain/justify their costs, and this information is being sought before a final settlement can be reached.

Mr. Norman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what estimate he has made of the total figure for compensation payments to the consortiums involved in the Weald and Downland Design, Build, Finance and Operate Project. [52092]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The Secretary of State will reimburse the tenderers their actual costs that were properly and reasonably incurred in preparing their tenders. It would be wrong for me to give an estimate of the likely total cost at this stage as it might prejudice the outstanding commercial negotiations with the tenderers.

Roadside Signs

Dr. Vis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions under what statutory power a highway authority can grant licences for *(a)* advertising structures, *(b)* other structures and *(c)* private street signs, promoting (i) commercial and (ii) sectional interest (1) in, (2) on and (3) under land having (A) public highway and (B) trunk road status. [52233]

Ms Glenda Jackson: Part VIIA (section 115A to 115K) of the Highways Act 1980 (which was inserted by Schedule 5 to the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1982) empowers a council to place objects or structures on, in or over highways of the kind listed in section 115A (mainly for use by non-vehicular traffic), and to grant a person permission to use such objects or structures for a purpose which will result in the production of income, or for the purpose of providing a centre for advice or information or for the purpose of advertising. A street authority may also grant a licence under section 50 of the New Roads and Street Works Act

1991 for the placing of apparatus, which may include structures bearing advertisements, in, or under, any street (defined in the 1991 Act as including any highway).

Surface and Groundwater Pollution

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what assessment he has made of the incidence of surface and groundwater pollution caused by *(a)* motorway and highways run-off and *(b)* agricultural activities; and if he will quantify the damage caused by both. [52208]

Angela Eagle: The Environment Agency, which is responsible for monitoring the aquatic environment in England and Wales, has recently published a report entitled 'The State of the Environment of England and Wales'. It shows that agricultural activity was responsible for 10 per cent. of the total pollution incidents and the transport sector, which includes motorway and highways run-off, was responsible for 9 per cent. of pollution incidents. While diffuse sources of pollution are difficult to quantify, the Environment Agency is aware of the significance of both these sources of diffuse pollution.

Standard Spending Assessments

Mr. Charles Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what assessment he has made of the advantage of using the settlement size definition in measuring the sparsity of rural populations for the standard spending assessment in England and Wales; and if he will make a statement. [52351]

Ms Armstrong *[holding answer 27 July 1998]:* In our discussions with the Local Government Association on possible changes in the SSA formulae for next year, no proposals have been put to us that there should be a change from the way in which sparsity of population is measured currently. If, in future rounds of these discussions, such a case is put forward, we should be willing to discuss it with local government representatives.

Domiciliary Social Services

Mr. Charles Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what estimate he has made of the costs of providing domiciliary social services in sparse rural areas in the last year for which figures are available; and if he will make a statement. [52353]

Ms Armstrong *[holding answer 27 July 1998]:* Norfolk County Council, on behalf of the County Councils' Network, have put forward for discussion information on the costs of providing domiciliary social services in rural areas. In the light of this, they have proposed that the current measure of sparsity of population should be introduced under this part of the SSA formulae. This proposal has been discussed with representatives of local government. We will consider the arguments for and against this change, and expect to announce our conclusions early in December.

Rural Need

Mr. Charles Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what research his Department has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated into the characteristics of rural need separately identifying that relating to rural poverty; and if he will make a statement on his assessment of such research. [52359]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 27 July 1998]:* The Rural Development Commission is the Government's statutory adviser on the economic and social development of rural areas of England. As part of its national advisory work, it commissions research into rural needs, including rural poverty. The RDC has recently published reports on two major research projects on rural deprivation: *Developing Indicators of Rural Disadvantage*, and *Rural Disadvantage—Understanding the Processes*. My Department is discussing with the RDC the findings of these reports.

Private Hire Vehicles

Mr. Fitzpatrick: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what steps he will take to monitor the subcontracting of services to operators from outside London, following the licensing of London's private hire vehicle industry. [52832]

Ms Glenda Jackson: This is one of the matters which will be monitored by the Public Carriage Office.

Mr. Fitzpatrick: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what measures he will take to ensure that following the licensing of private hire vehicles in London, private hire vehicles licensed to different criteria outside of London do not work predominantly in London. [52833]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The matter will be considered as necessary in the light of circumstances as indicated by the Public Carriage Office's monitoring.

Information Technology

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how much his Department spent on IT itemising *(a)* personal computers, *(b)* main-frame, *(c)* mini-computers and *(d)* file servers in the last year for which figure are available. [52875]

Angela Eagle: The information requested can be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Animal By-products

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will take steps to legislate to minimise the level of permitted odour during the transport of offal to the site of incineration. [52721]

Angela Eagle: The transport of animal by-products (animal waste) is controlled under the Animal By-Products Order 1992 (as amended) which is the responsibility of my right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. Among other matters, the 1992 Order requires that:

"1. Any animal by-product must be collected and transported in suitable containers or vehicles in such a way as to prevent leakage. The containers or vehicles must be adequately covered.

2. Vehicles, tarpaulin or other covers and reusable containers must be maintained in a clean condition."

Where necessary, local authorities may use the byelaw powers contained in section 82 of the Public Health Act 1936 and section 235 of the Local Government Act 1972 to prescribe times during which "noxious matter" may be carried through the streets in their area. These provisions also enable local authorities to require the vehicles used for the removal or carriage of "noxious matter" through their street to be properly constructed and covered.

We have received no evidence that these powers are not adequate and the Government have no plans to legislate further in relation to odour control in the context of the transport of animal waste.

Recycling Facilities

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what measures he will take to evaluate the effectiveness of the materials recycling facilities in use in the United Kingdom. [52821]

Angela Eagle: Our consultation paper, *Less Waste More Value*, invited views on whether the waste management industry has the necessary capabilities to develop the full range of facilities that will be required in the future (including materials recycling facilities). Consultees have until 25 September to respond. It is for the operators of these facilities themselves to reach a judgment of how effective they are.

Seed and Biotechnology Companies

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will list, with dates, each meeting he or other members of his Department have had with *(a)* seed and *(b)* biotechnology companies since 9 July 1998, giving in each case the names of those met. [52852]

Angela Eagle: On 20 July 1998 officials for the Department met members from the British Society of Plant Breeders, including representatives from Monsanto and AgrEvo, and later at a separate meeting representatives from the British Society of Plant Breeders, Europabio and the Green Industry Biotechnology Platform.

Housing Corporation (Rural Programme)

Mr. Peter Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what percentage of Housing Corporation allocations in the current financial year for rural areas are targeted on settlements of less than 1,000. [53176]

Mr. Raynsford: A target is not set for Housing Corporation allocations in rural settlements of less than 1,000. However around 46 per cent. of the allocations for the rural programme in 1998–99 are in rural settlements of less than 1,000.

Mr. Peter Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what target has been set for approvals by the Housing Corporation in its Rural Programme for the current financial year. [53175]

Mr. Raynsford: For 1998–99 we have asked the Housing Corporation to aim for around 3.4 per cent of the new social lettings approved under the Approved Development Programme to be in small rural villages with a population of 3,000 or less.

In addition, local authorities can use the extra resources we have made available to them, under the Capital Receipts Initiative this year, to invest in the provision of new social housing in rural areas in partnership with Registered Social Landlords where such developments are seen as a high priority in their housing strategies.

Nene and Ouse Rivers

Mrs. Brinton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (1) when he expects to make a statement concerning current and future statutory responsibilities for *(a)* flood, *(b)* ecological, *(c)* environmental and *(d)* navigational management of the rivers (i) Nene and (ii) Ouse; [52985]

(2) what representations he has received concerning the British Waterways Board consultation on its taking over responsibility from the Environment Agency for navigation on the Nene and Ouse rivers; and if he will place them in the Library. [52987]

Angela Eagle: The Department has received a number of letters, from Members of Parliament and the public, following British Waterways' (BW) public consultation on its report about the future management of navigation on the Rivers Nene and Great Ouse. There are no plans at this stage to make this correspondence available publicly.

BW is currently assessing the responses to its consultation and will be submitting a further report to me shortly. I imagine that this will include copies of all written submissions. The proposals in the report on which BW consulted present some complex issues relating to the management of the Nene and Great Ouse and to the impact on the environment, waterway users and other organisations connected with the two rivers. I will want to consider carefully all the responses and other comments on the report before deciding on how to proceed.

British Waterways Board

Mrs. Brinton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what research he has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated on the responsibilities of the British Waterways Board for its role in land drainage and flood relief; and what assessment he has made of the level of its annual grant in aid in respect of these functions. [52986]

Angela Eagle: In 1996 British Waterways (BW) and the Environment Agency submitted a joint report to the Department following a series of regional reviews of operational arrangements of the river navigations under their control. These reviews looked at emergency and contingency planning, including arrangements for flood defence. The report concluded that relationships at the local level between the two organisations were good and that BW and the Agency were working well together in many areas. A copy of the report was placed in the Library.

BW receives annual grant-in-aid to manage and operate the canal and river navigations for which it is responsible. No direct payments are made to BW in respect of its flood defence and land drainage responsibilities.

Departmental Environmental Policies

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 23 July 1998, *Official Report*, column *683*, concerning the activities of the Green Minister, if he will publish the guidance issued to green ministers on green transport plans. [53037]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The *Guide to Green Transport Plans—Advice to Government Departments* has been published on the DETR website: http://www.environment.detr.gov.uk/greening/fleet/fleet.htm. A copy is also available in the Library of the House.

Departmental Vehicles

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many of the vehicles due for replacement by *(a)* his Department and *(b)* bodies listed in the National Asset Register in (i) 1998–99, (ii) 1999–2000 and (iii) 2000–01 will be replaced by vehicles using (1) petrol, (2) diesel, (3) natural gas, (4) electric batteries and (5) other. [52624]

Ms Glenda Jackson: This information will be available when property managers have reviewed their replacement policy in preparing green transport plans. The first plans are to be completed by end March 1999.

Leaseholds

Mr. Caplin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when his Department's research, Flat Dwellers' Experiences of Leasehold Enfranchisement and Lease Renewal, will be published. [53235]

Mr. Raynsford: The results of the Department's study to monitor the implementation of the leasehold provisions of the 1993 Act have been published today. Copies of the report have been placed in the House Library. The findings support our proposals for a review of the enfranchisement process, which will be included in our forthcoming paper on leasehold reform.

Traffic Speed (London)

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what research he has commissioned on average traffic speeds in London and other cities during *(a)* peak periods and *(b)* off-peak periods. [51163]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The Department has commissioned traffic speed surveys in London since 1986. The surveys, covering central, rest of inner, and outer London are conducted on a rotating basis, with each of these three areas surveyed every three to four years. Similar surveys in other cities were carried out in 1993 and 1996. These covered the 19 largest conurbations in England, as well as five randomly chosen smaller towns.

M25

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has to widen the M25. [51229]

Ms Glenda Jackson: Details on our plans for the M25 will be set out in our strategic Roads Review document which will be published later this week.

Integrated Transport White Paper

Mr. Fabricant: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (1) what discussions he has had with Her Majesty's Treasury on the likely impact on inflation of the measures contained in the White Paper "A New Deal for Transport: Better for Everyone"; and what guidelines he has issued on the maximum RPI increase which would be permitted as a consequence of *(a)* his Department's proposed measures and *(b)* measures taken as a consequence of reviews instigated under the White Paper; [51961]

(2) pursuant to the White Paper "A New Deal for Transport: Better for Everyone", what assessment he has made of the economic impact of his proposals, separately identifying their impact on the rate of inflation. [51962]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The measures set out in "A New Deal for Transport: Better for Everyone" will help to support business and economic growth by encouraging more efficient use of transport infrastructure, improving reliability for journeys on all transport modes, improving transport links with international markets, enhancing the vitality of urban and rural areas and by promoting more efficient and sustainable transport industries.

My Department has considered the impact of the measures on inflation with Her Majesty's Treasury. The Government do not think it sensible to issue any guidelines on the maximum permitted RPI increase. The impact on inflation cannot be estimated with any degree of certainty. The impact on prices will, in particular, reflect both the beneficial effect on transport costs—e.g. fuel consumption and fleet and labour utilisation—of reduced congestion and the improved efficiency of the transport system, and the effect of the charging and taxation measures themselves. The details of many of these measures are subject to further consultation and/or future decisions by local authorities on whether to take up the charging powers for which the Government intends to introduce legislation.

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what assessment he has made of the impact of proposals set out in the Integrated Transport White Paper on his Department's policy towards settlements in the countryside. [52656]

Mr. Raynsford: The White Paper sets out proposals to improve the quality of life for people in all areas, both urban and rural. Addressing the transport needs of rural communities is an important part of the New Deal for transport.

Cycling

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what parking facilities for cycles exist at each office or site for which his Department is responsible and for each agency for which he is responsible. [52680]

Ms Glenda Jackson: A summary of the spaces available for parking cycles is as follows:

Department/Agency	*Number of spaces*
DETR (Central)	553
DETR Agencies	270
Government Offices for the Regions	281
A breakdown of the summarised information is as follows:	
(1) DETR (Central)	
Headquarters (Eland House)—(secure storage/racks)	258
Headquarters (Ashdown House)—(secure storage/racks)	106
Headquarters (Great Minster House)—(secure storage/racks)	60
ASD (Hemel Hempstead)—(no facilities, chain in covered car park)	9
Highwood Pavilions (Bristol)—(cycle racks share with HMC&E)	8
Traffic Area Network (various)—(spaces allocated to TANU)	55
Rent Assessment Panels (various)	13
Air Accident Investigation Branch—(no racks but space in hangars)	44
(2) Agencies	
Marine and Coastguard Agency—(10 cycle racks)	61
Driving Standards Agency—(rack at Stanley House, others shared)	6+
Driving and Vehicle Licensing Agency—(covered sheds/dedicated spaces)	159
Highways Agency—(secure compounds/racks)	137
Planning Inspectorate Executive Agency—(secure compound)	45
Queen Elizabeth II Conference Centre	0
Vehicle Certification Agency—(secure spaces)	6
Vehicle Inspectorate—(secure spaces (12 Bristol, 25 Swansea)	37
(3) Government Offices for the Regions	
[The Secretaries of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, Trade and Industry, and Education and Employment share responsibility for Government Offices in England]	
GO-North East	15
GO-North West	28
GO-Merseyside	5
GO-Yorkshire and Humber	20
GO-West Midlands	5
GO-East Midlands	10
GO-Eastern	(approximately) 130
GO-South East	12+
GO-South West	20
GO-London	36

Note:
The figures do not include DETR NDPBs
1. The above information is in respect of DETR (Central), DETR Agencies, and Government Offices for the Regions. It does not include DETR NDPBs
2. The data in several instances are only indicative and variously include the number of spaces which could be occupied by bicycles (i.e. no attempt has been made to identify the number of cycles generally stored) and offices where the facilities are shared with other (non DETR) users and exclude sites where no obvious facilities exist but (e.g) where some staff park cycles in their office

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what proportion of the employees of his Department and of the employees of each agency for which he is responsible cycle to work; and what measures he plans to increase that proportion. [52691]

Ms Glenda Jackson: Comprehensive and reliable figures are not held centrally. Measures to increase the proportion of employees cycling to work are being considered as part of the development of green transport plans for buildings occupied by the Department and its Agencies.

Area Cost Adjustment

Mr. Lansley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will implement the conclusions of the review of the area cost adjustment in time for the 1999–2000 financial year. [52926]

Ms Armstrong: We shall examine carefully all the findings that have emerged from research on the area cost adjustment both this year and earlier. We shall want to take all of this into account when deciding on our proposals for Standard Spending Assessments for 1999–2000.

Compliance Cost Assessments

Mr. Lansley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will list those compliance cost assessments since 1 May 1997 in which there is a net reduction in compliance costs resulting from a legislative proposal. [52938]

Angela Eagle: At present, in line with central guidance, my Department does not normally carry out compliance cost assessments where legislative proposals are expected to be cost neutral or yield a net saving to business. Of those compliance cost assessments published by the Department since 1 May, one—for the Civil

Aviation (Navigation Services) Regulations 1998—has resulted in a net reduction of compliance costs for certain geographical areas.

Floods (Worcestershire)

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when he expects to reach a decision on Worcestershire County Council's application for supplementary credit approvals to fund capital works resulting from the Easter floods. [52734]

Ms Glenda Jackson: Applications for additional supplementary credit approvals for transport capital expenditure are generally considered after the financial year to which they relate. Officials of my Department are investigating the extent to which there is immediate need for additional supplementary credit approvals from the Transport Policies and Programme system for reinstatement of transport infrastructure damaged by the flood. I will make a decision shortly.

Regional Development Agency (West Midlands)

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when he plans to announce the members of the Regional Development Agency Board for the West Midlands; and if he will make a statement. [52731]

Mr. Caborn: We cannot formally make appointments to boards until the Regional Development Agencies Bill, currently before Parliament, has received Royal Assent. However, we hope to identify the prospective chairs of the RDAs before then and an announcement will be made as soon as possible. A further announcement on other board appointments will be made in the autumn.

Housing (Worcestershire)

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what representations he has received about the new house building targets for Worcestershire; and if he will make a statement. [52732]

Mr. Caborn: To date we have received 10 representations expressing concern about Worcestershire County Council's housing development options set out in their consultation document "Shaping the New Worcestershire". This is intended to inform preparations of the Structure Plan for the new county. It is very much in line with the Secretary of State's statement in the House on 23 February 1998, *Official Report*, columns 21–25, when he said he wanted local people to be consulted as early as possible in the process so that they fully understand the consequences of decisions on releasing land for housing and can have a say in the choice of locations. My Department has chosen not to comment on the options at this stage but we expect to examine the Council's definitive proposals at the next stage of the Structure Plan process.

Social Housing Grants

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what advice he received from the Housing Corporation with regard to social housing grant rates for 1999–2000, if he will publish that advice; and if he will make a statement. [52725]

Ms Armstrong: Policy advice of this nature is confidential.

I have recently written to the Housing Corporation asking them to set an average headline Social Housing Grant rate for 1999/2000 of 54 per cent., unchanged from last year despite continued reductions in long term interest rates. I have also asked the Corporation to put greater emphasis on rents in the bidding process and to change grant eligibility rules to disallow new high rent schemes, whether supported through the Approved Development Programme or Local Authority Social Housing Grant.

Best Practice Code (Telecommunication)

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when he will announce the conclusions of his Department's review of the Code of Best Practice for telecommunications prior approval procedures. [52804]

Mr. Raynsford: The working group of local authority and telecommunications industry representatives who have been considering the effectiveness of my Department's Code of Best Practice for telecommunications prior approval procedures as applied to mast/tower development have made representations on a variety of issues arising from the current telecommunications planning controls. We are giving careful consideration to the representations made by the working group, and to those received more generally, and expect to announce our conclusions this week.

Genetically Modified Organisms

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what steps he is taking to protect *(a)* organic farmers and *(b)* consumers of organic food from contamination by genetically modified organisms. [52851]

Mr. Meacher: There are no specific requirements under the current legislation controlling the release of genetically modified organisms to consider organic farming when field testing genetically modified crops. However, where needed, release consents have specific measures attached that are designed to limit cross-pollination of neighbouring crops whether they are organic or not.

I am aware of the concerns raised by organic farmers and their customers in connection with the planting of GM crops and my officials are exploring with MAFF, the farming community and organic standards representatives how these concerns can be addressed.

Building Control Standards

Ms Rosie Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what steps he is taking to promote common standards across the public and private sectors of building control. [53361]

Mr. Raynsford: In March I welcomed the establishment by the Construction Industry Council, the Local Government Association and the Association of

Corporate Approved Inspectors of a Steering Group to draw up recommended standards and monitoring arrangements for building control.

The Steering Group has had two preliminary meetings, and has adopted the following terms of reference which I am happy to endorse:

"To help achieve compliance with the regulations of the work supervised, the Steering Group shall:

1. draw up proposals for a common Building Control Performance Standard for compliance with the requirements of the Building Regulations;
2. draw up proposals for monitoring the compliance of both local authorities and approved inspectors with the Building Control Performance Standard;
3. draw up proposals and a time scale for implementing (1) and (2);
4. consider other relevant issues; and
5. submit proposals to the DETR for approval".

The Steering Group has set itself the target of submitting a report to me by the end of the year.

Pilotage Act

Mr. Pond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will publish the report of his Department's review of the Pilotage Act 1987; and if he will make a statement. [53547]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The report of this review has been published today and I will place a copy in the Library of the House.

We have concluded that harbour pilotage services should continue to be provided by harbour authorities but increasingly integrated into their overall safety systems. These systems need to be reviewed as a whole if the highest standards are to be achieved.

We therefore propose to develop with the industry and other interests a "Marine Operations Code for Ports". We aim to set a national safety standard, and to create a guide for harbour authorities to prepare detailed safety policies. We look to them to consult local users and other interests in this process and to publish the resulting plans.

Planning Inspectorate

Mr. Mike Hall: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when he expects to publish the Planning Inspectorate's Annual Report and Accounts for 1997–98. [53677]

Mr. Caborn: Together with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales I have today published the Planning Inspectorate's Annual Report and Accounts. Copies have been placed in the Library of the House.

The Inspectorate has just completed the second of a three year programme to restore appeal handling times to optimum levels. Although it has not yet met its timeliness targets, it has improved handling times significantly. We expect them to improve further during 1998/99.

The Agency has also maintained the programme of development plan inquiries to a high standard, helping to create a greater certainty for all involved in the planning process as more areas are covered by up to date development plans.

The Inspectorate's quality target was met and exceeded, with reduced numbers of justified complaints against decisions issued. Surveys have continued to show that its decisions are widely respected. It has also produced an outstanding financial performance during the last year. The Inspectorate is very much involved in initiatives to develop the Government's proposals for the modernisation of the planning system. In the climate of a rapidly changing environment it is always ready to take on new areas of work in dispute resolution.

In December 1997 the Inspectorate achieved Investors in People status—the first Agency within the merged Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions to do so. I congratulate all its staff on the very substantial effort that this involved.

Right to Buy

Mrs. Butler: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how he will ensure better value for money for the taxpayer on right to buy sales; and how he will help local authorities buy back ex-council housing from owners in financial difficulty. [53770]

Ms Armstrong: My Department issued two consultation papers today setting out our proposals.

We intend the Right to Buy scheme to continue, and that eligible tenants should continue to buy at substantial discounts. At present, however, tenants get up to £50,000 discount. The annual cost of Right to Buy is currently around £400 million a year.

We plan, therefore to introduce lower limits to discounts, which would take account of local authority property values in each Government Office region. Details are in our consultation paper "Secure tenants' right to buy; proposals to change the maximum discount limit on right to buy and other home ownership incentive schemes", copies of which are in the Library of the House.

Subject to consultation, we propose later this year to substitute a new regulation for the Housing (Right to Buy) (Maximum Discount) Order 1989, SI 1989 513, to bring the new discount levels into effect.

Around 200,000 people in England have bought a council flat. These are mainly council tenants who bought under the Right to Buy scheme and research shows that the great majority see this as good value for money. But a small proportion of buyers are in difficulty with high service charges, and some are unable to resell their flat on the open market: either they cannot find a buyer, or mortgage lenders refuse to give a loan.

Local authorities have powers to buy housing, but their resources are limited and they have many other people needing help. So we propose to offer them a financial incentive. We plan to reduce the amount they have to set aside from their capital receipts from council house sales, by 25p for every £1 they spend on buying back an ex-council property. This would effectively cover 25 per cent. of the cost of the buy-back. They could use this incentive to buy back houses as well as flats.

In addition to this incentive, the authority would regain a capital asset which, sooner or later, would be available for reletting. Moreover, it would reduce the cost of

managing its leasehold property—which, in the case of someone in arrears or unable to resell, could be considerable. And in some cases, e.g. an elderly or vulnerable person in mortgage arrears, it would be helping someone whom it might otherwise have to re-house.

Local authorities are best placed to judge who is in greatest need and how they should use their resources to help them. So they would be free to decide whom to help, and on what terms. This could include someone who had bought under a local authority voluntary sale scheme.

We propose to set just two conditions. These are designed to ensure that the concession is available only for buying back properties from individual occupants who want to re-sell. The concession would therefore apply only where the repurchase is from an individual, not an organisation: and it is not done under compulsory purchase powers.

Copies of the consultation paper "Buying back ex-council flats and houses" are in the Library of the House. Subject to consultation, we propose to implement the change later this year by substituting a new regulation for regulation 104 of the Local Authorities (Capital Finance) Regulations 1997.

Technetium-99

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what arrangements exist for the storage of technetium-99 concentrates at Sellafield; how many waste streams from reprocessing at Sellafield contain Tc-99; and what long-term plans there are for the disposal of Tc-99. [52776]

Mr. Battle: I have been asked to reply.

Technetium-99(Tc-99) arises from both Magnox and Thorp reprocessing operations. The Tc-99 from Thorp is contained in the high-level waste stream and is immobilised in glass in the vitrification plant. Magnox operations lead to a discharge of Tc-99 to sea.

High integrity tanks provide long-term storage for the concentrate and solvent used in reprocessing operations prior to treatment.

The disposal of Tc-99 is subject to the limits and conditions in the authorisation to dispose of liquid radioactive waste, issued to BNFL under the Radioactive Substances Act 1993. Over and above the requirements for BNFL to comply with the limits in the authorisation is a requirement to use best practicable means to limit the activity of discharges. BNFL is actively investigating potential technologies for reducing Tc-99 discharges and part of a development programme agreed with the Environment Agency.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Human Embryos

Mr. Amess: To ask the Attorney-General if he will list the prosecutions there have been in each of the last five years for experimenting on human embryos over 14 days old. [52978]

The Attorney-General: The Crown Prosecution Service holds no central records in respect of particular offences. Crown Prosecution Service officials who handle this type of case and might reasonably be expected to recall any such cases do not recall any within the last five years.

Departmental Vehicles

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Attorney-General how many of the vehicles due for replacement by *(a)* his Department and *(b)* bodies listed in the National Asset Register in (i) 1998–99, (ii) 1999–2000 and (iii) 2000–01 will be replaced by vehicles using (1) petrol, (2) diesel, (3) natural gas, (4) electric batteries and (5) other. [52617]

The Attorney-General: I refer the hon. Member to my reply to him on 23 July 1998, *Official Report*, column *603*.

Since that reply the Crown Prosecution Service have leased a further petrol engined vehicle making a total of 34 vehicles; 26 of which have diesel engines and 8 have unleaded petrol engines.

The dates for their replacement are:

(i) 1998–99: 13 vehicles (including 1 petrol)

(ii) 1999–2000: 12 vehicles (including 4 petrol)

(iii) 2000–01: 9 vehicles (including 3 petrol).

The planned replacements for 1998–99 will be one vehicle using unleaded petrol and 12 using diesel fuel. The Crown Prosecution Service is monitoring development of alternative fuels and, where these prove to be less harmful to the environment and as economical, staff will be encouraged to adopt them.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Venezuela (Imataca Reserve)

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what plans she has to encourage the Venezuelan Government to protect the Imataca Reserve. [51931]

Mr. Foulkes: Our Embassy in Caracas maintains a regular dialogue with the Venezuelan Government and the non-government sector on a range of environmental issues, including the important one of the Imataca Forest Reserve. The Imataca issue is now with the Venezuelan Supreme Court. In the meantime discussions between the Government, mining companies and local environmental groups are continuing in order to achieve a consensus on sustainable solutions. Our Embassy is in regular contact with these groups.

Commonwealth Development Corporation

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will set out the mechanisms used by the Commonwealth Development Corporation to guarantee their loans to subsidiaries of multinational companies. [51885]

Mr. Foulkes: For loans made to subsidiaries of multinationals, the Commonwealth Development Corporation takes appropriate security, depending on the individual circumstances of the investment. This may include a parent company guarantee.

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will list the export of credit guarantees offered in respect of the loans made to Sierra Rutile by the Commonwealth Development Corporation. [51856]

Mr. Foulkes: The Commonwealth Development Corporation does not benefit from any export guarantees in relation to loans made to Sierra Rutile Ltd.

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how much money is currently owed to the Commonwealth Development Corporation from the company Sierra Rutile. [51854]

Mr. Foulkes: At 30 June 1998 the Commonwealth Development Corporation was owed £2.4 million by Sierra Rutile. Once their rutile mine returns to production it is expected that the outstanding debt of £2.4 million will be repaid.

Zimbabwe (Asbestos)

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what discussions she has had with the Zimbabwe Government on the production of asbestos in that country and on their policy towards the protection of *(a)* workers employed in that industry and *(b)* the surrounding environment. [51866]

Mr. Foulkes: Asbestos production and its effect on workers or the environment have not been raised in the Department for International Development ministerial or officials' discussions with the Zimbabwe government. However, since 1996 the Department for International Development has been funding a research project in Zimbabwe to develop alternatives to asbestos sheets as roofing materials.

South Pacific (Natural Disasters)

Mr. Öpik: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on her Department's contingency planning to assist in the aftermath of natural disasters in the South Pacific region. [52052]

Mr. Foulkes: The Department is ready to provide assistance to poorer countries in the aftermath of natural disasters where there are clear needs and we are asked to do so. In response to the initial appeal for assistance for those affected by the tidal wave that hit Papua New Guinea, we offered up to £250,000 for immediate relief and recovery needs. Over the last year we have also provided over £1 million in relief assistance to the Pacific region.

In addition, we are keen to help disaster-prone countries to make better use of their own emergency services and skilled personnel, as they are best placed to provide effective help when disaster strikes.

In the South Pacific, since 1994 we have provided £300,000 to the United Nations for the South Pacific Disaster Reduction Programme, which aims to mitigate the effect of natural disasters by building-up institutional capacity. We are currently considering further support for a new phase of the programme. We also provided nearly £60,000 to the International Red Cross last year for community-based disaster preparedness activities in the region.

Papua New Guinea

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assistance Her Majesty's Government will give to those affected by the tidal wave in Papua New Guinea. [52457]

Mr. Foulkes: We are in close contact with the Papua New Guinea authorities through the British High Commission in Port Moresby. In response to the initial appeal for assistance, we have offered up to £250,000 to meet the immediate relief and recovery needs of those affected by the tidal wave. Of this contribution, £75,000 has been allocated to the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies to provide family rehabilitation kits containing basic household items, and materials to rebuild houses. A further £44,944 has been channelled through the UK Foundation for the South Pacific, a non-governmental organisation, for the provision of medial supplies and temporary shelters. We have asked other humanitarian organisations active in the region to urgently submit proposals for the remaining funds.

We shall continue to monitor the situation closely through our High Commission and through the regular reports we receive from the United Nations and the Red Cross.

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assistance she has sought from the United Kingdom armed forces for help in Papua New Guinea. [52456]

Mr. Foulkes: We have been in contact with the Ministry of Defence and have concluded that the services of the UK armed forces will not be required. We are assisting those affected by the tidal wave through the provision of funds to Non-Governmental Organisations for emergency rehabilitation and recovery efforts.

Indonesia

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, pursuant to her answer of 8 July 1998, *Official Report*, column *533*, concerning the 150/500 KV sub-stations project in Indonesia, what plans there are to reinstate the project; what assessment has been made of the project's *(a)* achievements and *(b)* value for money; and if she will place in the Library copies of the project appraisal, monitoring and evaluation reports completed to date. [53027]

Mr. Foulkes: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply which I gave to her on 23 July 1998, *Official Report*, column *637*.

Belize

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what plans she has to assist Belize with debt relief. [53363]

Mr. Foulkes: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for International Development has agreed with the Government of Belize the cancellation of repayments of aid debt due from Belize to the UK between April and October 1998, amounting to £1.146 million.

We were able to make the offer under the Commonwealth Debt Initiative in recognition of the Belize Government's commitment to reduce poverty and promote accountable government, and to put in place sustainable economic policies.

The funds which would otherwise have been used to repay aid debts will now be used for poverty focused projects in education and water supply, specifically:

rural water schemes in several villages;

classroom furniture, equipment and materials in schools in poorer areas;

textbooks for primary schools in poorer areas, under the textbook loan scheme.

We will hold talks with the Government of Belize early in 1999 to consider further debt relief.

Compliance Cost Assessments

Mr. Lansley: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what cumulative net increase in compliance costs has been estimated in compliance cost assessments published by her Department since 1 May 1997. [52953]

Mr. Foulkes: The Department for International Development has not published any compliance cost assessments since 1 May 1997. There is presently no requirement on Departments to carry out compliance cost assessments where legislative proposals are expected to be cost neutral or resulting in a saving to business.

Mr. Lansley: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will list the compliance cost assessments published by her Department since 1 May 1997. [52951]

Mr. Foulkes: The Department for International Development has not undertaken any compliance cost assessments since 1 May 1997.

Mr. Lansley: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will list those compliance cost assessments since 1 May 1997 in which there is a net reduction in compliance costs resulting from a legislative proposal. [52952]

Mr. Foulkes: The Department for International Development has not undertaken any compliance cost assessments since 1 May 1997 in which there is a net reduction in compliance costs resulting from a legislative proposal.

Departmental Vehicles

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how many of the vehicles due for replacement by *(a)* her Department and *(b)* bodies listed in the National Asset Register in (i) 1998–99, (ii) 1999–2000 and (iii) 2000–01 will be replaced by vehicles using (1) petrol, (2) diesel, (3) natural gas, (4) electric batteries and (5) other. [52615]

Mr. Foulkes: Decisions on these questions are not taken centrally in DFID and this information would be available only at disproportionate cost.

Sudan

Mr. Streeter: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what discussions she has had with the Government of Sudan in the last four weeks about the situation in that country. [52999]

Mr. Foulkes: The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, my hon. Friend the Minister for Leeds, Central (Mr. Fatchett), had discussions with the Government of Sudan and the Sudan People's Liberation Movement during his visit to Nairobi and Khartoum on 14–16 July. Our Ambassador in Khartoum has regular discussions with Government of Sudan representatives at all levels on the humanitarian situation and the political process. Following my hon. Friend's visit, we are in contact with regional governments and international organisations to take full advantage of the three-months' cease-fire agreed for Bahr el Ghazal.

Cycling

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what parking facilities for cycles exist at each office or site for which her Department is responsible and for each agency for which he is responsible. [52662]

Mr. Foulkes: 38 cycle racks are provided at the Department for International Development's two Headquarters buildings. The Department has no agencies.

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what proportion of the employees of her Department and of the employees of each agency for which she is responsible cycle to work; and what measures she plans to increase that proportion. [52663]

Mr. Foulkes: This information is not recorded. Measures to increase the numbers cycling to work will be considered in the context of preparing a Green Transport Plan for the Department for International Development.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Public Registers

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if she will list the public registers which her Department has responsibility for. [47349]

Mr. Paul Murphy *[holding answer 29 June 1998]:* The public registers for which the Northern Ireland Office and the Northern Ireland Departments have responsibility for are as follows:

DANI

Seed Potato

Departmental Accounting and Information System (DAISy)

Cattle herd owners

Authorised Veterinary Inspectors

Private Veterinary Practitioners (PVPs)

Welfare Establishments (Boarding and Riding Premises)

Livestock marketing operators

Artificial Reproduction

Animal by-products

Animal protein

Waste food

Animal feed

NI LEADER II Programme partnerships' managers

NI Single Programme Measure 4.1.9. Area Based Strategy Managers

NI Rural Development Programme (General)—contact names and addresses for local community based organisations

Egg Packaging Stations in NI

Egg Wholesalers

Egg Hatcheries

EU Approved Dairy Establishments

EU Approved Meat Premises

Low Throughput Premises

Licensed Slaughtermen

Rural Development Council, client community groups

Rural Development Council, grants database for Measure 4.1.8 of NI Single Programme

Rural Development Council, grants database for Community Based Actions Measure of EU Special Support Programme for Peace and Reconciliation

Rural Development Council, Project List for "Developing Rural Enterprise"

Livestock Marketing Commission, Farm Quality Assurance Scheme Members

Livestock Marketing Commission bulletin circulation

Livestock Marketing Commission, Retail Butchery Outlets

DED

IDB Board Members' Interests

T&EA Board Members' Interests

IRTU Board Members' Interests

Disqualified Directors

Voluntary Arrangements

Deeds of Arrangement

Companies

Credit Unions

Industrial and Provident Societies

Improvement and Prohibition Notices issued under the Health and Safety at Work (Northern Ireland) Order 1978

Responses to all Consultative Documents issued by DED in respect of proposed new Health and Safety legislation

Weighing or measuring equipment which has been certified by DED as suitable for use for trade under Article 10 of the Weights and Measures (Northern Ireland) Order 1981 or granted a certificate by the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry under section 12 of the Weights and Measures Act 1985

DFP

Members of the Public Holding Public Appointments

Valuation List

DOE

Licensed drivers in Northern Ireland

Keepers of licensed vehicles in Northern Ireland

Approved Driving Instructors

Registry of Deeds

Statutory Charges

Planning Applications, Simplified Planning Zones, Enterprise Zones and Enforcement Notices.

New Deal

Mr. Healey: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many people her Department is committed to employing during 1998 under *(a)* the subsidised job option and *(b)* the unsubsidised job option of the New Deal programme. [52583]

Mr. Paul Murphy: Northern Ireland Civil Service Departments, like their GB counterparts, are "signing up" to participate as employers in New Deal. The programme does not, however, impose quotes, and it is expected that Departments and Agencies, like other participating employers, will recruit New Deal employers as and when appropriate vacancies arise.

PRIME MINISTER

Armed Forces

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Prime Minister if he will make a statement about the pay of medical and dental officers in the armed forces. [53364]

The Prime Minister: The Armed Forces Pay Review Body has made recommendations on the pay of Medical and Dental Officers in the Armed Forces. The Review Body recommends that all Medical and Dental Officers, in the ranks of Major and above, should receive a 5.2 per cent. increase, and Officers in the rank of Captain and below should receive a 4.2 per cent. increase, from 1 April 1998. The Review Body further recommends that the pay scales for qualified General Medical Practitioners and General Dental Practitioners in the rank of Major should be restructured to ensure broad comparability of earning with their civilian counterparts, particularly in the first half of a career. The Review Body also considers that the pay of Service General Dental Practitioners has fallen behind their NHS counterparts and recommend that those Officers should receive an additional £1,000 per annum.

The Government have decided to accept the Review Body's recommendations. In line with all awards to Pay Review Body remit groups, the award will be paid in two stages; 2 per cent. of the award will be payable from 1 April 1998 with the remainder payable from 1 December 1998.

Cabinet Office

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Prime Minister if he will make a statement on the future of the Cabinet Office. [53365]

The Prime Minister: The Government face many new challenges, and must be ready to operate in new ways to meet them. So, in January, I asked the Secretary of the Cabinet to review the effectiveness of the centre of Government.

The role of the Cabinet Office has traditionally been to help the Prime Minister and the Government as a whole to reach collective decisions on Government policy. Since the election, the three principal parts of the centre—my own office, the Cabinet Office and the Treasury—have worked closely and effectively together, and with other Departments, to take forward the Government's comprehensive and ambitious policy agenda.

However, Sir Richard Wilson identified a number of weaknesses that need to be addressed. He concluded that the linkage between policy formulation and implementation need further improvement. He found that cross-departmental issues of policy and service delivery are often not handled well. He diagnosed a weakness in looking ahead to future opportunities and threats, and in reviewing the outcome of Government policies and the achievement of Government objectives. Sir Richard confirmed one impression of my own: that, while the civil service has many outstanding staff, it has not always implemented the best systems to invest in their development. Sir Richard found that there was scope to improve the performance of the centre of Government in promulgating best practice and innovation in government and in the corporate management of personnel, IT, Government communications and scientific advice.

We have already taken some steps to address the weaknesses identified by Sir Richard. The Social Exclusion Unit is an example of our innovative approach to tackling cross-departmental issues. And the new Cabinet Committee on Public Expenditure, chaired by the Chancellor of the Exchequer, will play a key role in monitoring Departments' performance in meeting objectives. However, Sir Richard has identified an important agenda for reform. I can today announce key reforms to address the problems he has identified. Further details will be announced in the autumn.

First, I propose to merge the Office of Public Service with the rest of the Cabinet Office from today. The main purpose of the Cabinet Office is to help Departments formulate policy collectively. The main purpose of the Office of Public Service is to help Departments find ways to improve the implementation and delivery of policies and services on the ground. Yet policy formulation and delivery are two sides of the same coin. A unified organisation will help ensure that concerns about policy implementation are properly analysed in the process of developing policy, and help contribute to more effective follow-through when policies are agreed.

Second, a new Performance and Innovation Unit will be set up in the Cabinet Office. It will complement the Treasury's role in monitoring Departmental programmes and will have two principal functions. First, it will focus on selected issues that cross departmental boundaries and propose policy innovations to improve the delivery of the Government objectives. Second, drawing on the work of the successor to the Committee on Public Expenditure, and other sources, it will select aspects of government policy that require review, with an emphasis on the better co-ordination and practical delivery of policy and services which involve more than one public sector body. The Unit will be a resource for policy development for the whole of Government, building on the experience of the Social Exclusion Unit.

The new Unit will not carry out these roles in isolation from other departments. It will assemble teams from inside and outside the Civil Service to carry out studies of areas where cross-departmental working needs to be improved, or innovative approaches to delivery put in place, if the Government's objectives are to be delivered. The first group of projects to be carried out by the Unit will be announced in the Autumn. They will include studies of the Government's presence in Cities and the Regions, and of how older people can play a more active role in the community.

Third, I have decided to establish a new Centre for Management and Policy Studies in the Cabinet Office, incorporating a reshaped Civil Service College. If the modernisation of government is to be successful, and Ministers are to get the support they need in finding new approaches to policy and its delivery, we will need to ensure that the Civil Service continues to be a learning organisation, open to new ideas, and that staff at all levels get the training they need. The new Centre will also provide an entry point at the heart of Government for the best new thinking on current issues and new approaches to management. It will commission research into innovation in strategy and delivery. It will act as a repository for best practice in the public sector and elsewhere and be the focus for training the senior civil servants of the future.

Fourth, there needs to be more emphasis on the corporate management of the Civil Service as a whole. My objective is to meet the corporate objectives of the Government as a whole, rather than just the objectives of individual departments. The reorganisation of the Cabinet Office will give it a new focus as the corporate headquarters of the Civil Service. Ensuring that there is a coherent information technology strategy, and that personnel systems deliver the talent needed for modern government, are just two of the challenges. In order to involve departments in the work of the Cabinet Office as the corporate headquarters of the Civil Service, the Secretary of the Cabinet will establish a team, including a number of Permanent Secretaries, to act as a Management Board for the Civil Service. The Head of the Government Information and Communication Service will from now on be located in the Cabinet Office. The Chief Scientific Adviser to the Government will also work from the Cabinet Office as well as the Department of Trade and Industry.

So far as possible, the new Cabinet Office needs to be located together. Its main base will continue to be in 70 Whitehall. Plans are being drawn up to locate the rest of the Office, including the new Performance and Innovation Unit and the Centre for Management and Policy Studies, in the currently unoccupied accommodation in Admiralty Arch, Ripley House and Kirkland House.

The Cabinet Office will continue to report to me as Prime Minister and Minister for the Civil Service. I will continue to account to Parliament for matters of collective Cabinet responsibility; the Minister for the Cabinet Office will report to Parliament on the management of the Civil Service and allied matters and, in particular, will oversee the major programme of reform I am announcing today.

The aim of this programme is to create a focus for the drive to modernise government to tackle the new challenges it faces. The broad outline of the programme is clear. A lost of work, and consultation with staff, is now needed to put in place the detail and implement the measures I have described. Further details will be set out in the Government's White Paper on Better Government, which will be published in the Autumn.

Advisory Committee on Business Appointment

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Prime Minister if he has received the first report of the Advisory Committee on Business Appointments. [53550]

The Prime Minister: The Committee has submitted its first report to me and I have today placed copies in the Libraries of both Houses. Since 1975, the Committee has advised the Prime Minister of the day on the propriety of business appointments that Crown servants wish to take up when they leave Crown service. Following a recommendation of the Committee on Standards of Public Life, it now also provides advice directly to former Ministers on their business appointments. The Committee's first report offers an account of their work in advising former Ministers from the time they took on this role in November 1995 through the post-Election period until the end of March 1998. The report similarly covers the business appointments of senior Crown servants for a two year period from April 1996, when a number of changes were made to the rules, which included bringing special advisers into the system. The Committee gave advice to former Ministers on 175 appointments and made recommendations to Ministers on 128 applications from Crown officials.

The Committee's new responsibilities for giving advice to former Ministers have made their task more onerous. I am very grateful to all the members for devoting their time freely to this important role. The Chairman, the Right Honourable the Lord Carlisle of Bucklow QC, has served with distinction for a number of years and will be stepping down shortly, as will the Right Honourable the Lord Thomson of Monifieth, General Sir Charles Huxtable and Sir Robin Ibbs. They kindly agreed to extensions of their appointments to see through the introduction of the business appointment system for former Ministers. I thank them warmly for the valuable contribution they have made.

Panchen Lama

Mr. Baker: To ask the Prime Minister if he will request the release of the Panchen Lama during his forthcoming visit to China. [52789]

The Prime Minister: We have raised individual human rights cases with the Chinese authorities repeatedly and at the highest levels. These have included the case of the child identified by the Dalai Lama as the 11th Panchen Lama. I will press these cases, as well as wider human rights concerns, during my visit.

Policy Unit, 10 Downing Street

Mr. Baker: To ask the Prime Minister if he will make it his policy to publish the telephone logs relating to the No.10 Policy Unit. [52844]

The Prime Minister: By convention it is not the practice of Governments to make such information publicly available—a principle reflected in the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information published in January 1997.

Former Trade and Industry Minister

Mr. Forth: To ask the Prime Minister (1) if he will place in the Library the recent report on the hon. Member for Edinburgh, South (Mr. Griffiths) as a Minister prepared by the Permanent Secretary of the DTI; [52500]

(2) when he received the report on the competence and efficiency of the hon. Member for Edinburgh, South (Mr. Griffiths) as a Minister prepared by the Permanent Secretary of the DTI; and if he will place a copy in the Library. [52502]

The Prime Minister: There is not, and never has been, such a report.

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

Departmental Reviews

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will list the reviews his Department and its predecessors, initiated in the years *(a)* 1974–75, *(b)* 1979–80 and *(c)* 1992–93. [48515]

Dr. Howells *[holding answer 6 July 1998]:* The information requested is available only at disproportionate cost.

Deaf People

Mr. Healey: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how guidance interviews with deaf people will be conducted; and if the additional communication costs for interviewing deaf people will be provided centrally. [51142]

Dr. Howells: Careers services are required by contract to meet all the information and guidance needs of their clients. This particularly includes those clients with disabilities such as hearing impairment, who stay within the client group until they are settled in their careers intention.

Learning Direct, the national telephone helpline, which provides free information about learning and careers, launched earlier this year, includes a minicom facility to enable those with hearing impairment to access the service. Where a person's needs cannot be met through Learning Direct, they can be referred to appropriate local guidance networks or the careers service for a more in depth service.

As policy on various new Department for Education and Employment guidance initiatives develops, the needs of deaf people will be taken into account.

Grants and Awards (Wakefield)

Yvette Cooper: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will list the grants and awards that require bids from applicants which his Department is responsible for administering and awarding *(a)* nationally and *(b)* that people and groups within Wakefield Metropolitan District are eligible to bid for; if he will publish the deadlines for these applications; and if he will produce this list on a regular basis. [51270]

Dr. Howells: The grants and awards administered by the Department for which bids are invited this year and for which the closing date has not already passed are set out. All these items are either available nationally or regionally in the Wakefield area. This list excludes contracts for services.

Item	*Deadline*
Specialist Schools	2 October 1998
City Technology Colleges[1]	30 September 1998
Standards Fund[2]	A circular is published annually which offers guidance to LEAs on the Standards Fund programme and invites them to make bids where appropriate. The deadline for the 1999–2000 round has not yet been set.
Education Action Zones	Autumn 1998
Independent/State School Partnerships	Applications for grant in 1998–99 were invited by 27 March 1998. No decision has yet been taken on whether to extend this funding pilot into 1999 and beyond
Grants to LEAs towards the extra costs in providing for Traveller and refugee pupils Section 488 of the 1996 Education Act	LEAs will be invited shortly to apply for three-year projects for work beginning in April 1999.
Non Maintained Special Schools Capital Round	31 October 1998
Annual Capital Guidelines to LEAs and Capital and Repair Grants to VA Schools	Mid-October 1998
New Deal for Schools	Mid-January 1999[3]
European Social Fund[4]	Various initiatives, which do not run to the same timetable. The deadline for each round of applications is publicised nationally and by the relevant Government Office when a call for applications is made
Millennium volunteers[5]	Deadline for applications has yet to be set
Support for community based learning activities	Arrangements for bidding will be described in a prospectus to be issued shortly

[1] Available only to City Technology Colleges
[2] Grant 11 of the existing Standards Fund programme (football and study support) would not be available to Wakefield as it is limited to LEAs with Premier League and Nationwide Division 1 football clubs
[3] Provisional
[4] Administered in England and Wales by the Department's ESF Unit. ESF objectives 3 and 4 are available nationally. ESF objective 2 is regional and available in Wakefield
[5] Applications will be dealt with nationally and will be considered from all areas of the country

Careers Service

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what assessment he has made of the extent to which companies financed from public funds to provide career information are paying dividends to shareholders and cash transfers to parent companies; and if he will make a statement. [51871]

Dr. Howells: The careers service in England is provided by 66 companies operating under competitively tendered contracts. Most are companies limited by guarantee that operate as non profit-making bodies. A number of the contracts are held by commercial companies and where these have been able to generate a surplus through the efficient delivery of their contracts legitimate dividends to shareholders or cash transfers to a parent company may be possible.

Post-graduate Studies

Mr. Lepper: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will make a statement on *(a)* progress towards the adoption by universities and other relevant institutions and agencies of the guidelines for post-graduate studies published in December 1996 by the Higher Education Quality Council and *(b)* proposals for monitoring the application of those guidelines. [52230]

Dr. Howells: Higher education institutions are independent bodies responsible for their own academic and administrative affairs. The guidelines on post-graduate studies published by the Higher Education Quality Council in December 1996 are intended to help and guide institutional practice. The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education, which was formed in 1997, has accepted the principles on the HEQC guidelines. In response to the report of the National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education the Agency is currently preparing a Code of Practice on Postgraduate Research, which it expects to publish in the Autumn of 1998. The Agency intends to monitor and report on institutions' performance under the Code with effect from late 1999.

Literacy and Numeracy

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what plans he has to increase the level of literacy and numeracy among adults in Cumbria. [52219]

Dr. Howells: The levels of literacy and numeracy among adults in Cumbria will be improved in a number of ways.

By 2002 we plan to help over 500,000 people a year in England. The working group we have set up to advise us, chaired by Sir Claus Moser, will report in November.

This year we have provided up to £5.5 million for Further Education colleges to run Summer Schools to help those with low basic skills. All three colleges in Cumbria that bid to run Summer Schools have had their plans accepted.

We plan to expand the help given by further and adult education institutions and basic skills are a key target area for the University for Industry. We will also provide help through Investing in Young People, the New Deal 18–24, Adult Work Based Training and our new Adult and Community Learning Fund.

Sixth Form Colleges

Mr. Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many sixth form colleges there are; how many there were in 1992; when the most recent one was opened; what mechanism exists to establish further colleges; and if he will make a statement. [52257]

Dr. Howells: There are currently 109 sixth form colleges. 116 joined the Further Education sector on 1 April 1993 and two sixth form colleges have joined the sector since then, the most recent on 1 August 1995. New Further Education corporations are established by order of the Secretary of State under section 16 of the Further and Higher Education Act 1992.

Training Centre, Colchester

Mr. Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what alternative training facilities are available for the categories of people who attended the former SEAX Training Centre in Colchester. [52288]

Dr. Howells: Following the closure of the SEAX Training Centre in Colchester, training provision was transferred to the Colchester Institute, Otley College and STS Training in Colchester. Endalm Ltd., a training provider in Benfleet, has taken on some hairdressing and business administration trainees and HCTP of Chelmsford have taken on some catering trainees who would have previously been placed with SEAX Training.

Corrugated Packaging Association

Mr. Paice: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will make a statement on the decision by a National Training Organisation recognition panel to exclude the Corrugated Packaging Association from the print industry NTO. [52454]

Dr. Howells: The National Training Organisation Recognition Panel is an independent body appointed to advise the Secretary of State on the recognition of National Training Organisations (NTOs). The Panel comprises representatives of national employers, academics and the TUC, with an independent chair.

The criteria which NTOs must satisfy are designed to ensure a strong well-supported network able to address the education and training needs of their sectors. The Recognition panel was pleased to accept a bid from the Print and Graphic Communication sector but has not been persuaded that a case had been made to include the Corrugated Packaging Association. I understand that the Corrugated Packaging Association is now working to produce evidence of how the education and training needs of the sector fit with those of the printing industry.

Optical Fibre Communications

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what plans he has to develop the potential of modern broad band optical fibre communications within the education system; and if he will make a statement. [52329]

Dr. Howells: The Government are considering carefully the implications for education of broadband communications in the light of the experience of SuperJANET in linking higher education and research institutions, the outcomes of pilot projects under the Education Departments' Superhighways Initiative, and the overall development of the Government's strategy on the National Grid for Learning (NGfL) following consultation. Further announcements on the development of the NGfL will be made later this year.

Economic and Monetary Union

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what has been the nature and quantity of the material sent by his Department to schools concerning Economic and Monetary Union; what was its source, its publication and distribution cost; how it was funded; and if he will place a full set of the material in the Library. [52717]

Mr. Andrew Smith: No material about Economic and Monetary Union has been sent to schools by the Department for Education and Employment.

Millennium Compliance

Mr. Cotter: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what extra provision of funds there will be to the education sector following the Comprehensive Spending Review to address millennium computer compliance problems. [52904]

Dr. Howells: The Comprehensive Spending Review has only just concluded. Accordingly, decisions about more detailed allocations are currently in the process of being made. The outcomes of these deliberations will be available later in the year.

Modern Apprenticeships (Engineering)

Mr. Lansley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will estimate the proportion of the full average costs to employers of providing a modern apprenticeship in the engineering industry that is met by the subsidy payable through training and enterprise councils. [52957]

Dr. Howells: The information requested is not available. Funding for Modern Apprenticeships in the engineering industry is agreed through local negotiations between Training and Enterprise Councils and employers/training providers. The level of support will vary according to a range of factors including local circumstances and the needs of individuals.

Accountancy Qualifications

Mr. Pearson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how much was spent by the Higher Education Funding Council in 1995–96 in support of students studying for accountancy qualifications. [52244]

Dr. Howells: The Higher Education Funding Council for England allocate block grant to institutions based on a broad funding model. The Funding Council has estimated that in 1995–96 the funding model allocated around £36 million to institutions for students on accountancy courses.

Mr. Pearson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what statistics his Department collects on the fees charged to students by further education colleges for studying towards accountancy qualifications. [52242]

Dr. Howells: None.

Education Maintenance Allowance

Mr. Duncan Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) from which departmental budget the Education Maintenance Allowance will be paid; and how it will be paid to recipients; [53118]

(2) if the Education Maintenance Allowance will be linked to parents' income through *(a)* means-testing and *(b)* taxation; [53119]

(3) if he will list the pilot areas for Education Maintenance Allowance; [53120]

(4) how many people are included in the target groups in the pilot areas for the Education Maintenance Allowance; [53121]

(5) when the report from the Education Maintenance Allowance pilots will be published. [53122]

Dr. Howells: The details of the Education Maintenance Allowance pilots are being worked up. Such additional money as is required for EMA pilots is in this Department's budget. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will be making an announcement on the pilots in the Autumn.

Compliance Cost Assessments

Mr. Lansley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what cumulative net increase in compliance costs has been estimated in compliance cost assessments published by his Department since 1 May 1997. [52955]

Dr. Howells: Neither of the two compliance cost assessments published by this Department between 1 May 1997 and 30 June 1998 identified a net increase in compliance costs to business.

Mr. Lansley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will list the compliance cost assessments published by his Department since 1 May 1997. [52956]

Dr. Howells: Between 1 May 1997 and 30 June 1998 two compliance cost assessments were published by this Department. These related to: The Industrial Training Levy (Engineering Construction Board) Order 1998 and The Industrial Training Levy (Construction Board) Order 1998.

Mr. Lansley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will list those compliance cost assessments since 1 May 1997 in which there is a net reduction in compliance costs resulting from a legislative proposal. [52954]

Dr. Howells: Although neither of the two compliance cost assessments published by this Department between 1 May 1997 and 30 June 1998 identified a net reduction in compliance costs, in both cases there was a potential net benefit to business. The Department is committed to considering the effect its legislation has on business, for example in the design of the New Deal.

Cycling

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what proportion of the employees of his Department and of the employees of each agency for which he is responsible cycle to work; and what measures he plans to increase that proportion. [52683]

Dr. Howells: The Department does not collect information centrally on the specific modes of transport used by employees. Measures to increase the proportion of employees cycling to work are being considered as part of the development of green transport plans for buildings occupied by the Department and its Agencies.

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what parking facilities for cycles exist at each office or site for which his Department is responsible and for each agency for which he is responsible. [52682]

Dr. Howells: The number of cycle parking spaces in DfEE HQ sites is 183. The breakdown is shown in the table.

Office/site	*Number*
Darlington	37
London	65
Ranmoor Hall	12
Runcorn	30
Sheffield	39
Total	183

The Employment Service (ES) does not keep records of cycling spaces at its 1,200 properties in a wide range of locations. Where a need is identified, and it is feasible, spaces are made available for staff use.

Departmental Vehicles

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many of the vehicles due for replacement by *(a)* his Department and *(b)* bodies listed in the National Asset Register in (i) 1998–99, (ii) 1999–2000 and (iii) 2000–01 will be replaced by vehicles using (1) petrol, (2) diesel, (3) natural gas, (4) electric batteries and (5) other. [52612]

Dr. Howells: Decisions on fuel type are made as the individual vehicles are purchased. This is because the relevant technology and the availability of different fuels are constantly changing and the Department seeks efficiency, economy and value for money from every purchase.

SCOTLAND

University Students

Mr. Letwin: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what, at each university in Scotland, is the current number of undergraduates who are ordinarily resident in England whose secondary school was *(a)* a public or private school, *(b)* a grant-maintained or grammar school, *(c)* a local authority comprehensive school and *(d)* another type of school. [49707]

Mr. Wilson *[holding answer 9 July 1998]:* Available information is given in the table. Data are not available on English students at certain Scottish higher education institutions, nor on English students who entered higher education from further education colleges or similar routes (see footnotes).

Identifiable undergraduate students by last school attended, in higher education institutions in Scotland: 1996–97—by institution and type of school last attended

	Local authority maintained	*Grant maintained*	*Independent*[1]	*Local authority special*	*Other*
University of Abertay Dundee	74	10	21	—	—
Edinburgh College of Art	36	13	13	0	0
Glasgow School of Art	—	—	—	0	0
Moray House Institute of Education	—	—	—	0	0
Queen Margaret College	79	21	30	—	—
The Scottish College of Textiles	8	—	6	—	—
The Robert Gordon University	34	—	10	—	7
The University of Paisley	17	—	—	—	0
Napier University	172	—	65	9	27
University of Edinburgh	971	262	2,128	—	13
University of Glasgow	142	26	70	—	6
University of Strathclyde	124	24	45	0	6
University of Aberdeen	503	—	228	6	20
The University of Dundee	351	99	245	—	10
University of St. Andrews	727	180	882	0	10
The University of Stirling	170	40	70	—	—
Total[2,3]	3,418	693	3,820	29	106

[1] Includes 10 pupils from City Technology Colleges.
[2] Data not available for Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama, Northern College of Education, St. Andrew's College of Education, Glasgow Caledonian University, Heriot-Watt University and the Scottish Agricultural College.
[3] Information on last school attended is not available for students who entered HE via FE colleges or similar routes.

Domestic Abuse

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what measures he is taking to ensure *(a)* adequate and *(b)* secure funding for services providing information, support and refuge to those experiencing domestic abuse. [52271]

Mr. McLeish *[holding answer 24 July 1998]:* Local funding is for individual local authorities and other agencies, but nationally, the Scottish Office continues to give grants to Scottish Women's Aid, amounting this year to over £200,000 for their work on developing refuge and other permanent rehousing options for abused women who would otherwise be homeless, and social welfare work and training.

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what steps he is taking to raise public awareness about domestic abuse. [52792]

Mr. McLeish: The Scottish Office will launch a further national advertising campaign in early 1999, as one of a number of measures to prevent domestic abuse.

Standard Spending Assessments

Mr. Charles Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list in order of sparsity the local authorities in Scotland using *(a)* the definition of settlement size used by his office and *(b)* the definitions of sparsity and super-sparsity used in the SSA formula for England and Wales. [52358]

Mr. Macdonald *[holding answer 27 July 1998]:* Three measures of sparsity are currently in use in the calculation of Grant Aided Expenditure Assessments in Scotland. The table lists local authorities in Scotland in order using each of these measures.

The information required to list Scottish authorities in order using the definition of sparsity and super-sparsity used in the SSA formula for England and Wales is not

readily available and will take some time to prepare. I shall write to my hon. Friend with the information in due course.

Rural settlement pattern[1]	*Sparsity (additive)*[2]	*Sparsity (multiplicative)*[2]
Eilean Siar	Eilean Siar	Eilean Siar
Orkney Islands	Argyll and Bute	Argyll and Bute
Shetland Islands	Shetland Islands	Highland
Aberdeenshire	Highland	Shetland Islands
Moray	Orkney Islands	Orkney Islands
East Lothian	Aberdeenshire	Aberdeenshire
Scottish Borders	Dumfries and Galloway	Dumfries and Galloway
Highland	Perth and Kinross	Perth and Kinross
Argyll and Bute	Scottish Borders	Scottish Borders
Perth and Kinross	Moray	Moray
Dumfries and Galloway	Angus	Angus
Stirling	Stirling	Stirling
East Ayrshire	East Lothian	East Lothian
Clackmannanshire	South Ayrshire	South Ayrshire
Angus	North Ayrshire	Fife
South Ayrshire	Fife	North Ayrshire
North Ayrshire	East Airshire	South Lanarkshire
Fife	West Lothian	East Ayrshire
West Lothian	South Lanarkshire	West Lothian
South Lanarkshire	Midlothian	Midlothian
Midlothian	Falkirk	Falkirk
East Renfrewshire	Clackmannanshire	West Dunbartonshire
East Dunbartonshire	West Dunbartonshire	Clackmannanshire
North Lanarkshire	Inverclyde	Renfrewshire
Inverclyde	North Lanarkshire	Dundee City
Falkirk	Renfrewshire	North Lanarkshire
Renfrewshire	Edinburgh, City of	Inverclyde
Edinburgh, City of	Glasgow City	East Dunbartonshire
Aberdeen City	Aberdeen City	Aberdeen City
Dundee City	Dundee City	East Renfrewshire
West Dunbartonshire	East Renfrewshire	Edinburgh, City of
Glasgow City	East Dunbartonshire	Glasgow City

[1] Percentage of an authority's population living outwith settlements of 10,000+ population. A settlement is defined as a continuously built-up area that is at least 1km distant from any other built-up area

[2] The measures of sparsity include 3 elements: (1) hectares per person; (2) percentage of residents living outwith settlements of 1000+ population (census of population 1991); (3) average distance between population centre point of local authority and the centroid of each postcode sector or enumeration district weighted by its population (census of population 1991). Each component series is standardised and the 3 are combined either by adding together (the "additive") or multiplying together ("the multiplicative"). The sparsity indicator values for the new authorities are the combined values of corresponding former districts, weighted by district population.

Cycling

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what proportion of the employees of his Department and of the employees of each agency for which he is responsible cycle to work; and what measures he plans to increase that proportion. [52685]

Mr. Dewar: A recent survey showed that 6 per cent. of employees at my Department's main building at Victoria Quay, Edinburgh cycle to work. Equivalent information is not available for the large number of other employment sites for which my Department and agencies are responsible. We are committed to encouraging Green Transport Plans, including measures to increase the proportion of employees cycling to work, as we explained in our White Paper, "Travel Choices for Scotland" (Cm 4010).

Compliance Cost Assessments

Mr. Lansley: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the compliance cost assessments published by his Department since 1 May 1997. [52946]

Mr. Wilson: Details of compliance cost assessments published by The Scottish Office are contained in the six-monthly Command Papers of Compliance Cost Assessments.

Between 1 May 1997 and 30 June 1998, ten compliance cost assessments covering the following Scottish measures have been published:

The Environmental Assessment (Scotland) Amendment Regulations 1997; and The Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development)(Scotland) Amendment Order 1997;

The Building (Scotland) Amendment Regulations 1997—amendments to Parts D and E of the Technical Standards for compliance with the Building Standards (Scotland) Regulations 1990;

The Building (Scotland) Amendment Regulations 1997—amendments to Part J of the Technical Standards for compliance with the Building Standards (Scotland) Regulations 1990;

The Building (Scotland) Amendment Regulations 1997—amendments to Part K of the Technical Standards for compliance with the Building Standards (Scotland) Regulations 1990;

Town and Country Planning (Use Classes)(Scotland) Order 1997; and Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development)(Scotland) Amendment (No. 2) Order 1997;

The Surface Waters (Shellfish)(Classification)(Scotland) Direction 1998;

The Scheme for Construction Contracts (Scotland) Regulations 1998;

Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Act 1996 (Scotland) (Commencement No. 5) Order 1998;

Construction Contracts (Scotland) Exclusion Order 1998;

Surface Water (Dangerous Substances) (Classification) (Scotland) Regulations 1998.

Mr. Lansley: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list those compliance cost assessments since 1 May 1997 in which there is a net reduction in compliance costs resulting from a legislative proposal. [52947]

Mr. Wilson: There is presently no requirement on Departments to carry out compliance cost assessments where legislative proposals are expected to be cost neutral or result in a saving to business. In the period 1 May 1997 to 30 May 1998, The Scottish Office has produced no compliance cost assessments which have resulted in a net reduction in compliance costs to business, although we have produced some which have indicated that the proposals are cost neutral.

For the detail, I refer the hon. Member to Cmnd 3938 and the individual compliance cost assessments held in the House Library.

Regional Selective Assistance

Mr. Lansley: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what cost-per-job limits are set on offers of regional selective assistance in development areas in Scotland. [52925]

Mr. Wilson: Information on cost-per-job limits is confidential and cannot be disclosed. Regional Selective Assistance offers are made subject to common guidelines throughout Great Britain.

Football Hooliganism

Mr. Jim Murphy: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) how many Scotland supporters were *(a)* arrested, *(b)* detained and *(c)* removed from France by the French authorities during the World Cup; [51994]

(2) if he will list in order of frequency the towns and cities of residence given of the Scottish football fans *(a)* arrested, *(b)* detained and *(c)* removed from France by the French authorities during the World Cup; [51996]

(3) how many members of each official Scottish Football League supporters clubs were *(a)* arrested, *(b)* detained and *(c)* removed from France by the French authorities during the World Cup. [52002]

Mr. Dewar: The number of Scottish fans arrested in France during the World Cup was 6. The number detained and removed from France by the French authorities involved are listed below:

Arrests

Aberdeen (2), Edinburgh (2), Glasgow (1) and Coatbridge (1).

Detained

Edinburgh (35), Glasgow (15), Paisley (1), North Berwick (1), Airdrie (1), Harthill (1), Newcastle (1), Kilsyth (1), Kirkintilloch (1) and Milton of Campsie (1).

Information on how many of these individuals are members of official Scottish Football League supporters clubs is not available.

Mr. Jim Murphy: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) how many football supporters were arrested or detained by police at each football ground in the Scottish Premier and Scottish divisions 1, 2 and 3 for the last three years for which figures are available; [51999]

(2) how much was spent by each league club in Scotland on policing of football grounds *(a)* on average per game and *(b)* each of the last three years for which figures are available. [52003]

Mr. McLeish: It will take some time to obtain this information and I shall write to my hon. Friend and place a copy of my reply in the Library.

Lone Parents

Mr. Rendel: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many lone parents there are in Scotland; of these how many have children aged under five years; how many, of each of these categories are currently in employment; what proportion of the total of each category in the United Kingdom this represents; and what forcasts his Department has made of these numbers in future years. [52981]

Mr. Wilson: In Spring 1998, there were 173,000 lone parents in Scotland, of whom 72,000 were in employment. Of the 65,000 lone parents who had children aged under 5 years, 12,000 were in employment.

These figures are given in the table, which also shows the proportion of each category in the UK total.

Lone parents with dependent children by economic status and age of youngest dependent child
Spring 1998 (not seasonally adjusted)—Scotland

	Thousand	*As per cent. of UK total*
All lone parents	173	9.2
in employment	72	8.4
Lone Parents with children aged under 5	65	9.2
in employment	12	6.3

Source:
Labour Force Survey

European Regional Development Fund

Mr. Swinney: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will provide an analysis by sector, and for small, medium and large scale businesses, of those projects which have been most successful in gaining funding from the European Regional Development Fund. [52728]

Mr. Macdonald: The information requested is not held centrally. European Regional Development Fund support is delivered through 7 area-based programmes in Scotland and 11 Community Initiative programmes. Successful projects range from the provision of business premises and training facilities to support to the enterprise networks and local authorities to encourage the creation, development and expansion of individual business, particularly small and medium enterprises.

Mr. Swinney: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will outline the range of advice and assistance which is given to those seeking assistance from the European Regional Development Fund. [52726]

Mr. Macdonald: Potential applicants for funding receive advice and assistance from a number of sources. That, provided as part of the administration of the programmes, includes general information about the availability of European Funds and how to apply for them, detailed information on the respective programmes, guidance on the completion of application (and claim) forms, and the opportunity to discuss, proposals with Programme Executives and Secretariats responsible for programme administration and implementation.

Scottish Trade International

Mr. Swinney: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the structures and methods used by Scottish Trade International for assessing the success rate of Scottish projects in winning assistance from the European Regional Development Fund. [52727]

Mr. Wilson: Scottish Trade International is consulted on all European Regional Development Fund applications for export promotion activity. The success of such applications is monitored through STI's close involvement with the network of Export Partnerships, together with other relevant Scottish Office officials.

Mr. Swinney: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) what has been the sterling value of European Regional Development Fund assistance to Scottish Trade International in each of the last five years; [52725]

(2) if Scottish Trade International has made an application to access the European Regional Development Fund to support Scottish export promotion. [52818]

Mr. Wilson: Over the past five years, there have been two projects for which Scottish Trade International has been successful in securing European Regional Development Fund assistance. In 1996, Scottish Trade International secured funding of £175,400 over three years for a project which will develop links with European development agencies to find foreign partners for Scottish companies in overseas markets. The project started on 1 January 1997 and £31,000 of the overall award was paid out in the year 1997–98.

In 1997, Scottish Trade International was also successful in securing funding of £225,000 over two years to establish Scottish Software Centres in California and Virginia. As the project did not commence until 1 January 1998, no payments have as yet been made.

Potential European Regional Development Fund bids for the current financial year are presently being considered by Scottish Trade International.

Mr. Swinney: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the total overall budget for Scottish Trade International for the current year; and what proportion of that total is provided by *(a)* the Exchequer and *(b)* the European Regional Development Fund. [52724]

Mr. Wilson: STI's budget provision for the current year, including running costs, is £7.4 million, of which £6.6 million comes from Scottish Enterprise, with the remainder provided by The Scottish Office. Figures relate to core STI activities and cover both staffing and programme expenditure. In addition, STI will receive about £138,000 this year as a result of previous successful bids for ERDF funding.

Health Boards (External Consultants)

Mr. Swinney: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the expenditure by health boards in Scotland on public relations and media services provided by external consultants in each of the last five years. [52410]

Mr. Dewar: The information requested is not held centrally.

Superquarry, Isle of Harris

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he has received the report of the public inquiry into the proposed superquarry at Lingerbay, Isle of Harris; and when he plans to announce his decision. [52497]

Mr. Macdonald: My right. hon Friend has not yet received the Report of this public local inquiry. Part 1 of the Report (the summary of evidence led and the Findings of Fact) has been circulated to parties for comment and the Reporter is currently considering the responses received with a view to making any necessary adjustments. Thereafter, Part 2 of the Report has to be completed before it is submitted to the Secretary of State for his consideration. At this stage, it is not possible to indicate when a decision will be issued.

Scottish Record Office

Mr. Browne: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement about the prior options review of the Scottish Record Office. [53606]

Mr. Dewar: A prior options review of the Scottish Record Office was carried out recently by my Department. The review concluded that the functions of the Scottish Record Office will be required indefinitely as they are essential to the safekeeping and preservation of the national archives of Scotland, and recommended continuation of Agency status. A number of subsidiary recommendations were made to enhance the strategic management of the Agency and to develop its commercial activities. I have accepted the recommendations.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Waste Recycling

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Chairman of the Administration Committee if she will publish the targets set by the Committee for the Proportion of waste to be recycled in each of the categories *(a)* paper, *(b)* glass, *(c)* aluminium, *(d)* other metals and *(e)* plastics. [51186]

Mrs. Roe: This is a matter for the Serjeant at Arms; I have asked him to write to the hon. Gentleman.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Non-fossil Fuel Obligation

Mr. Boswell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many power projects contracted under the NFFO are at the planning approval stage; and what is the generation capacity of these projects. [51764]

Mr. Battle *[holding answer 21 July 1998]:* As at 31 March 1998 there were seventy-nine NFFO3 projects for which planning applications had been approved. A further twelve had submitted planning applications to the relevant planning authority. Details of these NFFO3 projects, including their contracted capacities, are set out in the table. Comprehensive information about NFFO4 projects' progress in obtaining planning permission is not yet available.

Tranche	*Site name*	*Contracted capacity*	*Status*
NFFO3			
01006L3	Mayton Wood	1.519	Application approved
01007L3	Blackborough End	1.519	Application approved
01024L3	Attlebridge	1.175	Application approved
01025L3	Bramford	0.81	Application approved
01026L3	Elstow	1.76	Application approved
01027L3	Sundon	2.64	Application approved
01047L3	Edgefield Hall Farm	0.6	Application approved

Tranche	Site name	Contracted capacity	Status
01098L3	Arlesey	1.08	Application approved
01099L3	L'field Stewartby	10.668	Application approved
01100L3	Dogsthorpe	1.89	Application approved
01107L3	Foxhall	1.175	Application approved
02001L3	Newton Longville	0.945	Application approved
02003L3	Portley Ford	1.82	Application approved
02015L3	Sidegate Lane	1.33	Application approved
02017L3	Brixworth	0.575	Application approved
02030L3	Waverley Wood Farm	0.802	Application approved
02066L3	Judkins Quarry Phase 3	1.157	Application approved
02080L3	Mountsorrel	1.519	Application approved
04006L3	Standard	0.875	Application approved
04007L3	Maw Green	1.615	Application approved
04008L3	Gowy	1.615	Application approved
05002L3	Himley Wood	1.82	Application approved
05044L3	Granville	1.393	Application approved
05072L3	Harn Hill Quarry	2.61	Application approved
06011L3	Ellington Road	0.945	Application approved
06012L3	Seghill Village	1.422	Application approved
06029L3	Harewood Whin	2.376	Application approved
07005L3	Danes Moss	1.63	Application approved
07109L3	Butchersfield	2.874	Application approved
08002L3	Cormongers Lane	1.82	Application approved
08023L3	Stangate Landfill	4.5	Application approved
08024L3	Offham Phase 2	1.18	Application approved
08035L3	Horton	1.825	Application approved
09008L3	Whites Pit	6.015	Application approved
09014L3	Ardley Fields Farm	1.825	Application approved
09143L3	Paulsgrove Landfill	2.415	Application approved
09157L3	Wapsey's Wood II	1.72	Application approved
09158L3	Netley	0.9	Application approved
10035L3	Tythegston	1.175	Application approved
11042L3	Yanley	0.945	Application approved
12004L3	Howden Clough Road	1.82	Application approved
12071L3	Winterton	3.772	Application approved
01045E3	Elean Business Park	31	Application approved
01106E3	Thetford Power Station	38.5	Application approved
02043E3	Phoenix Parkway	14.25	Application submitted
05004E3	Oakland Farm	0.3	Application submitted
11065E3	Poole	10.93	Application submitted
12076E3	Eggborough Power Station	8	Application approved
02027H3	Holme Pierrepont	0.89	Application approved
02029H3	Beeston Weir	1.66	Application approved
04024H3	Ffestiniog	1.75	Application approved
04096H3	Gelli Lago	0.18	Application submitted
04098H3	Cwmorthin	0.41	Application approved
05026H3	Ebley Mill	0.098	Application approved
10003H3	Llyn Brianne Dam	4.35	Application approved
10004H3	Elan Valley	2.95	Application approved
11034H3	Old Walls Hydro	0.076	Application approved
12035H3	Kirkthorpe	0.386	Application approved
02076W3	Copt Oak Farm	0.15	Application submitted
02092W3	Snibston Discovery Park	0.127	Application approved
04011W3	Mynydd Gorddu	4.18	Application approved
04016W3	Mynydd Glandulas	0.119	Application approved
04037W3	Rheidol Windfarm	1.001	Application approved
04050W3	Carno B Windfarm	6.321	Application approved
04051W3	Carno A Windfarm	6.321	Application approved
04053W3	Cemmaes B	1.365	Application submitted
04054W3	Trysglwyn Windfarm	2.36	Application approved
04068W3	Hafotty Ucha	0.257	Application approved
04076W3	Royal Seaforth Dock	1.535	Application approved
04081W3	Mynydd Clogau	4.253	Application submitted
04103W3	Mynydd Yr Hendre	12.492	Application submitted
04107W3	Llanbabo	9.181	Application approved
05001W3	Lynch Knoll	0.213	Application approved
06019W3	Great Eppleton Farm	1.277	Application approved
07046W3	Great Orton Airfield	1.018	Application submitted
07056W3	Harlock Hill	1.488	Application approved
07124W3	Siddick	1.791	Application approved
07125W3	Oldside	2.303	Application approved
07129W3	Kirkstanton Airfield	1.023	Application approved
07130W3	Far Old Park Farm	2.303	Application approved
11008W3	Davidstow Windfarm	3.371	Application submitted

Tranche	Site name	Contracted capacity	Status
11011W3	Trannack Downs	0.381	Application submitted
11080W3	Treculliacks	0.254	Application approved
12014W3	Barms Hill Farm	0.107	Application approved
05032M3	Dudley Incinerator	6.2	Application approved
05033M3	Wolverhampton Incinerator	8.35	Application approved
05034M3	Stoke Incinerator	12.5	Application approved
05036M3	Tyseley Waste Disposal Site	28.2	Application approved
06002M3	Haverton Hill	20.069	Application approved
08031M3	Betteshanger Colliery	9	Application submitted
12049M3	Bernard Road	2.1	Application approved
	Total NFF03	349.411	

Mr. Boswell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many power stations contracted under the NFFO above 7.5 megawatts are now in the course of construction; and where they are located. [51765]

Mr. Battle *[holding answer 21 July 1998]:* There are nine NFFO3 projects with contracted capacities exceeding 7.5 megawatts DNC (declared net capacity) for which planning applications have been approved. Of these, five are operational. Details of these NFFO3 projects, including their registered site addresses, are set out in the table. Comprehensive information of similar-sized NFFO4 projects' progress in obtaining planning permission is not yet available.

Site name	Site address	Contracted capacity MW (dnc)	Status
L'field Stewartby (Landfill Gas)	Green Lane Stewartby Bedfordshire MK43 9LZ	10.668	Operational
Wolverhampton (Energy from Waste)	Crown Street Wolverhampton West Midlands	8.35	Operational
Stoke (Energy from Waste)	Campbell Road Stoke on Trent Staffordshire	12.5	Operational
Tyseley (Energy from Waste)	James Road Tyseley Birmingham West Midlands B11 2BA	28.2	Operational
Llanbabo (Wind)	Anglesey Gwynedd	9.181	Operational
Haverton Hill (Wind)	Site B North off Haverton Hill Road Stockton Cleveland	20.069	Planning application approved
Eggborough Power Station (Biomass)	Eggborough Nr Selby North Yorkshire	8	Planning application approved. Under construction
Thetford Power Station (Biomass)	Thetford Norfolk	38.5	Planning application approved. Construction underway
Elean Business Park (Biomass)	Off A142 between March and Ely Sutton Cambridgeshire	31	Planning application approved

Mr. Boswell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how much electricity is currently being generated by projects contracted under the NFFO. [51766]

Mr. Battle *[holding answer 21 July 1998]:* Electricity generated from all NFFO1–4 projects from 1 April 1997 until 31 March 1998 was 2,732 Gwh.

Mr. Boswell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if she will estimate the savings in CO_2 emissions from the use of *(a)* all power stations and *(b)* biomass power stations contracted under the NFFO. [51767]

Mr. Battle *[holding answer 21 July 1998]:* I expect renewable energy projects contracted under NFFOs 1–5 to achieve savings in CO_2 emissions of about 2 million tonnes of carbon. Ten to twenty per cent. of this will be attributable to biomass power stations, depending on the number of projects which are successfully commissioned.

Mr. Boswell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many of the proposed power stations which have secured contracts under the NFFO have been refused planning permission by the relevant planning authority. [51768]

Mr. Battle *[holding answer 21 July 1998]:* Information about planning permission refusals for NFFO1 and NFFO2 projects is not held centrally. As at 31 March 1998 fifteen NFFO3 projects had been refused planning permission. Appeals had been lodged in respect of twelve of these projects, of which five have been dismissed. Comprehensive information about NFFO4 projects' progress in obtaining planning permission is not yet available.

British Coal

Caroline Flint: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what was the total revenue from sales of British Coal land and assets in each year since privatisation. [52447]

Mr. Battle: The total proceeds received for each year were:

£ million

Financial year	*Sale of land and assets*	*Sale of subsidiary undertakings*	*Total*
1995–96	48	48	96
1996–97	76	35	111
1997–98	49	13	62

Arbitration Legislation

Ms Kelly: To ask the President of the Board of Trade when the recent legislation concerning the arbitration of employment cases will come into force. [52632]

Mr. Ian McCartney: Provision for the Advisory Conciliation and Arbitration Service (ACAS) to provide, fund, and promote a scheme for the arbitration of unfair dismissal disputes, subject to the approval of the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, is included in the Employment Rights (Dispute Resolution) Act 1998. This provision will come into force on 1 August 1998. The scheme, which will be the subject of consultation, is not expected to begin operation until after April 1999.

Fuel Poverty

Mr. Barnes: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what research her Department has evaluated on the causes and extent of fuel poverty; and if she will make a statement. [51314]

Mr. Battle *[holding answer 27 July 1998]:* The Green Paper *A Fair Deal for Consumers: Modernising the Framework for Utility Regulation* highlighted a particular concern that disadvantaged consumers may be benefiting least from emerging competition in gas and electricity supply. In considering how these problems might best be resolved, the review of utilities regulation has considered available papers and research on these issues. Officials from my Department have also been involved in an interdepartmental working group under the leadership of the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions, which has considered how fuel poverty might be more closely defined and alleviated, and have contributed to the Gas Consumers' Council's Low Income Consumer and Competition working group.

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, pursuant to the answer of 20 July 1998, *Official Report*, column *402*, when he expects to publish his response to the action plan for the protection of disadvantaged consumers produced by the energy regulators and energy companies in consultation with consumer organisations. [53170]

Mr. Battle: The then President of the Board of Trade published on 27 July 'A Fair Deal for Consumers: Modernising the Framework for Utility Regulation: *The Response to Consultation*'. This details the Government's response to the consultation on the Green Paper on utility regulation, published in March, including the action plan for the protection of disadvantaged consumers. Copies have been placed in the Library of both Houses.

Foresight Programme

Mr. Cotter: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what systems are in place to measure the performance of the Foresight programme. [53083]

Mr. Battle: On coming into office my right hon. Friend the Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett), as President of the Board of Trade, commissioned an audit of the Foresight Programme across Government. Last October the findings of the audit were published, and the Ministerial Foresight Group was established under my chairmanship to provide top level oversight of the Foresight Programme across Whitehall. A further progress report was published last month. Copies are available in the Library.

Independent assessments of the impact of Foresight to date have been published by several organisations, including a 1995 report from the House of Commons Select Committee on Science and Technology, and a report from the Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology shortly after the General Election last year. Impact assessment will be an integral part of the next round of Foresight, starting in April 1999, which is currently the subject of widespread public consultation. The blueprint for the next round will be published in the Autumn.

Mr. Cotter: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what was the total cost of the Foresight Initiative in each of the last three years. [53082]

Mr. Battle: The Foresight Programme is spearheaded by sixteen panels drawn from business, the science base, and Government departments. Panel members give their time free of charge. The total cost of staff in the Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology servicing panels and managing the development of the programme, related consultancy support, and Panel activities in each of the last three years was as follows:

	£ million
1995–96	1.170
1996–97	1.502
1997–98	1.475

Mining Industry

Mr. Etherington: To ask the President of the Board of Trade when she expects to conclude her deliberations on the issue of dismissed miners. [52751]

Mr. Battle: The recently published Coalfields Task Force report recommended that the DTI review the pension entitlements of individuals who were dismissed by British Coal at the time of the 1984–85 miners' strike. The Department is actively looking into British Coal's handling of the issue. However, given the time that has elapsed since these dismissals and the consequent difficulty in establishing the full circumstances, it is too early to say when a conclusion might be reached.

Strikes

Mr. Lansley: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many days have been lost to strikes in each quarter since the first quarter of 1992. [52980]

Mr. Ian McCartney: The information requested is given in the table:

Number of working days lost due to labour disputes in the UK

Year	*Q1*	*Q2*	*Q3*	*Q4*	*Total*
1992	114,800	85,600	161,600	166,000	528,000
1993	194,000	198,900	76,300	180,000	649,300
1994	15,100	118,900	90,300	54,100	278,400
1995	70,600	101,300	75,200	167,600	414,700
1996	102,500	261,900	712,700	226,200	1,303,300
1997	75,500	97,000	17,900	44,300	234,700
1998[1]	62,300	—	—	—	—

[1] Provisional data

Source:
Office for National Statistics

Coal Authority

Mr. Derek Twigg: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when the Coal Authority's report and Accounts for 1997–98 will be laid before Parliament. [53551]

Mr. Battle: I have today laid a copy before each House of Parliament.

Landward Petroleum Licensing

Mr. Roy: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he has concluded his assessment of applications made in the 8 Round of Landward Petroleum Licensing. [53546]

Mr. Battle: All applications have now been assessed. No further awards will be made.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Nuclear Tests (South Asia)

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 1 June 1998, *Official Report*, column *152*, if he will establish for what reasons British Intelligence did not provide advance warning of the Indian nuclear tests. [46818]

Mr. Robin Cook: The performance of the intelligence agencies in meeting the requirements placed on them is reviewed regularly by the Joint Intelligence Committee and subsequently by Ministers.

GCHQ

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has to consult local authorities on the future location of GCHQ. [52205]

Mr. Robin Cook: GCHQ has maintained contact with and consulted local authorities at all stages of their new accommodation project and will continue to do so. The development of GCHQ's future accommodation is subject to statutory planning procedures and the short-listed consortia will be required to obtain planning consent from the Local Authorities for their development plans.

Diplomatic Representation

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on changes to his Department's policy and practice on the maintenance of diplomatic representation with de facto Governments, following the deposition of a democratic Government. [51876]

Mr. Robin Cook *[holding answer 23 July 1998]:* The policy of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office has not changed. Since 1980 the practice of the UK has been to recognise states and not governments. We maintain diplomatic representation when it is in the UK interest to do so. The level at which our representation is maintained depends upon the scale of British interests and the political acceptability of the government in power of the state concerned. The deposition of a democratic government does not necessarily bring about the withdrawal of diplomatic representation or a breach in diplomatic relations.

Immigration Section, Islamabad

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has received concerning conditions in the Immigration Office at the British High Commission in Islamabad; and if he will make a statement. [52048]

Mr. Fatchett: During 1997 we received representations from many Members of Parliament about the handling of individual visa applications and the standard of service provided by the Immigration Section at our High Commission in Islamabad. A combination of staff shortages and computer failures during the busy summer season in 1997 had resulted in a deterioration in service standards.

A programme of change (including increases in staff numbers, training programmes and improvements to public waiting areas) initiated at the beginning of this year has resulted in improvement in the quality of service. We are doing all that we can to maintain standards during the current summer peak season for visa applications.

Brazil

Mr. White: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what progress has been made in establishing the land rights of the Tapeba Indians in the state of Ceara, Brazil; and how many hectares have been demarcated. [52432]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: Embassy officials in Brasilia maintain regular contact with the authorities responsible for the demarcation of Indian lands.

4,658 hectares will be allocated to the Tapeba. The period for legal challenge to this decision lapsed on Friday 24 July, meaning that physical demarcation can now proceed. A company has been selected to carry out the physical demarcation and the tender for this was expected to be ratified by the President of FUNAI (the National Foundation for Assistance to Indians) on 27 July.

Cycling

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what proportion of the employees of his Department and of the employees of each agency for which he is responsible cycle to work; and what measures he plans to increase that proportion. [52689]

Mr. Fatchett: In relation to the number of employees, we provide the following proportion of cycle spaces:

London: 7.2 per cent.

Hanslope Park (near Milton Keynes): 11.5 per cent.

There is a fairly high usage rate, but precise details are not available.

We plan to increase the number of cycle spaces in our London buildings by up to 20 per cent. during this financial year in order to encourage those employees who live within cycling distance to use this method of transport.

Measures to increase the proportion of employees cycling to work are being considered as part of the development of green transport plans for buildings occupied by the Department and its Agencies.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

County Court, Evesham

Mr. Luff: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department when he expects to reach a decision on the future of Evesham County Court. [52736]

Mr. Hoon: The proposal to close Evesham County Court was put out to public consultation in May 1998. Consultation ended on 3 July 1998. All of the responses will now be considered by Court Service Officials before any decision is made on how this proposal is to proceed. If the decision is made to go ahead, the Group Manager will submit a business case (setting out all the points raised against closure and the reply made to them) to the Lord Chancellor for a final decision. It is therefore not possible at this stage to provide a timetable.

Departmental Vehicles

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many of the vehicles due for replacement by *(a)* his Department and *(b)* bodies listed in the National Asset Register in (i) 1998–99, (ii) 1999–2000 and (iii) 2000–01 will be replaced by vehicles using (1) petrol, (2) diesel, (3) natural gas, (4) electric batteries and (5) other. [52623]

Mr. Hoon: The information requested is as follows:

Department	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*
The Court Service	403 x diesel	153 x diesel	50 x diesel
Lord Chancellor's Department Headquarters	4 x petrol	5 x petrol	6 x petrol
	—	—	1 x diesel
Northern Ireland Court Service	—	—	1 x diesel
HM Land Registry	10 x diesel	4 x diesel	8 x diesel

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

UEFA Competitions

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what representations he has received in respect of the UEFA decision to impose ownership restrictions on clubs taking part in UEFA competitions. [50716]

Mr. Banks *[holding answer 16 July 1998]:* I have received a number of representations expressing concern about a recently adopted UEFA ruling preventing football clubs under common control from participating in the same UEFA competition.

While I can appreciate the concern about the potential impact of the ruling, I believe it is very important that the integrity of football competitions is not undermined. How far the new ruling is proportionate to UEFA's concerns in this regard is, of course, for the football authorities to judge in the first instance, and to pursue as necessary with UEFA. I am due to discuss this issue with the Premier League.

Sport (Worcestershire)

Mr. Michael J. Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what support he will give to outstanding sportsmen and sportswomen from Worcestershire. [50921]

Mr. Banks: Outstanding sportsmen and sportswomen from Worcestershire, who compete at the highest international levels, will be able to benefit from the Lottery funded World Class Performance Programme, which has so far awarded grants worth a total of £28.9 million to support 1,808 elite athletes across the country.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State announced on 16 December 1997, *Official Report*, column 77, that Sheffield was the successful consortium chosen to run and manage the United Kingdom Sports Institute Headquarters. Alongside the HQ there will be a regional network which will provide first class facilities for a range of Olympic and other non-commercial sports for our very best sportsmen and women.

The Home Country Sports Councils have been asked by Ministers to identify prospective regional centres. The English Sports Council (ESC) have looked very carefully at the siting of the Centres in England and have taken into account many factors including existing facilities, population and transport. The ESC have concentrated on

finding a solution so that all our elite athletes, wherever they live, will have access to the best training and support services.

I have received the ESC's recommendations but they will need careful consideration and discussion before any decision and announcement are made.

School Sports

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what guidelines his Department issues on the minimum number of sports schools should offer. [51319]

Mr. Banks *[holding answer 20 July 1998]:* My Department does not issue guidelines on the number of sports schools should offer. The national curriculum for PE is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Employment.

The English Sports Council's National Junior Sport Programme includes the TOP series of initiatives, developed and delivered with the Youth Sports Trust, which provide opportunities for children to become involved in sport and realise their full potential.

Cricket

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many women he estimates regularly play cricket in England. [51628]

Mr. Banks *[holding answer 21 July 1998]:* According to the England and Wales Cricket Board, there were 3,600 women and nearly 500,000 school girls playing cricket throughout this country in 1997. The Government, through the English Sports Council, actively encourage all governing bodies of sport to have programmes in place which promote our policy of "sport for all" and increase participation levels in all sports, from grass roots through to elite competitors.

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what assessment he has made of the possible locations for a national cricket centre of excellence; and what criteria will determine its location. [51627]

Mr. Banks *[holding answer 21 July 1998]:* As part of the consultation process on the National Cricket Centre, the England and Wales Cricket Board is exploring a number of possible locations, including English Sports Council's National Sports Centre at Lilleshall.

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if he will make a statement on the proposals for a national cricket centre of excellence. [51626]

Mr. Banks *[holding answer 21 July 1998]:* The Management Board of the England and Wales Cricket Board has already supported the idea in principle that a National Cricket Centre should be established, and a project manager is soon to be appointed. This has to be considered in the context of a number of other developments in the game and wide consultation is still taking place to determine the best way forward.

Millennium Sporting Competitions

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport which Millennium sporting competitions his Department is assisting. [51625]

Mr. Banks *[holding answer 21 July 1998]:* The Department for Culture, Media and Sport worked closely with the Millennium Commission, the other National Lottery distributors and the New Millennium Experience Company to develop the £100 million Millennium Festival Fund. The Fund will support events and activities to mark the Millennium in the United Kingdom throughout the year 2000.

The English Sports Council is responsible in England for sport's share of the National Lottery. The Council has agreed to support two major initiatives as part of the Millennium Festival. The Millennium Youth Games, launched by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State on 25 February, will celebrate and promote the role of sport in the personal development of young people by establishing a nationwide series of Youth Games culminating in a National Games in the year 2000. "Awards for All" will operate as a cross-distributor initiative involving three related minor grant programmes providing resources to schools, clubs and non-sporting organisations to promote and widen access to sport. The Scottish, Welsh and Northern Ireland Sports Councils are developing their own Festival programmes.

The Millennium Commission will support sports activities from its own contribution to the Festival Fund, where these form part of cross-sectoral Millennium projects or are endorsed by the respective sports councils.

Sport (Women)

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how much the English Sports Council has received in grant-in-aid for 1997–98; how much money was awarded to women's governing bodies of sport in 1997–98; and how much money was provided at (i) national and (ii) regional level for projects exclusively or primarily concerned with the development of women's sport. [51779]

Mr. Banks *[holding answer 23 July 1998]:* The English Sports Council (ESC) received £33.725 million grant in aid in 1997–98. Of this: (i) nationally, £541,000 was awarded to women's governing bodies and £35,000 to the Women's Sport Foundation to help women in sport; and (ii) £10,000 was awarded to various women's sporting projects in the regions.

All governing bodies in receipt of funding must demonstrate that they have policies offering equal opportunities for women; the sums identified do not, of course indicate the total expenditure benefiting women in all sports.

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what progress has been made towards increasing the involvement of women in traditionally male-dominated sports at *(a)* participant, *(b)* competitor, *(c)* coach and *(d)* administrator levels. [51781]

Mr. Banks *[holding answer 23 July 1998]:* The English Sports Council (ESC) is working closely with the governing bodies of football, rugby union, rugby league and cricket to increase the involvement of women in all areas of these sports.

The Council awards grant in aid funding to sports governing bodies to promote and develop women's involvement and examine ways to increase participation. Governing bodies are required to draw up an appropriate action plan as a condition of this funding.

The ESC held a conference in November last year with governing bodies in those sports specifically to examine this area closely. A follow-up conference will be held in January to monitor progress.

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what measures he is taking to promote the public profile of professional women athletes. [51783]

Mr. Banks *[holding answer 23 July 1998]:* The Government are determined to raise the profile of all women athletes.

The Sporting Ambassadors initiative will include top sportswomen to act as role models for young people. By doing so, the initiative will raise the profile of women athletes generally and encourage more women and girls to take part in sport.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and I are determined to increase the proportion of women appointed to Department-sponsored bodies, including the United Kingdom Sports Council and the English Sports Council. High-profile appointments such as this should also help raise the overall public profile of sportswomen.

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what discussions he has had with the Secretary of State for Health on the subject of promoting the health benefits of sport to females of all ages; and what action has subsequently been taken. [51785]

Mr. Banks *[holding answer 23 July 1998]:* My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has had no direct discussions with the Secretary of State for Health on this particular issue. However, there is contact between officials in the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, the English Sports Council (ESC) and the Department of Health about issues relating to the Health benefits of sport to women and men alike.

In considering the development of healthy living centres outlined in the National Lottery Act 1998, Ministers were mindful of the possible role sport can play in promoting the health of women. The draft policy directions for the New Opportunities Fund, currently out for consultation, make specific reference to the need to ensure that projects for healthy living centres cover a wide range of facilities, including sporting activities.

The ESC will be piloting a project addressing health and physiological issues for young girls starting in October.

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what discussions he has had with the Under Secretary of State for Women on the subject of women and sport; and what action has subsequently been taken. [51787]

Mr. Banks *[holding answer 23 July 1998]:* My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has had no direct discussions with my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Women on this particular issue. However, there is contact between officials in the Department for Culture, Media and Sport and the Women's Unit on a range of issues relating to women and sport. As a result, we, together with the English Sports Council, are examining ways to raise the profile of women in sport in a number of areas.

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many meetings *(a)* he and *(b)* the Minister for Sport have had with women's sport groups since 1 May 1997. [51788]

Mr. Banks *[holding answer Thursday 23 July 1998]:* My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has had no discussions specifically with women's sport groups; I have had one such meeting. However, we both have regular discussions with people involved in sport, including sportswomen, where issues relating to women in sport are raised.

Also, the English Sports Council is in continual dialogue with women's sports groups at all levels. The Council reports to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and me on this and a range of other sports-related matters.

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what measures he is taking to ensure that the objectives of the 1994 Brighton Declaration on women in sport are being met. [51784]

Mr. Banks *[holding answer 23 July 1998]:* I was delighted to announce on 19 May 1998, *Official Report*, column *309* that the Government had adopted the Brighton Declaration on Women and Sport. We shall abide fully with the aims and principles set out in the declaration.

The English Sports Council and United Kingdom Sports Council have already adopted the declaration and ensure that their policies reflect the declaration's aims.

The Government will be guided by the aims of the declaration in developing their sports policies and in their work with the Sports Councils and other sporting organisations.

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what steps he is taking to encourage more women to take part in sport; and what funding is available to encourage women's participation in sport at each level. [51782]

Mr. Banks *[holding answer 23 July 1998]:* My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and I work closely with the English Sports Council (ESC) to ensure it has policies aimed at encouraging more women into sport and raising participation levels.

The ESC has introduced a range of initiatives aimed at encouraging more women into sport and provides funding to women's sports governing bodies, including through the Lottery Sports Fund. The Council also promotes good practice through demonstration projects, advice and guidance notes and action plans.

The ESC's Womens Advisory Group examines issues relating to women in sport and gives advice to the Council to ensure that its policies offer equal opportunities for women.

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what discussions he has had with the Secretary of State for Education and Employment on the subject of increasing sporting opportunities for girls in schools; and what action has subsequently been taken. [51786]

Mr. Banks *[holding answer 23 July 1998]:* My department works closely with the Department for Education and Employment to promote sport in schools for all young people.

I am currently undertaking a number of meetings on the subject of encouraging greater involvement of women and girls in sport.

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what specific plans have been made to cater for the needs of women in sport within the UK Sports Institute. [51778]

Mr. Banks *[holding answer 23 July 1998]:* The development of the UK Sports Institute will ensure that any appropriate requirement for top women athletes are taken into account. The Headquarters project is shortly to enter its design phase when these matters will be fully considered.

Sport Governing Bodies

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, pursuant to his answer of 1 June 1998, *Official Report*, column *48*, when he expects the survey on the profile of officers in governing bodies to be published. [51789]

Mr. Banks *[holding answer 23 July 1998]:* My officials recently met the Central Council of Physical Recreation to discuss progress on the survey that the Council is to undertake of its membership. The Council have carried out some preliminary work on how the survey might best be conducted. They now intend to speak to my hon. Friend the Member for Eastwood (Mr. Murphy) about how the questions he raised in this House on the profile of officers serving on governing bodies of sport can best be addressed. I would hope the results of the Council's survey will be available after the Summer Recess.

HEALTH

Disability Awareness Training

13. **Miss Begg:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of NHS staff have had disability awareness training. [50988]

Mr. Boateng: Information about the implications of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 was issued to the National Health Service in 1996. Government advice to service providers includes the provision of disability [illegible] practices and procedures in the light of the Act's developing requirements. Such training will be arranged locally.

Primary Care Groups

16. **Mr. Coaker:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations he has received from representatives of general practitioners on his plans for primary care groups. [50991]

25. **Mr. Illsley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what support he has received from representatives of general practitioners for his plans for primary care groups. [51000]

Mr. Milburn: We have had a series of discussions with a range of general practitioner representative groups over the development of Primary Care Groups.

NHS Direct

19. **Mr. Barron:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proposals he has for extending NHS Direct. [50994]

26. **Mr. McCabe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has for extending NHS Direct. [51001]

Mr. Milburn: I refer my hon. Friends to the oral reply my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave today.

39. **Mrs. Mahon:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the performance of NHS Direct. [51014]

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the operation of NHS Direct. [50975]

Mr. Milburn: We have been monitoring the performance of the three current *NHS Direct* pilots and they will be independently evaluated to ensure that the service operates to best effect to benefit patients, and to make a significant contribution to better use of resources within the National Health Service.

The early evidence we have suggests that not only do the public like the service but it is clearly helping to guide them to the right response to their problems. In May nearly 1,500 people or 30 per cent. of callers were given advice on how they look after themselves at home. The service also put 83 people directly in touch with the ambulance service, possibly in some cases saving lives.

Cancelled Operations

20. **Dr. Palmer:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what are the current trends in the number of cancelled operations. [50995]

36. **Ms Beverley Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what are the current trends in the number of cancelled operations. [51011]

Mr. Boateng: The number of cancelled operations fell by 12 per cent., from 16,374 to 14,460, in the first three [illegible]

Hospitals (Clinical Performance)

21. **Laura Moffatt:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what action he is taking to give patients and general practitioners new rights to information about the clinical performance of local hospitals. [50996]

Mr. Dobson: I refer my hon. Friend to the oral reply I gave today, *Official Report*, columns 153.

28. **Mrs. Ellman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to *(a)* assess and *(b)* publish records of clinical performance in hospitals. [51003]

Mr. Milburn: Later in the year we will be publishing a number of hospital based clinical indicators on deaths and complications from a range of procedures. These indicators will provide the basis for a better understanding of how hospitals are performing on aspects of their clinical care.

Primary Care (Redbridge)

22. **Mr. Gapes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he next plans to visit Redbridge to discuss local primary care services. [50997]

Mr. Milburn: We have no plans at present to visit Redbridge to discuss primary care services.

Dentistry (Multiple Sclerosis)

23. **Mr. Gordon Prentice:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make it his policy to replace free of charge amalgam fillings with non-mercury-based materials for persons diagnosed as having MS. [50998]

Mr. Milburn: National Health Service dental treatments are provided on the basis of clinical need. This could include replacing fillings if that is the advice of the responsible medical practitioner. Full or partial exemptions from treatment charges are available for people on low incomes.

Community Hospitals (Funding)

24. **Mr. Woodward:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on community hospital funding between 1999 and 2002. [50999]

Mr. Milburn: My right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer has just announced a further £18 billion for the National Health Service in England over the next three years. Provided they meet the same standards of quality, access, efficiency and need, community hospitals will have the same opportunity to access additional funds as other hospitals.

Waiting Lists

27. **Mr. Swayne:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the likely impact of the current administrative reorganisation and prioritisation of waiting lists on the overall figures. [51002]

Mr. Milburn: The impact of our waiting list strategy will be to provide record growth in National Health Service activity to bring down waiting lists over the lifetime of this Parliament. We will also keep the position under review.

We have already eliminated over 18 month waits for treatment for the first time ever and we intend to continue to deliver this guarantee.

Mr. Hesford: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the current trends in hospital waiting lists. [50993]

Mr. Milburn: As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health told the Health Select Committee last week, provisional data show that waiting lists stopped rising in May and fell by around 21,000 in June. Validated figures will be published in due course. This is clear evidence that we are making real progress in reversing the legacy of rising waiting lists inherited from the previous administration.

General Practitioners (Vacancies)

29. **Mr. Rendel:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the number of vacancies that currently exist in general practitioner posts. [51004]

Mr. Milburn: Surveys by the Medical Practices Committee indicate that the vacancy rate for general medical practitioners remains low at around 3 per cent. Recent policy initiatives should help to ensure that the general practice workforce continues to be maintained at the size required to meet service needs overall.

NHS Trust Boards

30. **Mr. Hawkins:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health to whom letters requesting nominations from local authorities for trust boards will be sent for the next trawl for appointments; and if he will make a statement. [51005]

Mr. Milburn: Letters were sent to local authority chief executives in November and December 1997 seeking nominations for appointment to National Health Service trust and health authority boards in 1998. A similar letter will be sent to chief executives later this year seeking nominations for appointments in 1999.

Private Finance Initiative (Trent)

31. **Mr. Reed:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what progress has been made on the completion of PFI projects in the Trent region. [51006]

Mr. Milburn: Seven private finance initiative (PFI) projects with a combined capital value of £14.8 million either are complete and operational or have started work on site. Two further PFI schemes (combined capital value of £3.2 million) have had their Full Business Cases approved and are expected to reach financial close this year.

Two further trusts—Queen's Medical Centre and Fosse Health—are working closely with their preferred private sector partners on major PFI schemes and are expected to submit Full Business Cases before the end of the year.

Community Hospitals (Worcestershire)

32. **Mr. Luff:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the future of community hospitals in Worcestershire. [51007]

Mr. Milburn: Worcestershire Health Authority's strategy for community hospitals forms part of the submission on the Worcestershire Strategic Review which is now with Ministers, and a decision will be announced in due course.

Kidderminster Hospital

33. **Mr. Gill:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the unexpired life of the buildings at Kidderminster hospital for the purposes for which they were constructed. [51008]

Mr. Milburn: No formal assessment of the recent build at Kidderminster General Hospital has been made.

Community Pharmacies

34. **Mr. Grieve:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the effects of the provisions of the Competition Bill [*Lords*] on independent community pharmacies; and if he will make a statement. [51009]

Mr. Milburn: The effect of the Competition Bill will be to bring such community pharmacies, along with other businesses, within a modern and coherent framework of competition legislation. However, there will be a guaranteed five year transitional period during which the prohibition on anti-competitive agreements is not to apply to resale price maintenance for over the counter medicines.

NHS Dentistry (Somerset)

35. **Jackie Ballard:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on access to NHS dentistry in Somerset. [51010]

Mr. Milburn: Health authorities are responsible for monitoring the availability of general dental services in their area. If access to services is seriously limited, they can apply to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for help under the Investing in Dentistry scheme, to tackle these mainly localised problems. To date, five requests from Somerset Health Authority have been authorised to help improve access where a deficiency in services has occurred.

Radiotherapy Services (North West Region)

37. **Mr. Hoyle:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the provision of radiotherapy services in the North-West. [51012]

Mr. Milburn: Radiotherapy is currently provided in three centres in the North West: Clatterbridge Hospital in Wirral, Christie Hospital in Manchester and the Royal Preston Hospital in Lancashire. Following a review of cancer services in the North West led by Professor Peter Selby, the £5.1 million Lancashire and Lakeland Unit with Radiotherapy at the Royal Preston Hospital opened to patients in February 1997.

In order fully to assess the requirement for radiotherapy service provision in the North West and to ensure that deficiencies in access to radiotherapy services for all patients can be identified and addressed, the National [illegible] undertaking a study of [illegible] analysis of the level of service currently being provided and a projection of the level of service required. This will include staffing levels, equipment requirement and costs. The work is expected to be completed in the autumn.

General Practitioners (Training)

38. **Mrs. Dean:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the current trend in the number of trainee general practitioners starting training. [51013]

Mr. Milburn: The latest available data for England show that between 1996 and 1997, there was an upturn in the number of trainee general practitioners (now referred to as GP Registrars) of 2.9 per cent. Between 1987 and 1996 there was an average annual percentage decrease in the number of GP Registrars of 2.4 per cent.

The number of GP Registrars undergoing vocational training, in England on 1 October in each year from 1987 to 1997, is shown in the table. This is a snapshot of individuals in post on one specific day. 1997 is the last year for which information is available.

Year	*Number of GP Registrars*
1987	1,710
1988	1,685
1989	1,735
1990	1,562
1991	1,639
1992	1,613
1993	1,529
1994	1,445
1995	1,404
1996	1,305
1997	1,343

Source:
Department of Health, Statistics for General Medical Practitioners in England: 1987–1997

Director of Health Improvement

40. **Mr. Love:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what are the proposed powers and duties of the national Director of Health Improvement. [51015]

Ms Jowell: The Director of Health Improvement will be appointed by the Board of the Commission for Health Improvement. The establishment, powers and duties of the Commission for Health Improvement are subject to legislation. Further details of our proposals for the Commission for Health Improvement are set out in the document *A First Class Service: Quality in the new NHS*, copies of which are available in the Library.

Insulin Pen Needles

Mr. McCabe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the extra cost to the NHS of allowing general practitioners to prescribe insulin injection pen needles. [48993]

Mr. Milburn: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave my hon. Friend the Member for Preston (Audrey Wise) on 7 May 1998, *Official Report*, column *503*.

Mr. McCabe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health [illegible]

Mr. Milburn: The net ingredient cost of syringes and needles dispensed in the community in England in 1997 was £6.4 million. Further detail can be found on page 411 of Prescription Cost Analysis, England 1997, copies of which are in the Library. This cost does not take account of discounts, dispensing costs, fees or prescription charges income. Information about hospital dispensing is not available centrally.

Mr. McCabe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he anticipates a decision will be made on whether general practitioners should be allowed to prescribe insulin injection pen needles on the NHS. [48992]

Mr. Milburn: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave my hon. Friend the Member for Tynemouth (Mr. Campbell) on 28 April 1998, *Official Report*, column *121*.

Human Albumin Solution

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the safety of human albumin solution. [50118]

Mr. Dobson: *(holding answer 14 July 1998):* The safety of human albumin solution when used in resuscitation of critically ill patients has been questioned in a paper by the Cochrane Injuries Group published in the *British Medical Journal* (25 July 1998). This presents the findings of a systematic review of more than 30 clinical trials examining the effects of albumin in the treatment of seriously ill patients. Individually, these trials have many limitations but, taken together, they suggest that seriously ill patients given albumin may be less likely to survive their illness than if they are given alternative fluids. However, it is uncertain whether albumin is responsible for extra deaths or why it might be harmful. The paper states that the use of human albumin in the management of such patients should be urgently reviewed but no specific advice is given.

An article in *The Observer* of 26 July has questioned the handling of this issue by the Chief Medical Officer and the Medicines Control Agency. Following a telephone call with the Deputy Chief Medical Officer, one of the authors of the paper, Dr. Roberts, sent information on the systematic review to the Chief Medical Officer on 12 March. This was given very careful consideration before the Chief Medical Officer wrote back to Dr. Roberts on 27 April. He reinforced the Deputy Chief Medical Officer's advice that this information should be sent to the Medicines Control Agency, who are responsible for advice on licensed medicines containing human albumin. Dr. Roberts sent a draft of the paper to the Medicines Control Agency which was received by them on 28 April.

The paper was evaluated and the advice of the Committee on Safety of Medicines based on the evidence available was sought on 13 May. Further information was requested from Dr. Roberts on 14 May and a reply was received on 19 May. A full evaluation of the findings of the systematic review and the individual clinical trials included in the review was made. It was considered by the Committee on Safety of Medicines on 28 May. The Committee's view was that [illegible] advised an Expert Working Party be set up to consider the implications of the review for the use of human albumin. Experts in intensive care, burns, paediatrics, hepatology and cardiothoracic surgery were identified and on 25 June were invited to join the Expert Working Party. It met on 23 July. The Expert Working Party did not consider that withdrawal of human albumin products was warranted but requested further data on similar products to albumin, as some evidence on the colloid alternatives to human albumin also suggests an associated increase in mortality. The EWP is to meet again in September to consider this aspect.

Information was sent to hospital specialists through the CMO's Epinet cascade on 24 July, informing them of actions being taken, and an article will shortly appear in the CMO Update which is circulated to all doctors in England. Meanwhile, it is important that when human albumin is to be given, the precautions in authorised product information and the British National Formulary are followed.

This matter has been considered very carefully. Those responsible for advising me on licensing of human medicines have concluded that on the evidence available to them it is currently more appropriate to leave human albumin available for clinicians who wish to use it for the benefit of their patients than to ban it.

Mental Health

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what redress is available to individuals who have been charged by local authorities under section 117 of the Mental Health Act 1983 for residential or domiciliary services. [51504]

Mr. Boateng *[holding answer 20 July 1998]:* Charges cannot be levied for services, residential or non-residential, which are provided as part of the programme of aftercare for a patient who is entitled to such care under Section 117 of the Mental Health Act.

If a person believes that charges have been levied under these circumstances, they should raise the matter with the appropriate social services authority.

Mr. Ian Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what discussions he has had with other departments over the funding for people with mental health problems living in sheltered accommodation. [51316]

Mr. Boateng: The Government fully appreciate the importance of supported housing for vulnerable people, including those with mental health problems.

The Department is part of the inter-departmental review of the funding of support services in housing for vulnerable people.

Shropshire Health Authority

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list for each of the past 10 years the [illegible] paid out in compensation by Shropshire Health Authority [illegible]

Mr. Milburn: The payments for clinical negligence by Shropshire Health Authority are set out in the table.

£000

Year	Total negligence payments
1997–98	3,154
1996–97	529
1995–96	1,691
1994–95	2,143
1993–94	173
1992–93	87
1991–92	414
1990–91	418
1989–90	54
1988–89	19

Source:
Shropshire Health Authority

HIV-positive Patients

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many HIV-positive patients have not been admitted to HIV wards in Hampshire for lack of an available bed in the last five years; [52226]

(2) how many beds there are in HIV wards in the Portsmouth area. [52227]

Ms Jowell: This information is not collected by the Department. The hon. Member may, therefore, wish to contact Ms Judith Smyth, Chairman of Portsmouth and South East Hampshire Health Authority, for information on the care of patients with HIV in the Portsmouth area.

Hysterectomies

Mr. Ennis: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many hysterectomies were carried out in the United Kingdom in the last year for which figures are available; and how many were carried out for fibroids alone. [52067]

Mr. Boateng: The information for National Health Service Hospitals in England for 1995–96 (the latest figures available) is as follows:

	Number
Total number of hysterectomies	71,559
Number of hysterectomies where the primary diagnosis was uterine fibroids	16,311

Notes:
Operation codes: QO7-Q8, Excision of uterus
Diagnostic code (ICD-10): D25 Leiomyoma of uterus
Data in this table are grossed for both coverage and unknown/invalid clinical data
Source:
Department of Health, Hospital Episode Statistics (HES)

Matters relating to Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland are for my right. hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Wales, for Scotland and for Northern Ireland.

Derbyshire Ambulance NHS Trust

Mr. Todd: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will investigate the factors underlying the response

Mr. Boateng: Derbyshire Ambulance Service has experienced an increase in its emergency workload of almost 50 per cent. since 1993. North Derbyshire and Southern Derbyshire Health Authorities, Derbyshire Ambulance Service and the National Health Service Executive are working together to address ambulance response times in Derbyshire and how these can best be improved.

Drug-related Deaths

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many deaths have occurred in *(a)* England and *(b)* Wales in the past five years caused by the use of (i) heroin and (ii) methadone. [50502]

Ms Jowell *[holding answer 23 July 1998]:* The information available is shown in the table.

Deaths from heroin and methadone to residents of England and Wales, 1993–1997

Year	England		Wales	
	Heroin	Methadone	Heroin	Methadone
1993	54	215	1	5
1994	88	248	1	9
1995	128	277	1	19
1996	182	334	3	16
1997	167	344	2	24

Notes:
1. Data for years 1993–1996 are based on those that occurred during the year; data for 1997 on those that were registered in that year
2. Where both heroin and methadone are mentioned on a death certificate, the death is shown twice in this table, once under heroin and once under methadone
3. In some of these deaths other substances of misuse may be involved

Source:
Office for National Statistics

Ambulance Costs

Mr. Todd: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the costs incurred by each ambulance trust in England, the total number of patient journeys made by each trust, and the unit costs of each journey in 1997–98. [52105]

Mr. Boateng: Details of the number of patient journeys made by each National Health Service ambulance trust are in the Department of Health Statistical Bulletin *Ambulance Services, England 1997–98*, copies of which are available in the Library. Details of trust expenditure in 1997–98 are not yet available.

Coeliac's Disease

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he is taking to improve the dietary advice available to sufferers of Coeliac's disease. [52381]

Ms Jowell: This is a professional matter. The British Society of Gastroenterology issued "Guidelines for the management of patients with coeliac disease" in September 1996. They include guidance on the dietary treatment of the condition and the need for supervision by a dietitian. The Coeliac Society, a national patient

Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority

Mr. Amess: To ask the Secretary of State for Health where frozen embryos are currently being stored; and how many have been disposed of since the implementation of the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Act 1990. [52977]

Mr. Milburn: There are 74 clinics licenced by the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority to store embryos. These are listed.

The authority does not routinely keep central records of the number of embryos removed from storage and subsequently disposed of. The number of embryos created in the course of treatment involving in vitro fertilisation that were not frozen or used for treatment or other purposes between 1 August 1991 and 31 March 1996 was 138,450.

Clinics licenced to store embryos (as of 31 July 1998)

1. Assisted Conception Unit, University College Hospital
2. Assisted Reproduction and Gynaecology Centre, London Welbeck Hospital
3. Birmingham Maternity Hospital
4. BMI Chelsfield Park Hospital
5. BMI Chiltern Hospital, Great Missenden
6. BMI Priory Hospital, Birmingham
7. BMI Ross Hall Hospital, Glasgow
8. Bourn Hall Clinic, Cambridge
9. Bridge Fertility Centre, London Bridge Hospital
10. BUPA Chalybeate Hospital, Southampton
11. BUPA Hospital, Norwich
12. BUPA Murrayfield Hospital, Wirral
13. Centres for Assisted Reproduction Ltd (CARE), Park Hospital, Arnold, Nottingham
14. Chaucer Hospital, Canterbury
15. Chelsea and Westminster Hospital
16. Churchill Clinic
17. Clarendon Wing, Leeds General Infirmary
18. Cromwell Hospital
19. Cromwell IVF and Fertility Centre, Washington Hospital
20. Cromwell IVF and Fertility Centre, Singleton Hospital, Swansea
21. Diana, Princess of Wales Centre for Reproductive Medicine, St George's Hospital, Tooting
22. Esperance Private Hospital, Eastbourne
23. Fazakerley Hospital, Liverpool
24. Glasgow Nuffield Hospital
25. Glasgow Royal Infirmary
26. Hartlepool General Hospital
27. Holly House Hospital, Buckhurst Hill
28. Homerton Hospital, London
29. John Radcliffe Maternity Hospital, Oxford
30. King's College Hospital
31. Leicester Royal Infirmary
32. Lister Hospital, London
33. Liverpool Women's Hospital
34. London Female and Male Fertility Centre, Highgate Private Hospital
35. London Gynaecology and Fertility Centre, Harley Street
36. London Women's Clinic/Hallam Medical Centre
39. Midland Fertility Services, Aldridge
40. Multicare International, Harbour Exchange, London
41. New Cross Hospital, Wolverhampton
42. Newham General Hospital
43. Ninewells Hospital and Medical School, Dundee
44. North Hampshire Fertility Centre, North Hampshire Hospital
45. NURTURE, University of Nottingham
46. Princess Royal Hospital, Hull
47. Queen Elizabeth Hospital, Gateshead
48. Regional IVF and DI Unit, St Mary's Hospital, Manchester
49. Royal Devon and Exeter Hospital, Exeter
50. Royal Infirmary of Edinburgh
51. Royal Maternity Hospital, Belfast
52. Royal United Hospital, Bath
53. Salford Royal IVF and Fertility Centre, Hope Hospital, Salford
54. Sheffield Fertility Centre
55. South Cleveland Hospital, Middlesborough
56. South West Regional Cytogenetics Centre, Bristol
57. Southmead General Hospital, Bristol
58. St Bartholomew's Hospital
59. St James University Hospital, Leeds
60. St Thomas' Hospital
61. Sunderland District General Hospital
62. The BUPA Roding Hospital, Ilford
63. The Hampshire Clinic, Basingstoke
64. The Portland Hospital, London
65. Three Shires Hospital, Cliftonville
66. University Hospital of Wales, Cardiff
67. University of Aberdeen
68. University of Bristol IVF Service, The BUPA Hospital, Bristol
69. Walsgrave Hospital, Coventry
70. Wessex Fertility Services, Princess Anne Hospital, Southampton
71. Winterbourne Hospital, Dorchester
72. Withington Hospital, Manchester
73. Woking Nuffield Hospital
74. Wolfson Family Clinic, Hammersmith Hospital

Mr. Amess: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the criteria for relocating the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority; and if there are currently vacancies on the Authority. [52976]

Ms Jowell: There are no proposals for relocating the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority.

There are no current vacancies on the Authority. In respect of future vacancies, I refer the hon. Member to my answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Streatham (Mr. Hill) on 21 July 1998, *Official Report*, column 529.

Hernias

Mr. Austin: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the effectiveness of the tension-free reinforcement mesh technique for treatment of hernias relative to conventional surgery; what assessment he has made of possible savings to the NHS

Mr. Boateng: The Royal College of Surgeons issued clinical guidelines on the management of groin hernias in 1993. These endorsed the Shouldice technique but recognised that early results from tension-free repairs using prosthetic mesh rivalled the Shouldice repair. The Department has provided funding to the Surgical Epidemiology and Audit Unit at the Royal College of Surgeons to carry out a national audit of the outcome of groin hernia. This will enable current surgical practice to be compared with the 1993 guidelines. The use of prosthetic mesh in hernia repairs has also been advanced by the development of laparoscopic herniorrhaphy which has been the subject of a large randomised controlled trial conducted by the Medical Research Council. Results from that trial are expected early next year. We will, in the light of this work, consider with the Royal College of Surgeons whether further guidance is needed.

Doctors and Nurses

Dr. Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many unemployed doctors and nurses there are currently in the United Kingdom. [52802]

Mr. Milburn: Information about numbers of unemployed doctors and nurses is not available centrally.

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what projections his Department has made of the number of doctors and nurses who will have to be recruited from outside the United Kingdom to fulfil his targets of 7,000 extra doctors and 15,000 extra nurses. [52807]

Mr. Milburn: Numbers of doctors are expected to increase by up to 7,000 and numbers of nurses by up to 15,000 during the period 1998–2001. Our projections suggest that around half the doctors will be recruited from outside the United Kingdom. More nurses will complete the training each year, in which we have already invested. As the National Health Service offers more supportive and flexible family-friendly working environments, trusts will be able to attract and retain more nurses, some of whom may be from overseas, and encourage back in to practice those not currently working in their profession.

Cycling

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what parking facilities for cycles exist at each office or site for which his Department is responsible and for each agency for which he is responsible. [52678]

Ms Jowell: All of the buildings and sites for which the Department has management responsibility have facilities for cycle storage either in the form of dedicated spaces (for example cycle racks), by the provision of secure areas, or by arrangement with landlords, as shown in the table. In the majority of buildings additional cycle parking is available in the car park.

Building	*Dedicated cycle spaces*
Richmond House, London, SW1A	18
Skipton House, London, SE1	35
Wellington House, London, SE1	25
Market Towers, London, SW8	4
[illegible]	[illegible]
[illegible]	[illegible]
Trevelyan Square, Leeds	8
Capital Drive, Milton Keynes	4
Premier Buildings, Lancashire	[1]—
Bartholomew House, Birmingham	[1]—
John Snow House, Durham	[4]—
Maid Marion House, Nottingham	4
Hasketh House, Lancashire	79
Millennium Park, Warrington	[3]—
Westward House, Bristol	[3]—
J. Rothschilde House, Nottingham	[3]—
Glenthorne Youth Treatment Centre, Birmingham	20
Berkley Square, Bristol	4

[1] Shares Skipton House facilities
[2] Cycle parking available in landlord's underground car park
[3] Parking available in car park
[4] Secure area available for parking cycles

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of the employees of his Department and of the employees of each agency for which he is responsible cycle to work; and what measures he plans to increase that proportion. [52679]

Ms Jowell: No information is available on the proportion of the Department's employees who cycle to work. Measures to increase the proportion of employees cycling to work are being considered as part of the development of green transport plans for buildings occupied by the Department and its agencies.

Compliance Cost Assessments

Mr. Lansley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the compliance cost assessments published by his Department since 1 May 1997. [52960]

Ms Jowell: Since 1 May 1997, the Department has published seven compliance cost assessments:

June 1997: Proposal for a Council Directive on Health Protection of Individuals Against the Dangers of Ionising Radiation in Relation to Medical Exposures, replacing Directive 84/466/Euratom (final).

August 1997: The Prescription Only Medicine (Human Use) (Amendment) Order 1997—the reclassification of analgesic medicines; and The Medicines (Sale or Supply) (Miscellaneous Provisions) Amendment (No.2) Regulations 1997.

August 1997: The Prescription Only Medicine (Human Use) (Amendment) Order 1997—the reclassification of Terfenadine.

December 1997: Proposal for a Council Directive on the Advertising of Tobacco Products.

January 1998: The Prescription Only Medicines (Human Use) Amendment Order 1998—reclassification of insulin.

March 1998: The Medicines for Human Use and Medical Devices (Fees and Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 1998.

May 1998: The Prescription Only Medicines (Human Use) Amendment (no. 2) Order 1998—reclassification of phenolphthalein.

Chiropractors

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he expects the Register of Chiropractors to open; and if he will make a statement. [52979]

Ms Jowell: The Department is currently discussing a timetable for the opening of the register with the General [illegible]

Social Services (Worcestershire)

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to increase funding of social services in Worcestershire; and if he will make a statement. [52733]

Mr. Boateng: We recently announced, as part of the outcome of the Comprehensive Spending Review, that Personal Social Services will receive an additional £2.8 billion over the next three years, an average annual real terms growth of 3.1 per cent. over the period. Details of each local authority's share of these increased resources will be announced later in the year.

Hepatitis C

Mr. Coaker: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will respond to representations made on behalf of people infected with hepatitis C by blood products. [53098]

Mr. Dobson: I have today written to the Haemophilia Society explaining that, after lengthy and very careful consideration, we have concluded that haemophiliacs who have been infected with hepatitis C through National Health Service treatment should not receive special payments.

Government policy is that compensation or other financial help to particular patients or groups of patients is paid out only where the NHS or individuals working in it have been at fault. The needs of people whose condition results from inadvertent harm is met from benefits available to the population in general. On that basis, we have decided not to make an exception to the general rule in the case of haemophiliacs infected with hepatitis C.

Whilst the Society makes a special case for haemophiliacs because the infection comes on top of a pre-existing serious long term medical condition, the same considerations apply to other individual patients and groups of patients, whether inadvertently infected with another illness or harmed as a result of another medical or surgical procedure who can obtain compensation only if there has been negligence. The Society also argued that, as Government provides financial help to haemophiliacs infected with HIV, this scheme should be extended to cover people with hepatitis C. However, our view is the circumstances were different: the stigma around HIV at the time the original decision was taken, the fact that it was generally considered a sexually transmitted disease and that haemophiliacs could inadvertently infect their partners were all important considerations which do not apply to hepatitis C.

The Society was particularly concerned that young people were fearful of the possibility of passing on hepatitis C. That is a concern we share. The Department is therefore working with the Society to develop a project aimed at helping young people with haemophilia and related disorders who are infected with hepatitis C to understand their condition and so improve their future health, education and employment prospects. We will help with funding for this project.

In an earlier decision, we have already agreed that

WALES

Asbestos

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what guidance his Department issues to those constructing buildings for which it is responsible on the use of materials containing asbestos. [52303]

Mr. Ron Davies: The construction industry no longer uses asbestos because safe alternatives are available.

When asbestos has to be removed from a building, the dismantling, removal from site and ensuring the building is free of all asbestos dust, is strictly controlled by Health and Safety Executive regulations.

New Deal

Mr. Healey: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many people his Department is committed to employing during 1998 under *(a)* the subsidised job option and *(b)* the unsubsidised job option of the New Deal programme. [52578]

Mr. Ron Davies: The Welsh Office intends to employ at least 20 subsidised people under the New Deal this year. The number of unsubsidised people employed will depend on the number of applicants from the New Deal programme who are successful in open recruitment competitions.

National Assembly

Sir Raymond Powell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many car spaces are planned for the new Welsh Assembly building; to whom these spaces will be made available; and how much they will cost to provide. [53099]

Mr. Ron Davies: The design competition to select an Architect to design the building to house the National Assembly for Wales is taking place at present. A small amount of car parking will be provided for disabled people, but until the design process reaches a more advanced stage, the total number of spaces and the cost of that provision will not be known.

Trunk Road Programme

Mr. Edwards: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he expects to publish the report on the review of the Welsh trunk road programme. [53228]

Mr. Hain: The report "Driving Wales Forward" has been published today. Copies have been placed in the Library of the House.

Departmental Vehicles

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many of the vehicles due for replacement by *(a)* his Department and *(b)* bodies listed in the National Asset Register in (i) 1998–99, (ii) 1999–2000 and (iii) 2000–01

Mr. Ron Davies: The following is the information:

1998–99: 1 petrol vehicle

1999–2000: 3 diesel vehicles; 1 other (type of fuel yet to be determined).

2000–01: 3 diesel vehicles.

The information for *(b)* is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Cycling

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what proportion of the employees of his Department and of the employees of each agency for which he is responsible cycle to work; and what measures he plans to increase that proportion. [52675]

Mr. Ron Davies: 3.3 per cent. of employees cycle to work. Measures to increase this proportion are being considered as part of the development of green transport plans for buildings occupied by my Department and its Agencies.

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what parking facilities for cycles exist at each office or site for which his Department is responsible and for each agency for which he is responsible. [52674]

Mr. Ron Davies: There are 73 secure cycling spaces located at the following premises:

Cathays Park, Cardiff: 59

Carmarthen: 2

Llandrindod Wells: 3

Colwyn Bay: 9.

Selective Assistance

Mr. Lansley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what cost-per-job limits are set on offers of selective assistance in development areas in Wales. [52974]

Mr. Hain: Information on cost-per-job limits is confidential and cannot be disclosed. Regional Selective Assistance offers are made subject to common guidelines throughout Great Britain.

Compliance Cost Assessments

Mr. Lansley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) if he will list those compliance cost assessments published by his Department since 1 May 1997 which would lead to a reduction in compliance costs; [52930]

(2) if he will list the compliance cost assessments published by his Department since 1 May 1997; [52929]

(3) what is the cumulative net increase in compliance costs resulting from compliance cost assessments published by his Department since 1 May 1997. [52928]

Mr. Ron Davies: No compliance cost assessments have been published by my Department in the period in question.

PRESIDENT OF THE COUNCIL

Privy Counsellors

Mr. Pendle (Mr. Prentice), of 20 July 1998, *Official Report*, column 779, on the Privy Council, if she will publish the text of the oath sworn by privy counsellors. [52790]

Mrs. Beckett: The text of the Privy Counsellors Oath is as follows:

"You do swear by Almighty God to be a true and faithful Servant unto the Queen's Majesty, as one of Her Majesty's Privy Council. You will not know or understand of any manner of thing to be attempted, done, or spoken against Her Majesty's Person, Honour, Crown, or Dignity Royal, but you will lett and withstand the same to the uttermost of your Power, and either cause it to be revealed to Her Majesty Herself, or to such of Her Privy Council as shall advertise Her Majesty of the same. You will, in all things to be moved, treated, and debated in Council, faithfully and truly declare your Mind and Opinion, according to your Heart and Conscience; and will keep secret all Matters committed and revealed unto you, or that shall be treated of secretly in Council. And if any of the said Treaties or Counsels shall touch any of the Counsellors, you will not reveal it unto him, but will keep the same until such time as, by the Consent of Her Majesty, or of the Council, Publication shall be made thereof. You will to your uttermost bear Faith and Allegiance unto the Queen's Majesty; and will assist and defend all Jurisdictions, Pre-eminences, and Authorities, granted to Her Majesty, and annexed to the Crown by Acts of Parliament, or otherwise, against all Foreign Princes, Persons, Prelates, States, or Potentates. And generally in all things you will do as a faithful and true Servant ought to do to Her Majesty.

So help you God".

SOCIAL SECURITY

Child Support

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security under her proposals for reform of the child support system, what the combined loss would be through higher taxes, lower means-tested benefits and higher maintenance of an absent parent with earning of *(a)* £90 per week, *(b)* £150 per week and *(c)* £210 per week with two children from a first relationship and one subsequent child, who is awarded a pay rise of £10 per week, assuming that the proposed working families tax credit has been implemented. [50004]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 10 July 1998]:* All children are entitled to the financial and emotional support of both their parents wherever they live. It is not right that so many non-resident parents should seek to avoid paying the maintenance which their children are due. An extra £15 million is being invested in the Child Support Agency this year and next, specifically aimed at increasing the amounts of maintenance which are paid.

The information set out in the table is based on the current provisions for Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit, which are themselves under review. The impact of the new child support arrangements would, therefore, need to be considered in the light of any proposals for changes to those benefits.

Also, an increase in income will not necessarily result

cases would normally fall to be reassessed every two years, with interim changes of circumstance taking effect only if maintenance were to increase or decrease by more than a specified amount, for example, £10 per week.

Changes in income (£ per week)

Gross earnings		*Assessable income*		*Impact on net income (+ = gain, − = loss)*		
From	*To*	*From*	*To*	*No rent*	*LA rent*	*PRS rent*
£90	£100	158.07	164.25	+2.95	−1.07	−1.07
£150	£160	180.73	183.88	+2.15	+2.15	+0.10
£210	£220	199.00	202.02	+3.02	+3.02	+1.06

Notes:

1. Based on April 1998–99 benefit rates but assumes that the Working Families Tax Credit (WFTC) taper is 55 per cent. and the threshold is £90
2. The assessable income in the second column is the sum of earnings (after tax and national insurance) and WFTC entitlement and, as with the current scheme, is the amount to be used in the calculation of maintenance under the new child support arrangements. Assessable income for Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit also includes WFTC as well as some other forms of income
3. Average Rent is assumed to be £41.70 for local authority cases and £66.40 for Private Rented Sector cases
4. Based on average Council Tax of £11.70 per week
5. Non-resident parent's new child assumed to be 8 years old
6. No child care costs
7. The fall in income includes the effect of increased taxes and employee national insurance; reduced WFTC, Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit; and increased maintenance assessments
8. Figures rounded to the nearest penny
9. PRS = Public Rented Sector; LA = Local Authority

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security on what basis child maintenance assessments will be reduced for those earning between £100 and £200 per week under the new Child Support Agency system. [53127]

Mr. Denham: Our proposals for a new child support system are set out in the Green Paper "Children First: a new approach to child support" (Cm3992). Where net income is £200 or more a week, maintenance will be assessed at 15 per cent. for one child, 20 per cent. for two children and 25 per cent. for 3 or more children, with allowances for any children in the non-resident parent's second family.

However, we recognise that a simple percentage approach does not adequately reflect the difficulties faced by non-residents parents on very low incomes. Those with a net income of £100 or less would, therefore, pay a flat-rate minimum amount of around £5. Those with net incomes between £100 and £200 a week would pay the flat rate on their first £100 with a percentage deduction from the balance, using a straight linear progression so that at £200 or more the standard deductions are applied to the whole of the income. The sample tables in the Green Paper illustrate the overall effects, which ensure that levels of maintenance payable on income between £100 and £200 will be lower than would apply using the standard deduction rates.

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what exceptional circumstances are being considered by the Government in determining which cases [illegible] to the new tribunal under the new Child [illegible]

Mr. Denham: Our Green Paper "Children First: a new approach to child support" (Cm 3992) proposes that, where a non-resident parent is already contributing in some way to the cost of supporting his child, for example by meeting housing costs, he would be able to apply for a lower level of maintenance. Other child-related expenses, such as high costs of maintaining contact, will also be considered. The Green Paper specifically invites views on this aspect of the new scheme. However, there is a balance to be struck between making appropriate allowance for exceptional circumstances and simply re-inventing all the complexities of the current scheme by a different route.

Grants and Awards (Wakefield)

Yvette Cooper: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if she will list the grants and awards that require bids from applicants which her Department is responsible for administering and awarding *(a)* nationally and *(b)* that people and groups within Wakefield Metropolitan District are eligible to bid for; if she will publish the deadlines for these applications; and if she will produce this list on a regular basis. [51268]

Mr. Denham: The Department is responsible for administering and awarding people's entitlement to a range of Social Security benefits and to child support maintenance. It also makes grants, in the form of subsidies, to local authorities to cover most of the costs of paying and administering the Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit schemes.

The Department is also responsible for making grants to charitable organisations (Motability and the British Limbless Ex-Servicemen's Association) who offer support in terms of adaptations to motor vehicles for disabled persons who are in receipt of qualifying benefits. Grants are also provided to the Independent Living Fund who offer financial assistance to disabled people who wish to live independently in the community.

Benefit Payment Methods

Mr. Todd: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if she will make a statement on progress in respect of the Pathway Project. [52110]

Mr. Denham: At present 204 post offices in the North-East and South-West of England have been automated and are paying Child Benefit by Payment Card as part of a limited trial.

Mr. Rendel: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many post offices in Scotland are to be automated for the purpose of social security benefit payments by swipecard under ICL/Pathway; and how many of these post offices have so far been automated. [53116]

Mr. Denham: The project provides for automation of benefit payments by payment card at every post office in the United Kingdom. At present 204 post offices have been automated, none of which is in Scotland.

Mr. Rendel: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will *(a)* provide compensation and *(b)* take legal action against ICL with reference to delays in [illegible] project to automate social security

Mr. Denham: The Benefits Agency, Post Office Counters Ltd. and ICL Pathway continue to work together to plan the next stages of the programme to automate benefit payments at post offices. Commercial and contractual considerations remain confidential to the parties.

Disability Living Allowance

Mr. Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) how many recipients of the disability living allowance have had the level reduced *(a)* since 1 May 1997 and *(b)* in the previous 15 months; how many requested a review; and how many had the benefit restored; [52259]

(2) how many recipients of the disability living allowance have had the allowance withdrawn *(a)* since 1 May 1997 and *(b)* in the previous 15 months; how many requested a review; and how many had their disability living allowance restored. [52258]

Mr. Denham: The information is not available in the format requested but some relevant figures are given in the table.

Disability living allowance

Period[1]	*Reviews requested*[2]	*Awards terminated*[2,3]	*Awards increased*[4]	*Awards decreased*
1 February 1996 to 30 April 1997	473,446	155,826	—	—
1 May 1997 to 30 June 1998	395,752	172,857	—	—
1 March 1996 to 31 May 1997	—	—	147,140	31,190
1 June 1997 to 31 May 1998	—	—	99,300	36,120

[1] It is not possible to produce two compatible fifteen month periods
[2] Source: Analytical Services Division: 100 per cent. data
[3] Figures cover terminations due to death of the claimant, residence and presence conditions not satisfied, withdrawal from benefit by the claimant or withdrawal of benefit by the Department.
[4] Awards increased and decreased will include reviews requested in an earlier period than that shown.
Source:
Analytical Services Division: 5 per cent. data

SERPS

Ms Stuart: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what was the cost of administering the contracting out of SERPS in the last year for which figures are available. [52379]

Mr. Denham: The Contributions Agency's (CA) Contracted-Out Employments Group (COEG) administers the arrangements for employees who are contracted out of the State Earnings Related Pension Scheme (SERPS) and is responsible for ensuring that the pension rights of such employees are accurately recorded, maintained and safeguarded. This involves the approval and supervision of contracted-out occupational and appropriate personal pension schemes, dealing with notifications relating to scheme membership, and overseeing the payment of contracted-out rebates.

COEG's administration costs for the 1997–98 year amounted to £10.926m.

Ms Stuart: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what was the cost to her Department of funding the contracted out element of SERPS in the last year for which figures are available. [52376]

Mr. Denham: In 1996–97, the last year for which figures are available, the cost of funding the contracted-out element of SERPS was £7.368 billion.

Asbestos

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what guidance her Department issues to those constructing buildings for which it is responsible on the use of materials containing asbestos. [52310]

Mr. Denham: Following the PRIME initiative which constructions, is provided to the Department by the private sector consortium Trillium, previously known as PPM.

Trillium are contractually obliged to use building materials and consumables that comply with any relevant European or British Standard or Code of Practice and, where reasonably able, to procure them from sources that practise environmentally friendly policies. They must also comply with all UK or European Law and all Statutory requirements.

The agreement with Trillium requires them to bring all existing accommodation up to statutory requirements within 2 years and they have been charged with achieving a very good BREEAM rating for both existing sites and new developments. They must also undertake assessments covering all aspects of the Department's facilities, and sites, to identify significant hazards and risks within the workplace. They will build on and maintain the Department's asbestos register and carry out regular inspections to monitor the condition of asbestos and, when necessary, they will remove it under controlled conditions. Technical Audits will be carried out by the Department's contract management team, with expert consultancy support where appropriate, and if requested Trillium will have to supply evidence to demonstrate their compliance.

Occupational Pensions

Ms Stuart: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what estimate she has made of the number of pensioners who received increased awards from their occupational pension scheme after the point of retirement. [52380]

Mr. Denham: Information is not available to be able

All occupational pension benefits accrued after 6 April 1997, except those deriving from the payment of additional voluntary contributions, must be indexed in line with the Retail Prices Index (RPI), with indexation being capped at 5 per cent. Before that date, the only indexation requirement applied to pensions accrued as a result of contracting-out of the State Earnings Related Pension Scheme (SERPS) after 5 April 1988. Such pensions had to be indexed in line with RPI, capped at 3 per cent.

However, from 5 April 1978, full indexation was effectively provided within SERPS itself for those who had contracted-out. From 5 April 1988 to 5 April 1997, SERPS provided indexation of the balance above 3 per cent, where the RPI rose above this level.

Numbers of people in the UK entitled under the rules of their scheme to various levels of indexation of pension benefits in payment through private and public sector defined benefit occupational pension schemes

million

Indexation	*Private sector*	*Public Sector*
With RPI	0.5	2.8
With RPI up to a maximum of 5 per cent.	1.2	0.1
Other indexation	1.1	0.3
None	0.6	nil
Total	3.4	3.2

Notes:

1. All figures are in millions and have been rounded to the nearest 0.1 million
2. The statistics refer to rights accorded to members and beneficiaries through the scheme rules. However, schemes may choose to award more generous increases on a discretionary basis
3. The indexation levels quoted in the table may be applied by the providers to the whole pension benefit an individual receives or only to pension benefits received which have been accrued in excess of any Guaranteed Minimum Pension (GMP) component. However, if the indexation level is applied to the whole pension, then it must be sufficient to cover any increase in GMP to which a pensioner may be entitled
4. No information is available on indexation arrangements for pension benefits in payment accrued through defined contribution occupational pension schemes, which are converted into annuities

Source:

1991 Government Actuary's Department Survey of Occupational Pension Schemes

Industrial Injuries

Caroline Flint: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people claimed disablement benefit for *(a)* vibration white finger and *(b)* carpal tunnel syndrome in (i) 1994, (ii) 1995, (iii) 1996 and (iv) 1997; and how many of these had been employed in the mining industry. [52446]

Mr. Denham: The information requested is not available. Information is available on the number of claims to Industrial Injuries Disablement Benefit made in respect of individual diseases and on the number of initial assessments of disablement in respect of the industry an individual was employed in when the prescribed disease was contracted. Such information as is available is set out in the tables.

Total number of claims to industrial injuries disablement benefit for all industries

Period	*Vibration white finger*	*Carpal tunnel syndrome*
April 1995 to December 1995	4,400	1,070
January to December 1996	16,210	2,030
January to December 1997	15,280	1,780

Number of initial assessments in the mining industry

	April to December 1994	*1995*	*1996*	*1997*
Vibration white finger				
All initial assessments	521	880	2,585	2,353
Assessments of 14–100 per cent.	24	31	163	169
Carpal tunnel syndrome				
All initial assessments	48	44	61	110
Assessments of 14–100 per cent.	3	5	8	12

Note:

An assessment of disablement of at least 14 per cent. is required for entitlement to Industrial Injuries Disablement Benefit

Source:

DSS Analytical Services Division. Data on claims based on a 10 per cent. sample. Data on initial assessments based on a 100 per cent. count. Earlier information is not available

Earnings Statistics

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if she will list for (i) a lone mother with two children aged under 11 years and (ii) a married couple with two children aged under 11 years, gross weekly earnings and net week incomes taking into account child benefit and family credit/working families tax credit, income tax and NICs in January 1998, at (1) 50 per cent., (2) 75 per cent. and (3) 100 per cent. of average (A) female and (B) male manual earnings, assuming *(a)* the existing tax and benefit systems, *(b)* that working families tax credit was in place and *(c)* that the lone mothers had child care costs of £78 a week in each case. [52333]

Mr. Denham: The information is set out in the tables.

Lone parent with two children aged under 11 and child care costs of £78 per week

£

Gross earnings per week	*Income Tax*	*NICs*	*Take home pay*	*Family Credit*	*Housing Benefit*	*Council Tax Benefit*	*Net Income Before housing costs*	*Net Income After housing costs*
(a) Family Credit								
210.00	21.78	15.88	172.34	73.56	8.06	0	274.71	142.30

Lone parent with two children aged under 11 and child care costs of £78 per week

£

Gross earnings per week	Income Tax	NICs	Take home pay	Family Credit	Housing Benefit	Council Tax Benefit	Net Income Before housing costs	Net Income After housing costs
(b) Working Families Tax Credit								
210.00	21.78	15.88	172.34	98.62	0	0	291.71	159.30
157.50	9.88	10.63	136.99	118.06	2.11	0	277.91	145.50
105.00	0	5.38	99.62	138.61	13.04	0	272.02	139.61

Married couple with two children aged under 11 and no child care costs

£

Gross earnings per week	Income Tax	NICs	Take home pay	Family Credit	Housing Benefit	Council Tax Benefit	Net income Before housing costs	Net income After housing costs
(a) Family Credit								
330.00	49.38	27.88	252.74	0	0	0	273.49	215.88
247.50	30.41	19.63	197.46	1.38	0	0	219.59	161.98
165.00	11.43	11.38	142.19	40.07	7.60	1.09	211.70	154.09
(b) Working Families Tax Credit								
330.00	49.38	27.88	252.74	0	0	0	273.49	215.88
247.50	30.41	19.63	197.46	30.20	0	0	248.41	190.80
165.00	11.43	11.38	142.19	60.60	0	0	223.54	165.93

Notes:

1. All figures are at 1998–99 prices. (This is consistent with published documents and previous replies to questions on Working Families Tax Credit (WFTC))
2. To reflect the current system as far as possible figures relate to July 1998, so both family types are assumed to receive standard rates of Child Benefit and the family premium in Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit. Net income therefore includes Child Benefit of £20.75 per week for both family types
3. Gross earnings are based on average full-time manual earnings taken from the April 1997 New Earnings Survey, uprated to July 1998 levels
4. The non-contracted-out rate of National Insurance Contributions is assumed
5. Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit amounts are based on average local authority rent of £45.01 per week and council tax of £9.40 for the lone parent and £12.60 for the married couple
6. 'After housing costs' includes rent, council tax and child care costs, where applicable
7. It is assumed that the earner is working at least 30 hours per week and is therefore entitled to the 30 hour premium in Family Credit/WFTC worth £10.80 per week
8. A number of other changes to the tax and benefit system, as announced in the Budget, will be in place by the time the WFTC is introduced. This means that the amounts above are not the actual amounts that will be received (in 1998 prices) by these family types in October 1999

Optical Fibre Communications

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans she has to develop the potential of modern broad band optical fibre communications within her Department and its agencies; and if she will make a statement. [52327]

Mr. Denham: The Department currently uses a wide range of data and voice communication services to provide links between its staff and their information technology systems. The bulk of these services are provided under contract and are delivered through technology chosen by our service providers. These service providers all utilise broadband optical fibre communication products for part of the current network. We will look to exploit the value of these and other high speed communications products as part of our drive to create a modern welfare service.

New Deal

Mr. Healey: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people her Department is committed to employing during 1998 under *(a)* the subsidised job

Mr. Denham: This Department is finalising guidance on recruitment under the New Deal programme and is committed to offering posts to New Deal clients when suitable opportunities arise. At this stage we cannot estimate how many jobs will be offered during 1998.

Information Technology

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how much her Department spent on IT, itemising *(a)* personal computers, *(b)* main-frame, *(c)* mini-computers and *(d)* file servers in the last year for which figures are available. [52888]

Mr. Denham: The bulk of the Department's expenditure on IT is accounted for by the Information Technology Services Agency (ITSA) which exists to provide IT services both to DSS and to certain Other Government Departments. ITSA's expenditure on the provision of such services for the 1997/98 financial year was as follows:

Current Expenditure: £337.702m

Capital Expenditure: £17.454m.

Of this expenditure the Department recovered

Additional Departmental IT expenditure for the 1997–98 financial year (not accounted for by ITSA) is as follows:

Current Expenditure: £7.363m

Capital Expenditure: £15.640m.

It is not possible to separately identify money spent on personal computers, main-frame, mini-computers and file servers as expenditure. It is not recorded in this way.

In October 1995 the provision of main-frame services was outsourced to EDS. Since that date, EDS have been responsible for the purchase of main-frame hardware which may be needed to provide a new service, or a change to an existing one.

National Insurance

Mr. Dawson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what would be the effect on Treasury revenue *(a)* in 1998–99, and *(b)* in a full year, of raising the national insurance ceiling to the same level as the higher rate tax band. [52916]

Mr. Denham: Estimated additional revenue of some £1.4 billion would be raised in 1998–99 if the Upper Earnings Limit on employees' Class 1 contributions were increased from its present level to the same level as the higher rate tax band. The additional revenue in a full year would be £1.55 billion.

The figures assume that the current 10 per cent. Class 1 contribution rate would apply to earnings above the present Upper Earnings Limit and that the current Upper Earnings Limit would remain in place for the calculation of employee and employer contracted-out rebates.

Source:

Government Actuary's Department.

Liable Relatives

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to her answer of 21 July 1998, *Official Report*, columns *495–96*, concerning liable relatives, if she will review the application of Paragraph 4(b) of the Code of Open Government Practice to such cases. [52279]

Mr. Denham: Review of the application of the guidance is a matter for Peter Mathison, the Chief Executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Peter Mathison to Mr. Paul Burstow, dated 27 July 1998:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question, pursuant to the answer on 20 July concerning liable relatives, if she will review the application of applying Paragraph 4(b) of the Code of Open Government Practice to such cases.

Whilst the current guidance relating to liable relatives is not wholly available in the public domain, requests for access to information contained within the guidance is always considered on an individual basis and granted where possible. As I explained in my letter of 20 July certain guidance is restricted to minimise the possibility of abuse.

The Benefits Agency (BA) regularly reviews its codes in line [illegible] As part of the ongoing move [illegible] of the "Residual Liable Relatives & Proceedings Guide" and will make appropriate sections available. Until this review has been completed, requests for information will continue to be considered on an individual claim basis.

I hope you find this reply helpful.

Benefit Integrity Project

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to her answer, 29 June 1998, *Official Report*, columns *118–19*, concerning the Benefit Integrity Project, when the Chief Executor of the Benefits Agency will be in a position to set out a firm start date for the exercise. [52610]

Mr. Denham: The administration of this programme is a matter for Peter Mathison, Chief Executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Peter Mathison to Mr. Paul Burstow, dated 27 July 1998:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question asking when her Department will start to review the cases of people subject to the Benefit Integrity Project prior to 9 February.

This programme of work will commence on Monday 3 August 1998.

I hope you find this reply helpful.

Welfare Reform

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to the Green Paper on Welfare Reform, what targets he has set for the reduction of working-age people living in workless households; and by what date these targets will be achieved. [52988]

Mr. Denham: The proposals and success measures contained in the Welfare Reform Green Paper "A New Contract for Welfare" are still subject to consultation which concludes on 31 July.

Mr. Duncan Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to the Green Paper on Welfare Reform, what targets he has set for the level of an adequate retirement income over the next 10 years. [53114]

Mr. Denham: A key objective of the Government Pensions Review is to ensure that pensioners should have an adequate income in retirement; that they should share fairly in rising national prosperity, and that public finances should be both sustainable and affordable. The best way to ensure that pensioners have security in retirement is a combination of the basic state pension and a good second pension. We are concerned about those pensioners who will not have access to a decent occupational scheme. That is why we will create a new framework of secure, flexible and value for money Stakeholder Pensions for those who cannot join an employer's occupational scheme, or whose pay is low or intermittent, and for whom personal pensions are usually unsuitable.

The Government have announced a £2.5 billion package of measures to help today's pensioners which will give single pensioners a guaranteed minimum income of not less than £75 a week, and £116.60 for a married couple. In addition we have reduced VAT on fuel to 5 per cent. and have committed £400 million to make Winter Fuel Payments last winter and next. We have also

allocated a further £0.5 billion so that from the following winter all eligible pensioner households will get an annual winter fuel payment of £20.

Benefit Fraud

Mr. Duncan Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when he will publish his Department's review of benefit rules announced in the Green Paper on Fraud. [53112]

Mr. Denham: Reviewing the benefit rules which are most frequently broken will take some months to complete. We will report on our progress in the Government's second annual anti-fraud audit, which will be published next year.

Mr. Duncan Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what calculations his Department has made of the estimated *(a)* maximum and *(b)* minimum benefit savings from increased (i) prevention and (ii) detection of benefit fraud over the next three years. [53108]

Mr. Denham: Our current estimates have been inherited from the previous administration and are for savings arising from detective activity for the next two years by the Department and by local authorities. These savings are £2.4 billion in 1998–99, and £2.5 billion in 1999–2000.

As we explained in the Green Paper "Beating Fraud is Everyone's Business: Securing the Future", a key element of our new anti-fraud strategy is the development of better measures of the amount of fraud, and the savings which flow from particular preventive and detective activities. This will, over time, allow us to refine our estimates of future savings as well as to direct anti-fraud resources to where they are most effective.

Mr. Duncan Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when he will publish the code of practice on the use of data and data-matching announced in the Green Paper on Fraud. [53113]

Mr. Denham: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to my hon. Friend the Member for Leyton and Wanstead (Mr. Cohen) on 29 June 1998, *Official Report*, columns *112–13*.

Mr. Duncan Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) what assessment he has made of the monthly level of fraud involving benefit payment cards; [53129]

(2) if he will make a statement on the timetable for extending the Benefit Payment Card nationally. [53128]

Mr. Denham: The Payment Card is designed to virtually eliminate fraud at the point of encashment. To date there have been no recorded examples of this type of fraud using a Payment Card.

Current plans provide for the automation of post offices nationally to start in the first half of 1999 and to be completed by the end of 2000.

Departmental Vehicles

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many of the vehicles due for replacement by *(a)* his Department and *(b)* bodies listed in the National Asset Register in (i) 1998–99, (ii) 1999–2000 and (iii) 2000–01 will be replaced by vehicles using (1) petrol, (2) diesel, (3) natural gas, (4) electric batteries and (5) other. [52625]

Mr. Denham: The table shows for the years 1998–99, 1999–2000, 2000–01 the number of cars currently owned by DSS that are expected to be replaced by vehicles in the categories listed in the questions.

	1998–99	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*
Petrol	220	614	0
Diesel	684	0	507
Natural gas	0	0	0
Electric batteries	0	0	0
Other	42	263	273

The 'other' category represents bi-fuelled (Petrol/Liquid Petroleum Gas) vehicles.

The Departmental Transport Officer was "highly commended" and runner-up in the Fleet Environmental Award category at this years Fleet Industry Awards. This recognition demonstrates the commitment the Department has made to greening its fleet operation.

Compliance Cost Assessments

Mr. Lansley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) what cumulative net increase in compliance costs has been estimated in compliance cost assessments published by his Department since 1 May 1997; [52941]

(2) if he will list the compliance cost assessments published by his Department since 1 May 1997; [52940]

(3) if he will list those compliance cost assessments since 1 May 1997 in which there is a net reduction in compliance costs resulting from a legislative proposal. [52939]

Mr. Denham: Details of compliance cost assessments (CCAs) published by this Department are contained in Command Papers. Between 1 May 1997 and 31 December 1997 (the last date covered by the eighth such Command Paper—published on 22 April 1998), two compliance cost assessments were published. They both related to what is now the Social Security Act 1998; the estimated net increase in compliance costs set out in these two assessments was between £100,000 and £1 million.

This year to date, two further CCAs have been published (in February 1998) by this Department as follows:

SI 263/98—The Social Security (Contributions and Industrial Injuries) (Canada) Order 1998—minimal compliance costs were off-set by related savings for business.

SI 470/98—The Social Security Benefits Up-rating Order 1998—zero recurring and non-recurring compliance costs, and minimal revenue costs (less than £0.5 million) as a result of adjustment to the Statutory Sick Pay and Statutory Maternity Pay rates.

There is presently no requirement on departments to carry out compliance cost assessments where legislative proposals are expected to be cost neutral or to result in a saving to business.

Benefit Statistics

Mr. Rendel: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) what statistics his Department collects relating to social security benefits and expenditure; what is the frequency and timetable for release of these statistics; and what statistics his Department plans to release during the summer adjournment; [52983]

(2) what statistics his Department collects relating to social security benefits, social security expenditure and claimants of social security benefits for Scotland. [52982]

Mr. Denham: Details of the statistical information collected, the frequency and timetable for release, relating to Social Security Benefits, can be found in a publication named "Guide to ASD Statistical Projects Revised May 1998". A copy of this publication can be found in the Library. The information collected covers all areas of Great Britain and can produce analyses for Scotland.

No information is collected on Social Security expenditure for Scotland.

The list contains information on statistical publications that are due to be released during the summer adjournment:

Date	*Title/author (including series/issue No.)*
August 1998	Child Support Agency Quarter Ended May 1998
August 1998	Jobseeker's Allowance Summary Statistics, May 1998 Quarterly Statistical Enquiry
August 1998	Income Support Statistics Quarterly Enquiry, February 1998
August 1998	Industrial Injuries Disablement Benefit—new claims and assessments of claims (clerical)—Quarterly March 1998
August 1998	Retirement Pension Summary of Statistics, March 1998
September 1998	Disability Working Allowance Statistics Quarterly Enquiry, April 1998
September 1998	Social Security Statistics 1998
September 1998	Jobseeker's Allowance Statistics Quarterly Enquiry, February 1998
September 1998	IB/SDA (scan)—official publication—Quarterly May 1998
October 1998	Disability Living Allowance/Attendance Allowance/Invalid Care Allowance (scan)—Quarterly May 1998
October 1998	Family Credit Statistics Quarterly Enquiry, May 1998
October 1998	Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit Quarterly Summary Statistics, May 1998

The following list contains information on expenditure publications:

Title	*Frequency*	*Date of issue*
Social Security Departmental Report	annually	March
Fact and Figures	annually	April

Disabled People

Mr. Gale: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) how many organisations *(a)* he and *(b)* his Ministers have met that represent wheelchair users in Kent; and if he will list them; [53029]

(2) if he will list the names of the organisations that *(a)* he and *(b)* his Ministers have (i) met and (ii) plans to meet in connection with his review of the access to benefits available to disabled people. [53028]

Mr. Denham: Our Green Paper 'New ambitions for our country: A New Contract for Welfare' pledged that those who are disabled should get the support they need to lead a fulfilling life with dignity, free from discrimination. In taking our reforms forward, we have given a clear commitment to consult.

As part of this commitment we have set up a Disability Benefits Forum with organisations of and for disabled people to discuss how disability benefits can be reformed to ensure that they go to those who need them most and that the gateways are clear and robust.

The Forum initially met on 17 June and continue to meet regularly. Membership includes a number of national/ umbrella organisations detailed in a written answer from the then Secretary of State for Social Security, on 17 June 1998, *Official Report*, columns *243–44*, several of which represent wheelchair users.

Cycling

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what parking facilities for cycles exist at each office or site for which his Department is responsible and for each agency for which he is responsible. [52660]

Mr. Denham: A full breakdown of the cycling spaces throughout the Department is not available in the format requested and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. At the last count there were approximately 4,125 spaces in total.

To encourage staff to travel to and from work by bicycle, 20 local Commuting Action Plans are to be put in place throughout the Department from 1 April 1999. We also plan to hold a Departmental "Car Free Day" this autumn.

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what proportion of the employees of his Department and of the employees of each agency for which he is responsible cycle to work; and what measures he plans to increase that proportion. [52661]

Mr. Denham: There is no information available on methods staff employ to travel to work, whether by cycle or any other means.

However, at least 20 local Commuting Action Plans (CAPs) are presently being developed for introduction throughout DSS by March 1999. Each will address the means by which staff travel to and from work and will include proposals for the encouragement of a greater use of bicycles in the areas where CAPs will be introduced.

A further measure to highlight the use of bicycles will be a departmental 'Car Free Day' to be held this Autumn.

Measures to increase the proportion of employees cycling to work are being considered as part of the development of green transport plans for buildings occupied by the Department and its Agencies.

Residential Care Allowance

Mr. Dawson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what assessment he has made of the *(a)* costs and *(b)* benefits of paying residential care allowance to people on income support who enter public sector residential care. [53000]

Mr. Denham: No assessment has been made of either the costs or benefits of paying residential allowance to people on Income Support who enter public sector residential care.

Pensions

Mr. Duncan Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what targets have been set for the time within which payments of the minimum pension top-up will be made. [53165]

Mr. Denham: The current targets for Income Support, which are reviewed annually, are for 60 per cent. of new claims to be cleared within 5 days, and for 87 per cent. to be cleared within 13 days.

Our new national programme to get extra help to the poorest pensioners help ensure that claims are properly assessed with minimum delay.

Mr. Duncan Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security whether the minimum pension guarantee will be uprated in line with *(a)* earnings and *(b)* prices. [53167]

Mr. Denham: On 17 July 1998, *Official Report*, columns 703–05, the Government announced that Income Support rates would be increased by three times the normal price uprating, to give the poorest pensioners a guaranteed minimum income of £75 per week, with couples and older pensioners receiving more.

Future uprating of benefit levels will be considered in the normal way.

Mr. Duncan Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security whether the minimum pension guarantee will be classed as a benefit or as part of the basic state pension. [53168]

Mr. Denham: The guaranteed minimum income will be a benefit.

Mr. Duncan Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to the oral statement of 17 July 1998, *Official Report*, columns 703–05, concerning payment of the minimum pension guarantee to be made within one week of signature of the form, whether eligibility for this payment will be established before the payment is made. [53166]

Mr. Denham: Clearly, eligibility will be established before the payment is made.

Mr. Duncan Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what are the pilot areas for the minimum pension guarantee; how many people are in the target groups for the pilot areas; and what the publication date is for the pilots. [53169]

Mr. Denham: Pilot projects have been running since April in nine areas—East Renfrew, Glasgow, Preston, York, Stroud, South Staffordshire, Torfaen, Torbay and Lambeth. The pilot offices will, between them, be contacting nearly 14,000 pensioners. The results will be evaluated by an independent research company, and we expect to be able to publish the findings early next year.

Incapacity Benefit

Mr. Duncan Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when he will publish his Department's proposals on incapacity benefit reform. [53111]

Mr. Denham: We have given a commitment to fundamentally reform Incapacity Benefit for future claimants. We are examining the scope for a new test which focuses on what people can do as well as what they cannot do, recognising that capacity for work is a continuum. We will bring forward our proposals in due course.

Education Maintenance Allowance

Mr. Duncan Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if the educational maintenance allowance will be administered by his Department. [53117]

Mr. Denham: Details of the Education Maintenance Allowance pilots are still being developed. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Employment will make an announcement about the pilots in the autumn.

Winter Fuel Payments

Mr. Duncan Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to the answer to the hon. Member for Bromsgrove (Miss Kirkbride) of 5 June 1998, *Official Report*, column *402*, concerning winter fuel payments, when he expects to provide a precise figure for her Department's actual expenditure on winter fuel payments. [53178]

Mr. Denham: Total expenditure on Winter Fuel Payments during 1997–98 was £190,646,790. The latest information for 1998–99 shows that during April additional expenditure of £1,184,260 was incurred. Further expenditure will be brought to account as any additional or replacement girocheque payments are encashed.

Expenditure is classified as being incurred at the point when payments are made by automated credit transfer into bank or building society accounts, or issued by Payable Order. Expenditure on girocheque payments is incurred following encashment.

DEFENCE

Government Policies

Mr. Fabricant: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the projects undertaken by his Department since 1 May 1997 to research public reaction to *(a)* Government policies and *(b)* potential new policies; and if he will place the results of the research in the Library. [46681]

Dr. Reid *[holding answer 30 June 1998]:* Research into public opinion formally commissioned by my Department since 1 May 1997 is set out in the table. This concentrates on Service recruiting issues. In addition, on March 5 this year we published a Green paper, "Defence diversification—getting the most out of defence technology".

Public opinion research commissioned by MOD since 1 May 1997

Date	*Description*
June 1997	RAF advertising strategy
August 1997	Navy advertising evaluation
August 1997	Technicians Target market research
August 1997	RAF Degree Package research
August 1997	Army Presentation Team—evaluation
September 1997	Attitudes to NATO
October 1997	'Be the Best' branding research
October 1997	Territorial Army advertising development research
January 1998	Image of RAF/reactions to advertising concepts
February 1998	Army fitness video research
March 1998	RAF attitude survey and advertising tracking
March 1998	Army Campaign Development research
March 1998	Catterick Garrison Radio Trade evaluation
March 1998	SGE and OM qualitative research
March 1998	OG8 Dropout research
May 1998	Evaluation of marketing effects on walk-ins to AFCO IACIO offices
May 1998	Advertising tracking
May 1998	Public presentation of the SDR
June 1998	'Be the Best' tracking research
September 1998	Events evaluation research
November 1998	Army Ethnic Minority Initiative evaluation
December 1998	Officer profiling research

Plutonium

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if, pursuant to paragraph 72 of the Strategic Defence Review, Cm. 3999, he will list the current location of the *(a)* 7.6 tonnes of plutonium, *(b)* 21.9 tonnes of highly enriched uranium and *(c)* 15,000 tonnes of other forms of uranium. [51412]

Mr. Spellar: The majority of the holdings of plutonium, highly enriched uranium and other forms of uranium referred to in paragraph 72 of Cm. 3999 are held at various BNFL and Ministry of Defence sites. Smaller quantities are also held on various Defence contractors premises. Additionally, and subsumed in the overall totals of these materials, are the amounts in our nuclear weapons and the reactor cores of our nuclear submarines. To provide further information on locations would be contrary to national defence and security interests and details are being withheld under Exemption 1 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to paragraph 72 of the Strategic Defence Review, Cm. 3999, what is his Department's definition of weapons grade plutonium. [51413]

Mr. Spellar: The Ministry of Defence defines weapons grade plutonium as that which contains greater than 92 per cent. of the Plutonium-239 isotope.

Future Large Aircraft

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what representations he has received on the Future Large Aircraft for use in heavy lift. [51501]

Mr. Spellar *[holding answer 20 July 1998]:* Since 1 May 1997, the Ministry of Defence has received 17 Parliamentary Questions and 7 letters from MPs on the subject of the Future Large Aircraft, FLA. No representations have been received on the use of the FLA in respect of the short term requirement for additional strategic lift as announced in the Strategic Defence Review White Paper. The FLA will not be available in time to meet that requirement but remains a contender for a longer term requirement to replace our current air transport fleet.

Trident

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if the deployment plans for Trident under the Strategic Defence Review include warheads assigned to a sub-strategic role. [52216]

Mr. George Robertson: Yes.

Mr. Alan Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what measures are being taken to maintain a minimum capability to design and produce a successor to Trident should this prove necessary; and what the estimated annual cost of this commitment will be. [52165]

Mr. George Robertson: Since Trident should meet our needs well into the next century, there is no work under way to develop a new generation of nuclear weapons. No decisions on any successor system will be needed for several years.

Mr. Alan Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many crews are assigned to each of the four Trident submarines; and if he will make a statement. [52161]

Mr. George Robertson: HMS Victorious and HMS Vigilant each have two crews of 140. HMS Vanguard has a single augmented crew of 200. We plan over time to move to single augmented crews for all our Trident submarines.

Mr. Alan Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will place the annual report on the Progress of the Trident Programme in the Library. [52181]

Mr. Spellar: Given the comprehensive nature of the Strategic Defence Review White Paper and supporting essays, we have no plans to produce a separate report on the Progress of the Trident Programme this year.

Mr. Alan Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the circumstances in which Trident would be used. [52178]

Mr. George Robertson: The United Kingdom would consider the use of nuclear weapons only in extreme circumstances of self-defence and in accordance with international law.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if any Trident submarine in the operational cycle, apart from one on patrol, will be loaded with 48 warheads. [52136]

Mr. George Robertson: All three Trident submarines normally in the operational cycle will have 48 warheads loaded.

Hunter-killer Submarines

Mr. Alan Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence which two hunter-killer submarines are to be retired as a result of the outcome of the Strategic Defence Review. [52182]

Mr. Spellar: As a consequence of the Strategic Defence Review, HMS Splendid and HMS Spartan will be taken out of service earlier than previously planned.

Mr. Alan Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what estimate he has made of the cost of fitting each nuclear-powered hunter-killer submarine with Tomahawk missiles. [52172]

Mr. George Robertson: The overall cost of procuring Tomahawk for the Royal Navy is some £180m at 1997–98 prices. This includes the procurement of missiles, test and training systems, submarine weapon handling and fire control systems, and provision of a mission planning and targeting facility. In addition, the average cost of fitting out each submarine is estimated to be some £1.4m.

Atomic Weapons Establishment

Mr. Alan Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will provide a breakdown of AWE running costs for 1997–98 into *(a)* staff costs, *(b)* waste management and disposal, *(c)* research and development, *(d)* production and dismantlement, *(e)* construction costs and *(f)* payments to Hunting-BRAE. [52170]

Mr. Spellar: I would draw my hon. Friend's attention to the Strategic Defence Review White Paper Supporting Essay Five which contains a general breakdown of costs for the nuclear warhead programme for the Financial Year 1997–98. Staff costs and payments to Hunting-BRAE are commercially confidential and I am withholding this information in accordance with Exemption 13 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information relating to Third Party commercial confidences.

Mr. Alan Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the amount paid in each year since 1993 to Hunting-BRAE Ltd for managing the atomic weapons establishments. [52171]

Mr. Spellar: Payments to Hunting-BRAE are commercially confidential and I am, therefore, withholding this information in accordance with Exemption 13 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information relating to Third Party commercial confidences. My hon. Friend will find a general breakdown of costs for the nuclear warhead programme for the Financial Year 1997–98 in the Strategic Defence Review White Paper Supporting Essay Five.

Anglo French Nuclear Co-operation

Mr. Alan Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on Anglo-French nuclear co-operation. [52186]

Mr. Spellar: We continue to maintain close contact with France on defence nuclear matters, including through our Joint Nuclear Commission.

Nuclear Warheads

Mr. Alan Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) if he will list the yields and total amounts in the British stockpile of the WE177 nuclear warhead; [52188]

(2) if he will list the yields, amount deployed per missile and total amount in the British stockpile of the Chevaline nuclear warhead. [52185]

Mr. Spellar: As stated in paragraph 10 of Supporting Essay 5 to the Strategic Defence Review White Paper, each of our Polaris submarines carried 32 Chevaline warheads and, at the end of the Cold War, we had a stockpile of several hundred WE177 free-fall nuclear bombs. Precise details of the total numbers of weapons held and on explosive yields are covered by exemption 1 of the Code of Practice governing access to Government information.

Mr. Alan Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what British involvement there is in the US SLBM Warhead Protection Programme. [52177]

Mr. George Robertson: To date British involvement in the US SLBM Warhead Protection programme has been limited to briefings.

US W87 Life Extension Programme

Mr. Alan Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what British involvement there is in the US W87 Life Extension Programme. [52187]

Mr. Spellar: The UK is not involved in the US W87 Life Extension Programme.

South Korea

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what armaments and of what value have been sold by UK firms to the South Korean Government over the last five years. [52911]

Mr. Spellar: The Ministry of Defence is currently working with the FCO and the DTI to prepare the Government's first Annual Report on Strategic Export Controls. The Report will include details of export licence applications for UK Military List items and details of such equipment exported with annual values. When the Report has been issued I will write to the hon. Member in regard to the information requested for previous years.

Occupational Welfare Service

Mrs. Gilroy: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the performance of his Department's civilian management (Welfare) unit sections; and how many cases relating to *(a)* grievance and *(b)* disciplinary procedure took (i) six and (ii) twelve months or more to reach a conclusion in (1) 1996–97, (2) 1995–96 and (3) 1994–95. [52831]

Mr. Spellar: The performance of the Ministry of Defence Occupational Welfare Service, OWS, is assessed through a range of Performance Targets and Performance Indicators. The key Performance Target is the provision of an efficient service for all Ministry of Defence UK based civilian staff. Performance is assessed and reported on by senior officers within the OWS. As part of this

assessment, discussions are held with senior personnel and line managers across the Department. The Performance Indicators relate to response times; these have been consistently met. An Annual Report on the activities of the OWS is sent to all Chief Executives and Senior Managers in the MOD.

Records detailing grievances raised are not kept, as many are resolved locally and at various levels throughout the Department. The number of disciplinary cases which took between six and 12 months were, in 1996–97, 11, and in 1995–96, 21. In 1996–97 there were no cases which took longer than 12 months; in 1995–96 there were two. These cases were among a total of 309 in 1996–97, and 339 in 1995–96. Records for 1994–95 are not available. In all cases the aim was to reach a decision within two months at most, but unfortunately this was not always possible.

Departmental Vehicles

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many of the vehicles due for replacement by *(a)* his Department and *(b)* bodies listed in the National Asset Register in (i) 1998–99, (ii) 1999–2000 and (iii) 2000–01 will be replaced by vehicles using (1) petrol, (2) diesel, (3) natural gas, (4) electric batteries and (5) other. [52627]

Mr. Spellar: I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Cycling

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what parking facilities for cycles exist at each office or site for which his Department is responsible and for each agency for which he is responsible. [52680]

Mr. Spellar: Cycle facilities, both open and covered exist at a number of Ministry of Defence and Agency sites, but records of the precise number and type are not held centrally. The provision of cycle parking facilities will be considered during the preparation of my Department's Green Transport Plans.

Compliance Cost Assessments

Mr. Lansley: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what cumulative net increase in compliance costs has been estimated in compliance cost assessments published by his Department since 1 May 1997; [52934]

(2) if he will list the compliance cost assessments published by his Department since 1 May 1997; [52935]

(3) if he will list those compliance cost assessments since 1 May 1997 in which there is a net reduction in compliance costs resulting from a legislative proposal. [52933]

Mr. Spellar: The Ministry of Defence is not a regulatory department and rarely places legislation before Parliament which requires compliance cost assessments. As a consequence, no such assessments have been carried out or published by the Ministry of Defence since 1 May 1997.

Defence Evaluation and Research Agency

Mr. Keith Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the future of DERA within his Department. [52798]

Mr. Spellar: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key) on 24 July 1998, *Official Report*, column *737*.

TREASURY

Departmental Reviews

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the reviews his Department initiated in the years *(a)* 1974–75, *(b)* 1979–80 and *(c)* 1992–93. [48523]

Mrs. Liddell *[holding answer 6 July 1998]:* Information published on reviews initiated in the years in question in the Chancellors' Departments is:

Inland Revenue

1974–75

Consultations on:

taxation of expenses payments and benefits in kind

capital transfer tax

wealth tax

oil taxation

1979–80

Consultations on:

taxation of husband and wife

taxation of company profits

construction industry tax deduction scheme

Reviews on:

capital taxation

enforcement powers of Inland Revenue and Customs and Excise

1992–93

Consultations on:

income tax treatment of company cars

tax treatment of foreign exchange gains and losses

a simpler system for assessing personal tax

surplus advance corporation tax

Customs and Excise

Review on:

administration arrangements for Gaming Machine Licence Duty

HM Treasury

Financial Services Regulation—Making the Two Tier System Work.

Further information is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Sierra Leone

Sir John Stanley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if discussions took place between officials and political advisers in his Department and officials and political advisers in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office in relation to the answer given by the Financial Secretary to the Treasury to the right hon. Member for Tonbridge and Malling on 25 June 1998, *Official Report*, column *618*. [49483]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 8 July 1998]:* The normal contacts occurred which would take place when a question concerns an issue which involves more than one Department. No special advisers were involved.

Quangos

Mr. Denzil Davies: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his oral statement of 14 July 1998, *Official Report*, column 193, if he will specify the quangos which will be cut, indicating the total sum saved as a consequence. [51460]

Mrs. Liddell: Subject to Parliamentary approval, the Government have decided to abolish the following NDPBs: Cardiff Bay Development Corporation; Central Council for Education and Training in Social Work; Rural Development Commission (to merge with Countryside Commission); County Court Rule Committee; Development Board for Rural Wales; English Partnerships (to merge with Commission for New Towns); Funding Agency for Schools; Independent Commission for Police Complaints for Northern Ireland; Land Authority for Wales; Local Government Property Commission (Scotland); National Disability Council; North Hull Housing Action Trust; Residuary Body for Wales; Scottish Water and Sewerage Customers Council; Supreme Court Rule Committee; Tai Cymru (Housing for Wales); Advisory Committee on Service Candidates; Central Adjudication Services; Child Support Appeal Tribunals; Commission for Racial Equality (NI); Crime Prevention Agency Board; Disability Appeal Tribunals; Disability Council (NI); Equal Opportunities Commission (NI); Fair Employment Commission (NI); Firearms Consultative Committee; Health and Safety Agency (NI); Medical Appeals Tribunals; Metropolitan Police Committee; Poisons Board; Social Security Appeal Tribunals; Vaccine Damage Tribunals.

At this point in time, the aggregate level of savings is not known.

In addition to this, the following NDPBs have been abolished since 1 May 1997: Advisory Committee for the Joint Environmental Markets Unit; Advisory Committee on Design Quality in the NHS; Advisory Committee on Plant and Machinery; Agricultural Advisory Panel for Wales; Assessment Panel for Construction Research; Citizen's Charter Panel of Advisers; Deregulation Task Force; Local Government Staff Commission (England); National Advisory Council for the Employment of People with Disabilities; National Council for Vocational Qualifications; Northern Ireland Citizen's Charter Advisory Panel; Race Relations Employment Advisory Group; Regional Panels in MAFF (9); School Curriculum and Assessment Authority; Scottish Economic Council; Scottish Seed Potato Development Corporation; Sheffield Development Corporation; Staff Commission for Wales; Supported Employment Advisory Group; Treasure Trove Reviewing Committee; Ulster Folk and Transport Museum (2) (merged with Ulster Museum); Urban Development Corporations (8); Welsh Council for Postgraduate Medical and Dental Education.

Consultation papers were issued on 24 July proposing streamlining of the Department for Culture, Media and Sport's NDPBs to reduce bureaucracy. Decisions will be made following the consultation.

Subsidies

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his oral statement of 14 July 1998, *Official Report*, column 191, if he will list the subsidies that he has assessed as no longer justifiable together with the most recent estimate of their cost in the last year. [51509]

Mr. Byers: The Government are reviewing the system of industrial subsidies across Departments to ensure that the taxpayer gets value for money. The largest specific industrial subsidy is support to the agricultural industry which totalled £4.5bn in 1997–98. The Government also played a leading role in negotiating the phased abolition of shipbuilding operating subsidies across Europe by the end of the year 2000: these subsidies cost the UK £10m in the last financial year.

Land Acquisition and Sales

Mr. Rhodri Morgan: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the dates and circumstances on which consent *(a)* before the event and *(b)* retrospectively in the past five years has been sought for land acquisition and sales involving (i) the Welsh Development Agency, (ii) the Scottish Development Agency and (iii) English Partnerships. [51223]

Mrs. Liddell *[holding answer 17 July 1998]:* Some of the information that my hon. Friend requires will take considerable time to provide. I will therefore write to my hon. Friend and place copies in the Library of the House. Details of Welsh Development Agency cases will be provided only for the last three years because of the disproportionate cost of providing details before then.

Comprehensive Spending Review

Mr. Maude: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will provide figures on the same basis as Tables A1, A2 and A3 in the Comprehensive Spending Review, Cm. 4011, for 1992–93. [51657]

Mrs. Liddell: The figures are not readily available.

International Debt

Mr. Cash: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list by country *(a)* the amount recovered by the Export Credits Guarantee Department and *(b)* the amount repaid under aid loans in each year since 1979 by (i) severely indebted low income countries, (ii) moderately indebted low income countries, (iii) severely indebted middle income countries, (iv) moderately indebted middle income countries, (v) Afghanistan, (vi) Cuba, (vii) Gibraltar and (viii) Iraq. [51546]

Mrs. Liddell: Neither ECGD nor DFID maintain their records on a basis that would enable them to provide the breakdown requested back to 1979 without disproportionate cost. I list the cash that ECGD has received in the last two financial years. Figures are in £ millions and are given to two significant figures.

Severely indebted low income country	*Receipts by ECGD FY 1997–98*	*Receipts by ECGD FY 1996–97*
Afghanistan	0	0
Angola	0	0
Bosnia and Herzegovina	0	0

Severely indebted low income country	*Receipts by ECGD FY 1997–98*	*Receipts by ECGD FY 1996–97*
Burkina Faso	0	0
Burundi	0	0
Cameroon	0.54	0.030
Central African Republic	0	0
Congo-Brazzaville	0	0
Cote d'Ivoire	0.60	3.8
Equatorial Guinea	0	0
Ethiopia	0.24	0.24
Ghana	3.5	1.3
Guinea (Conakry)	0	0.18
Guinea-Bissau	0.13	0
Guyana	0	0
Haiti	0.27	0
Honduras	0	0
Liberia	0	0
Madagascar	0	0
Malawi	0.56	0.19
Mali	0	0.32
Mauritania	0.31	0.020
Mozambique	0.12	0.29
Myanmar	0	0
Nicaragua	0	0
Niger	0	0.060
Nigeria	1.9	5.5
Rwanda	0	0
Sao Tome and Principe	0	0
Somalia	0	0
Sudan	0	0
Tanzania	0	0
Uganda	0.030	0.17
Vietnam	0	0
Yemen	0.29	0
Zambia	0	0

Moderately indebted low income country	*Receipts by ECGD FY 1997–98*	*Receipts by ECGD FY 1996–97*
Bangladesh	0	0
Benin	0	0.28
Cambodia	0	0
Chad	0	0
Comoros	0	0
Gambia	0.18	0.73
India	0.70	0.58
Kenya	8.8	0.11
Lao PDR	0	0
Pakistan	0.080	0
Senegal	0.010	0.010
Togo	0.010	0.12
Zimbabwe	0.020	0

Severely indebted middle income country	*Receipts of ECGD FY 1997–98*	*Receipts by ECGD FY 1996–97*
Algeria	0.010	4.7
Argentina	11	11
Brazil	81	86
Bolivia	0.13	0
Bulgaria	0	0
Cuba	0	0
Ecuador	0.06	0.43
Gabon	2.6	0
Indonesia	0.35	0.37
Iraq	0.080	0.16
Jamaica	0.41	0.52

Severely indebted middle income country	*Receipts of ECGD FY 1997–98*	*Receipts by ECGD FY 1996–97*
Jordan	8.4	4.2
Peru	0.020	0.020
Syrian Arab Republic	3.9	0.83

Moderately indebted middle income country	*Receipts by ECGD FY 1997–98*	*Receipts by ECGD FY 1996–97*
Chile	0	0
Colombia	0.020	0
Georgia	0	0
Hungary	0	0
Macedonia	0	0
Malaysia	0	0
Mexico	32	23
Morocco	10	22
Panama	0	4.2
Philippines	11	5.0
St. Vincent	0	0
Thailand	0	0.030
Tunisia	0	0
Turkey	0	0
Uruguay	0	0
Venezuela	0.050	4.9
Gibraltar	0	0

Mr. Cash: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list by country the value of the outstanding debts on *(a)* United Kingdom aid loans and *(b)* loans guaranteed by the British Government through the Exports Credits Guarantee Department, for each of the countries defined by the World Bank as severely or moderately indebted middle income countries. [51543]

Mrs. Liddell: I list the value of outstanding debts on both UK aid loans and loans guaranteed by the British Government through ECGD, for each of the countries defined by the World Bank as severely or moderately indebted middle income countries. The figures on aid loans are the value of principal and interest outstanding as at end-1997. The figures on ECGD's claims are the total outstanding principal as at end-March 1998. All figures are given to two significant figures.

£ million

Middle income country	*Value of outstanding aid loans*	*Value of outstanding ECGD claims*
Severely indebted		
Algeria	0	220
Argentina	0	62
Brazil	2.6	440
Bolivia	0	8.1
Bulgaria	0	15
Cuba	0	51
Ecuador	12	31
Gabon	0	83
Indonesia	0.91	5.4
Iraq	0	630
Jamaica	55	3.2
Jordan	30	320
Peru	7.5	73
Syrian Arab Republic	0	0.37

£ million

Middle income country	Value of outstanding aid loans	Value of outstanding ECGD claims
Moderately indebted		
Chile	0	0
Colombia	0.22	0.080
Georgia	0	0
Hungary	0	0.020
Macedonia	0	3.4
Malaysia	3.8	0.060
Mexico	0	120
Morocco	0	45
Panama	0	0
Philippines	3.5	22
St. Vincent	3.5	0
Thailand	0	0.26
Tunisia	0	0
Turkey	34	0
Uruguay	0	0
Venezuela	0	0.78

Millennium Compliance

Mr. David Atkinson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will introduce tax incentives for the works required by businesses to ensure the millennium compliance of their computer systems; and if he will make a statement. [51811]

Mrs. Liddell: Most expenditure of this kind incurred by businesses is already likely to attract tax relief under current rules. Normally a business will be able to deduct such expenditure in full in calculating trading profits except where the expenditure is capital in nature in which case it qualifies for capital allowances.

Private Finance Initiative

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) if he will extend Tables B14, B15, B16 and B17 in the Budget 98 Red Book to include plans for the next three years; [51761]

(2) what is the total annual allocation for PFI schemes in *(a)* the current year and *(b)* the next three years; and if he will list the allocation to each department alongside the figure for capital spending by each department. [51760]

Mrs. Liddell: *[holding answer 21 July 1998]:* The information on public sector capital expenditure as given in Table B14 of the March 1998 FSBR was updated in Table A5 of the Comprehensive Spending Review—Statistical Annex.

The information in Table B15 of the March 1998 FSBR will not be updated until September.

Table B16 of the March 1998 FSBR still gives the latest figures for estimated payments under PFI contracts.

Table B17 of the March 1998 FSBR sets out figures for General Government sales if fixed assets, debt sales and privatisation proceeds. Projections of disposals of fixed assets by central and local government over the next three years are set out in paragraph 4.2.3 of the Economic and Fiscal Strategy Report 1998.

Debt sales and privatisation proceeds, both of which are classified as financial transactions, lie outside Total Managed Expenditure. Projections of financial transactions over the next three years are set out in table 4.4 of the Economic and Fiscal Strategy Report 1998.

Local Authorities (Asset Sales)

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will set out his reasons for his decision to allow local authorities to reinvest most proceeds of asset sales and his reasons for continuing to limit reinvestment of the proceeds of council housing and associated land. [51759]

Mrs. Liddell *[holding answer 21 July 1998]:* The Government want to encourage local authorities to sell surplus assets to help pay for new investment. Allowing reinvestment of most of the proceeds of non-housing assets provides authorities with the right incentives to identify and dispose of such assets. However, sales of housing assets mainly arise as a result of tenants exercising the Right to Buy, not because of active asset management by Councils, and produce substantial proceeds which do not accrue in a pattern that reflects need to spend. Because this is a national scheme, we have to have regard to the capacity of the economy and of the construction industry to cope with substantial levels of reinvestment, and to bear in mind the distributional impact. For all these reasons, we will continue to limit reinvestment of new Council housing sale proceeds.

Gas-powered Vehicles

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will allow a write down allowance of 100 per cent. in the first year for fleet operators converting a vehicle to gas power. [51859]

Mrs. Liddell: We already have a number of positive measures in place in the tax system to promote the use of gas powered vehicles. For example, duty on road fuel gases has been frozen in the last two Budgets and the cost of enabling company cars to run on gas is now disregarded when calculating an employee's taxable car benefit. There are no plans to offer enhanced capital allowances for the costs of converting vehicles to gas power.

Motorcycles

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will assess the advantages of exempting commuter motorcycles from vehicle excise duty under the forthcoming review of vehicle excise duty rates. [52024]

Mrs. Liddell *[holding answer 23 July 1998]:* A consultation document containing the options for reforming vehicle excise duty will be published shortly. The Chancellor will make his proposals for vehicle excise duty in the next Budget in the light of this consultation.

Optical Fibre Communication

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to develop the potential of modern broad band optical fibre communications within

(a) his Department, *(b)* the Inland Revenue and *(c)* Her Majesty's Customs and Excise; and if he will make a statement. [52325]

Mrs. Liddell: New technology is adopted whenever it answers a business need and offers value for money.

Pay Negotiations

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 10 July 1998, *Official Report*, column *669*, what assessment he has made of the effect of current headline RPI inflation on wages and salary negotiations. [52548]

Mrs. Liddell: It is up to individual companies to negotiate with their workforce over remuneration and the level of inflation should be only one of a number of factors in any individual settlement. The Government have repeatedly stated the importance of pay in the public and private sectors being related to what the economy can afford.

Retail Trade

Mr. Ivan Henderson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the net impact on United Kingdom retail trade if the Commission's option on the successor regime duty and tax-paid sales after 30 June 1999 is adopted. [52521]

Mr. Geoffrey Robinson: No specific assessment has been made in the form suggested. However, Customs and Excise have been in very close touch with the trade regarding duty frees and the successor regime. In this way, the views of the trade are being taken into account in the Government's consideration of all the options, including the Commission's suggestion for a successor regime.

Asbestos

Mr. Cox: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what guidance his Department issues to those constructing buildings for which it is responsible on the use of materials containing asbestos. [52302]

Mr. Geoffrey Robinson: Her Majesty's Treasury is not currently constructing any buildings. Guidance on the use of asbestos is contained in the "Control of Asbestos at Work Regulations 1987" and the two approved codes of practice: "Control of Asbestos at Work" and "Work with Asbestos Insulation, Asbestos Coating and Asbestos Insulating Board" produced by the Health and Safety Executive.

Environmental and Sustainable Development

Mr. Edward Davey: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what efforts he is making to raise the awareness of environmental and sustainable development issues within his Department; and what specific training will be made available to staff. [52374]

Mrs. Liddell: Included in the Treasury's Environmental Strategy is a commitment to maintain publicity campaigns to increase staff awareness of particular environmental issues.

Articles and notices have been run on: recycling schemes and achievements; energy awareness; a "Bag It and Bin It" campaign; and the "Going for Green" campaign. These have been made available to staff via the Accommodation Services bulletin, the in-house staff journal; and by the electronic message system; and to the wider public via the Treasury's website. Copies were circulated to every member of staff of the Government's consultation paper on a revised UK strategy for sustainable development "Opportunities for Change".

Depending on the requirements of their post, most policy staff in the Treasury undertake training in microeconomics. The courses introduce staff to the concept of environmental and other externalities, and the need to take these non-costed effects on board in policy appraisal.

DETR recently circulated guidance to other Government Departments on policy appraisal and the environment. Copies of the DETR guide have been circulated widely to staff in the Chancellor's Departments. A series of seminars have been arranged to make sure the main messages are understood.

Social Landlords

Mr. Gerrard: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the effects of Customs and Excise proposals to limit VAT group relief on the activities of registered social landlords, the rents of their tenants, and housing benefit costs. [52455]

Mr. Geoffrey Robinson: The proposal to restrict eligibility for VAT group treatment to fully taxable companies is currently the subject of a public consultation. Since the consultation period has not ended, no such assessment has been made.

Tobacco Smuggling

Mr. Alan Simpson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the level and value of tobacco smuggling into the United Kingdom. [53093]

Mr. Geoffrey Robinson: The table sets out Customs' most recent estimate of the total revenue (excise duty and VAT) lost to the Exchequer through cross-Channel smuggling of tobacco products in calendar year 1997.

Revenue lost to the Exchequer from smuggling in 1997

£ million

Product type	*Revenue lost*
Hand-rolling tobacco	540
Cigarettes and other tobacco products	145
Total	690

Note:
Figures have been independently rounded to £5 million. Components may not therefore sum to the totals given

There are no official estimates for the revenue lost through smuggling in freight consignments or by air passengers, and the estimates given do not include any amounts for these types of supply.

The share of UK consumption represented by cross-Channel smuggling is about 1½ per cent. for cigarettes, and about 69½ per cent. for hand-rolling tobacco.

EU Financial Contributions

Mr. Harvey: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the per capita financial *(a)* contributions and *(b)* receipts of each EU member state for the last year for which figures are available. [53081]

Mrs. Liddell: 1996 is the latest year for which information about Member States' contributions and receipts is available. The information requested, in respect of that year, is set out in the table. The amounts shown are in European Currency Units, the unit of account for the EC Budget.

Contributions to and receipts from the EC budget in 1996

	Gross contribution	*Gross receipts (mecu)*	*Population (millions)*	*Gross contribution per head (ecu)*	*Gross receipts per head (ecu)*
Belgium	2,743.0	1,996.8	10.194	269.1	195.9
Denmark	1,359.9	1,553.3	5.247	259.2	296.0
Germany	20,766.9	9,872.0	81.825	253.8	120.6
Greece	1,107.1	5,039.8	10.530	105.1	478.6
Spain	4,538.9	10,511.1	39.312	115.5	267.4
France	12,410.9	11,951.1	58.388	212.6	204.7
Ireland	710.2	2,970.5	3.584	198.2	828.8
Italy	8,935.2	7,532.9	57.370	155.7	131.3
Luxembourg	163.2	83.9	0.411	397.1	204.1
Netherlands	4,435.7	1,988.9	15.534	285.5	128.0
Austria	1,872.6	1,600.4	8.046	232.7	198.9
Portugal	906.1	3,680.4	9.856	91.9	373.4
Finland	961.3	988.4	5.126	187.5	192.8
Sweden	1,957.4	1,204.9	8.920	219.4	135.1
UK	8,227.1	5,951.1	58.680	140.2	101.4

Notes:
1. The Court of Auditors uses ecu figures, the unit of account for the EC Budget
2. Gross contribution figures are after account has been taken of the UK's abatement (including corrections in respect of earlier years) and for adjustments to VAT and GNP-based contributions in respect of earlier years

Sources:
Contributions and receipts data taken from Court of Auditors Report on 1996 Community Budget
Comparative population data taken from the European Commission's document "European Economy"

Economic and Monetary Union

Mr. Streeter: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the impact of the single currency on the CFA franc. [52467]

Mrs. Liddell *[holding answer 27 July 1998]:* The Government have made no assessment of the impact of the single currency on the CFA franc, which is a matter for member states participating in the euro and, in particular, France.

Mr. Timms: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the state of preparations by businesses and other organisations in the United Kingdom for the implications of EMU. [53549]

Mrs. Liddell: The Government today publish their first six-monthly report on preparations for EMU, "Getting ready for the euro: first report July 1998". Copies have been placed in the Libraries of the House.

Ms Lawrence: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make an announcement on the tax consequences of EMU. [53680]

Mrs. Liddell: The Finance Bill provided a power to make regulations in order to prevent unintended tax consequences arising from the start of the single currency in other member States. Following consultations with business, the Government have identified some technical changes that need to be made in order to achieve this. Details of the proposed changes are being published in an Inland Revenue Press Release today, and we shall make the draft regulations available for consultation in the Autumn.

The Government's proposals will help business and other taxpayers by clarifying before the single currency comes into existence on 1 January 1999 how transactions and contracts involving participating currencies will be treated for tax purposes.

Alcohol and Tobacco Fraud

Mr. Caplin: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when the Government will publish the outcome of the Alcohol and Tobacco Fraud Review. [53548]

Dawn Primarolo: The report is being published today and copies will be placed in the Libraries of the House. HM Customs and Excise will be issuing a press release setting out how the resources made available by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer, as part of the Comprehensive Spending Review, are to be developed.

Departmental Environmental Policies

Mr. Edward Davey: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what steps he *(a)* has taken, and *(b)* plans to take, to discourage car use by his Department's employees. [52407]

Mrs. Liddell *[holding answer 27 July 1998]:* In line with Government policy, the Treasury has set a target to have Green Transport Plans in place by March 1999. We are currently preparing the first draft of our Green Transport Plan and within this we are taking the opportunity to review our car parking policy.

Mr. Edward Davey: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the current energy consumption of his Department; what targets have been set to reduce this

level; and what plans there are for including energy efficiency performance figures in his Department's annual report. [52408]

Mrs. Liddell *[holding answer 27 July 1998]:* The Treasury's energy consumption figures up to and including 1996–97 were incorporated in the Government estate energy efficiency performance tables which were announced by the Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, my hon. Friend for Wallasey (Angela Eagle) to my hon. Friend the Member for Sunderland, North (Mr. Etherington) on 1 April 1998, *Official Report*, columns *529–30*. Energy performance figures for 1997–98 are not yet available.

The Department supports the Government's target to achieve a 20 per cent. improvement over 1990 levels by 31 March 2000.

The Department will consider including energy performance figures in its annual report in the light of core requirements.

Mr. Edward Davey: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what percentage of his Department's waste is recycled at present; and what targets have been set for increasing this percentage in the future. [52409]

Mrs. Liddell *[holding answer 27 July 1998]:* 11 per cent. of the Treasury's waste was recycled during 1997–98. We are currently revising and updating the Department's Domestic Environment Policy and are considering what targets we can realistically set to increase this percentage of waste we recycle.

Economic Forecasts

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the forecast issued on 22 July by the National Institute of Economic and Social Research; and what assessment he has made of the areas in which it diverges from his Department's Economic and Financial Strategy report. [52528]

Mrs. Liddell *[holding answer 27 July 1998]:* The Treasury regularly monitors a wide range of independent forecasts for the UK economy, none of which we would expect to be identical to our own. In this particular case, the National Institute projections for the economy are not very different from those set out in the Budget and Economic and Fiscal Strategy Reports or indeed the independent consensus. The Institute noted that their forecast showed the Government's fiscal objectives being broadly met.

Competitiveness

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what steps his Department is taking to improve the competitiveness of United Kingdom firms. [52394]

Mr. Geoffrey Robinson *[holding answer 27 July 1998]:* The Government are pursuing long term economic policies which will allow firms to improve their performance and competitiveness over time.

The Government have introduced a wide range of policies since May last year to promote enterprise. These include cutting both the main and small business rates of corporation tax to their lowest ever levels, and the lowest of any major industrialised country.

The Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR) introduces new spending plans, including over £1 billion of investment in the UK's science and engineering base.

Together with the President of the Board of Trade the Chancellor is conducting a series of seminars with leading business people addressing the wide productivity gap between Britain and our main competitors. In addition the Government are undertaking a wide ranging review of the UK's R&D performance.

Minimum Wage

Mr. Derek Twigg: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the Government's policy on tax-relieved profit-related pay in relation to *(a)* the proposed national minimum wage legislation and *(b)* the existing agricultural minimum wage legislation; and if he will make a statement. [53679]

Mrs. Liddell: The Government accept the Low Pay Commission's recent recommendation that incentive payments—and, in particular, payments of tax-relieved profit-related pay (PRP)—should be included in the earnings that count towards the National Minimum Wage. This represents a significant step towards achieving the Commission's aspiration that the definition of the National Minimum Wage should be "simple and fair". Also, in order to ensure that employers and employees in the agricultural sector are subject to the same PRP rules as employers and employees in other business sectors, the present PRP rule that tax-relieved PRP should not count towards the existing agricultural minimum wage, will be repealed in the Finance Act 1999, with retrospective effect from today. This change will not affect an agricultural worker's right to be paid at least the appropriate agricultural wage—which must not be less than the National Minimum Wage.

Departmental Vehicles

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many of the vehicles due for replacement by *(a)* his Department and *(b)* bodies listed in the National Asset Register in (i) 1998–99, (ii) 1999–2000 and (iii) 2000–01 will be replaced by vehicles using (1) petrol, (2) diesel, (3) natural gas, (4) electric batteries and (5) other. [52622]

Mrs. Liddell: The number and fuel types of the vehicles which are due for replacement in the years in question are as follows:

	Replacements		
Fuel type	*1998–99*	*1999–01*	*2000–01*
(a) Vehicles owned or leased by the Chancellor of the Exchequer's Departments			
Petrol	733	736	739
Diesel	203	204	207
Natural gas	1	3	5
(b) Bodies listed in the National Assets Register			
Petrol	4	1	4

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 23 July 1998, *Official Report*, columns *653–54*, concerning the National Asset Register, how the information on the numbers of vehicles was collected. [53038]

Mrs. Liddell: From information provided by the relevant organisations, namely National Savings and the Bank of England.

Employment Service (Privatisation)

Mr. Brady: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate his Department has made of the value of the Employment Service if sold to the private sector. [52796]

Mr. Byers: The Government have made no such estimate.

Taxation (Investment Income)

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 23 July 1998, *Official Report*, column *652*, concerning the reclaim of 10 per cent. tax credit, when he expects to conclude his review and announce a decision. [53036]

Mr. Geoffrey Robinson: I shall announce the outcome of my review as soon as I am in a position to do so.

Child Benefit

Mr. Duncan Smith: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what savings he estimates will arise from switching child benefit to the Education Maintenance Allowance for children between the ages of 16 to 18 years. [53123]

Mr. Byers: The details of the Education Maintenance Allowance pilots are being worked up. The Secretary of State for Education and Employment will make an announcement on the pilots in due course.

Cycling

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what parking facilities for cycles exist at each office or site for which his Department is responsible and for each agency for which he is responsible. [52672]

Mrs. Liddell: The Treasury has 60 covered cycle parking spaces in the GOGGS building in Parliament Street and 5 in the satellite office in Allington Towers. Information for the Chancellor's other Departments and agencies is not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what proportion of the employees of his Department and of the employees of each agency for which he is responsible cycle to work; and what measures he plans to increase that proportion. [52673]

Mrs. Liddell: From an analysis of the number of cycles stored in the department's buildings, it appears that approximately 5 per cent. of Treasury employees cycled to work. A more detailed figure could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Measures to increase the proportion of employees cycling to work are being considered as part of the development of green transport plans for buildings occupied by the Department and its Agencies.

Disabled Person's Tax Credit

Mr. Burns: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the pilot areas for the disabled person's tax credit, the number of people in the target groups and the report date for the disabled person's tax credit pilot schemes. [52998]

Mrs. Liddell: There are no plans to pilot the Disabled Person's Tax Credit before it is introduced in October 1999.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Government Car Service

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster how many cars are currently made available from the Government Car Service for the use of the Prime Minister; and how many cars were made available to his predecessor in 1996–97. [52316]

Mr. Kilfoyle: Two secure cars, a Daimler and a back-up car, are made available from the Government Car Service for the use of the Prime Minister.

The same number were made available to his predecessor in 1996–97.

New Deal

Mr. Healey: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster how many people his Department is committed to employing during this calendar year under *(a)* the subsidised job option and *(b)* the unsubsidised job option of the New Deal programme. [52580]

Mr. Kilfoyle: For the purposes of this question, this department includes the office of the Prime Minister.

The Cabinet Office, including its agencies, is committed to employing five people during this calendar year under the subsidised option of the New Deal Programme. The extent of our participation in the unsubsidised job option depends upon the number of vacancies for jobs which arise.

Public Bodies

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will list the non-departmental public bodies the Government have *(a)* established and *(b)* abolished since 1 May 1997. [52569]

Mr. Kilfoyle *[holding answer 27 July 1998]:* Since 1 May 1997, the Government have established 25 NDPBs and abolished 39. These are listed. Additional proposals to create NDPBs to deliver the Government's Manifesto commitments, and to abolish further bodies, have also been announced; a number of these will be subject to Parliamentary approval. Ministers will continue to examine all the NDPBs they sponsor with a view to identifying further candidates for abolition.

NDPBS established since 1 May	*NDPBS abolished since 1 May*
Advisory Committee for Disabled People in Employment and Training	Advisory Committee for the Joint Environmental Markets Unit
Better Regulation Task Force	Advisory Committee on Design Quality in the NHS
British Potato Council	Advisory Committee on Plant and Machinery
Civil Justice Council	Agricultural Advisory Panel for Wales
Civil Procedure Rule Committee	Assessment Panel for Construction Research
Commission for Racial Equality (NI)	Citizen's Charter Panel of Advisers
Development Awareness Working Group	Deregulation Task Force
Disability Rights Task Force	Local Government Staff Commission (England)
Expert Panel on Sustainable Development Education	National Advisory Council for the Employment of People with Disabilities
Expert Group on Airborne Particles	National Council for Vocational Qualifications
Expert Group on Cryptosporidium in Water Supplies	Northern Ireland Citizen's Advisory Group
Football Task Force	Race Relations Employment Advisory Group
Historic Royal Palaces	Regional Panels in MAFF (9)
National Endowment for Science, Technology and the Arts	School Curriculum and Assessment Authority
National Museums and Galleries of Northern Ireland	Scottish Economic Council
New Deal Task Force	Scottish Seed Potato Development Council
New Opportunities Fund	Staff Commission for Wales
Police Information Technology Organisation	Supported Employment Advisory Group
Qualifications and Curriculum Authority	Treasure Trove Reviewing Committee
Race Relations Forum	Ulster Folk and Transport Museum
Royal Commission on Long Term Care of the Elderly	Ulster Museum
Security Vetting Appeals Panel	Urban Development Corporations (9)
Skills Task Force	Welsh Council for Postgraduate Medical and Dental Education
Spectrum Management Advisory Group	
Treasure Valuation Committee	

Pendle Witches

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will take steps to open to the public those dungeons at Lancaster Castle, which held the Pendle witches. [52400]

Dr. John Cunningham *[holding answer 27 July 1998]:* The dungeons which are alleged to have held the Pendle witches are located in that part of the Castle which is let to Lancashire County Council and which is sub-let to the Home Office for use as a prison, although the dungeons are not in use for that purpose. It is not possible to provide access to the dungeons other than through the Prison area.

No. 10 Policy Unit

Mr. Baker: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if the telephone logs relating to the No. 10 Policy Unit would be available for public inspection under the proposals within the Freedom of Information White Paper. [52845]

Mr. Kilfoyle: In considering the disclosure of information, the Government currently apply the provisions of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information (Second Edition, published on 14 January 1997). Disclosure under our Freedom of Information proposals would depend, as with any such information, on an assessment of the substantial harm and public interest tests that are integral to the access provisions described in the White Paper.

Departmental Vehicles

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster how many of the vehicles due for replacement by *(a)* his Department and *(b)* bodies listed in the National Asset Register in (i) 1998–99, (ii) 1999–2000 and (iii) 2000–01 will be replaced by vehicles using (1) petrol, (2) diesel, (3) natural gas, (4) electric batteries and (5) other. [52626]

Mr. Kilfoyle: This answer covers the Prime Minister's Office, the Cabinet Office (including its Agencies), but excludes the Government Car and Despatch Agency, for which I have asked its Chief Executive, Mr. Nick Matheson, to reply to the hon. Member direct.

A total of 65 vehicles are leased, of which 17 fall due for replacement during 1998–99. 14 of these will use unleaded petrol and three will use diesel. 44 of the remaining 48 vehicles become due for replacement during 1999–2000, of which six will use unleaded petrol and 38 will use diesel. The replacement of the remaining four vehicles will depend on the success, or otherwise, of a PFI exercise currently under way. Should it prove necessary to replace them, it will be done on a like for like basis. There are no vehicles due for replacement in 2000–01.

Letter from Nick Matheson to Mr. Paul Burstow, dated July 1998:

The Parliamentary Secretary, Office of Public Service, has asked me in my capacity as Chief Executive of the Government Car and Despatch Agency to reply to your Parliamentary Question about this Agency's vehicle replacement programme.

As I stated in my letter of 21 July I anticipate replacing a total of 172 vehicles over the next three years.

This Agency has been investigating the use of alternative fuels since 1993. In November 1997 the Prime Minister announced that this Agency would be replacing its car fleet over the next five years with vehicles that can run on both gas and petrol. The figures quoted for gas refer to these bi-fuelled vehicles. Replacement of petrol only fuelled vehicles will continue where there are no gas conversions available for replacement models, or where security or other factors require petrol only fuelled vehicles to be retained.

The Agency has also looked at the use of electric powered vehicles, and worked closely with Ford on the development of its Ecostar van. However, these alternatives are not yet commercially viable.

An exact breakdown of the information you requested is set out in the following table:

Year	Petrol	Diesel	Gas	Electric	Other
1998–99	23	19	20	0	0
1999–2000	9	20	10	0	0
2000–01	26	19	26	0	0

Cycling

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what proportion of the employees of his Department and of the employees of each agency for which he is responsible cycle to work; and what measures he plans to increase that proportion. [52669]

Mr. Kilfoyle: For the purposes of this question this Department includes the Office of the Prime Minister. My Department and its agencies do not formally monitor the use of the cycling parking facilities that are available. Consequently, we cannot give an estimate of the number of employees that cycle to work.

Measures to increase the proportion of employees cycling to work are being considered as part for the development of green transport plans for buildings occupied by the Department and its agencies.

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what parking facilities for cycles exist at each office or site for which his Department is responsible and for each agency for which he is responsible. [52668]

Mr. Kilfoyle: The Cabinet Office and its Agencies have a total of 203 cycling spaces in their buildings, broken down as follows:

Buildings	Number
Cabinet Office	
Central London Sites	126
Basingstoke	18
Agencies	
Civil Service College, Sunningdale	8
PACE	
London Office	25
Manchester	6
CCTA	
Norwich	20
COI	
Central London Office	8 with proposal to increase to 26

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Civil Servants

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many civil servants in his Department *(a)* have a degree in science and *(b)* have held a position using that expertise. [50897]

Mr. Morley: We do not have the information in precisely the form requested. However, within core MAFF there are approximately 900 staff who have professional/vocational qualifications and are working in posts for which their qualifications are directly relevant, although not all of these will have science degrees. From the remaining 5,900 staff it is not possible to separately identify for statistical purposes those with science degrees who have held relevant posts.

The Executive Agencies are the responsibility of their Chief Executives. I have asked them to reply direct to my hon. Friend.

Letter from Dr. J. M. Rutter to Dr. Ian Gibson, dated 28 July 1998:

The Minister has asked me to reply to your question about the number of civil servants in the Veterinary Medicines Directorate a) who have a degree in science and b) have held a position using that expertise.

There are currently 39 staff in the veterinary and scientific grades, 37 of whom have a degree in science. Of the remaining staff it is not possible to identify separately those with science degrees who have held relevant posts.

Letter from G. K. Bruce to Dr. Ian Gibson, dated 28 July 1998:

The Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food has asked me to reply, in respect of the Pesticides Safety Directorate (PSD), to your question concerning how many civil servants in the Agency have a degree in science and have held a position using that expertise.

There are currently 123 staff in scientific grades and the vast majority of these have relevant degrees. From the remaining 89 staff in other grades it is not possible to identify for statistical purposes those with science degrees who have held relevant posts.

Letter from T. W. A. Little to Dr. Ian Gibson, dated 28 July 1998:

The Minister has asked me to reply to your question on how many civil servants in his Department (a) have a degree in science and (b) have held a position using that expertise.

In the VLA, there are currently 549 staff in scientific grades and the majority of these have relevant degrees. From the remaining 568 staff in other grades it is not possible to separately identify for statistical purposes those with science degrees who have held relevant posts.

Letter from Dr. V. J. Bye to Dr. Ian Gibson, dated 28 July 1998:

In the absence of the Agency Chief Executive, I am responding to your question to the Minister of Agriculture in relation to the Centre for Environment, Fisheries and Aquaculture Science Agency (CEFAS). Your question related to the number of civil servants with science degrees.

In the CEFAS Agency at 1 April 1998, of 233 staff in professional grades (mainly scientific and technical), the breakdown is:

a) 181 with a degree in science

b) 127 holding a position directly using that expertise

If you require further information please contact me.

Letter from Johnston McNeill to Dr. Ian Gibson, dated 28 July 1998:

As Chief Executive of the Meat Hygiene Service (MHS), your question to the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food enquiring about the number of civil servants who have a degree in science and who have held a position using that expertise has been passed to me to respond as regards this Executive Agency.

The MHS is responsible for enforcing meat hygiene, inspection and animal welfare at slaughter legislation in all licensed fresh meat premises in Great Britain. The MHS directly employs 48 veterinary staff, and contracts the services of 156 veterinary staff (on a full

time equivalent basis), all of whom have a relevant degree in science and operate as Official Veterinary Surgeons in licensed premises using that expertise.

Letter from Sarah Nason to Dr. Ian Gibson, dated 28 July 1998:

The Minister has asked me to reply, in respect of the Farming and Rural Conservation Agency (FRCA), to your question about how many civil servants have (a) a degree in science and (b) held a position using that expertise.

In FRCA there are currently 317 staff in professional grades and the vast majority of these have degrees which are relevant to their current positions. For the remaining staff it is not possible to identify separately for statistical purposes those with science degrees who have held relevant posts.

Letter from P. I. Stanley to Dr. Ian Gibson, dated 28 July 1998:

The Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food has asked me to reply, in respect of the Central Science Laboratory (CSL), to your question concerning the number of staff who hold a degree in science and have held a position using that expertise.

CSL currently employs 637 staff, 482 staff are employed on scientific work and of these 276 hold relevant degrees. In addition, 29 of the 155 staff employed in support positions hold a science degree and the majority are employed in a capacity that utilises this expertise.

Grants and Awards (Wakefield)

Yvette Cooper: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the grants and awards that require bids from applicants which his Department is responsible for administering and awarding *(a)* nationally and *(b)* that people and groups within Wakefield Metropolitan District are eligible to bid for; if he will publish the deadlines for these applications; and if he will produce this list on a regular basis. [51267]

Mr. Morley: The Department administers a wide range of grants and awards for which individuals and groups may apply. Some schemes are open to application from Local Authorities; however, the majority are in support of individual farmers or landowners. The geographical area to which they apply varies according to the objectives of the scheme. Comprehensive information about the Department's national grants and awards for the year ending March 1998 is contained within the 1998 Departmental Report (Cm 3904), copies of which have been placed in the Library of the House.

Organophosphates

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what research his Department is conducting into the possible link between the use of organophosphates and the spread of BSE; and if he will make a statement. [52108]

Mr. Rooker: The Spongiform Encephalopathy Advisory Committee (SEAC) has not found any evidence of a link between BSE and the use of organophosphates. The EU Commission's Scientific Steering Committee reached a similar conclusion in June. SEAC feels that consideration of a role for organophosphates in the epidemiology of BSE is an area where more work could usefully be done, but has not recommended to Government that it should be given priority over other research.

Horses

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what steps his Department is taking to prevent the potential loss of native-breed, semi-feral horse bloodlines; and what plans he has to introduce a compulsory register for all equines. [52101]

Mr. Rooker: The various semi-feral horse breed societies and associations do a lot of valuable work in preserving, maintaining and promoting semi-feral horse breeds. The Government believe the breed societies themselves are best placed to do this work. The Zootechnical Standards Regulations 1992 already exist to protect recognised horse breed societies and their members. The Government have no plans to introduce a compulsory register for all equines.

Tuberculosis

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what safeguards exist to prevent the entry of identified TB infected cattle into the human food chain; and if he will make a statement. [52104]

Mr. Rooker: All fresh meat produced in Great Britain which is intended to be sold for human consumption must be produced in licensed premises in accordance with the requirements of the Fresh Meat (Hygiene and Inspection) Regulations 1995. The Regulations, which implement the EC Fresh Meat Directive (64/433/EEC), require, amongst other things, full ante-mortem and post-mortem veterinary checks and health marking of the resulting meat at all stages of production. In Great Britain, veterinary supervision and meat inspection in licensed meat plants is carried out by the Meat Hygiene Service.

Under the Regulations, no animal may be slaughtered for human consumption if, at the ante-mortem health inspection, it shows any clinical signs of any disease which can be transmitted through fresh meat to humans, including tuberculosis. In addition, where it is found at post-mortem inspection that an animal was suffering from generalised tuberculosis or tuberculosis with emaciation, the Regulations require that the whole carcase be rejected as unfit for human consumption. Where only localised lesions of tuberculosis are found, these parts of the carcase must be rejected as unfit for human consumption.

The risk of contracting bovine tuberculosis by eating improperly cooked contaminated meat is considered to be extremely small, and there have been no recorded instances of the transmission of the disease to humans by this route. I am satisfied that these procedures provide appropriate public health safeguards.

Asbestos

Mr. Cox: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what guidance his Department issues to those constructing buildings for which it is responsible on the use of materials containing asbestos. [52305]

Mr. Morley: The Department issues no guidance to those constructing its buildings on the use of material containing asbestos. Our contractors, however, must guarantee not to use asbestos.

An asbestos register is maintained of our existing buildings and those working on them must take responsibility to comply with all health and safety requirements pertaining to asbestos.

Farming Diversification

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what proposals his Department has to promote diversification in farming. [52118]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 24 July 1998]:* Funding to encourage a wide range of agricultural activities, including farm diversification, is available in the six areas designated to receive assistance under the English Objective 5b Structural Fund Programmes. No grant aid for farm diversification is available outside these areas. However, in order to assist farmers in developing successful diversified enterprises, the Ministry has produced a series of advisory booklets on farm diversification.

Hill Farming

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the recent trends in the number of hill farmers. [52114]

Mr. Rooker *[holding answer 24 July 1998]:* The table sets out the number of farmers classified as being in the Less Favoured Area (LFA) of England from 1990 to 1997:

Year	*Full-time*	*Part-time*	*Total*
1990	12,741	3,690	16,431
1991	12,437	3,965	16,402
1992	12,503	4,096	16,599
1993	12,514	4,334	16,848
1994	12,115	4,298	16,413
1995	11,713	4,030	15,743
1996	11,160	3,878	15,038
1997	10,738	3,859	14,597

Over the period 1990–1997 there has been a reduction in the number of full-time farmers and an increase in the number of part-time farmers in the English LFA. This trend is broadly consistent with the overall decline in the number of farmers in agriculture generally. Our aim is to contribute to the well-being of rural communities in upland areas by promoting a viable and sustainable farm sector. We will continue to pursue this aim with appropriate support for hill farmers.

Lobsters

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) what assessment he has made of the success of artificial lobster reefs off *(a)* Louisiana and *(b)* Hong Kong in relation to similar proposals by the Harwich Haven Authority; and if he will make a statement; [52481]

(2) what is his assessment of the effects of the dumping of dredging material on the catch rate of lobsters off the North Essex coast; [52483]

(3) what environmental safeguards he will demand to ensure the viability of the lobster fishery off the North Essex coast; [52482]

(4) what is his assessment of the environmental impact of the Harwich Haven Authority's proposals to dump dredging material on the Tails of Rough in the North Sea; and if he will make a statement. [52480]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 27 July 1998]:* I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to him on 22 April 1998, *Official Report*, column *666*.

Although no final decisions have yet been taken on the licence applications, Harwich Haven Authority (HHA) are proposing that the stiff clay and rock materials will be carefully placed to form a bund at the Roughs Tower disposal site and part of that site would then be capped with gravel and rock material to provide suitable reef habitat for lobsters. In considering the design of this reef, Ministry scientists are taking account of the experience gained in a number of artificial reef experiments both in the US and in Hong Kong.

Recognising concerns about the possibility of fine grained material drifting onto adjacent lobster fisheries, HHA, with assistance from Ministry scientists and in consultation with fishermen, have been investigating a new disposal site further offshore. It is the Authority's intention that all dispersible silty material from the Harwich dredging work would be deposited at this site except where other beneficial uses for it are proposed.

It would be a condition of any licence which might be issued that HHA should undertake a rigorous monitoring programme to ensure that there are no adverse impacts of a disposal operation on all aspects of the marine environment including the North Essex lobster fishery. That programme would also study the behaviour of the dredged material and the speed of recruitment of lobsters and crabs to the reef. In addition, HHA have offered to supply additional juvenile lobsters to increase stock on the reef in due course.

Seeds Regulations

Mr. Baker: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food for what reasons the requirements of the Seeds (National Lists of Varieties) Regulations 1982 were not complied with in the matter which was the subject of Regina v Secretary of State for the Environment and MAFF ex parte Watson. [52495]

Mr. Rooker *[holding answer 27 July 1998]:* Regulation 11(3) of the Seeds (National Lists of Varieties) Regulations 1982 (as amended) provides, for certain species, that no application shall be entertained for entry of a variety in a National List unless it is accompanied by the results of replicated trials undertaken in the UK.

The requirement to submit the results of replicated trials was introduced to reduce the volume of National List applications for the common species to a manageable level. Its purpose was to encourage breeders to screen varieties before entering them into the statutory system and to deter them from entering varieties which had little chance of addition to the National List, at a time when the trialling system was overloaded and also heavily subsidised by the tax payer. Some limited use was made of the results of these trials, but only to persuade applicants to withdraw applications with little chance of success. The results of breeders' replicated trials were never used in reaching decisions on whether a variety should be added to the National List.

A fundamental review of the National List trials system was undertaken in 1992, in consultation with plant breeders. Following this, a streamlined system of trials for Value for Cultivation and Use (VCU) was introduced, which reduced the burdens on the trials system. The staged reintroduction of fees for official VCU trials in 1994 and 1995 reinforced these measures.

The requirement to submit the results of replicated trials had no value once the pressure on the system was relieved. It was felt that a requirement to provide information which served no purpose and which was not used placed an unnecessary and unjustifiable burden on applicants. In accordance with the Court of Appeal judgment, I am seeking urgent legal advice on how the position can be resolved speedily and across the board for all plant varieties affected by the judgment.

Pesticides Safety Directorate

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he will publish the 1997–98 Annual Report and Accounts for the Pesticides Safety Directorate. [53599]

Mr. Rooker: I am pleased to announce that the 1997–98 Annual Report and Accounts for the Pesticides Safety Directorate were laid before Parliament today. Copies are available in the Library of the House.

I should like to congratulate all staff on their achievements during the year.

Veterinary Medicines Directorate

Ms Jenny Jones: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he will publish the 1997–98 Annual Report and Accounts for the Veterinary Medicines Directorate. [53674]

Mr. Rooker: I am pleased to announce that the 1997–98 Annual Report and Accounts for the Veterinary Medicines Directorate were laid before Parliament today. Copies are available in the Library of the House.

I should like to congratulate all staff on their achievements during the year.

Meat Hygiene Service

Angela Smith: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he will publish the 1997–98 Annual Report and Accounts for the Meat Hygiene Service. [53675]

Mr. Rooker: I am pleased to announce that the 1997–98 Annual Report and Accounts for the Meat Hygiene Service were laid before Parliament today. Copies are available in the Library of the House.

I should like to congratulate all staff on their achievements during the year.

Central Science Laboratory

Dr. Iddon: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he will publish the 1997–98 Annual Report and Accounts for the Central Science Laboratory. [53676]

Mr. Rooker: I am pleased to announce that the 1997–98 Annual Report and Accounts for the Central Science Laboratory were laid before Parliament today. Copies are available in the Library of the House.

I should like to congratulate all staff on their achievements during the year.

Livestock Research

Mr. Evans: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, pursuant to his answer of 6 July 1998, *Official Report*, column *415*, if he will make a statement on the terms of reference of his Department's research into livestock science. [53232]

Mr. Rooker: The Department's research into livestock science aims to assist in creating conditions in which a competitive and sustainable livestock industry can thrive in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Evans: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list those organisations which have contributed financially to his Department's research into livestock science. [53202]

Mr. Rooker: The following organisations have, within the last 5 years, contributed financially to the Department's research into livestock science:

Acorn House Veterinary Surgery
ADAS Consulting Ltd.
Agricultural Research Institute of Northern Ireland
Anglo Beef Producers
Associated British Nutrition Ltd.
British Association of Green Crop Driers Ltd.
Barclays Bank
Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council
BOCM Pauls Ltd.
Borregaard UK Ltd.
BP Nutrition
British Pig Association
Carrs Agriculture
Cobb Breeding Company
Cotswold Pig Development Company
Criddle Billington Feeds Ltd.
Dalgety Agriculture Ltd.
Dalgety plc
David Filmer Ltd.
Dengie Crops Ltd.
Department of Agriculture, Northern Ireland
Department of Trade and Industry
Dynamic Nutrition Services Ltd.
Ecosyl Products Ltd.
FAC
Frank Wright (Feeds) Ltd.
Genus Management
Germinal Holdings
Hanford Feeds Ltd.
Hannah Research Institute
Heygate and Sons Ltd.
Hoechst
Holstein Friesian Society
Hydro Agri

Ivor Bending
J. Bibby Agriculture Ltd.
Johnson's Seeds
John Thompson and Sons Ltd.
JSR Healthbred
Maize Growers Association
Massey Bros. (Feeds) Ltd.
Meat and Livestock Commission
Milk Development Council
Mole Valley Farmers
Newsham Hybrid Pigs Ltd.
Nutec Ltd.
Nutrico
Nutrition Services (International) Ltd.
NWF Agriculture Ltd.
Pedigree Pet Foods
Pig Improvement Company Ltd.
Premier Poultry Ltd.
Purina Mills
Pye Farm Feeds
Rattlerow Farms
Rhone-Poulenc Animal Nutrition
Roche Products
Roslin Institute (Edinburgh)
Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals
SAC
Scottish Office Agriculture, Environment and Fisheries Department
Scottish Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals
Stonefield Systems Plc
Tesco Stores plc
Trident Feeds
UK Association of Fish Meal Manufacturers
UM Group
United Distillers
Wynnstay & Clwyd Farmers plc.

Compliance Cost Assessments

Mr. Lansley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list those compliance cost assessments since 1 May 1997 in which there is a net reduction in compliance costs resulting from a legislative proposal. [52969]

Mr. Morley: There is presently no requirement on Departments to carry out Compliance Cost Assessments where legislative proposals are expected to be cost neutral or resulting in a saving to business. However, between 1 May 1997 and 30 June 1998, the Department has published the following Compliance Cost Assessments or Regulatory Appraisals which show a net reduction in estimated compliance costs:

Potatoes Originating in the Netherlands Regulations 1997

Home Grown Cereal Authority (Rate of Levy) Order 1998

Plastic Materials in Contact With Food Regulations 1998.

Mr. Lansley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the compliance cost assessments published by his Department since 1 May 1997. [52967]

Mr. Morley: For the period 1 May 1997 to 31 December 1997, details of Compliance Cost Assessments or Regulatory Appraisals published by the Department are contained in Command Papers CM 3801 "Compliance Cost Assessments: 1 January 1997 to 30 June 1997" and CM 3938 "Compliance Cost Assessments: 1 July 1997 to 31 December 1997", copies of which are available in the Library of the House.

For the period 1 January 1998 to 30 June 1998, Compliance Cost Assessments or Regulatory Appraisals which the Department has published to accompany legislation are as follows:

January

The Beef Carcase (Classification) (Amendment) Regulations 1998

The Feeding Stuffs (Amendment) Regulations 1998

February

The Spreadable Fats (Marketing Standards) Amendment Regulations 1998

The Specified Animal Pathogens Order 1998

The Sugar Beet (Research and Education) Order 1998

The CAP (Wine) (Amendment) Regulations 1998—amending The CAP (Wine) Regulations 1996 (The Principal Regulations)

March

The Beef Labelling (Enforcement) Regulations 1998

The Cattle Identification Regulations 1998

April

The Fertilisers (Mammalian Meat and Bone Meal) Regulations 1998

The Medicines (Exemptions for Merchants in Veterinary Drugs) Order 1998

The Feeding Stuffs (Establishments and Intermediaries) Regulations 1998

The Plant Breeders Rights (Fees) Regulations 1998

The Seeds (National Lists of Varieties) (Fees) (Amendment) Regulations 1998

The Plant Breeders Rights (Information and Notices) (Extension to European Plant Variety Rights) Regulations 1998

The Plant Breeders Rights (Information Notices) Regulations 1998

The Bovines and Bovine Products (Trade) Regulations 1998

The Implementation of Council Directive 96/51/EC Amending Directive 70/524/EEC Concerning Additives in Feeding Stuffs. This Regulatory Appraisal was prepared for the parent Directive for the four Statutory Instruments listed below:

The Medicines (Sale or Supply) (Miscellaneous Provisions) Amendment Regulations 1998

The Medicated Feeding Stuffs Regulations 1998

The Feeding Stuffs (Zootechnical Products) Regulations 1998

The Medicated Feeding Stuffs and The Feeding Stuffs (Zootechnical Products) (Consequential Provisions) Regulations 1998

May

The Action Programme for Nitrate Vulnerable Zones (England and Wales) Regulations 1998

The Razor Shells, Trough Shells and Carpet Shells (Specified Sea Area) (Prohibition of Fishing) Order 1998

The Welfare of Livestock (Amendment) Regulations 1998

The Home Grown Cereals Authority (Rate of Levy) Order 1998

June

The Food Labelling (Amendment) Regulations 1998

The Seeds (Fees) (Amendment) Regulations 1998

The Plastic Materials and Articles in Contact with Food Regulations 1998.

Mr. Lansley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what the cumulative net increase in compliance costs has been estimated in compliance cost assessments published by his Department since 1 May 1997. [52968]

Mr. Morley: The cumulative net increase in compliance costs estimated in compliance cost assessments or regulatory appraisals published alongside new regulations made by the Department between 1 May 1997 and 30 June 1998 is £280 million, of which £55 million are non-recurring costs. £40 million of the possible recurring costs could result from certain products having to be withdrawn from sale but are likely to be largely offset by increased sales of alternative agrochemical products.

Bankrupt Farmers

Mr. Peter Bradley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many farmers were declared bankrupt in each of the last five financial years. [53174]

Mr. Morley: Data for the 1997–98 financial year are not yet available. The table sets out calendar year data.

Number of bankruptcies in the agricultural and horticultural sectors England and Wales 1993–1997

Year	*Bankruptcies of self-employed individuals*	*Company[1] insolvencies*	*Total*
1993	277	157	434
1994	231	166	397
1995	218	99	317
1996	168	89	257
1997	155	51	206

[1] Including partnerships

Source:

Department of Trade and Industry

Flooding (Peterborough)

Mrs. Brinton: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement concerning the responsibilities of statutory authorities to take action to *(a)* prevent and *(b)* give earlier warning of the risk of flooding within the area of the City of Peterborough. [52984]

Mr. Morley: The Environment Agency is the lead flood defence operating authority in England and Wales and has powers to undertake flood defences on designated Main Rivers, which include the River Nene. On non-main rivers, flood defence powers rest with local authorities or, in areas of special drainage need, with internal drainage boards.

The responsibility for disseminating flood warnings in England and Wales rests with the Environment Agency.

Cycling

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what parking facilities for cycles exist at each office or site for which his Department is responsible and for each agency for which he is responsible. [52670]

Mr. Morley: The Department and the Agencies are made up of more than 200 separate sites and this information is not readily available. The position at the Ministry's principal headquarters sites is as follows:

Ministry building	*Number of spaces*
Eastbury House, Albert Embankment, London	8
Nobel House/Ergon House, Smith Square, London	41
Whitehall Place and 55 Whitehall, London	20 plus secure space (not racks) for another 20
Epsom Road, Guildford	30
Hook Rise South, Tolworth	30
Kings Pool, York	210
Total	339 (+20)

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what proportion of the employees of his Department and of the employees of each agency for which he is responsible cycle to work; and what measures he plans to increase that proportion. [52671]

Mr. Morley: This information is not readily available. Measures to increase the proportion of employees cycling to work are being considered as part of the development of green transport plans for buildings occupied by the Department and its Agencies.

Fresh Meat (Beef Controls) (No. 2) Regulations

Mr. Evans: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list those countries excluded from the Fresh Meat (Beef Controls) (No. 2) Regulations 1996. [53198]

Mr. Rooker: The countries exempted from regulation 3(1) of the Fresh Meat (Beef Controls) (No. 2) Regulations 1996 are Argentina, Australia, Botswana, Brazil, Mauritius, Namibia, New Zealand, Paraguay, Poland, South Africa, Swaziland, Uruguay, United States of America and Zimbabwe.

Written Answers to Questions

Wednesday 29 July 1998

PRIME MINISTER

Royal Household

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Prime Minister what plans the Government have for funding the procurement of communication and information services for the Royal Household. [53933]

The Prime Minister: The cost of communication and information services in connection with official Royal functions and engagements which are currently the responsibility of the Central Office of Information will be met from funds provided to the Royal Household by way of grant-in-aid from the Central Office of Information Vote.

This change, which involves no increase in public expenditure, will bring the treatment of these costs into line with that of property services and travel. With this change, the Royal Household will assume financial control to match operational responsibility, with the continuing aim of achieving best value for money from this public money. Parliamentary accountability will follow the pattern of the existing grants-in-aid payable to the Royal Household, and there will be an annual report to Parliament.

Security Commission

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Prime Minister if he will make a statement about the membership of the Security Commission. [53934]

The Prime Minister: I have recently appointed Sir John Foley and Sir Clive Whitmore to serve as members of the Security Commission. They have succeeded Sir Derek Boorman and Sir Christopher Curwen.

The current membership of the Commission is:

The right hon. the Lord Lloyd of Berwick (Chairman)

The right hon. Lady Justice Butler-Sloss DBE (Alternative Chairman)

Sir John Blelloch KCB

Sir John Foley KCB OBE MC

Lord Tombs of Brailes

Sir Clive Whitmore GCB CVO

Lord Wright of Richmond.

PRESIDENT OF THE COUNCIL

Departmental Research

Mr. Fabricant: To ask the President of the Council if she will list the cost of all research undertaken by her Department since May 1997, excluding the cost of green papers and other public consultation documents drafted by her officials; and if she will list in each case the organisations which undertook that research. [52704]

Mrs. Beckett: No research has been commissioned by my Department since May 1997.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Refreshment Department

Mr. Barnes: To ask the Chairman of the Catering Committee what was the net cost of running the Refreshment Department outlets in the Palace of Westminster; and if he will list the major items of capital expenditure in 1997–98. [53026]

Mr. Dennis Turner: This information will be given in the Annual Report from the House of Commons Commission and in the Refreshment Department's Trading Account for 1997–98, neither of which has yet been published. I shall ensure that copies of both documents are sent to my hon. Friend as soon as they are available.

ENVIRONMENT, TRANSPORT AND THE REGIONS

New Settlements (Traffic)

Mr. Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what research his Department has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated into the traffic generating effects of smaller new settlements. [52264]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The Department has not yet commissioned research on the travel effects of smaller new settlements. The Department needs first to investigate the factors determining location decisions and how these in turn affect travel decisions in order to determine the travel generating characteristics of different patterns, types and scale of development. We hope to commission research in the next year.

Asbestos

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what guidance his Department issues to those constructing buildings for which it is responsible on the use of materials containing asbestos. [52306]

Mr. Meacher: The Department has published guidance on asbestos, "Asbestos Materials in Buildings", available from the Stationery Office.

Local Authority Housing

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what is the number of council-owned properties in the London Borough of Wandsworth that have been empty for *(a)* over three months, *(b)* over six months and *(c)* over one year; and if he will make a statement. [52287]

Mr. Raynsford: Details of the number of vacant council dwellings on 1 April, by reason for vacancy and time vacant are collected from local authorities for the annual Housing Investment Programme exercise. Wandsworth's 1997 return reported a total of 134 dwellings vacant for over 6 weeks and up to 6 months, 46 vacant for over 6 months and up to one year and 37 vacant for over year. The data collected do not separately identify dwellings vacant for over 3 months.

New Deal

Mr. Healey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many people his Department is committed to employing during 1998 under *(a)* the subsidised job option and *(b)* the unsubsidised job option of the New Deal programme. [52587]

Mr. Meacher: Within my Department, some ten posts have so far been identified as suitable for young people under the job option (whether subsidised or unsubsidised) of the New Deal programme. We aim to fill as many of these posts as possible through the programme, subject to suitable candidates being found.

Railways

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (1) if he will ensure that adequate investment in new rolling stock is promised by rail operators before extending rail franchises; [52519]

(2) what targets he will lay down for rail operators to meet before rail franchises are extended. [52518]

Ms Glenda Jackson: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave on 28 October 1997, *Official Report,* column *806*, and the statement made by my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister on 20 July 1998, *Official Report,* column 786. The early re-negotiation or extension of franchises will be considered only where train operators offer improved investment and services and more demanding performance standards on a basis that provides value for public money. Cases will be considered on their merits against these objectives.

Bus Companies

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what initiatives he has taken to encourage public-private partnerships between bus companies and local authorities. [52520]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The further development of bus Quality Partnerships between local authorities and operators is an important part of the proposals announced in *New Deal for transport.* We will introduce legislation to put such partnerships on a firmer footing by giving them a statutory basis. They will also form part of the new local transport plans to be drawn up by local authorities as described in the White Paper.

Quarry Sites

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will amend the provisions of the Environment Act 1995 covering the reactivation of dormant and active quarry sites to provide greater protection for *(a)* areas of outstanding natural beauty, *(b)* sites of special interest and *(c)* other environmentally sensitive locations; and if he will make a statement. [52322]

Mr. Raynsford: We have no plans to amend the Environment Act 1995. The powers in Schedule 13 to the Act to review old mineral permissions and ensure that they are brought up to date with modern operating and restoration conditions are generally working well.

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many quarry sites for which mining permission has been approved since the implementation of Schedule 13 of the Environment Act 1995 are *(a)* wholly and *(b)* partly within (i) sites of special scientific interest and (ii) areas of outstanding natural beauty. [52321]

Mr. Raynsford: This information is not held centrally.

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many dormant quarry sites have been reactivated since the implementation of Schedule 13 to the Environment Act 1995. [52320]

Mr. Raynsford: According to information prepared by the Planning Officers' Society, there are 879 dormant sites in England and Wales. As at January 1997, 61 of these have had new conditions determined by mineral planning authorities, who are responsible for conducting minerals reviews under Schedule 13 to the 1995 Act. Dormant quarry sites cannot be re-activated until full modern conditions have been approved by the relevant mineral planning authority.

Traffic Diversions (Disruption)

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions under what circumstances compensation is payable to residents of properties on local authority roads who suffer disruption as a result of traffic diversions resulting from the temporary closure of nearby trunk roads. [52373]

Ms Glenda Jackson: There is no liability for loss of damage caused by the lawful exercise of statutory powers unless the statute provides a remedy or there has been some negligence by the authority in the way they have carried out their functions.

Brown Land

Miss Kirkbride: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will estimate the area of brown land in the *(a)* Dudley, *(b)* Sandwell, *(c)* Birmingham, *(d)* Wolverhampton, *(e)* Solihull and *(f)* Walsall local authorities. [52436]

Mr. Caborn: There is no specific definition of 'brown land', but it is usually taken to mean land previously developed for urban uses. This includes vacant previously developed and derelict land. Estimates of the amount of derelict land in each English local authority district were published in 'Survey of Derelict Land in England 1993', a copy of which is in the Library. Phase 1 of the National Land Use Database, for which I announced plans on 19 May, will provide information on previously developed vacant and derelict land, and vacant

buildings which may be available for development, for local authorities in England. Summary results are expected by March 1999.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will list *(a)* the standard spending assessments for 1997–98 and 1998–99, *(b)* the standard spending assessments for 1997–98 and 1998–99 as they would have been had the Elliot report on area cost adjustment been implemented and *(c)* the difference between these two figures expressed in (i) percentage, (ii) cash and (iii) pounds per head terms for (1) Buckinghamshire County Council, (2) Aylesbury Vale District Council, (3) Chiltern District Council, (4) South Buckinghamshire District Council, (5) Wycombe District Council and (6) Thames Valley Police Authority. [52633]

Ms Armstrong: The information requested is in tables that have been placed in the Library. They show the effects of re-calculating the standard spending assessments for 1997–98 and 1998–99 using the method of calculating the area cost adjustment proposed by the 1996 Review of the Area Cost Adjustment but keeping the indicators of need used in the current SSA formulae.

Mine Works (Pollution)

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what steps he is taking to assess the risks of pollution from waste flowing from old mine works. [52375]

Mr. Meacher: Contaminated minewaters from abandoned coal mines are dealt with by the Coal Authority under a prioritised programme agreed with the Environment Agency and the Scottish Environmental Protection Agency. The Authority spent £3 million in 1997–98 in tackling water pollution from abandoned coal mines, and this is anticipated to rise to £3.9 million in 1998–99. The Authority has undertaken detailed feasibility studies on 21 of the most environmentally significant overflows from abandoned mines, and works are in place or nearing completion at a number of these sites.

In addition, the Agency is continuing to operate the treatment plant at the Wheal Jane tin mine in Cornwall, having spent £9.5 million since 1990 on research and treatment. The Agency is also continuing to monitor the situation at the recently abandoned South Crofty tin mine in Cornwall, carrying out further work to predict the timing of any outbreak, the likely quality of the minewater discharge and the appropriate treatment options. Similar monitoring is being undertaken by the Agency at the recently abandoned Whittle coal mine in Northumberland.

Local Agenda 21 Initiatives

Dr. Stoate: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what support his Department *(a)* is giving and *(b)* plans to give to Local Agenda 21 initiatives (i) 1998–99, (ii) 1999–2000, (iii) 2000–01 and (iv) 2001–02. [52424]

Mr. Meacher: DETR's main role in the Local Agenda 21 process is to provide advice and encouragement to local authorities. In this capacity, during 1998–99 it is supporting the following, specific projects:

- Providing a telephone helpdesk and introductory guide for local authorities on the Eco-management and audit scheme (LA-EMAS)—£39,100.
- Supporting the collection and publication of best practice Local Agenda 21 case studies—£15,600.
- A seminar to consult on a menu of indicators of sustainable development for local use—£20,000.
- Contributing towards the cost of producing *Sustainable local communities for the 21st century* which provides guidance to local authorities on why and how to prepare an effective Local Agenda 21 strategy—£2,600.

In addition, through Government Offices, DETR supports a range of regional projects, events and seminars to promote Local Agenda 21, expenditure on which is estimated to be £55,000 during 1998–99.

At this stage, it is not possible to provide details of spending in future years.

Dr. Stoate: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many Local Agenda 21 initiatives include allotment groups. [52425]

Mr. Meacher: This information is not collected centrally.

Channel Tunnel Rail Link

Mr. Timms: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when he expects to announce his decisions on the applications for Transport and Works Act Orders for *(a)* Stratford International Station and *(b)* the Channel Tunnel Rail Link connection to the West Coast Main Line. [52593]

Ms Glenda Jackson: These proposed works are the subject of a single application, for the Channel Tunnel Rail Link (Stratford Station and Subsidiary Works) Order. The Inspector's report following the public local inquiry into this Order is being considered by the Secretary of State. A decision will be made as soon as possible.

Mr. Timms: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will provide a breakdown of the £3 billion benefits identified in A New Deal for Transport from the Channel Tunnel Rail Link. [52592]

Ms Glenda Jackson: It is anticipated that the Channel Tunnel Rail Link (CTRL) will provide £3 billion NPV of benefits to the UK comprising (with some overlaps between categories):

- £1,800 million from time savings to UK resident Eurostar passengers;
- £600 million from domestic services on the CTRL;
- £120 million of environmental and decongestion benefits;
- £1,000 million representing the regeneration programmes which would be required to deliver the same regeneration benefits as the CTRL.

Disabled People (Transport)

Mr. Amess: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make

a statement on the provisions in the Transport White Paper which will assist disabled people to be able to use public transport over the next 12 months. [52872]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The White Paper sets the framework to promote better transport choice for disabled people. Measures include implementation of the transport provisions of the Disability Discrimination Act, starting with the rail regulations which will apply accessibility requirements to rolling stock coming into service from 31 December 1998. Dates for implementation of the regulations requiring buses, coaches and licensed taxis to be accessible to disabled people will be set in the light of recent consultation.

Looking beyond the next 12 months, the new local transport plans will specifically address accessibility issues and the new Strategic Rail Authority will have a specific duty to promote the provision of accessible transport for disabled people.

Land-fill Tax Credits

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has to make available unused land-fill tax credits for environmental enhancement purposes. [52823]

Mr. Meacher: The Government have no power to compel landfill operators to make contributions to the Landfill Tax Credit Scheme. However, many have taken advantage of the tax credits available. £85.5 million has been contributed to date to fund schemes that provide clear environmental benefits including research into waste management, land reclamation and the provision of public amenity areas such as parks. HM Customs and Excise, together with other departments, are currently considering whether the scheme could be further improved, and in particular whether it could be amended to bring recycling within its scope.

Waste Management

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what criteria his Department uses to evaluate the environmental and waste management activity of local authorities. [52822]

Mr. Meacher: My Department does not systematically evaluate the waste management performance of individual local authorities. Different waste management choices will make environmental sense in different local authority areas, depending on geography and local markets.

Information and statistics on local authority waste management are available in "Municipal Waste Management 1995–96", published by my Department last year; data on 1996–97 are due to be published shortly.

The consultation paper "Less waste: more value" explains our view that there is a case for individual local authorities or regions to be given an indication of the contribution towards national targets that the Government expect from them, taking into account their geographical circumstances. We are also considering what performance indicators on waste management should be prescribed under the new Best Value regime for local authority services, to support local accountability.

Brownfield Sites

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what changes he is considering which will expedite the planning permission system for developers who wish to build on brownfield sites. [52825]

Mr. Raynsford: Current planning policy guidance already encourages the re-use of previously developed (or brown field) sites. The Government are currently revising Planning Policy Guidance Note 3 (Housing) to reflect the higher target for building new homes on previously-developed land announced in Planning for the Communities of the Future, published in February. We hope to issue a draft PPG3 for consultation later this year.

The Government are also helping local authorities and developers through their preparation of a national land use database which will for the first time produce a comprehensive picture of previously-developed land. The Government have also set up the Urban Task Force which will provide guidance on how local authorities can make better and more innovative use of such land. In addition, the Government are currently considering what role economic instruments might play in helping to bring forward more previously used land for development.

Whales

Mr. Anthony D. Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he supports the US proposal for establishing mandatory ship reporting systems to reduce ship strikes on endangered large whales; and if he will make a statement. [52826]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The United States proposals were discussed at the International Maritime Organisation's 44th session of its Safety of Navigation Sub-Committee (NAV 44) from 20–24 July, where they received the full backing of the United Kingdom Delegation. We believe that the proposed mandatory ship-reporting systems off the eastern coast of the United States will make a positive contribution to reducing the number of ship strikes on right whales. We will support the formal adoption of the systems at the IMO's Maritime Safety Committee in December.

Public Houses

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will list the appeal decisions for each of the last two years where the local planning authority has refused planning permission for a change of use of shop unit into a public house and the inspector has upheld the refusal. [52280]

Mr. Raynsford: I have asked the Chief Executive of the Planning Inspectorate, Mr. Chris Shepley, to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Chris Shepley to Mr. Paul Burstow, dated 29 July 1998:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your Question about appeal decisions where the local planning authority has refused planning permission for a change of use of a shop unit into a public house and the Inspector has upheld the refusal.

I enclose details of 17 planning appeals which were dismissed in 1996–97, and 38 which were dismissed in 1997–98. I believe this is an exhaustive list. The list includes all cases of a change of use

to a public house, not only those from a shop unit. It may also contain some appeals against the failure of the local planning authority to determine the application within the time limit.

Should you require copies of the Inspector's decision letters for any appeal, please contact Colin Stevens (Room 1208 at the above address) directly and he will arrange for them to be sent to you. From these you will be able to see whether the Inspector agreed or disagreed with any reasons for refusal by the local authority.

Taxis (Smoking)

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will introduce further measures to allow licensed taxi drivers to exclude passengers who wish to smoke from their vehicles. [53581]

Ms Glenda Jackson: When Parliamentary time permits, we intend to propose a change in the law to enable licensed taxi drivers to designate their vehicles as "no-smoking cabs", thereby relieving them of the obligation to carry passengers who insist on smoking.

Overhead Power Lines

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what consultations *(a)* he, *(b)* his Ministers and *(c)* his officials have had with (i) the Secretary of State for Health, (ii) health ministers and (iii) officials from the Department of Health, concerning the possible carcinogenic effects of overhead power lines. [53136]

Mr. Meacher: The Secretaries of State and Ministers of both Departments are aware of public interest in this area through correspondence and questions raised in the House. Officials from DETR and other Government Departments with a direct interest meet regularly with the national Radiological Protection Board to review information and consider developments regarding non-ionising radiation, including the alleged carcinogenic effects of overhead power lines.

An investigation into electromagnetic fields and childhood cancer is being funded by the Department of Health and forms part of the United Kingdom Childhood Cancer Study. When the results of this study are published, the Secretary of State for Health will consult colleagues as appropriate.

The current consensus view is that in normal domestic circumstances there is no quantifiable risk to health from electromagnetic field from power lines or sub-stations.

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will issue planning guidance notes to local authorities to advise against building homes underneath overhead power cables and next to pylons; and if he will make a statement. [53135]

Mr. Raynsford: I refer the hon. Member to my answer of 19 June 1998, *Official Report*, column *331*, which explained that the Government intend, later this year, to issue a draft circular for consultation on development in proximity to electromagnetic fields. This would include the health and safety aspects of overhead power lines.

Departmental Research

Mr. Fabricant: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will list the cost of all research undertaken by his Department since May 1997, excluding the cost of green papers and other public consultation documents drafted by his officials; and if he will list in each case the organisations which undertook that research. [52693]

Mr. Raynsford: The provision for DETR research spend in 1997/98 and the planned spend for 1998/99 were published in March in 'DETR Opportunities for Research and Development', which is available on the DETR Website. A summary is given in the table. Records on all research contractors are not currently kept centrally. This information is now being collected with a view to publishing it in the next edition of 'DETR Opportunities for Research and Development'. I will arrange for this information to be sent to the hon. Gentleman when it is ready.

DETR science and technology expenditure

£ million

Research area	*Provision 1997–1998*	*Plan 1998–1999*
Air Quality	9.7	9.7
Global Atmosphere	13.56	13.56
Radioactive Substances	0.88	0.88
Water and Contaminated Land	3.5	3.5
Chemicals and Biotechnology	3.0	3.0
Noise	0.45	0.45
Environmental Policy Analysis	0.45	0.45
Waste Policy	0.25	0.25
Planning and Minerals	3.7	3.7
Countryside	1.3	1.4
Darwin Initiative	3.0	3.0
Local Government	0.82	0.8
Housing and Regeneration	6.5	6.5
Construction	22.9	22.0
Environment Technology ETBPP and ETIS	0.25	0.25
Land Transport	18.1	18.8
Road Safety	4.3	4.5
Vehicle Standards and Engineering	5.9	6.2
Urban and Local Transport	4.8	4.8
National Roads Policy	1.2	1.3
Cross-cutting central programmes	1.9	2.0
Civil Aviation Services	0.7	0.4
Transport Security	1.7	1.7
Highways Agency	12.8	13.2
Total Research and Development	103.56	103.54
Technology Transfer		
Construction	0.5	0.5
Environment Technology EEBPP and ETIS	2.5	2.5
Energy Efficiency	15.0	15.0
Total Science and Technology	121.56	121.54

Private Hire Vehicles

Ms Perham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what steps he will take to ensure that the provisions allowing private hire operators to subcontract services to operators licensed outside London are not used to introduce lower standards than those which apply in London. [52197]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The matter will be considered as necessary in the light of circumstances as indicated by Public Carriage Office's monitoring.

Ms Perham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what criteria the Public Carriage Office will use when it monitors the use of subcontracting by London's private hire industry. [52198]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The matter will be considered as part of the implementation arrangements for the legislation on London minicab regulation.

Federal Aviation Administration

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what representations he has made to the US Government concerning the delays by the Federal Aviation Administration in processing applications by United Kingdom companies for FAA approval. [53012]

Ms Glenda Jackson: None.

Concessionary Fares (Pensioners)

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when he expects to introduce concessionary bus fares for pensioners. [53579]

Ms Glenda Jackson: Most local authorities do already offer concessionary travel schemes for pensioners. Our White Paper "A New Deal for Transport" (Cm3950) said that we will introduce a national minimum standard for local authority concessionary fares schemes for elderly people, with a maximum £5 per year charge for a pass entitling the holder to travel at half fare on buses. The necessary legislation will be introduced as soon as Parliamentary time permits.

Mobile Homes

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has to bring forward reforms to the Mobile Homes Act 1983; and if he will make a statement. [53570]

Mr. Raynsford: I refer the hon. Member to the answers I gave to the hon. Member for Taunton (Jackie Ballard) on 6 May 1998, *Official Report,* column *389* and to the hon. Member for Teignbridge (Mr. Nicholls) on 17 June 1998, *Official Report,* column *204.*

M25, Spelthorne

Mr. Wilshire: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement on the proposal to widen the M25 in the Spelthorne constituency. [53218]

Dr. Reid: We plan to make an announcement on the outcome of the Roads Review before the Recess.

Telecommunications Masts

Mr. Ennis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what representations he has received about the current planning controls on the erection of telecommunications masts. [53841]

Mr. Caborn: We have received a number of representations from local authorities, from industry and from the working group which has been considering the effectiveness of my Department's Code of Best Practice for telecommunications prior approval procedures.

After careful consideration, I have concluded that the use of permitted development rights continues to be appropriate for this type of development but that there is scope for improving procedures in order to address a number of concerns.

In doing this, we aim to strike the right balance between facilitating a competitive national telecommunications network and protecting our environment. I have today published a consultation paper on proposals for changes to the control of development by licensed telecommunications operators under the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) Order 1995. Copies of the consultation paper have been placed in the Library.

The main change proposed is a new two-stage procedure for ground-based masts erected under permitted development rights, to allow time for greater public consultation over their siting and appearance. This will give the public a clear opportunity to comment upon the installation of a mast in sensitive cases where such development would impact upon their amenity. We also propose to increase the protection currently afforded to Sites of Special Scientific Interest in this context by making telecommunications development in these areas subject to similar constraints as already apply in areas such as National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty. This would include development such as the installation of masts and antennas being made subject to a full planning application in SSSIs.

Planning (Sport and Recreation)

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when he proposes to revise Planning Guidance Note 17 on Sport and Recreation. [53940]

Mr. Caborn: My Department will shortly be publishing a research report which examines the Effectiveness of Planning Policy Guidance on Sport and Recreation. The findings and recommendations in that research point clearly towards the need to revise PPG17. We agree. The PPG, which dates from September 1991, urgently needs to be brought up to date, not least to take account of the Government's sustainable development objectives. Work on a revision will therefore start later in the Summer, and I hope that a draft revised PPG17 will be issued for public consultation around the turn of the year.

Regional Development Agencies

Mr. Hope: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when he proposes to appoint chairs for the boards of the proposed regional development agencies; and if he will make a statement. [53941]

Mr. Caborn: Formal appointments to the boards of the Regional Development Agencies (RDAs) cannot be made until the Regional Development Agencies Bill, currently before Parliament, has received Royal Assent. However,

we propose to engage a chairman designate for each RDA on an advisory basis prior to Royal Assent to assist in preparations for the establishment of the RDAs.

Our choices are as follows:

Eastern RDA: Vincent Watts—Vice Chancellor of the University of East Anglia

East Midlands RDA: Derek Mapp—Formerly Chairman of Tom Cobleigh plc. Currently part-time Executive Chairman of Leapfrog Day Nurseries

North East RDA: John Bridge—Chief Executive of the Northern Development Company

North West RDA: Lord Thomas of Macclesfield—Formerly Managing Director of the Co-operative Bank and founding Chairman of the North West Partnership

South East RDA Ltd: Allan Willett—Chairman and founder of Willett International

South West RDA: Sir Michael Lickiss—Chairman of Edexcel Foundation (previously BTEC)

West Midlands RDA: Alex Stephenson—Managing Director of Rover Group Power Train

Yorkshire and Humber RDA: Graham Hall—Chief Executive of Yorkshire Electricity Group plc.

There was a strong list of candidates in each region and we were able to appoint people of the highest calibre to lead each RDA. Candidates for chairman of each RDA were sought from a wide range of sources, including a public advertisement, nominations from regional and national stakeholders, and details of people who had previously expressed an interest in public service. Independent assessors were involved both in the short listing process and in interviews. All appointments have been made on merit and in accordance with guidance issued by the Commissioner for Public Appointments.

There will also be a development agency in London. The creation of the London Development Agency will take account of the new arrangements for the government of London including the way that appointments are made.

Queen Elizabeth II Conference Centre

Mr. McNulty: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what performance targets he has set the Queen Elizabeth II Conference Centre Executive Agency for 1998–99. [54062]

Mr. Raynsford: The Agency's principal financial target for 1998–99 is to achieve a minimum contribution to the Exchequer of £963,000.

Operational targets have been set to increase occupancy of the Churchill Auditorium to 190 days; the Fleming Room to 210 days; and the Mountbatten Room to 165 days.

The Agency is also being required to achieve additional room hire revenue from banqueting of £75,000, and has the following key customer service targets to meet:

1. An overall score for quality of service from client questionnaires of at least 78 per cent.
2. 98 per cent of clients to report that they would use the centre again.
3. The number of complaints received to be less than 4 per 100 events.
4. An average response time when answering complaints of less than 4 working days.
5. An overall score for quality of service by catering staff of at least 88 per cent.

Non-domestic Rating

Mr. McNulty: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has for legislation on valuation for non-domestic rating; and if he will make a statement. [54063]

Ms Armstrong: In its decision dated 11 March 1998 in the case of *Benjamin v Anston Properties*, the Lands Tribunal decided that, in valuing a property for non-domestic rating purposes, it cannot be assumed that the property is in a reasonable state of repair if, on the material day, it is not. This decision runs counter to the approach adopted for compiling and maintaining rating lists under the Local Government Finance Act 1988. The Government therefore propose to introduce legislation as soon as Parliamentary time allows to reverse the effect of the Lands Tribunal decision.

It is intended that this legislation will have effect from 1 April 1990, when the first rating lists under the 1988 Act were compiled. However, outstanding cases in which the proposal for reduction in the rateable value was made on or before 11 March 1998, will not be affected.

Environmental Protection

Mr. Burgon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when the Government will undertake public consultation on the review of legislation relating to the Environment Agency and the Scottish Environment Protection Agency. [54134]

Mr. Meacher: I announced on 8 April 1998, *Official Report*, columns *306–07*, that we would review the legislation relating to the Environment Agency and the Scottish Environment Protection Agency, with a view to identifying any barriers preventing the Agencies from taking an integrated approach to the environment. We are issuing the relevant consultation paper today, copies of which have been placed in the Library. We are sending it to a wide range of bodies, and publishing it on the Internet.

Countryside and Rural Programmes

Mr. Burgon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will set out his spending plans for the countryside and rural programmes of his Department following the Comprehensive Spending Review. [54135]

Mr. Meacher: The review of countryside and rural policy, conducted jointly by my Department and the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, has concluded that there is a strong case for Government intervention to support rural communities, protect the landscape and wildlife resources of the countryside, and promote access to and enjoyment of the countryside. This Government want to see a living, working and sustainable countryside, and are determined both to increase resources towards meeting these objectives, and to improve the co-ordination and delivery of countryside and rural programmes in the future.

Support for individual DETR agencies or programmes will be as follows:

English Nature's allocation will rise from £38.5 million in 1998–99 to £44.6 million in 1999–2000. This will allow the agency to continue and develop its nature conservation work, deliver obligations under the EU Birds and Habitats Directives, improve the management of Sites of Special Scientific Interest, and accelerate the implementation of the Biodiversity Action Plan's species and habitats plans. We have asked English Nature to assist its smaller voluntary partners to play a full part in the Biodiversity Action Plan process.

The merged agency to be formed on 1 April 1999 from the Rural Development Commission and the Countryside Commission will receive an increase of £8.68 million in 1999–2000. This will give the agency an effective start by strengthening its work protecting and conserving the natural landscape, supporting rural communities, and promoting access to and enjoyment of the countryside, and will also provide for pilot projects. Part will be used for necessary restructuring costs.

The National parks and Broads Authority grant will increase from £17.412 million in 1998–99 to £19.277 million in 1999–2000.

Support for the National Forest Company will increase from £2.5 million in 1998–99 to £3.1 million in 1999–2000, to help meet its planting targets, increase the resources available for partnership formation and bidding, and begin to develop the tourism potential of the Forest.

Funding for DETR's countryside research will grow from £1.527 million in 1998–99 to £1.727 million in 1999–2000, and countryside publicity from £0.257 million in 1998–99 to £0.317 million in 1999–2000.

In addition to increasing resources, we also intend to improve the delivery and co-ordination of programmes for the countryside. The Regional Development Agencies, which will begin operation in April next year, will be responsible for developing an integrated approach to economic development and regeneration in rural areas, in a way that contributes to sustainable development. At the centre, DETR and MAFF already work closely together in many ways, but there is room for improvement in the way the Government deliver rural policy in an integrated way. Together with the decision already taken to merge the Rural Development and the Countryside Commissions from 1 April 1999, we will be taking forward steps to improve co-ordination of the countryside programmes across the two Departments, to ensure that our countryside and rural policy objectives are fully met.

Further decisions on the level of resources for the following two years will be announced in 1999, in the light of the joint financial planning to be developed by DETR and MAFF.

Sewage Treatment and Disposal

Mr. Burgon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when he intends to publish his response to the Environment, Transport and Regional Affairs Committee's report on Sewage Treatment and Disposal, HC 266-I of Session 1997–98. [54147]

Mr. Meacher: I will be laying before the House tomorrow the Government's formal response to the Second Report of the Environmental, Transport and Regional Affairs Select Committee on Sewage Treatment and Disposal tomorrow. Copies will be placed in both Libraries of the House.

Within days of taking office, we called a Water Summit to signal our intention to ensure a world-class, water efficient, environmentally sustainable water industry. We remain firmly committed to that goal. We welcomed the publication of the Select Committee's report as an important contribution to the debate.

Within our broad objective, the Government's response to the Select Committee will set out significant elements of our approach to the quality of the water environment. Our approach will strike a balance between the need for and value of environmental improvements by the water industry and the need to protect consumers from large increases in their water bills as a result of those improvements.

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

National Disability Council

Mr. Stephen Twigg: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment when the National Disability Council will report on its activities during the 1997–98 financial year. [54064]

Ms Hodge: I am pleased to announce that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has today laid the National Disability Council's third annual report before Parliament. Copies of the report have been placed in the Libraries.

The Council has worked very hard during the year on an impressive array of initiatives and to develop proposals for a code of practice on improved rights of access to goods and services for disabled people. These new rights will be introduced in October 1999. The Council, therefore, has another busy year ahead as it consults on and refines the proposals. I look forward to continuing to work with the Council on this and on other initiatives to help end discrimination against disabled people.

Equal Opportunities Commission

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment when he expects the report of the quinquennial review of the Equal Opportunities Commission to be published; and if he will make a statement. [52504]

Ms Hodge: We expect to publish the report immediately after the summer adjournment.

Post-16 Education

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will ensure that all year 11 pupils receive information on appropriate post-16 providers who operate courses in their immediate locality. [52809]

Mr. Mudie: To improve the current system of providing information on post-16 learning opportunities, the Government have proposed that careers services, in

their role as independent broker, are best placed to take responsibility for ensuring that all young people in years 10 and 11 have access to the full range of information at times, and in ways, appropriate to their needs. To do this, careers services would need to work closely with local schools, colleges and other training providers and arrangements for the provision of this information would be agreed locally.

Design

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many full-time students in higher education are currently enrolled on design-related courses; and how many there were *(a)* five and *(b)* 10 years ago. [52291]

Mr. Mudie: The available information is given in the table:

Full-time students[1] on courses of design studies

Thousand

Academic year	*Number*
1987–88	18.6
1992–93	31.8
1997–98[2]	44.7

[1] In former UFC establishments in the GB, and former polytechnics, HEIs and FEIs in England
[2] Provisional

Further Education Colleges (Hampshire)

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what funding has been allocated to further education colleges in Hampshire in (i) 1996–97, (ii) 1997–98 and (iii) 1998–99. [52189]

Mr. Mudie *[holding answer 24 July 1998]:* Funding has been allocated to further education colleges in Hampshire for academic years 1996–97, 1997–98 and 1998–99 as follows:

£000

Year	*Amount*
1996–97	112,116
1997–98	109,956
1998–99	110,381

Training

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what arrangements are in place to harmonise legal requirements between New Deal trainees and those being trained with TEC or private sector funding separately identifying those relating to health and safety measures. [52342]

Mr. Andrew Smith *[holding answer 27 July 1998]:* The contracts which the Employment Service has entered into with all organisations delivering New Deal set out the obligations of New Deal providers, including their statutory obligations. The contract places a duty of care on the provider requiring that Health and Safety requirements are met. Fulfilment of these responsibilities will be evaluated by ES together with other aspects of contract compliance; with these arrangements in place there is not a current need to harmonise regulation with that operated by TECs and other training providers.

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will list the New Deal partnerships which expressed an interest in leading a pilot for the New Deal for over 25 year olds; and what percentage of these has been invited to submit a full proposal for a pilot in their area. [52778]

Mr. Andrew Smith: 73 partnerships expressed an interest in leading a New Deal 25+ partnership pilot. The following 43 partnerships have been shortlisted for around 20 pilots:

Argyle and the Islands
Ayrshire
Bexley and Greenwich
Birmingham
Bolton
Bradford
Brighton
Bristol and South Gloucester
Camden and North Islington
Cardiff and the Vale
Cornwall
Coventry
Dumfries and Galloway
Ealing
Eastbourne
Fulham
Grampian
Hammersmith
Hereford and Worcester
Hounslow and Richmond
Hull
Kensington and Chelsea
Lanarkshire
Leeds
Manchester
North Derbyshire
Oldham
Oxfordshire
Peterborough
Portsmouth and S.E. Hampshire
Powys and Ceredigan West Wales
Rotherham
Sheffield
South Derbyshire
Southampton and S.W. Hampshire
Stockport
Suffolk and Waveney
Sunderland
Sutton, Epsom, Merton and Wandsworth
Teesside
West Norfolk
Western Isles
Wigan.

50 organisations completed 79 expressions of interest to take part in the New Deal 25+ private sector led pilots. 22 organisations have now been shortlisted and have submitted 38 bids for the 10 private sector led pilots. These are as follows:

Action for Employment Ltd.
Belgrave Development and Enterprises
BTCV Enterprises Ltd.
Christian Care Training
DHP Enterprise Trust
Fernly Business Services Ltd.
Instant Muscle Ltd.
JHP Group Ltd.
Leicestershire Chamber of Commerce
Lothian Training Ltd.
Manpower plc
Pelcombe Training Ltd.
Pertemps Group Ltd.
Reed W2W Ltd.
Scout Enterprises (Western) Ltd.
SEETEC Business Technology Centre Ltd.
The MARI Group Ltd.
The Shaw Trust
The Training and Business Group (London) Ltd.
TP Training Ltd.
Triage Central Ltd.
Van Hee Transport Ltd.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Security Service

Ms Christine Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will provide further information about files held by the Security Service; and if he will make a statement. [54146]

Mr. Straw: During an adjournment debate in this House on 25 February 1998, *Official Report*, columns 341–48, I undertook to make an announcement, before the summer recess, on the subject of the Security Service's file holdings and on the Service's file destruction programme. I now fulfil that commitment. I do so having consulted the Director General of the Security Service, and having been advised by him that the information which I shall be revealing for the first time today may be disclosed without detriment to the requirements of national security or to the operational effectiveness of the Service.

The Security Service currently holds in total about 440,000 files which have been opened at some time since its establishment in 1909. Of these, approximately 35,000 files relate to Service administration, policy and staff. A further 40,000 concern subjects and organisations studied by the Service. About 75,000 files relate to people or groups of people who have never been investigated by the Service, such as those who have received protective security advice. This leaves about 290,000 files relating to individuals who, at some time during the last 90 years, may have been the subject of Security Service inquiry or investigation. Of this 290,000, some 40,000 have been reduced to microfilm and placed in a restricted category to which Security Service staff have access only for specific research purposes. A further 230,000 files are closed so that Security Service officers may use them where necessary in the course of their current work, but may not make inquiries about the subjects of the files.

It will be apparent that only a small proportion of the Security Service's file holdings relate to individuals who may be under current investigation by the Service. The number of files which fall within that category is around 20,000. Of that number, about one third relate to foreign nationals—typically, members or associates of foreign intelligence services or terrorist groups. This leaves in the order of 13,000 active files on United Kingdom citizens. To place it in context, this compares with about 5.7 million records on individuals on the Police National Computer. It represents about 3/100ths of one per cent. of the current adult population, and only a tiny proportion of the 13,000 are likely ever to be under close investigation at any one time.

Of those 13,000 files, more than half are for individuals who have come to the Service's attention in a terrorist related context, while the remainder relate to the Service's other fields of investigation, such as espionage, proliferation and serious crime. A proportion of these files are for individuals who are co-operating with the Service against these threats to national security. Following the collapse of Soviet Communism and the decline in the threat from subversive groups, the Service scaled down its counter-subversion work over a number of years to the point where it is no longer running any investigations in the field of subversion.

Detailed criteria govern the opening of files on individuals and organisations. These criteria specify the circumstances in which opening a file and initiating inquiries are justified within the terms of the Service's statutory functions. They are kept under continual review and are formally checked on an annual basis for currency, relevance and propriety.

It has long been the policy of the Security Service to review its file holdings and to destroy those files which it no longer requires for operational purposes and which do not merit retention on grounds of historical interest. In the period between its formation in 1909 and the early 1970s, the Service destroyed well over 175,000 files. The destruction programme was then halted in response to concern that it had impeded investigations into espionage cases. In the early 1990s, following the collapse of Soviet communism and the associated decline in the threat from subversion, the review and destruction programme was reinstated. Since then, more than 110,000 files have been destroyed or have been earmarked for destruction.

In reviewing files for destruction, the Service takes account of their operational value, their historical significance, and the Service's obligation to retain certain categories of records against the possibility of a complaint to the Security Service Tribunal. With these criteria in mind, the Security Service continues to review its holdings of closed files for destruction and will continue to destroy files which no longer need to be retained on those grounds. The rate of review and destruction is dependent upon the resources which the Service can afford to spare for the task.

I have said that the Service takes account of the likely historical significance of each file before sending it for destruction. It is a matter of interest to professional

historians, writers and journalists that records which might be of real historical value should be kept for posterity. It might, therefore, be helpful if I explain how that process is governed.

The Security Service, as with Government Departments, is subject to the Public Records Act 1958. This Act, among other things, regulates policy on the selection of files for preservation. In common with many other Departments, the Service has drawn up guidance to govern this process and this has been approved by the Public Record Office. I published the criteria applied by the Service in response to a Question from the hon. Member for New Forest, East (Dr. Lewis), on 20 January 1998, *Official Report*, columns *519–20*. The Service also takes advice from the Public Record Office on the retention, preservation and release of historical records.

The operations of the Public Record Office are, in turn, scrutinised by the Lord Chancellor's Advisory Council on Public Records, chaired by the Master of the Rolls. There are three eminent historians on the Advisory Council and others with an academic or professional interest in 20th century records, including a Professor of Politics and Mr. Andreas Whittam Smith, former founding editor of *The Independent* newspaper.

Panel of Historians

Earlier this year, in response to a question from the Public Administration Committee, I said that I was looking at whether there was a need for a panel of historians to advise the Security Service on the retention of its files for historical reasons. With the agreement of my right hon. and learned Friend the Lord Chancellor and the Director General, I have asked the Advisory Council specially to review the criteria which the Service currently apply in determining whether files which they would otherwise destroy should be kept on grounds of historical interest. The Council has agreed to carry out such a review, and I am grateful to the Chairman for accepting the invitation. The Council will welcome submissions from those with an interest in the subject. Representation should be submitted, in writing, to the Advisory Council at the following address:

Tim Padfield
Secretary, Advisory Council on Public Records
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Correspondence should be received by 30 September. The Council will aim to report by the end of the year.

Release of Security Service files into the public domain

The Security Service is fully committed to a policy of releasing as much material of historical significance as it can. But in determining which files may safely be released, there are important considerations which the Service will always have to take into account. These include: the need to protect sensitive investigative techniques; to protect information supplied in confidence by agents and liaison services; and to bear in mind the potential impact of release on those individuals concerned and their families. The Service's current programme of reviewing its early records of historical interest has already resulted in the release of almost all the surviving material covering the years 1909–1919. The Service is now actively reviewing its more extensive stock of records from World War Two, but, as with the review for destruction, this process will continue to depend upon the resources available for the task.

I am aware, however, that the Intelligence and Security Committee has, itself, been reviewing these issues and may have more to say about the subject in its Annual Report. I look forward with great interest to seeing what they have to say.

Booklet

Finally, I am pleased to announce that the Security Service is, today, publishing the third edition of the booklet which describes the Service and its work. The booklet is even more informative than its predecessors. This reflects our policy of making available as much information about the Service as we sensibly can, without undermining the effectiveness of its operations or risking the safety of its staff or its agents.

I have arranged for copies of the booklet to be placed in the Library.

Metropolitan Police

Mr. Stephen Twigg: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects to make additional appointments to the Metropolitan Police Committee. [54138]

Mr. Straw: I have today appointed the following as members of the Metropolitan Police Committee:

Councillor Lincoln Beswick (Labour, Brent)

Councillor Toby Harris (Labour, Haringey)

Councillor Barbara Hughes (Labour, Camden)

Councillor Tim Joiner (Conservative, Westminster)

Councillor Serge Lourie (Liberal Democrat, Richmond upon Thames)

Councillor Maggie Mansell (Labour, Croydon)

Councillor Derek Sawyer (Labour, Islington)

Councillor Michael Slaughter (Conservative, Bexley)

Councillor Ala Uddin (Labour, Tower Hamlets)

Councillor Ron Gee (Independent, Epsom & Ewell).

They will join the eleven existing members, who are Sir John Quinton, who will remain Chair, Miss Maria Callaghan, Mr. Thomas Chan, Councillor Maurice Heaster (Conservative, Wandsworth), Major General Malcolm Hunt, Councillor Margaret O'Neill (Labour, Bexley), Mrs. Shahwar Sadeque, Mr. Mark Souhami, Mr. Inder Uppal, Mr. Reginald Watts and Ms Rachel Whittaker.

Nine of the new members were nominated by the Association of Local Government, in response to my request for nominations reflecting the current make-up of London Boroughs. The tenth is the representative of the Outer London Metropolitan Police Group.

The new members will take up their appointments on 1 September 1998. The Committee's task will continue to be to advise me in relation to the discharge of certain of my functions as police authority for the Metropolitan Police. The functions in question are based on those

which, outside London, are the responsibility of the police authorities established under the Police Act 1964, as amended by the Police Act 1996.

In particular, I look to the Committee to prepare for the Metropolitan Police Authority which we intend to establish as part of our proposals for a Mayor and Assembly for London.

The next couple of years bring new challenges, with the Crime and Disorder Bill, efficiency plans and the preparation for the Metropolitan Police Authority. The whole Committee has much to contribute on these and other key issues.

Mr. Wilshire: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the funding of the transitional arrangements necessary to enable those parts of the Metropolitan Police District not within the Greater London boundary to be transferred to neighbouring police force areas in April 2000. [53213]

Mr. Michael: The changes to the Metropolitan Police District boundaries are expected to come into effect in April 2000. It is likely that transitional costs in transferring those areas not within the boundary of the proposed Greater London Authority to other forces will fall in the financial year 1999–2000. It is too early to give an accurate estimate of the size of such costs but they will be taken into account when considering the needs of the police areas affected.

Fire Safety

Mr. Heppell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 8 April 1998, *Official Report*, column *255*, about the Fire Precautions (Workplace) Regulations 1997, when he expects to issue a consultation document on the Government's proposals for the amendments; and if he will make a statement. [54140]

Mr. George Howarth: As I explained on 8 April, the European Commission has expressed some concern about our implementation of the fire safety aspects of the European Framework Directive (89/391/EEC). We expect to be in a position to publish a consultative document on our proposals for amendments, to allay the Commission's concerns, in early August. Copies of the document will be available to hon. Members through the usual sources. However, as the House will be in recess at the time of publication, my hon. Friend and others may like to know that copies may also be had, free of charge, from Christians Limited, whose details are as follows:

Orderline/telephone number: 0181–867–3434

Fax number: 0181–867–3234

E-mail address: firesafe@echristians.co.uk

Freepost address:

Fire Safety Consultation Document,
FREEPOST HA 4441,
Hayes,
Middlesex
UB3 1BR.

Juveniles (Secure Accommodation)

Ms Beverley Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement about the provision of secure accommodation for juveniles. [54141]

Mr. Straw: The Crime and Disorder Bill [*Lords*] will provide courts with more appropriate custodial remand and sentencing powers to deal with the most serious and persistent young offenders. To complement these changes, the Government have undertaken a review of all forms of secure accommodation for young offenders and young people held on remand. The Government believe that present arrangements for the provision and management of secure accommodation are inefficient and incoherent and are in need of reform. The review of juvenile secure accommodation was completed at the end of March and the Government have decided now on a programme of further work to be undertaken, a summary of which has been placed in the Library.

The main focus of this further work involves extending the role of the new Youth Justice Board for England and Wales, expected to be in place by October this year. The Crime and Disorder Bill already provides for the Youth Justice Board to advise on the setting of standards for secure accommodation for remanded and sentenced juveniles and to monitor the delivery of those standards. The Government have decided in principle to extend this role to include the commissioning and purchasing of secure accommodation for juveniles on remand and under sentence. This additional function will enable the Youth Justice Board to provide a much-needed central focus for the delivery of high quality secure facilities for remanded and sentenced young people. Subject to the outcome of further detailed work, the Government envisage that it should be possible for the Youth Justice Board to take on the function of commissioning and purchasing secure accommodation by April 2000. This will involve making an order under clause 42 (6) of the Crime and Disorder Bill.

A priority for immediate action is to improve the standard of care and quality of regimes in accommodation currently used for those remanded and sentenced as juveniles. Ninety per cent. of these young people are held in Prison Service accommodation. The Prison Service is already working on the development of new regime standards for juveniles and is planning to pilot improved regimes in two establishments, Werrington and Huntercombe Young Offender Institutions. Proposals to help achieve greater separation of juveniles from adult prisoners are also being taken forward. This work will pave the way for the introduction of the detention and training order, contained in the Crime and Disorder Bill, which will involve a programme of improved education and training to tackle offending behaviour, undertaken partly in custody and partly in the community.

The Government plan to set out their detailed proposals on the future role of the Youth Justice Board in respect of secure accommodation early next year.

Police Complaints Authority

Mr. Darvill: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he intends to make further appointments to the Police Complaints Authority. [54142]

Mr. Straw: I have decided to appoint Mr. Ian Bynoe and Miss Mehmuda Mian as Members of the Authority.

Mr. Bynoe has most recently been engaged in research work commissioned by the Institute for Public Policy Research. He was previously Legal Director of MIND (The National Association for Mental Health). He will take up his post on 3 August.

Miss Mian was until recently a senior caseworker in the Solicitors Practice Unit of the Office for Supervision of Solicitors. She will take up her post in the autumn.

Their appointments, which are initially for three years, bring to 13 the number of Members of the Authority, including the Chairman and Deputy Chairman.

Crime Prevention

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his oral statement of 21 July 1998, *Official Report*, columns 914–28 on crime prevention, how much will be spent on the extension of closed circuit television in each of the next three years. [52522]

Mr. Michael: Further announcements on how the £250 million crime reduction strategy will operate will be made in the autumn.

Asbestos

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what guidance his Department issues to those constructing buildings for which it is responsible on the use of materials containing asbestos. [52314]

Mr. Straw: In each building contract that the Home Office enters, the contractor warrants that asbestos will not be used in constructing the works.

CS Spray

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will list the numbers of incidents when CS spray has been used by the police force in Gloucestershire for the most recent five years for which records are available; [51391]

(2) what representations he has received on the potential dangers posed by CS spray; [51393]

(3) what assessment his Department has made of the effectiveness of the police use of CS spray. [51394]

Mr. Michael: Since 1 January 1996, there have been 46 Parliamentary Questions about police use of CS spray, and the Home Office has received 55 letters from hon. Members on the subject. Since 1 April 1997, 69 letters on the subject have been received from members of the public.

CS sprays have been discharged by Gloucestershire police officers in 138 incidents since its introduction there on 14 April 1997.

In December 1996, the Home Office Police Research Group published an assessment of police operational trials of CS spray. The trials involved 16 forces and took place between March and August 1996.

In October 1997, my right hon. Friend reviewed the available evidence relating to the use of CS spray by the police and confirmed our support for its use. During operational trials, it was found that CS typically took effect within five seconds. We have no doubt that, in many cases, its use has not only prevented injury to police officers and members of the public but prevented any injury to the person who would otherwise have been subject to physical restraint.

Violence in Families

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will evaluate the cost to his Department arising from violence within families; and if he will make a statement. [52440]

Mr. Straw: The way in which statistics are held centrally does not readily allow a comprehensive estimate of these costs.

However, a report by Professor Elizabeth Stanko (Brunel University) and others, "Counting the costs: estimating the impact of domestic violence in the London Borough of Hackney", has recently been published by Crime Concern. This estimates the total cost in 1996 to the public sector of providing services for women and children facing domestic violence in Hackney at around £90 per annum per household. This report estimates the total cost for Greater London to be around £278 million per annum.

I have placed a copy of this report in the Library.

New Deal

Mr. Healey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people his Department is committed to employing during 1998 under *(a)* the subsidised job option and *(b)* the unsubsidised job option of the New Deal programme. [52585]

Mr. Straw: My Department is actively considering proposals for recruiting under the New Deal scheme and expects to sign up formally to participation as a New Deal Employer by autumn 1998.

The Home Office will act as an employer for the subsidised employment option and will aim to recruit approximately two to three per cent. of new intakes into appointments suitable for New Deal participants. Those seeking employment through the New Deal unsubsidised option may apply through open competition for posts in the Home Department. Selection will be made on the basis of merit alone.

Crime Prevention (North-west)

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the effects of the extra £250 million investment on crime prevention in *(a)* the North West and *(b)* Chorley. [52458]

Mr. Straw: The crime reduction strategy which I announced on 21 July 1998, *Official Report*, column 913, is designed to produce long term benefits in reducing offending as well as having a more immediate impact on certain kinds of crime, such as burglary. I shall make further announcements in the autumn on how the crime reduction strategy will operate.

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will estimate the impact on the number of police officers on the beat of the creation of a North West regional police force; [52459]

(2) what assessment he has made of the savings and efficiencies which will be created through the development of a North West regional police force based on the RDA. [52460]

Mr. Michael: We have no proposals to create regional police forces in England and Wales, and consequently have made no assessment of the effects of doing so.

It is for individual chief constables to determine the number of police officers on the beat within available resources. We are working with the police to ensure that the resources which the Government make available to them are used as efficiently as possible, with the emphasis on outputs and outcomes rather than on inputs.

British Board of Film Censors

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects the annual report 1997–98 of the British Board of Film Censors to be published. [53266]

Mr. Michael: My right hon. Friend expects to receive the 1997–98 Annual Report from the British Board of Film Classification and to lay it before Parliament by the end of this week.

Criminal Injuries Compensation Board

Mr. Austin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to review staffing levels at the Criminal Injuries Compensation Board. [52506]

Mr. Michael: Staffing and other resources required for the operation of the 1990 scheme under the aegis of the Criminal Injuries Compensation Board and of the tariff-based scheme by the Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority (CICA) are reviewed regularly, as shown in CICA's business plans. Copies of the plan for 1998–99 should shortly be available in the Library.

Mr. Austin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many appeal cases against decisions of the Criminal Injuries Compensation Board are pending; and what assessment he has made of the total capacity of the Board to process decisions annually. [52505]

Mr. Michael: The Board advises that there are currently some 16,800 appeals and other hearings cases pending under the 1990 scheme. The plan for clearing such cases at an annual rate of 10,000 was set against the overall target for this year of clearing over 90,000 claims under both the 1990 scheme and the new, tariff-based one (effective for claims made on or after 1 April 1996). That will result in payments of over £200 million, thereby giving victims of violent crime a high degree of priority in the allocation of finite resources.

Mr. Austin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to review the withholding of benefit payable by the Criminal Injuries Compensation Board where a complainant appeals against a reduction; and if he will make a statement. [52507]

Mr. Michael: I have no plans to review the withholding of an award in these circumstances. The position under the schemes is that a claimant has no title to any award offered until he accepts it in full and final settlement. Where he appeals, any earlier decision falls; the case must be examined completely afresh and a new decision made upon it. That may be a full award, a reduced award, or no award at all.

Departmental Vehicles

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many of the vehicles due for replacement by *(a)* his Department and *(b)* bodies listed in the National Asset Register in (i) 1998–99, (ii) 1999–2000 and (iii) 2000–01 will be replaced by vehicles using (1) petrol, (2) diesel, (3) natural gas, (4) electric batteries and (5) other. [52616]

Mr. Straw *[holding answer 28 July 1998]:* It is not possible to make accurate predictions two or three years in advance, as each case is considered on merit at the time of replacement. Factors such as fitness for purpose, expected rate of use, location, available funds, technical developments, fuel cost etc. are taken into account.

Our best estimate is that like for like replacements will continue until further technical developments take place in alternative power sources.

Cycling

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what parking facilities for cycles exist at each office or site for which his Department is responsible and for each agency for which he is responsible. [52686]

Mr. Mike O'Brien *[holding answer 28 July 1998]:* The Home Office Central London estate provides 41 secure spaces for parking bicycles. The formal facilities include:

- the provision of a bicycle shed in one car park where bicycles can be chained to metal loops
- the provision in another car park of spaces where bicycles can be chained to a metal frame secured to the ground by concrete
- spaces in a basement storage room.

Generally, there is some provision for parking bicycles for most offices and sites throughout the rest of the Home Office estate (including those occupied by the Agencies). However, details of these are not available centrally and could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proportion of the employees of his Department and of the employees of each agency for which he is responsible cycle to work; and what measures he plans to increase that proportion. [52687]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: My Department has no record of the mode of transport used by its staff to travel to work.

Existing measures to encourage the use of cycling to work include the provision of secure cycle parking, showers, and interest free loans for bicycle purchase.

Measures to increase the proportion of employees cycling to work are being considered as part of the development of green transport plans for building occupied by the Department and its Agencies.

Bedfordshire Police

Sir Nicholas Lyell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will establish the numbers and

rank of *(a)* police officers and *(b)* civilian staff employed in the administration support units of Bedfordshire Police Force. [52658]

Mr. Michael: I understand from the Chief Constable that there are 66 civilian staff employed in the Administration Support Units of the Bedfordshire Police. No police officers are deployed to these units. The Bedfordshire Police is restructuring its Criminal Justice Department, which will include the provision of new IT systems. These changes are likely to reduce the number of civilian staff employed in Administration Support Units.

Custody (Girls)

Ms Julie Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many girls aged under 18 years from Wales were sentenced to custody in each year since 1992. [53256]

Ms Quin: The available information relates to the number of girls aged under 18 years sentenced to immediate custody in Welsh courts and is given in the table.

Number of girls aged under 18 years sentenced to immediate custody[1] at all courts for all offences, Wales, 1992–96

	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996
Total sentenced immediate custody[1]	11	4	9	15	10
Detained under S53 of the Children and Young Persons Act 1933[2]	—	2	—	1	4

[1] Sentenced to imprisonment at a Young Offender Institution

[2] Detainees may be held either in Prison Service establishments or in local authority secure or open community homes or Department of Health Youth Treatment Centres. The youngest detainees are automatically held outside Prison Service establishments

Juries

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what changes he is proposing to the way juries *(a)* in serious fraud and *(b)* in other cases are compiled and appointed; and if he will make a statement. [52858]

Mr. Michael: We are currently considering the responses to the recent consultation exercise on the use of juries in serious fraud trials. We will consider the issue further in the light of the responses.

New Voting Systems

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what action his Department is taking to increase public awareness of the new electoral systems which will be used in *(a)* European Parliament elections and *(b)* elections for the Scottish Parliament and Welsh Assembly; [52824]

(2) what budget he has allocated for informing the public of new voting systems to be used for *(a)* the European Parliament elections and *(b)* the elections to the Scottish Parliament and Welsh Assembly; [52828]

(3) how much his Department will be spending in informing and educating the public on the new electoral system to be used for the European elections. [53683]

Mr. George Howarth: No budget has been allocated for informing the public of the new electoral system for European Parliamentary elections.

The Government are supporting the efforts of the Institute of Citizenship and the London office of the European Parliament and others to publicise the new electoral system.

Publicity arrangements for elections to the Scottish Parliament and National Assembly for Wales are the responsibility of my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Scotland and Wales respectively.

Women's Prison, Ashford

Mr. Wilshire: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he plans to submit a formal planning application to build a Women's Prison at Woodthorpe Road, Ashford (Middlesex). [53214]

Ms Quin: The Prison Service is aiming to submit a formal planning application to Spelthorne Borough Council during August.

Football Hooliganism

Mr. Jim Murphy: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many England supporters were *(a)* arrested, *(b)* detained and *(c)* removed from France by the French authorities during the World Cup. [51995]

Mr. Michael *[holding answer 28 July 1998]:* The latest information that we have available is as follows:

Arrests in France during the World Cup: 275

Given custodial sentences: 20

Expelled from France during the World Cup: 14

Refused entry to France during the World Cup: 363

Awaiting trial or on bail for offences committed during the World Cup: 11.

Prison Statistics

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* men and *(b)* women have been sentenced to imprisonment in England and Wales in each of the last five years for offences relating to (i) physical abuse of children, (ii) sexual abuse towards children, (iii) manslaughter of a child and (iv) murder of a child under the age of five years. [52089]

Mr. Michael: Information taken from the Home Office Court Proceedings Database is given in Table A. It should be noted that it is not possible to identify all violent (including sexual) offences where the victim is aged 16 years or under.

Table B provides information taken from the Homicide Index.

Table A—Number of persons sentenced to immediate custody at all courts for violent offences against children by sex and type of offence, England and Wales, 1992–1996

Offence	*Gender*	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*	*1995*	*1996*
Indictable offences						
Violence against the person						
Murder of infant under 1 year of age	M	—	2	2	4	8
	F	1	—	—	2	—
Infanticide	F	—	—	—	—	—
Child destruction	M	—	—	—	—	—
	F	—	—	—	—	—
Cruelty to, or neglect of children	M	41	44	32	55	64
	F	12	15	12	29	37
Abandoning children under 2 years	M	—	—	1	1	—
	F	—	—	—	—	—
Child abduction	M	11	14	15	35	29
	F	2	2	1	4	4
Sexual offences						
Buggery with a boy under the age of 16 or with a woman or an animal	M	113	106	93	75	5
	F	—	—	2	—	—
Attempt to commit buggery with a boy under the age of 16 or with a woman or an animal	M	12	10	12	11	2
	F	—	—	—	—	—
Buggery by a male of a male under 16[1]	M	—	—	—	28	62
	F	—	—	—	—	—
Buggery by a male aged 21 or over with a male aged 16 or 17[1]	M	—	—	—	1	3
	F	—	—	—	—	—
Buggery by a male aged 18–20 with a male aged 16 or 17[1]	M	—	—	—	—	—
	F	—	—	—	—	—
Buggery by a male with a female under 16[1]	M	—	—	—	4	14
	F	—	—	—	—	—
Buggery by a male aged 21 or over with a female aged 16 or 17[1]	M	—	—	—	2	2
	F	—	—	—	—	—
Buggery by a male aged 18–20 with a female aged 16 or 17[1]	M	—	—	—	1	—
	F	—	—	—	—	—
Indecent assault on male person under 16 years	M	140	152	170	203	213
	F	2	3	2	1	1
Gross indecency by a male aged 21 or over with a male aged under 18[2]	M	—	—	—	4	4
	F	—	—	—	—	—
Gross indecency by a male aged 18–20 with a male aged under 18[2]	M	—	—	—	—	—
	F	—	—	—	—	—
Rape of a female aged under 16[1]	M	—	—	—	94	185
	F	—	—	—	1	1
Rape of a male aged under 16[1]	M	—	—	—	1	4
	F	—	—	—	—	—
Attempted rape of a female aged under 16[1]	M	—	—	—	16	27
	F	—	—	—	—	—
Attempted rape of a male aged under 16[1]	M	—	—	—	2	2
	F	—	—	—	—	—
Indecent assault on a female under 16	M	559	609	654	823	911
	F	2	4	3	3	3
Unlawful sexual intercourse with girl under 13	M	48	50	36	54	35
	F	—	—	—	—	—
Unlawful sexual intercourse with girl under 16	M	47	55	64	85	86
	F	—	—	—	—	—
Incest with a girl under 13	M	36	44	25	12	18
	F	—	—	—	—	—
Inciting girl under 16 to have incestuous sexual intercourse	M	1	1	4	2	—
	F	1	—	—	—	—
Householder permitting unlawful sexual intercourse with girl under 16	M	—	2	2	1	—
	F	—	—	—	1	—
Person responsible for girl under 16 causing or encouraging her prostitution etc.	M	—	—	—	1	—
	F	—	—	—	1	—
Male aged 21 or over procuring or attempting to procure a male under 18 of gross indecency with another male[2]	M	—	—	—	1	2
	F	—	—	—	—	—
Abduction of unmarried girl under 16	M	5	3	5	5	1
	F	—	—	1	—	—
Gross indecency with boys aged 14 or under	M	30	35	32	28	20
	F	—	3	1	—	—
Gross indecency with girls aged 14 or under	M	60	54	46	57	58
	F	1	1	—	1	—

Table A—Number of persons sentenced to immediate custody at all courts for violent offences against children by sex and type of offence, England and Wales, 1992–1996

Offence	Gender	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996
Summary Offences						
Violent offence						
Cruelty to or neglect of children	M	—	—	—	—	—
	F	—	—	—	—	—

[1] Buggery and attempted buggery offences under the Sexual Offences Act 1956 Section 12 as amended by the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994, Section 143
[2] Indecency between males offences under the Sexual Offences Act 1956 Section 12 as amended by the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994, Section 144
[3] Rape and attempted rape offences under the Sexual Offences Act 1956 Section 1 as amended by the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994, Section 142.
Source:
Home Office Court Proceedings database

Table B—Persons[1] sentenced to imprisonment for offences of manslaughter of a child[2] and murder of a child under the age of five years by sex, England and Wales, 1992–1996

Offence	Gender	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996
Homicide offences						
Manslaughter of a child[2]	M	17	19	16	11	16
	F	3	3	5	1	4
of which:						
Manslaughter of a child under the age of 5 years	M	15	14	14	5	7
	F	2	3	5	1	2
Murder of a child under the age of 5 years	M	14	5	11	12	6
	F	—	2	—	—	—

[1] As at 1 August 1997; figures are subject to revision as cases are dealt with by the police and by the courts, or as further information becomes available
[2] Child aged 16 years or older.
Source:
Homicide Index

Fire Stations

Mr. Wilshire: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on Surrey County Council's application for permission to close Staines and Sunbury-on-Thames fire stations and replace them with a single new fire station based in the Spelthorne constituency. [53216]

Mr. George Howarth: Surrey County Council has applied for approval, under section 19(4) of the Fire Services Act 1947, to the above change in fire cover arrangements. In considering such an application, my right hon. Friend grants approval only where he is satisfied that the fire authority has consulted as appropriate and that the national standards of fire cover will be maintained. The County Council's application, and the representations that we have received, are being carefully considered in consultation with her Majesty's Fire Service Inspectorate.

Voting System Commission

Mr. Syms: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department on what date he expects to announce the conclusions of the Independent Commission on the Voting System. [53181]

Mr. George Howarth: I understand from the Commission that they hope to complete their work at the end of October. Their report will be published very shortly thereafter.

Mr. Peter Bleach

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department on how many occasions Mr. Peter Bleach met officials of Her Majesty's Government and its agencies in relation to the issue of arms exports; and on what dates and where. [51878]

Mr. Straw *[holding answer 23 July 1998]:* Mr. Bleach was interviewed by officers of North Yorkshire Police at his home address on 14 September, 22 September and 8 December 1995 about an alleged illegal shipment of arms. I understand that he also met officials at the London office of the Defence Export Services Organisation of the Ministry of Defence in late 1994 regarding the supply of helicopters to Bangladesh. This led to subsequent meetings with the British Defence Attaché in Dhaka.

Wandsworth Prison

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the refurbishment of A and B wings at Wandsworth Prison; and when this work is planned to be completed. [52786]

Ms Quin: Wandsworth prison's A and B wings were decommissioned shortly before 1 April 1996 because they did not meet the stipulation that all prisoners from 1 April 1996 must have 24 hour access to sanitation. A refurbishment and modernisation programme for the wings (covering integral sanitation, cell doors/windows,

roofs, electrics, heating, health and safety, security measures, food services and prisoner and staff facilities) is nearing completion. The programme has encountered construction and labour difficulties which have necessitated programme revisions. Replanning the work and extending working hours has enabled acceleration of the works to be achieved. Work to A wing is now due to finish this week with occupation in September; B wing is now programmed to finish in early October in time to meet the planned programme of occupation in late October or early November.

Norwich Prison

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects to *(a)* receive and *(b)* publish the report on the suicides of prisoners at Norwich Prison. [52763]

Ms Quin: The area manager has received a copy of the review of suicide awareness procedures at Norwich prison following the recent sequence of self-inflicted deaths at the establishment, as he commissioned that review. This is an internal review which is confidential. The current Prison Service policy is that internal reviews or reports are not disclosed. This policy is currently being reviewed but any change will not apply retrospectively.

Police (Racial Discrimination)

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many outstanding cases of racial discrimination brought against police forces are awaiting a hearing by industrial tribunals; how many in each case were brought by *(a)* officers and *(b)* civilians; and if he will provide a breakdown by police force; [53094]

(2) how many cases of racial discrimination against police forces have *(a)* been settled out of court and *(b)* been won by civilian and officer applicants in the last five years; how many in each were brought by (i) officers and (ii) civilians; and if he will provide a breakdown by police force. [53095]

Mr. Michael: It is a matter for each chief officer to investigate claims of racial discrimination made to his or her force and to the police authority, in consultation with the police authority. The information requested is not held centrally and could only be obtained at disproportionate cost by contacting each police force.

Hunting

Mr. Tony Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to introduce legislation to ban hunting with hounds. [52898]

Mr. George Howarth: Several approaches to the question of hunting with hounds are being discussed.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Victim Support

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if she will list those self-help groups, organisations and agencies offering assistance to victims of the conflict and their families funded by her Department; how much public funding each body has received in each of the past five years; and how much is earmarked to each for the current year and each of the next three years. [48469]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 7 July 1998]:* The Northern Ireland Office and Northern Ireland Departments fund a number of self-help groups, organisations, and agencies which assist victims of the conflict and their families. Some of these organisations do not, however, exist solely to help victims, and there are other organisations which assist victims but do not receive public funding. I have set out the available information, for each of the years requested.

With the exception of the NIO's grant to Victim Support (NI) (those sums marked *), payments made by NIO represent 25 per cent. fully additional funding towards projects which have received 75 per cent. funding from the EU Special Support Programme for Peace and Reconciliation (EUSSPPR), which began in 1995.

In the case of the EU Special Support Programme, it is not possible to indicate current and future funding specifically for groups assisting victims, as the Government's commitment is to the Programme as a whole, however the Government expect to pay some £157,405 to those bodies listed for the lifetime of already approved projects.

Funding made available by DOE has been provided through Making Belfast Work; and that by DFP through the Central Community Relations Unit.

I plan to initiate an analysis of the number of support groups, organisations and agencies which assist victims of the conflict and their families and the funding which they receive. Once this has been completed I will write to my hon. Friend and place a copy in the House of Commons Library.

1993–94

£

	Northern Ireland Office	*Department of Finance and Personnel*	*Department of the Environment*
Cornerstone Community	—	37,600.00	—
Corrymeela	—	148,100.00	—
FAIT	—	39,700.00	—
Victim Support (NI)	207,000.00*	—	—
Women Together	—	25,100.00	—

1994–95

£

	Northern Ireland Office	*Department of Finance and Personnel*	*Department of the Environment*
Cornerstone Community	—	38,000.00	—
Corrymeela	—	148,100.00	—
FAIT	—	15,000.00	—
Newtownabbey Victim Support	—	—	750.00
Victim Support (NI)	280,500.00*	—	—
WAVE	—	—	2,740.00
Women Together	—	25,000.00	—

1995–96

£

	Northern Ireland Office	*Department of Finance and Personnel*	*Department of the Environment*
Ballynafeigh Community Development Initiative	—	7,300.00	—
CALMS	—	9,000.00	—
Cornerstone Community	—	41,600.00	—
Corrymeela	—	165,000.00	—
CRUSE	7,000.00	—	—
FAIT	—	43,400.00	—
Victim Support (NI)	370,000.00*	—	—
WAVE	—	24,000.00	280.00
Women Together	—	25,800.00	—

1996–97

£

	Northern Ireland Office	*Department of Finance and Personnel*	*Department of the Environment*	*European Union*
Ballynafeigh Community Development Initiative	—	21,000.00	—	—
CALMS	7,000.00	18,000.00	—	28,000.00
Community Development Centre North Belfast	—	16,500.00	—	—
Cornerstone Community	—	44,600.00	—	—
Corrymeela	—	165,000.00	—	—
CRUSE	5,682.50	—	—	22,730.00
Institute for Counselling	2,200.00	—	—	8,800.00
FAIT	—	30,200.00	—	—
NI Music Therapy	4,000.00	—	—	16,000.00
Newtownabbey Victim Support	—	—	570.00	—
Partnership for those affected by the Troubles	10,000.00	—	—	40,000.00
Shankill Stress	750.00	—	—	3,000.00
Survivors of Trauma	9,200.00	—	—	36,800.00
Treetops	187.50	—	—	750.00
Victim Support (NI)	3,000.00 398,000.00*	—	—	12,000.00
WAVE	9,000.00	33,000.00	—	36,000.00
Women Together	—	37,100.00	—	—

1997–98

£

	Northern Ireland Office	*Department of Finance and Personnel*	*Department of the Environment*	*European Union-Peace and Reconciliation*
Ballynafeigh Community Development Initiative	—	21,000.00	—	—
Barnardos	8,650.00	—	—	34,600.00
Bogside and Brandywell Initiative	7,536.25	—	—	30,145.00
CALMS	8,750.00	—	—	35,000.00
Coleraine/Ballymoney Branch Reg UDR	750.00	—	—	3,000.00
Columba Support Services	2,358.00	—	—	9,432.00
Community Development Centre North Belfast	—	44,000.00	—	—
Cornerstone Community	—	44,600.00	—	—

1997–98

£

	Northern Ireland Office	Department of Finance and Personnel	Department of the Environment	European Union-Peace and Reconciliation
Corrymeela	—	165,000.00	—	—
Cost of the Troubles Study	—	—	10,125.00	—
CRUSE	8,977.75	—	—	35,911.00
DPOA	5,025.00	—	—	20,100.00
Institute for Counselling	550.00	—	—	2,200.00
FAIT	—	31,600.00	—	—
FEAR	750.00	—	—	3,000.00
Lifeline	800.00	—	—	3,200.00
NI Intermediate Treatment Association	9,600.00	—	—	38,400.00
NI Music Therapy	1,000.00	—	—	4,000.00
Partnership for those affected by the Troubles	2,500.00	—	—	10,000.00
St. James Community Forum	5,300.00	—	—	21,200.00
Shankill Stress	17,075.00	—	—	68,300.00
Survivors of Trauma	10,507.50	—	8,300.00	42,030.00
Victim Support (NI)	3,750.00	—	—	15,000.00
	480,000.00*			
WAVE	17,865.00	36,400.00	13,414.00	71,460.00
Women Together	—	32,100.00	—	—

1998–99

£

	Northern Ireland Office	Department of Finance and Personnel	Department of the Environment
Ballynafeigh Community Development Initiative	—	21,000.00	—
Community Development Centre North Belfast	—	44,000.00	—
Cornerstone Community	—	44,600.00	—
Corrymeela	—	165,000.00	—
Cost of the Troubles Study	—	—	1,687.00
FAIT	—	33,500.00	—
Survivors of Trauma	—	—	800.00
Victim Support (NI)	667,000.00*	—	—
WAVE	—	35,000.00	12,264.00
Women Together	—	32,100.00	—

1999–00

£

	Northern Ireland Office	Department of Finance and Personnel	Department of the Environment	European Union
Cornerstone Community	—	44,600.00	—	—
Corrymeela	—	165,000.00	—	—
Survivors of Trauma	—	—	[1]91,000.00	[1]274,000.00
Victim Support (NI)	747,000.00*	—	—	—
WAVE	—	35,000.00	—	—
Women Together	—	32,100.00	—	—

[1] Over three years

2000–01

£

	Northern Ireland Office	Department of Finance and Personnel	Department of the Environment
Cornerstone Community	—	44,600.00	—
Corrymeela	—	165,000.00	—
Victim Support (NI)	747,000.00*	—	—
WAVE	—	35,000.00	—

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what was the total budget for assisting victims and their families in *(a)* each of the last five years, *(b)* the current year and *(c)* each of the next five years. [48470]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 7 July 1998]:* Assistance for victims and their families has been provided from resources within a number of Government Departments. It has never been a separate Government Programme and has, therefore, no specific budget.

In anticipation of the publication of the Report of the Northern Ireland Victims Commissioner, the Prime Minister announced, in May of this year, that £5 million would be made available to provide support for victims and their families in the current year.

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what research has been commissioned and what estimate her Department has made of the future expenditure that might be required to support the victims of the conflict and their families. [48471]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 7 July 1998]:* My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland established on 24 October 1997, a Commission, headed by Sir Kenneth Bloomfield,

"to examine the feasibility of providing greater recognition for those who have become victims in the last thirty years as a consequence of events in Northern Ireland".

Sir Kenneth's subsequent Report, launched on 13 May 1998, entitled "We Will Remember Them", and the recently published report of the Social Services Inspectorate, "Living with the Trauma of the Troubles", which aimed to

"examine and promote the further development of services to meet the social and psychological needs of individuals affected by the conflict",

contain a series of recommendations relating to the needs of people who have become victims of the conflict and their families. Both reports are currently the subject of extensive consultation and, until the outcome of this is known, it will not be possible to estimate what future expenditure might be required.

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what consultation preceded allocation of the additional £5 million victim support fund announced by the Prime Minister in May; when this money will be distributed, and to whom. [48472]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 7 July 1998]:* The recommendations in Sir Kenneth Bloomfield's Report, "We Will Remember Them", were the result of a 6-month consultation exercise with victims, their families and their representatives. I announced on 30 June 1998 a number of initiatives representing an expenditure of almost £1 million. The remainder of the additional £5 million is yet to be allocated and the Victims Liaison Unit, which I have established to drive forward progress in implementing the recommendations in Sir Kenneth Bloomfield's report, is currently carrying out a consultation exercise which will help to identify and prioritise a package of measures for victims, and inform the future allocation of funding, including the remainder of that £5 million.

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is her policy towards the provision of statutory and voluntary sector services for victim support; and what measures she is planning to promote this policy. [48473]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 7 July 1998]:* I acknowledge the excellent work currently undertaken by both the statutory and voluntary sectors. Both deliver an important and diverse range of services, and I have already given a commitment that any measures put in place for the future assistance of victims will take full account of the need to sustain a balance of both sectors' interests.

Ulster-Scots Language

Mr. Moss: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what progress is being made in assisting the further development of the Ulster-Scots language. [49982]

Mr. Ingram: In 1997–98 the Ulster-Scots movement received Government funding amounting to some £108,000. The Government also propose to commission independent academic research which will help to determine whether Ulster-Scots should be treated as a language for the purposes of the Council of Europe Charter for Regional or Minority Languages.

Churches (Attacks)

Mr. Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many *(a)* Catholic and *(b)* Protestant churches have been attacked in each month since January 1996. [50195]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 14 July 1998]:* The table shows the number of attacks on churches during the period in question. The records do not distinguish between Protestant and Catholic (or other) churches.

Month	*1996*	*1997*	*1998*
January	1	1	3
February	0	1	2
March	1	1	0
April	2	13	0
May	0	3	4
June	3	2	3
July	24	10	[1] 1
August	6	3	—
September	2	3	—
October	1	1	—
November	7	2	—
December	5	1	—
Totals	52	41	23

[1] to 3 July

Asbestos

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what guidance her Department issues to those constructing buildings for which it is responsible on the use of materials containing asbestos. [52311]

Mr. Paul Murphy: Those constructing buildings for which my Department is responsible are required to comply with the Construction (Design & Management) Regulations (NI) 1995 which cover the use of hazardous materials such as those containing asbestos. These

regulations in turn require compliance with other statutory regulations, approved codes of practice and Health and Safety Executive guidance notes relating specifically to, and giving guidance on, the use of materials containing asbestos.

Compliance Cost Assessments

Mr. Lansley: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what cumulative net increase in compliance costs has been estimated in compliance cost assessments published by his Department since 1 May 1997. [52970]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 28 July 1998]:* The net cumulative increase in compliance costs as estimated in compliance cost assessments published by Northern Ireland Departments during the period 1 May 1997 to 30 June 1998 is as follows:

Estimated compliance costs

£ million

	Range
Non-recurring	19.6–13.4
Recurring (annually)	2.3–1.2

Mr. Lansley: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if she will list the compliance cost assessments published by her Department since 1 May 1997. [52971]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 28 July 1998]:* Between 1 May 1997 and 30 June 1998 compliance cost assessments were published in respect of the following Northern Ireland measures laid before Parliament at Westminster.

- Horse Racing (Charges on Bookmakers) Order (Northern Ireland) 1997
- Industrial Pollution Control (Northern Ireland) Order 1997
- Waste and Contaminated Land (Northern Ireland) Order 1997
- Company Accounts (Disclosure of Directors Emoluments) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1997
- Activity Centres (Young Persons Safety) (Northern Ireland) Order 1998
- Social Security (Northern Ireland) Order 1998
- Gaming (Variation of Monetary Limits) Order (Northern Ireland) 1998
- Horse Racing (Charges on Bookmakers) Order (Northern Ireland) 1998.

Mr. Lansley: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if she will list those compliance cost assessments since 1 May 1997 in which there is a net reduction in compliance costs resulting from a legislative proposal. [52972]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 28 July 1998]:* There is presently no requirement on Departments to carry out compliance cost assessments where legislative proposals are expected to be cost neutral or result in a saving to business.

Ambulance Service

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, pursuant to her answer to the hon. Member for North-East Cambridgeshire (Mr. Moss) of 21 July 1998, *Official Report*, column *439*, at what *(a)* age and *(b)* mileage level the Northern Ireland Ambulance Service considers ambulances become out of standard and requiring replacement. [52788]

Mr. Paul Murphy *[holding answer 28 July 1998]:* DHSS Guidelines for the replacement of accident and emergency ambulances stipulate that vehicles should be replaced after they have reached 7 years of age or whenever they have covered 140,000 miles, whichever is the sooner. For patient care service vehicles this is 5 years or 70,000 miles.

Child Support Agency

Mr. McNulty: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when the Northern Ireland Child Support Agency's 1997–98 Annual report and Accounts will be published. [53935]

Mr. Worthington: The Northern Ireland Child Support Agency will publish its 1997–98 Annual Report and Accounts today. Copies will be placed in the Library.

It is pleasing to note that the Agency has met all Ministerial and Milestone targets for the second year running. Given the strong emphasis which the Agency has placed on improving the quality of service, it is particularly gratifying to see that the bulk of new maintenance applications (94%) are now being cleared within 26 weeks. The report also records continuing progress on all major fronts over the past three years.

During the year the Agency collected £7.6 million in maintenance, a 43% increase on 1996–97 and is striving to improve the collection rate further through additional measures, such as the recruitment of staff to work alternative working patterns including evenings and Saturdays.

Closer working with the Social Security Agency to improve working practices, contribution to the Lone Parent Initiative and the successful transfer of all pre-Maintenance Assessment work to the Area Offices is yet a further demonstration of the Agency's commitment to make its services more efficient and accessible to its clients.

The Agency has delivered an effective performance during 1997–98 within the allocated resources. With the substantial progress made to date the Northern Ireland CSA is well placed to contribute effectively to the Active Modern Service Programme.

Valuation and Lands Agency

Mr. Savidge: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what performance targets have been set for the Valuation and Lands Agency in 1998–99. [53936]

Mr. Paul Murphy: For 1998–99 the following key performance targets have been set for the Agency:

1. To complete rating and client service cases—equivalent to 48,600 casework units.
2. To achieve a productivity for caseworking valuers of 355 work units.
3. To reduce the unit cost of casework by 2 per cent. in real terms.
4. To achieve a standard in domestic rating valuations such that 90 per cent. of those determined on appeal are within plus or minus 10 per cent. of the initial assessment.

5. To achieve a standard in non-domestic rating valuations such that 80 per cent. of those determined on appeal are within plus or minus 10 per cent. of the initial assessment.

6. To complete 93 per cent. of domestic rating appeals within 6 months of receipt.

7. To complete 82 per cent. of non-domestic rating appeals within 6 months of receipt.

8. To complete 93 per cent. of a representative sample of client services casework within agreed time limits.

9. To issue 90 per cent. of certificates for Continuous Revision Cases subject to retrospective backdating within 12 months of the event giving rise to the revision of the Valuation List.

Full details are set out in the Agency's Corporate and Business Plans, copies of which have been placed in the Library of the House.

Military Complaints

Shona McIsaac: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what steps she has taken to fill the post of Independent Assessor of Military Complaints Procedures. [53937]

Marjorie Mowlam: I have today re-appointed Mr. Jim McDonald as Independent Assessor of Military Complaints Procedures in Northern Ireland. Mr. McDonald's appointment will continue, while an Army presence is required in Northern Ireland to act in support of the Royal Ulster Constabulary, until 24 August 2000.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Comprehensive Spending Review

8. **Mr. Connarty:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what steps she will take to monitor the effectiveness of her Department's increased support for education resulting from the Comprehensive Spending Review. [51327]

Clare Short: We are committed in our Development White Paper to mobilising the international community to meet the agreed target that every child should be in quality primary education by 2015. We are increasing our spending on this objective. We have also reviewed our scholarship programmes to ensure that we support training that assists development. We monitor and evaluate all our programmes and are strongly committed to the comprehensive spending review emphasis on measuring success by measuring outputs, which is why we place such stress on the poverty eradication targets.

21. **Mr. Patrick Hall:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how she intends to spend the increased resources made available for international development assistance following the outcome of the comprehensive spending review, with particular reference to anti-poverty programmes. [51342]

Clare Short: Our budgetary increase of £1.6 billion provides substantial new resources for development. The additional resources will be used to fund partnerships with developing country Governments who are committed to policies which will reduce poverty and increase support to multilateral agencies committed to this objective. We plan to agree allocations in the autumn.

British Council

9. **Sir Geoffrey Johnson Smith:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what priority her Department gives to the activities of the British Council. [51328]

Clare Short: We have concluded that it would be more efficient for the British Council to be responsible to a single department. The FCO will, therefore, assume responsibility for the British Council and the resources previously set aside in DFID's budget for the Council's grant in aid will transfer to the FCO. We have agreed that at the least the transferred element of the grant in aid must continue to benefit poorer countries and will therefore qualify as official development assistance.

Bilateral Aid

11. **Mr. Bayley:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how much money out of the increased resources allocated to her Department in the comprehensive spending review will be spent on bilateral aid. [51330]

Clare Short: We will agree the allocation of our increased resources in the Autumn. The International Development White Paper makes clear that we are now giving greater priority to seeking to influence multilateral systems to achieve a stronger commitment to the international poverty eradication targets. We are also redirecting our bilateral efforts to this purpose.

23. **Mr. Wilkinson:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will list the principal priorities within her bilateral aid programmes on which the additional funding over the next three years announced by the Chancellor of the Exchequer on 14 July will be spent. [51344]

Clare Short: The primary objective of the development assistance programme, as our White Paper sets out, is to contribute to the elimination of poverty through the implementation of the international development strategy. The key target of the strategy is to reduce by one half the proportion of people living in extreme poverty by 2015. The additional resources available to the Department for International Development (DFID) as a result of the Comprehensive Spending Review will be allocated to contribute to the realisation of that target.

We have set out as part of the CSR some specific targets for DFID. For the twenty largest recipients of British assistance we will aim to achieve by 2002 an annual increase in GDP per capita for the poorest 20 per cent. of the population, a reduction in the under five and maternal mortality rates and an increase in the number of children in primary school.

Latin America

12. **Mr. Allan:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what plans she has to increase British support for development projects in Latin America. [51331]

Mr. Foulkes: We are not a major donor in Latin America, but our programmes are set to increase by 40 per cent. over the next 3 years and we contribute through our support for international agencies. We are also collaborating more closely with the major multilateral

agencies in the region. Our support will be firmly focused on promoting the sustainable elimination of poverty, which includes improved management of environmental resources.

India (Child Immunisation)

13. **Mr. Heppell:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what action her Department has taken in respect of the immunisation of children in the Indian sub-continent since May 1997. [51332]

Clare Short: Vaccine preventable diseases kill 9 million people every year. Immunisation programmes are the backbone of our efforts to meet the target of reducing by two-thirds the death rate of children under 5 years by 2015. In 1997, we committed £51 million to the polio eradication programme in India—the largest contribution to immunisation in developing countries Britain has ever made. We have also made new contributions to immunisation programmes in Pakistan and Bangladesh. In Sri Lanka, we are helping the Ministry of Health improve vaccination delivery to those displaced by conflict.

Tanzania

14. **Dr. Iddon:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on the help her Department gives to Tanzania. [51333]

Clare Short: Our development assistance for Tanzania last year was £38 million. This included £25 million of support for debt relief, and support for projects in areas such as health, education and public administration. Yesterday, the Prime Minister announced a new £18 million commitment to work with the WHO to eradicate polio in East Africa which of course includes Tanzania. I plan to visit Tanzania next month and will be reviewing our strategy.

Russia

15. **Mr. Clapham:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what steps her Department is taking to assist the Government of Russia with economic and political reform. [51334]

Mr. Foulkes: We are assisting the Russian Government, and other Russian organisations, with economic political and social reform.

We also provide assistance through multilateral agencies, especially the EU Tacis programme.

A copy of our new Country Strategy Paper for Russia, which places an increased emphasis on the need to reduce poverty, has been placed in the House of Commons Library.

Debt

16. **Mr. Savidge:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what steps her Department is taking to reduce the debt burden of the world's poorest and most indebted countries. [51335]

Clare Short: As part of the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) Debt Initiative, my Department has provided over £6 million to help the African Development Bank meet its share of the costs for Uganda, as well as making £10 million funds available to help Mozambique qualify for HIPC relief. We have also provided over £25 million of interim debt relief to Tanzania and Mozambique. Part of a new £30 million pledge for Rwanda will be earmarked for a multilateral debt trust fund, established to ensure Rwanda is able to meet its debt obligations during the period leading up to HIPC eligibility. Under the Commonwealth Debt Initiative, eight countries have benefited so far, at a cost of £25 million, and we have provided £400,000 to enable Debt Relief International to assist countries with their debt management. With the additional resources provided under the Comprehensive Spending Review, I look forward to doing more to help reduce the constraints which debt imposes on development.

27. **Sir Sydney Chapman:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on progress to reduce the debt of poorer developing nations. [51348]

Clare Short: The Government's Mauritius Mandate presses for the speedy and flexible implementation of the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) Initiative. This was endorsed by G8 Leaders at their Summit held in Birmingham in May. So far, six countries have qualified for debt relief under the Initiative, and decisions on a further three countries are expected this year. The IMF and World Bank are currently undertaking a review of HIPC which will be considered by Governors at the Annual Meetings of the IMF and World Bank in October.

Farmers (Caribbean)

17. **Mr. Soley:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what plans she has to assist small farmers in Caribbean countries to diversify their crops. [51337]

Clare Short: Substantial EC resources to which we contribute are available to promote efficiency in the banana industry, agricultural and economic diversification. We also provide help for infrastructure and education. We are currently in the process of drafting a strategy paper for the Windwards. We are consulting widely and are open to ideas for new initiatives that have a poverty focus.

St. Helena

18. **Mr. Bob Russell:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what discussions she has had with the St. Helena island authority about providing facilities for air travel and improved seaport facilities. [51339]

Clare Short: My Department and the St. Helena Government have agreed to undertake in 1998, a preliminary desk study into the basic technical and economic viability of an airlink to St. Helena. We have agreed to a feasibility study if the outcome of this desk study is positive. European Development Fund resources have been approved in principle for a major wharf improvement project at Jamestown. In the meantime, improved cargo handling equipment funded by my Department will be delivered later this year.

Development Issues

19. **Mr. Ben Chapman:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what steps she is taking to promote greater public understanding of development issues; and if she will make a statement. [51340]

Clare Short: My Department runs an active information and development awareness programme.

As outlined in the development White Paper, the Department attaches high priority to promoting greater awareness of development issues. I have recently doubled the budget for work in this field. I have also set up a Development Awareness Working Group to agree strategies for this work. In November, we will hold the first Development Policy Forum which will enable a wide public debate on development issues.

In addition, the Department produces publications on its work, attends exhibitions, runs a mobile roadshow, produces its own magazine, "Developments", and has its own internet site. My hon. Friend the Under-Secretary and I are currently undertaking a series of regional visits to promote greater understanding of development issues.

Malawi

20. **Mr. Nigel Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on the review of aid to Malawi. [51341]

Clare Short: I have approved a new Department for International Development Country Strategy Paper for Malawi which has been agreed with the Malawi Government. The Paper envisages a strong long-term partnership to promote sustainable development, equity and human rights in Malawi.

I will send the hon. Member a copy of the Country Strategy Paper and place a copy in the Library of the House.

Southern Africa

22. **Mr. Jim Murphy:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on the Government's plans for new aid expenditure in southern Africa. [51343]

Clare Short: During my visit to South Africa and Mozambique last week, I saw the impressive progress that has been made. But much more needs to be done to reduce poverty and create opportunities for some of the poorest people in the world. Our programmes with all countries in Southern Africa are being reviewed this year to ensure we implement the commitments of the development White Paper. Proposals for future allocations are being prepared for all the Department for International Development's programmes.

Sub-Saharan Africa

24. **Mr. Goggins:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will estimate how much additional aid will be committed to sub-Saharan African countries over the next three years as a result of the comprehensive spending review. [51345]

Clare Short: We are working on proposals for the internal allocation of resources over the next three years. Allocations will be finalised for all programmes in the Autumn and will be published in the Departmental Report early in 1999. We expect to increase our allocations to sub-Saharan African countries, to enable us to further our work on the objectives set out in the White Paper.

Sudan

25. **Mr. Tipping:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what recent discussions her Department has held with other Governments and international organisations about the situation in Sudan. [51346]

Clare Short: I have had various discussions and contacts with other Governments and international organisations about Sudan among these are the following:

On 30 April, I met the Coordinator of Operation Lifeline Sudan (OLS) (Southern Sector)

On 18 May, I chaired a discussion of EU Development Ministers on Sudan

On 4 June, I met the UN Under Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs

On 9 June, I spoke to the Executive Director of the World Food Programme

On 23 June, I met the Heads of Save the Children Fund, OXFAM, Action Aid, Christian Aid and CAFOD

On 9 July, I met the Executive Director of UNICEF

On 14 July, I wrote to Development Minister colleagues urging them to make additional resources available for the relief effort in Sudan

On 16 July, I spoke on the telephone to the Administrator of USAID.

I addition, my officials maintain frequent contact with all agencies looking for a negotiated settlement to the crisis in Sudan. They regularly update me on the situation. For example, they attended the meeting of the International Advisory Committee of the OLS on 18 May and on 24 June they were at a World Food Programme briefing session.

Mr. Canavan: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how many tons of food aid have been allowed through to the south of Sudan by *(a)* train, *(b)* road and *(c)* air since the ceasefires by the Government of Sudan and the SPLA. [53245]

Clare Short: The World Food Programme report that between 15 July, when the cease-fire began, and 26 July 2,753 tonnes of food have been delivered to the south of Sudan by air and 323 tonnes by road. No food aid has yet been delivered by train. In addition, on 23 July, a barge carrying 2,125 tonnes of food left Kosti in northern Sudan. It will drop food at 33 points in the south.

Indonesia

26. **Mr. Tony Clarke:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what steps she is taking to provide assistance to the most vulnerable groups in Indonesia. [51347]

Clare Short: Indonesian community groups are working to prepare a Community Recovery Programme. I have agreed that we should provide an amount up to £6 million needed to complete the programme design and

run its first six months of operation as a pilot phase. The Community Recovery Programme will provide rapid response grant assistance for the most vulnerable people affected by the crisis in Indonesia. It will focus particularly on people without land or jobs and look to meet needs otherwise unmet by existing support mechanisms in such areas as food security, basic social services, income generation and job creation. Ultimately, the Programme will look to secure funding of up to £25 million from various donors.

EU Development Programmes

28. **Mr. Drew:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what steps she is taking to ensure that European Union development programmes are targeted at the poorest people in recipient countries. [51349]

Clare Short: Our aim is for the EC's external development programmes to make an effective contribution in meeting the international poverty eradication goal. My Department seeks to work closely with the European Union to help improve the poverty focus and effectiveness of the Community's aid programmes.

In agreeing the EU mandate for negotiation with those Africa, Caribbean and Pacific States (ACP) party to the Lomé Convention, we succeeded in securing stronger backing for the International Development Strategy and targets. When negotiations open in September, we will strongly argue that aid allocations should focus on poverty.

We are also seeking to ensure that a larger share of external assistance allocations goes to poorer countries. We are trying to influence the new Financial Perspectives, which will set the ceiling for spending on external assistance through the EC Budget for the years 2000–2006, and the 1999 EC Budget.

Iraq

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assistance her Department has provided to treat or help the victims of Halabja in northern Iraq following the chemical weapons attack by Iraqi military forces on the town in March 1988; what work her Department has funded to monitor the long-term effects of the chemical weapons on the residents of the town since the attack; and if she will make a statement. [53091]

Clare Short: We share the widespread concern for the people of Halabja, who are suffering from the continuing effects of the chemical weapons attack. We have been working with NGOs, other donors and medical experts to determine what best can be done to help. Earlier this year, we funded an initial delivery of basic medical supplies to Halabja. We have also contracted a medical specialist to carry out research into the types of illnesses suffered by the people and possible treatments, with a view to developing immediate and longer term health care programme in collaboration with the World Health Organisation, taking into account the difficulties of working in northern Iraq. Other donors have expressed an interest in providing funding towards such a programme and we continue to liaise with them closely.

Multinationals (OECD Guidelines)

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, pursuant to her answer of 7 July 1998, *Official Report*, column *436*, on the OECD, when she will publish the specific objectives of the current review of the OECD guidelines for multinational enterprises. [53137]

Clare Short: The next meeting of the committee responsible within the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development for reviewing the Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises will be in November 1998. Prior to that meeting, the Department of Trade and Industry, (DTI) in conjunction with my Department and other interested Departments, will be drawing together UK experience with the Guidelines and objectives for the review. The DTI will be consulting business and trade union representatives, together with those NGOs who have expressed an interest in the Guidelines, and our aims for the review will take account of the views that they express. We expect to make our objectives public nearer the time.

World Day for the Eradication of Poverty

Mr. Goggins: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what plans her Department has to mark 17 October as the World Day for the Eradication of Poverty. [53005]

Clare Short: The eradication of poverty in developing countries is the Department for International Development's purpose, and the focus of our work throughout the year. We currently have no plans to single out 17 October as a specific day for the eradication of poverty. However, we will consider any opportunities that do arise for taking forward our work in the context of the day.

Asbestos

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what guidance her Department issues to those constructing buildings for which it is responsible on the use of materials containing asbestos. [52309]

Clare Short: The Department for International Development (DFID) does not undertake the construction of any buildings. In those buildings that it occupies there are strict guidelines laid down to protect staff and visitors from any hazard to health. All areas in which such a hazard exists (such as certain partitions in the Victoria Street Headquarters) are clearly marked.

Construction standards for buildings constructed with DFID assistance in developing countries do not permit the use of asbestos.

Occasionally DFID has assisted with projects involving the modification of buildings which are found to contain asbestos. One such case occurred with the Zimbabwe Department of Civil Aviation (DCA) in the upgrading of air traffic control systems. DFID introduced specialist technical assistance for DCA staff and contractors to deal with this problem in the short term and to be aware of it for the future.

SCOTLAND

Departmental Reviews

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the reviews his Department initiated in the years *(a)* 1974–75, *(b)* 1979–80 and *(c)* 1992–93. [48524]

Mr. Dewar *[holding answer 6 July 1998]:* The information is not held centrally by my Department and comprehensive details of all such reviews cannot be provided. The following table lists certain reviews for the years in question which have been obtained from published information.

Year	*Review*
1974–75	Review of financial support for shipping services to the Islands
	Review of school leaving date arrangements
	Dunning Committee on O Grade examination structure
1979–80	Committee of Inquiry into Local Government in Scotland
	Working party on provision of non-university tertiary education in the Dundee area
1992–93	Review of bursaries scheme for non-advanced further education students
	Review of councillors' expenses
	Loch Lomond and Trossachs working party

Asbestos

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what guidance his Department issues to those constructing buildings for which it is responsible on the use of materials containing asbestos. [52301]

Mr. Dewar: The Scottish Office issues copies of the common guidance prepared by the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions, "Asbestos Materials in Buildings" to those who require it.

Domestic Abuse

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what steps he is taking to ensure that the links between domestic abuse and child abuse will be recognised in the Scottish Strategy against domestic abuse, and that children's experiences of domestic abuse will be included. [52269]

Mr. McLeish *[holding answer 24 July 1998]:* The links between domestic abuse and child abuse are increasingly becoming recognised. The Scottish Partnership on Domestic Violence can be expected to take account of this as it develops the Scottish strategy on domestic violence. The wide range of membership of the Partnership should ensure that all aspects of domestic abuse are considered.

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has to follow up the research on service provision to women experiencing domestic violence in Scotland, published by the Scottish Office Central Research Unit with initiatives and research to address the needs of children and young people experiencing domestic abuse. [52268]

Mr. McLeish *[holding answer 24 July 1998]:* The research we have already published "Service Provision to Women Experiencing Domestic Violence in Scotland" has provided us with a good basis for the improvement of services. We will consider the need for further initiatives and research in the light of the recommendations which will be received from the Scottish Partnership on Domestic Violence.

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how he intends to facilitate consultation with children and young people who have experienced domestic abuse in developing policy, practice and provision. [52262]

Mr. McLeish *[holding answer 24 July 1998]:* Our aim in establishing the Scottish Partnership on Domestic Violence is to ensure that it contains a wide range of interests, including those who are knowledgeable about the problems faced by children and young people who have experienced domestic abuse, so that they can reflect this in the work of the Partnership. It will also be open to the Partnership to carry out its own consultations with children and young people.

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will introduce legal safeguards to prevent women and children being placed at risk of further abuse due to contact between children and abusive fathers. [52261]

Mr. McLeish *[holding answer 24 July 1998]:* The Children (Scotland) Act 1995 provides for parental responsibilities and rights (such as contact) to continue after separation or divorce. If contact results in risk of abuse, a range of protective measures are available. The Children (Scotland) Act 1995 allows a court to deprive a person of parental responsibilities and rights. The Act also introduced orders to protect children and to exclude a named person from the family home. As part of its remit, the Scottish Partnership on Domestic Violence will take full account of the impact of domestic violence and will consider the adequacy of existing safeguards. The matter of consultation will be for the Partnership to determine as its work progresses.

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what steps he is taking to increase access to support and protection following domestic abuse for *(a)* women and children from rural areas, *(b)* ethnic minority women and children and *(c)* those who have a family member with disabilities or special educational needs. [52260]

Mr. McLeish *[holding answer 24 July 1998]:* The remit of our proposed Scottish Partnership on Domestic Violence will include a requirement to consider particularly the problems in obtaining access to services which affect women and children living in rural areas; women and children from ethnic minorities; and women or children who have disabilities.

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will issue guidance to local authorities on the treatment of children and young people experiencing domestic abuse in local authorities' children's services plans. [52793]

Mr. Dewar *[holding answer 28 July 1998]:* Extensive guidance on the provisions of the Children (Scotland) Act 1995 was issued last year. Although the guidance does not specifically refer to children and young people who experience domestic abuse, it does identify children

who are in need of protection and children whose health and development is suffering among those categories of children for whom local authorities should plan services.

I do not propose to issue further guidance at this stage, but the existing guidance will be reviewed in due course in the light of experience and of any recommendations received from the Scottish Partnership on Domestic Violence.

Football Clubs

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what assessment he has made of the impact on soccer in Scotland of UEFA's proposed ban on multi-club ownership. [52330]

Mr. Dewar: I appreciate the concern about the potential impact of the ruling, and it is very important that the integrity of football competitions is not undermined. The football authorities are best placed to decide how far the new ruling is required to ensure fair competition, and pursue as necessary with UEFA.

Scottish Parliament (Parking)

Sir Raymond Powell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many car spaces are planned to be provided for the new Scottish Parliamentary building; to whom these spaces will be made available; and how much they will cost to provide. [53101]

Mr. Dewar: On present plans, the proposed number of car parking spaces to be provided in the new Scottish Parliament building is 170. This figure comprises 129 secure dedicated spaces for MSPs with the remainder being available for visitors and staff, including special provision for disabled users. The cost of providing car parking facilities will be met within the overall project budget.

Compliance Cost Assessments

Mr. Lansley: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what cumulative net increase in compliance costs has been estimated in compliance cost assessments published by his Department since 1 May 1997. [52945]

Mr. Dewar *[holding answer 28 July 1998]:* It is not practicable to give a single net figure, because of the diverse detail contained within some of the individual compliance cost assessments.

In the majority of the compliance cost assessments produced by The Scottish Office, measures have been confirmed as being cost neutral or not imposing any cost on business. The compliance costs for 3 of the measures, however, have been estimated as follows:

the building (Scotland) Amendment Regulations 1997—amendments to Part J of the Technical Standards for compliance with the Building Standards (Scotland) Regulations 1990. The net cumulative increase in compliance costs in respect of any typical year, range from a minimum of £30m to £60m per annum. The amendments will lead to an improvement in the energy performance of buildings resulting in a reduction of energy costs. Overall, the measures can be expected to pay for themselves in approximately 8–15 years.

the Environmental Assessment (Scotland) Amendment Regulations 1997, and the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) (Scotland) Amendment Order 1997. The recurring cost of compliance across all business sectors affected will be in the range £50,000 to £100,000.

the Building (Scotland) Amendment Regulations 1997—amendments to Part K of the Technical Standards for compliance with the Building Standards (Scotland) Regulations 1990. The building construction costs are likely to increase by about £75 for an average sized house. This, as a percentage of total construction costs, is considered negligible and should have little effect on construction costs, is considered negligible and should have little effect on construction firms. It is estimated that the total additional building costs for the Scottish house building industry as a whole will be £1.7m per annum.

For the detail, I refer the hon. Member to Cmnd Paper 3938 and the individual compliance cost assessments held in the House Library.

Environmental Agencies

Mr. Alexander: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when the Government will undertake public consultation on the review of legislation relating to integration within the Environmental Agency for England and Wales and the Scottish Environment Protection Agency. [54144]

Mr. Dewar: I announced on 8 April 1998, *Official Report,* column *241,* that we would review the legislation relating to the Environment Agency for England and Wales and the Scottish Environment Protection Agency, with a view to identifying any barriers preventing the Agencies from taking an integrated approach to the environment. We are issuing the relevant consultation paper today. We are sending it to a wide range of bodies, and publishing it on the Internet.

Scottish Education Unit

Mrs. McKenna: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement about the forthcoming policy and financial management review of the Scottish Education Unit. [54145]

Mr. Dewar: My Department will conduct a review of the Scottish Further Education Unit during 1998 under the programme of five-yearly non-departmental public body reviews. The review will examine the status and functions of the Scottish Further Education Unit in accordance with Cabinet Office guidance.

The review will be conducted in two distinct stages. The initial stage of the review—the "prior options" stage—will focus on whether the body is required at all, whether NDPB status is correct, and whether the functions are being delivered in the most effective manner. As part of this, The Scottish Office will thoroughly examine the case for abolition, transferring part or all of the functions to another body, rationalisation, privatisation, and continuation as an NDPB. The second stage of the review will then examine the Scottish Further Education Unit's financial management and control systems.

The first part of the review will also examine the roles of other organisations involved in the development and support of further education in Scotland and the scope for co-ordination of their activities with those of the Unit to ensure maximum value for money from the central government resources available for further education in Scotland.

This study will commence in the autumn and will be carried out by the Scottish Office Management and Organisation Unit.

In order to help ensure that all options are considered fully, comments from interested parties will be welcome. Comments should be sent by mid October 1998 to:

Dr. David McAllister
Further Education Funding Division
The Scottish Office Education and Industry Department
Area 1-C
Victoria Quay
Edinburgh
EH6 6QQ.

Leases

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many leases of residential properties extend to a period of 99 years or more in Scotland; and how many of these tenants are liable to be affected by the expiry of such long leases and consequential claims by the Landlords for excessive payments. [53138]

Mr. Dewar: It would require a time-consuming and exhaustive search of the Register of Sasines and the Land Register of Scotland to establish how many leases of residential properties in Scotland extend to a period of 99 years or more. It is therefore impossible to verify how many of these tenants are liable to be affected by the expiry of such long leases. The Government are aware of the difficulty of assessing compensation payable to a landlord if the tenant wishes to buy the property when the lease expires. Because of this and other difficulties caused to the tenant, residential leases of more than 20 years' duration were prohibited by the Land Tenure Reform (Scotland) Act 1974. The Scottish Law Commission will examine leasehold tenure when it completes its work on abolition of the feudal system and the reform of real burdens.

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what research has been commissioned by his Department into the number of tenants holding long leases and the levels of rent payable thereunder. [53139]

Mr. Dewar: No specific research has been commissioned into the number of tenants holding long leases in Scotland, which are leases for more than 20 years. Leasehold tenure is relatively rare in Scotland and is concentrated in specific geographical areas. The vast majority of property is held under feudal tenure. Long leases, for example for 999 years, were very often granted as an alternative to feuing because of restrictions on the power to feu. Levels of rent payable under these long leases tend to be minimal.

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what research he has commissioned from the Law Commission into the law of Scotland relating to long leases; and if he will assess the advantages of converting tenant's interest into *(a)* a registered title in the Land Register of Scotland and *(b)* a recorded title in the Register of Sasines. [52811]

Mr. Dewar: Under its Fifth Programme of Law Reform, the Scottish Law Commission has an objective to undertake, as a long-term project, an examination of leasehold tenure, in particular long leases of residential subjects. Although some work has already been carried out, it is unlikely that the Commission will be able to resume its work on this subject until it has completed its work on abolition of the feudal system and the reform of real burdens, which takes priority because the vast majority of property in Scotland is held under feudal tenure.

It has been possible to record the tenants' interest in a long lease in the Register of Sasines since the passing of the Registration of Leases (Scotland) Act 1857. The Land Registration (Scotland) Act 1979 allows the tenant's interest in a long lease to be registered in the Land Register of Scotland.

Departmental Research

Mr. Fabricant: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the cost of all research undertaken by his Department since May 1997, excluding the cost of green papers and other public consultation documents drafted by his officials; and if he will list in each case the organisations which undertook that research. [52701]

Mr. Dewar: I shall write to the hon. Member as soon as possible and arrange for a copy of the reply to be placed in the Library.

Waiting Lists

Mr. Moore: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many people were on *(a)* in-patient waiting lists and *(b)* out-patient waiting lists, by quarter in each of the last three years. [53258]

Mr. Dewar: The number of patients on waiting lists for in-patient and day case treatment in NHS hospitals in Scotland at the end of each quarter for the last three years is given in the following table. Information on the number of patients waiting for out-patient appointments on a given date is not collected centrally.

Date	*In-patient and day care waiting list*
30 June 1995	78,582
30 September 1995	80,482
31 December 1995	82,811
31 March 1996	82,640
30 June 1996	81,106
30 September 1996	79,843
31 December 1996	82,848
31 March 1997	84,649
30 June 1997	84,813
30 September 1997	84,981
31 December 1997	87,766
31 March 1998	89,525

Source:
ISD Scotland

Ambulance Age

Mr. Moore: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many ambulances and similar vehicles operated in each of the Scottish Ambulance Service NHS Trust's 10 regional divisions are *(a)* under one year old, *(b)* between one and three years old, *(c)* between three and five years old, *(d)* between five and seven years old and *(e)* over seven years old. [52540]

Mr. Dewar: The information is set out in the table.

Ambulance Division	Number of vehicles at 31 March 1998 by age band (a)	(b)	(c)	(d)	(e)	Total
Argyll and Clyde	19	27	36	21	29	132
Ayrshire and Arran	4	27	23	15	16	85
Dumfries and Galloway	1	11	22	12	7	53
Greater Glasgow	27	56	32	12	19	146
Fife	11	18	12	17	13	71
Lothian, Borders	27	34	28	44	25	158
Forth Valley, Lanarkshire	23	29	28	5	40	125
Grampian, Orkney, Shetland	13	31	31	31	12	118
Highland, Western Isles	9	27	30	22	10	98
Tayside	10	21	19	28	15	93
Total	144	281	261	207	186	1,079
Scotland AEU[1]	71	130	135	109	7	452
PTV[2]	47	94	84	86	154	465
Support[3]	26	57	42	12	25	162

[1] Accident and Emergency Units
[2] Patient Transport Vehicles
[3] Mobile Ambulance Control Units, Emergency Support Units, Response Units, Motorcycles, District Ambulance Officers' Cars and Workshop Vehicles

Elections

Mr. Alasdair Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what assessment he has made of advantages of making the times of the opening and closing of the poll the same for the elections to both the Scottish Parliament and the Scottish local authorities on 6 May 1999. [52630]

Mr. McLeish: A Working Group has been set up comprising officials from the Scottish Office, the main political parties, the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, the Society of Local Authority Chief Executives and the Association of Electoral Administrators to look at the arrangements for the conduct of elections on 6 May 1999, including the polling hours.

The current assumption is that the polling hours should be the same for both elections, but no conclusion has yet been reached on the precise times.

Bed Blocking

Mr. Alasdair Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list for each health board in Scotland the number of beds blocked on average in March of the current year. [52629]

Mr. Dewar: Information on the number of patients occupying beds although they are ready for discharge to the community is not collected routinely.

Mental Illness Grant

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has to increase the mental illness specific grant for 1999–2000 and subsequent years; and if he will make a statement. [52503]

Mr. Dewar: The Mental Illness Specific Grant (MISG) will continue to provide ring-fenced resources totalling £18 million a year towards community-based mental health projects in Scotland.

In addition to the MISG, the Mental Health Development Fund is providing £9 million over 3 years up to 2000–2001 to assist local agencies to work together to provide integrated support for people with mental health problems, in line with the principles set out in the Framework for Mental Health Services in Scotland. Following the Comprehensive Spending Review, the non-ring-fenced Grant Aided Expenditure allowances to local authorities for their social work responsibilities, including for mental health services, will increase by £279 million over the next 3 years. Over £90 million is also transferred each year from Health Boards to local authorities to reflect the shift from psychiatric and other NHS hospital care to care in the community.

TREASURY

Foreign Earnings (Deductions)

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment his Department has made of the impact of recent changes to the foreign earnings deduction arrangements on *(a)* operating costs of British charities and *(b)* in the gross and net tax revenues accruing to Government. [52539]

Dawn Primarolo: In reaching the decision to end the general Foreign Earnings Deduction, full consideration was given to all likely practical consequences. Based on information provided on behalf of UK charities, any costs arising as a result of this legislative change will be very low. Most aid agency employees working abroad will not be UK resident for tax purposes and so will be unaffected by the change. The net full year Exchequer yield from the withdrawal of the general Foreign Earnings Deduction is forecast to be at least £250 million a year and the gross figure will be higher than this.

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment his Department has made of the impact of recent changes to the foreign earnings deduction arrangements, on the overseas earnings and competitive position outside the United Kingdom of *(a)* the consultancy sector, *(b)* consulting engineers, *(c)* contractors and *(d)* industries in the United Kingdom which supply goods and services for British consultants and contractors operating overseas. [52538]

Mr. Geoffrey Robinson: In reaching the decision to end the general Foreign Earnings deduction, full consideration was given to all likely practical consequences. It is important to note that FED was available to all employees and provided a loophole exploited not only by UK employers. It is, therefore, impossible to measure precisely the effect on overseas earnings of the withdrawal of this relief. More importantly, in terms of international competitiveness, it is misleading to look at one feature of the tax system in isolation. We believe in support for all businesses through economic stability and broad based relief. We have already reduced the main rate of corporation tax by two percentage points. A further one per cent. reduction is proposed for 1999. Advance corporation tax is also being abolished. It is measures such as these which makes the UK attractive to business and which will result in the creation of jobs and closing discredited loopholes such as FED helps to fund these measures.

Unemployment

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will provide his assumptions for *(a)* the number of people unemployed and *(b)* the percentage of the workforce unemployed in respect of his estimates for social security expenditure in the Comprehensive Spending Review. [51472]

Mr. Byers *[holding answer 20 July 1998]:* The unemployment assumption was set in line with the convention, audited and approved by the National Audit Office—a flat profile for future years based on the most recent outturn.

Departmental Research

Mr. Fabricant: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the cost of all research undertaken by his Department since May 1997, excluding the cost of green papers and other public consultation documents drafted by his officials; and if he will list in each case the organisations which undertook that research. [52694]

Mr. Geoffrey Robinson: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave him on 22 July 1998, *Official Report*, columns *581–82*.

The organisations which undertook the research projects listed are as follows:

SA public information campaign: Research International

SA budget payments Plans: NOP

Two alcohol and tobacco smuggling surveys: Customs and Excise (Monitored by the Government Statistical service)

Presentational aspects of the individual savings account: Fishburn Hedges

Presentational aspects of the working families tax credit: Ogilvy and Mather

Various surveys of PEP/TESSA holders: NOP, ONS, MORI.

The aggregate cost of the projects is £350,250. Pricing information can be commercially sensitive and the contractors have asked for certain individual project costs not to be disclosed. However, I refer the hon. Member to the answers I gave to the hon. Member for Bognor Regis and Littlehampton (Mr. Gibb) on 19 May 1998, *Official Report*, column *303* and on 30 March 1998, *Official Report*, column *441*, which gave information on the individual costs of some of these projects.

Euro

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what research he has commissioned on the impact of the euro on the United Kingdom mortgage market. [53009]

Ms Hewitt: The Government have not commissioned research into the impact of the euro on the United Kingdom mortgage market. However, the Government are familiar with the range of outside studies on the subject.

Ecu Mortgages

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many United Kingdom home buyers have taken out ecu mortgages in each year since 1989. [53010]

Ms Hewitt: These statistics are not readily available.

Houses-builders Federation

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what discussions he has had with *(a)* the House-builders Federation and *(b)* other organisations concerning the implications for the United Kingdom housing market of the introduction of the euro. [53011]

Ms Hewitt: The Chancellor of the Exchequer holds regular discussions with a wide range of organisations on the implications of EMU for the UK economy, including the housing market.

Disability Living Allowance

Mr. Burns: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many recipients of disability living allowance are liable for taxation at *(a)* the highest, *(b)* the standard and *(c)* the basic rate; and what proportion these constitute of all recipients of disability living allowance. [53034]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 28 July 1998]:* The information requested is given for 1998–99 in the table. It is estimated that there are 2.1 million recipients of disability living allowance in 1998–99. Very few recipients, if any, are liable at the higher rate.

Marginal rate tax	*Number of recipients of disability living allowance*	*Percentage of total recipients*
Basic rate	200,000	10
Lower rate	200,000	10

ICL Pathway Project

Mr. Chope: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 23 July 1998, *Official Report*, columns *652–53*, on the ICL Pathway Project, (1) if he will list the firm or firms who have supplied the consultants; [53160]

(2) on what date the consultants were appointed; and whether their appointment followed a competitive tender. [53164]

Mr. Geoffrey Robinson *[holding answer 28 July 1998]:* The PA Consulting Group, Mr. Alec Wylie and Mr. Bill Robins were engaged to assist with the monitoring of the ICL Pathway project. The Government have a call off contract with PA Consulting through the CCTA service catalogue. PA Consulting started work on 28 April 1998. Mr. Wylie and Mr. Robins, with whom contracts were signed on 1 May, were selected after a number of candidates were interviewed.

Mr. Chope: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 23 July 1998, *Official Report*, columns *652–53*, when the objectives set by the Government will be achieved by the ICL Pathway Project. [53161]

Mr. Geoffrey Robinson *[holding answer 28 July 1998]:* Present plans provide that the programme to automate all post offices will be completed by end 2000.

Mr. Chope: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 23 July 1998, *Official Report*, columns *652–53*, on the ICL Pathway Project, if he will list the parties involved. [53163]

Mr. Geoffrey Robinson *[holding answer 28 July 1998]:* The parties to the contracts are: the Benefits Agency (on behalf of DSS), Post Office Counters Limited and ICL Pathway.

Mr. Chope: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 23 July 1998, *Official Report*, columns *652–53*, for what reasons the Government have decided not to assess alternative options to the ICL Pathway Project. [53162]

Mr. Geoffrey Robinson *[holding answer 28 July 1998]:* ICL Pathway are engaged in a project to automate post office counters under contracts agreed in 1996. The Government remain committed to the objectives of the project.

Coinage

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many *(a)* planned and *(b)* current sterling coins match the dimensions of euro coinage; what discussions have taken place (i) on potential problems arising from duplication, (ii) between the Commission and his Department and (iii) with representatives of British business; and if he will make a statement. [53829]

Ms Hewitt: None.

ECOFIN Council

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on public access to the January ECOFIN Council; what publicity was given to the meeting; if representatives from *(a)* political parties and *(b)* lobby groups were admitted; what audience vetting took place; and to what proportion of the conference public attendance was permitted. [53773]

Ms Hewitt: The first agenda item of the 19 January Council Meeting was the presentation and discussion of the Presidency and Commission work programmes for the UK Presidency. As my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer told my hon. Friend the Member for Preseli Pembrokeshire (Ms Lawrence) on 28 January 1998, *Official Report*, column *264*, this took the form of an "open debate". This was the only agenda item to which public attendance was permitted.

Open debates are regularly held, but as part of the UK commitment to openness, took a higher profile during our Presidency. Eight open debates were held during the UK Presidency. More than three times as many members of the public attended the UK's open debates as under the previous Presidency, and the Presidency took the initiative actively to invite the public to watch the debates. The Council Secretariat sent invitations to the first two open debates (ECOFIN work programme, 19 January and GAC work programme 26 January) to 2,800 Brussels based organisations, including NGOs, consultants, law firms, educational organisations and thinktanks.

Some 200 people pre-registered for the ECOFIN debate, and the Secretariat estimate that this number, together with about 100 journalists, watched the debate through a video link to Justus Lipsius Press Conference room, which was full to capacity. *Europe by Satellite* also broadcast the debate. The Chancellor referred to the initiative in his post-Council press conference.

Personal Investment Authority

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received concerning the non-requirement for the Personal Investment Authority's disciplinary committee to publish its rules of procedure. [53780]

Ms Hewitt: None. The rules governing discipline are published in the rulebook of the PIA.

Financial Services Authority

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what form practitioner involvement will take in the operation of the Financial Services Authority; and when such arrangements will be in place; [53779]

(2) what is the timetable for the Financial Services Authority in drawing up the guides envisaged in its consultation document designing the FSA handbook of rules and guidance; [53785]

(3) when the Financial Services Authority will publish details of the system it intends to operate for monitoring independent financial advisers. [53778]

Ms Hewitt: I understand that the Financial Services Authority intends to publish further details of its approach to regulation shortly.

Green Minister

Mr. Edward Davey: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what activities his Department's Green Minister has undertaken relating to his environmental responsibilities since being appointed. [52437]

Dawn Primarolo: As the Treasury's Green Minister, I am committed to 'greening' the Department's operations, to integrating environmental considerations into other policy areas, and to improving the economic analysis underpinning the Government's environmental initiatives.

Information campaigns have been run on the recycling schemes in place and energy awareness. The Treasury also has the "Bag It and Bin It" campaign, and the "Going for Green" campaign.

The Statement of Intent on Environmental Taxation, released with the July 1997 Budget, committed the Government to exploring the scope for using taxes to help reduce environmental damage. The last two Budgets contained a considerable package of environmental tax measures and commitments to further action. I was involved in its preparation, and in drawing up the assessment of the environmental impact that appeared within the Financial Statement and Budget Report.

On a number of occasions I have met environmental non-Governmental organisations (NGOs) and other interested bodies to discuss, among other matters, their proposals for environmental taxes. I have also given evidence on the Treasury's environmental performance, and on the Government's use of environmental taxes, to both the Environmental Audit Committee and the Environment, Transport and Regional Affairs Committee.

Individual Savings Accounts

Mr. Love: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received from *(a)* friendly societies, *(b)* building societies and *(c)* co-operative societies on the individual savings account and its regulation; and if he will make a statement. [53904]

Mr. Geoffrey Robinson: The Inland Revenue has received over 100 responses to the draft regulations for the individual savings account, which were issued for consultation in May. Six of these were from individual building societies and two from friendly societies, and responses were also received from the relevant representative bodies. No representations were received from co-operative societies. We are grateful for all the points made to us, which have been carefully considered.

Income Tax

Mr. Maude: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many income tax payers there were in each of the tax years from 1990–91 to 1998–99. [51735]

Dawn Primarolo: The number of income taxpayers in each of the specified years is given in the table. They are based on the Survey of Personal Incomes for 1995–96 and earlier years. Figures for 1996–97 onwards are projected in line with the March 1998 Budget forecast.

	Number of income taxpayers (million)
1990–91	26.1
1991–92	25.7
1992–93	25.4
1993–94	25.0
1994–95	25.3
1995–96	25.8
1996–97[1]	25.9
1997–98[1]	26.1
1998–99[1]	26.2

[1] Provisional

Mr. MacShane: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 9 July 1998, *Official Report*, column 577, if he will provide comparable figures for two earner married couples with *(a)* one child aged four and *(b)* two children aged four and six. [51165]

Dawn Primarolo: The data requested are given in the table.

Tax, National Insurance, Child Benefit and Family Credit payments at multiple of gross earnings

	Gross earnings (£ per week)				
	150	*200*	*250*	*300*	*400*
2 earner married couple with 1 child under 4					
National Insurance	3.88	9.76	14.76	19.76	29.76
Income Tax	0.00	2.38	12.25	22.75	44.55
Child Benefit	11.45	11.45	11.45	11.45	11.45
Family Credit	24.97	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Tax and NICs less Child Benefit and Family Credit as a percentage of gross earnings	−21.69	0.35	6.22	10.35	15.71
Net income	182.54	199.31	234.44	268.94	337.14
Equivalised Net Income	154.69	168.90	198.68	227.92	285.71
2 earner married couple with 1 child aged 4 and 1 child aged 6					
National Insurance	3.88	9.76	14.76	19.76	29.76
Income Tax	0.00	2.38	12.25	22.75	44.55
Child Benefit	20.75	20.75	20.75	20.75	20.75
Family Credit	37.32	8.10	0.00	0.00	0.00
Tax and NICs less Child Benefit and Family Credit as a percentage of gross earnings	−36.13	−8.35	2.50	7.25	13.39
Net income	204.19	216.71	243.74	278.24	346.44
Equivalised Net Income	146.90	155.90	175.35	200.17	249.24

Note:

The figures are calculated on the basis that all earnings are from employment and that there are no other sources of income

The Married Couples Allowance has been allocated to the person earning 60 per cent. of the total

The standard McClements scales have been used to determine equivalised income. This is the same process that is used in the DSS's Households Below Average Income publication

Some of these families may also be entitled to housing benefit and council tax benefit. However, as this will depend upon the composition of the housing costs (between mortgage payments, council tax, and rent) housing benefit and council tax benefit have been left out of these figures

Credit Unions

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received on reform of the regulations governing credit unions; and if he will make a statement. [53777]

Ms Hewitt: A number of representations have been received on reforming credit unions, including one from the Association of British Credit Unions. We will shortly be issuing a consultation document containing a package of measures designed to lift some of the restrictions in existing legislation, whilst maintaining the movement's focus on the less well off.

Widowers and Widows Benefits

Mr. Todd: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if the Government will extend the entitlement to widows bereavement allowance to widowers. [53342]

Dawn Primarolo: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave to the hon. and learned Member for Harborough (Mr. Garnier) on 3 July 1998, *Official Report*, columns *330–31*.

Self-assessment

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many late-filing penalty notices have been issued by the Inland Revenue to taxpayers due to submit 1996–97 self-assessment income tax returns; and how many of the penalty notices have proved *(a)* to be incorrect or *(b)* to be issued in error. [52761]

Dawn Primarolo: 670,000 late filing penalties have been issued to taxpayers whose 1996–97 self assessment tax returns were received after the filing deadline. About 8 million tax returns were filed on time. There are a number of circumstances in which a penalty notice may need to be cancelled. A common example would be where the taxpayer turns out to have a reasonable excuse for delivering the return late. However, there are no available statistics for the numbers of penalties which were discharged simply because they were incorrect or issued in error.

Information Technology

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much his Department spent on IT, itemising *(a)* personal computers, *(b)* main-frame, *(c)* mini-computers and *(d)* file servers in the last year for which figure are available. [52876]

Dawn Primarolo: In 1997–98 Her Majesty's Treasury spent as follows:

(a) on Personal Computers: £612,512.00

(b) on Main-frame: Nil

(c) on Mini-Computers: Nil

(d) on File Servers: £653,495.00.

Alcohol and Tobacco Smuggling

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many successful prosecutions there have been in each of the last five years for smuggling *(a)* alcohol and *(b)* tobacco into the United Kingdom from mainland Europe. [52297]

Mr. Geoffrey Robinson: The information requested is not available in this form, however, specific figures are available for the number of prosecutions generated by Excise Verification Officers for the smuggling of alcohol and/or tobacco from within the European Union.

1993–94: 44

1994–95: 515

1995–96: 438

1996–97: 502

1997–98: 417.

Charities Taxation

Mr. Caplin: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on progress on the Review of Charities Taxation. [53938]

Dawn Primarolo: Over 3,000 replies were received in the first phase of the Review. The Government are determined to devote the time and attention necessary to do justice to all these contributions before launching the next phase. We expect to publish a Consultation Document in the autumn.

Funeral Payments

Mr. Timms: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to regulate pre-payments for funerals. [53939]

Ms Hewitt: The planned legislation to establish the Financial Services Authority as a single financial regulator provides the opportunity to put in place some essential protections for pre-payments for funerals. Pre-payments for funerals will be included in the scope of regulation under the Bill. However, we will be looking at ways of excluding from direct regulation under the Bill arrangements that offer sufficient protection, such as plans backed by life insurance policies, which meet certain criteria. Consumer concerns about the conduct of the funeral business will remain the responsibility of the Department of Trade and Industry.

The Government will be consulting on the proposals in due course. A consultation document will explain our plans in more detail. As part of the consultation we will be seeking views on possible criteria which life policies backing pre-paid funeral plans might meet if the plans are to stay outside the scope of the Bill. The key aim in setting these criteria will be to see that appropriate safeguards exists, so that when the funeral is delivered, the money is there to pay for it.

I am determined to see that pre-payments for funerals are kept safely and are sufficient to meet the funeral costs. The framework I propose is designed to ensure that, as far as possible, consumers get the funeral for which they have paid.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

New Deal

Mr. Healey: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many people his Department is committed to employing during 1998 under *(a)* the subsidised job option and *(b)* the unsubsidised job option of the New Deal programme. [52586]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: The Foreign and Commonwealth Office is committed to the following programme in support of the New Deal programme:

Phase 1—Plans are underway to employ eight (8) people under the subsidised job option and no members of staff under the unsubsidised job option in 1998.

Phase 2—We will look at employing people under the unsubsidised job option, and increasing the number of people employed under the subsidised option in the next calendar year.

Nigeria

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the proposals outlined by General Abubakar in his national broadcast on Tuesday 21 July. [52755]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: We welcome General Abubakar's commitment to the restoration of democratic civilian government by May 1999, after free and fair elections in early 1999. We also welcome his undertaking to respect human rights and democracy, including the release of the remaining political prisoners. This is the best news that we have had from Nigeria for a long time.

The time has now come to re-establish dialogue between Nigeria and Britain and the wider international community. We are working to secure the agreement of EU partners that members of the Nigerian Government should now be allowed to visit EU member states where that would help General Abubakar's programme and promote constructive dialogue.

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has to assist with arrangements for the international monitoring of the forthcoming Nigerian elections. [52758]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: We are considering, with our Commonwealth and other partners, how to respond to General Abubakar's invitation to observe the elections in Nigeria.

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent representations he has received from British industry concerning the situation in Nigeria. [52757]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: I am in contact with a range of companies, either individually or through the West Africa Committee, who represent the majority of British companies active in Nigeria. A welcome has been expressed for recent positive developments in Nigeria.

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the restoration of air services between Nigeria and the UK by British Airways. [52760]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: I am pleased to announce that on 23 July General Abubakar, with immediate effect, lifted the ban on British Airways' flights to Nigeria.

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what official contact the Government have had with the Head of State of Nigeria since the visit of the Minister of State. [52756]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister spoke to General Abubakar by telephone on 24 July. He welcomed General Abubakar's statement of 20 July committing himself to the restoration of democratic civilian government by May 1999, after free and fair elections. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister re-iterated that Britain was ready to help Nigeria with the implementation of the programme. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister also thanked General Abubakar for resolving the air services dispute.

Biological Warfare

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when the laboratory tests on the fresh samples of missile warhead fragments which were removed from Iraq earlier this year and are alleged to contain traces of VX nerve gas and VX stabiliser are expected to be completed. [53104]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: On 14 July, fresh samples were collected from missile warhead fragments in Iraq by an UNSCOM team including French and Swiss experts. The samples are now being analysed in Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) accredited laboratories in France and Switzerland. UNSCOM does not expect to receive the full results of the new tests before September.

Departmental Vehicles

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many of the vehicles due for replacement by *(a)* his Department and *(b)* bodies listed in the National Asset Register in (i) 1998–99, (ii) 1999–2000 and (iii) 2000–01 will be replaced by vehicles using (1) petrol, (2) diesel, (3) natural gas, (4) electric batteries and (5) other. [52621]

Mr. Fatchett: The expected replacement programme for official vehicles at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office is:

Year	*Overseas*	*Home*
1998–1999	189	5
1999–2000	254	9
2000–2001	160	8

Detailed information about the fuel types to be chosen for replacement vehicles to be purchased at FCO Posts overseas is not known. In each case, this will depend on the type of vehicle required, and the availability of fuel types in each country at the time of purchase.

Of the vehicles to be replaced in the FCO home fleet, the five replacement vehicles for 1998–99, have already been bought and consist of 3 petrol saloon cars and 2 diesel commercial vehicles. No advance decisions have been taken about the types of fuel for the replacement vehicles needed in future years. This will be carefully assessed at the time, based on vehicle requirements, technical advances in commercially available fuel types and availability.

Cycling

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what parking facilities for cycles exist at each office or site for which his Department is responsible and for each agency for which he is responsible. [52688]

Mr. Fatchett *[holding answer 28 July 1998]:* This Department has 200 secure cycling spaces—108 in London and 92 at Hanslope Park, near Milton Keynes.

Burma

Mr. Crausby: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement about the situation in Burma. [54149]

Mr. Fatchett: We continue to deplore the authorities' disregard for human rights and democracy. Ministerial statements have unequivocally condemned abuses. We continue to exert pressure on the regime to engage in substantive dialogue with opposition leaders, including Aung San Suu Kyi. We used our Presidency to renew EU measures against Burma and to draft the tough resolution agreed by the UN Commission on Human Rights in April.

We do not encourage trade with or investment in Burma: in present circumstances we will include in any responses to inquiries about the market from British companies a very clear statement about the nature of the regime; and any briefings will emphasise the Burmese political and human rights situation and the state of the economy.

We also wish to draw attention to the views of the pro-democracy leaders in Burma that it would be inappropriate for tourists to visit Burma at present.

Panel 2000

Mr. Crausby: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when Panel 2000 will be making public its recommendations. [54150]

Mr. Fatchett: Panel 2000 is in the final stages of producing a Consultation Document. This is intended to stimulate public debate on how Britain's identity is projected abroad. The Panel will welcome comments from all those with an interest in how Britain is perceived overseas. As soon as the document is finalised it will be deposited in the Libraries of both Houses.

Sudan

Mr. Crausby: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the approval of an export licence for the supply of two Bedford trucks to Church Ecumenical Action in Sudan. [54151]

Mr. Fatchett: The Government recently approved the export of two Bedford trucks to CEAS to help with the distribution of humanitarian aid in southern Sudan. While the trucks were once owned by the MOD, they have been stripped of all military hardware and painted white. They will now be used to help ease the terrible crisis in southern Sudan of which we are all aware. We were therefore glad to be able to approve this export as an exception to our interpretation of the EU arms embargo on Sudan. This decision does not affect the Government's continued support for the EU common position on arms exports to Sudan.

Entry Clearance Report

Mr. Crausby: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he intends to lay before the House the report covering 1997 by Dame Elizabeth Anson, the Independent Monitor, of refusal of entry clearance where there is no right of appeal. [54152]

Mr. Robin Cook: I have arranged for copies of Dame Elizabeth's Report covering 1997 to be placed in the Libraries of the House today. I welcome the Report and note Dame Elizabeth's recommendations, which will receive careful consideration.

Wilton Park

Mr. Crausby: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how the Wilton Park executive agency performed against the targets agreed for 1997–98; and what are the agreed targets for the current year. [54154]

Mr. Fatchett: Wilton Park exceeded all four of the agreed targets set for the 1997–98 financial year, for the number of conference participants, income, cost recovery and cost per head to the FCO overall. The 1997–98 targets were:

Income: £1,554K

Recovery of costs from commercial activities: 78 per cent.

Number of Wilton Park Conference participants: 1,750

Costs to FCO per conference participant: £247.

The following key targets have been agreed for the financial year, 1998–99

To increase overall income to £2,051K.

To increase cost recovery to 81 per cent.

To increase the target for the overall number of Wilton Park Conference participants to 2,000.

To reduce the average cost to the FCO of each participant to £240.

Chagos Archipelago

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what action he is taking to designate vulnerable areas of the Chagos Archipelago as marine protected areas. [51336]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave on 24 July 1998, *Official Report*, column *713*.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Small Claims Courts

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will establish performance measures for small claims courts for the *(a)* implementation of orders and *(b)* response times to correspondence from the public. [51850]

Mr. Hoon: The Court Service is not responsible for implementing court orders. This is for the parties to decide. However, the Court Service aims to prepare court orders and reply to correspondence from the public within 5 working days, but no longer than 10 working days. The target for 1997–98 was 92 per cent. within 5 working days, although the courts' achieved 98.3 per cent. This includes the performance of all county courts and the Supreme Court Group.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what assessment he has made of the effectiveness of the enforcement procedures for orders made by small claims courts; and if he will make a statement. [51849]

Mr. Hoon: The Lord Chancellor recognises that there are widespread concerns about the enforcement of civil court judgments, including judgments resulting from the small claims procedure.

For that reason, the Lord Chancellor has directed that a Review be carried out to examine the effectiveness of current methods of enforcement, identify changes necessary to enhance their effectiveness and make recommendations. The full Terms of Reference are set out in my reply of 25 March 1998, *Official Report*, column *141–42*.

Ms Marian Temple

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department when he expects the Chief Clerk of Bow County Court to reply to the letter of 17 April 1998 from Ms Marian Temple, 43a Grove Park Road, Wanstead. [51851]

Mr. Hoon: The Chief Executive of the Court Service wrote to my hon. Friend about this matter on 2 June of this year. This letter was also in reply to Ms Temple's letter of 17 April. At the time Ms Temple wrote, the court was experiencing difficulties and delays largely due to the introduction of a new computerised system, which has been introduced in all county courts. These problems and delays have now been resolved.

Departmental Research

Mr. Fabricant: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will list the cost of all research undertaken by his Department since May 1997, excluding the cost of green papers and other public consultation documents drafted by his officials; and if he will list in each case the organisations which undertook that research. [52696]

Mr. Hoon: The information requested is listed in the following tables.

LCD Research projects completed May-December 1997

Project title	*Cost (£)*	*Date completed*	*Researcher details*
Law-and-Economics: State of the Art and Questions for the Future	4,000	May 1997	Professor Anthony Ogus, Rachel Amass University of Manchester
Rationing and Cost-containment in Legal Services	8,000	June 1997	Professor Robert Dingwall, Professor Paul Fenn, Jackie Tuck University of Nottingham
The Workings of the Child Abduction Conventions	6,457	June 1997	Professor Nigel Lowe, Alison Perry University of Wales, Cardiff
Omnibus Survey: Court Customers Experience of the Courts	2,400	July 1997	Office of National Statistics
Review of the Court of Appeal	13,486	July 1997	Professor Hazel Genn University College London Joyce Plotnikoff and Richard Woolfson Consultants in Management, IT and the Law
Regulating Legal Services	9,000	August 1997	Professor Robert Baldwin London School of Economics
The use of Judicial Appointment Commissions: A Review of the US and Canadian Models	2,250	August 1997	Dr. Kate Malleson London School of Economics
Judicial Appointments in Continental Europe	8,400	August 1997	Dr. Cheryl Thomas Wolfson College, Oxford University
Contracting for civil litigation: modeling volumes, access and regional distributions for certified non-matrimonial civil legal aid	1,800	September 1997	Tamara Goriely TPR Social and Legal Research
The Division of Marital Assets Following Divorce With Particular Reference to Pensions	4,900	October 1997	Professor Antony Dnes University of Hertfordshire
Monitoring the Small Claims Limit: Litigants' Experiences of Different Forms of Adjudication	22,800	November 1997	Professor John Baldwin University of Birmingham
Ethnic monitoring of defendants appearing at Leicester Magistrates' Court 1995	3,000	November 1997	Professor Phillip Bean Loughborough University
Total	86,493		

LCD Research projects completed or due to complete in 1998

Project title	*Cost (£)*	*Date completed*	*Researcher details*
Contracting For Legal Services with Different Cost Rules	6,200	March 1998	Gwyn Bevan London School of Economics and Political Science Professor Paul Fenn University of Nottingham Dr. Neil Rickman University of Surrey
Costing Fast Track Procedures Through Hypothetical Case Studies	96,000	March 1998	Tamara Goriely, Farah Butt, Professor Avrom Sherr Institute of Advanced Legal Studies
Review Papers on Marriage causes, and ways of preventing marital breakdown	79,150	March 1998	One plus one
ADR in the Court of Appeal—Preliminary Work	5,000	March 1998	Professor Hazel Genn University College London
Economic Impact of Law on Ancillary Relief	4,000	April 1998	Professor Antony Dnes University of Hertfordshire
The Central London County Court Pilot Mediation Scheme—Evaluation Report	23,615	May 1998	Professor Hazel Genn University College London
Effect On Magistrates Of Learning That The Defendant Has A Previous Conviction	33,940	May 1998	Dr. Sally Lloyd-Bostock University of Birmingham
Criminal Justice Reform and the Organisation of Criminal Defence Services	15,200	June 1998	Professor Lee Bridges University of Warwick
Toward a Civil Justice Audit	32,168	June 1998	Professor Joanna Shapland University of Sheffield
Study of the services to litigants in person provided by the Citizens' Advice Bureau in the Royal Courts of Justice	10,693	June 1998	Joyce Plotnikoff and Richard Woolfson Consultants in Management, IT and the Law
Court Customer Needs	4,200	July 1998	Sarah Beinart (Independant consultant)
Empirical Analysis of Standard Fees in Magistrates' Courts	6,000	July 1998	Professor Paul Fenn University of Nottingham
Review of the law relating to profits from crime	7,500	July 1998	Professor Gareth Jones Trinity College, Cambridge University
Government Policies and Lawyers' Roles	11,075	September 1998	Phillip Lewis Wolfson College, Oxford University
Ancillary Relief Pilot Scheme	206,703	September 1998	KPMG
Applicability to other tribunals and court jurisdictions of organisational principles/practices of the London Parking Appeals Service	22,787	October 1998	Dr. John Raine University of Birmingham
Economic Impact of the Quality of Legal Machinery	2,500	October 1998	Dr. Alice Belcher University of Dundee
Fast Track Simulation Pilot	31,386	December 1998	John Peysner Nottingham Trent University
Information Meeting pilots a monitoring, evaluation, consultation and spatial mapping exercise	692,876 —since May 1997	1998	University of Newcastle
Safeguarding Children's Welfare After Divorce	78,080 —since May 1997	1998	University of Wales
Total	1,369,073		

Combined research costs May 1997–98	£
May-December 1997	86,493
January-December 1998	1,369,073
Grand Total	1,455,566

In addition, £18,853 has been contributed to a study entitled 'Baseline Customer Research' commissioned by the Legal Services Ombudsman. The study is being run by Customer Management Consultancy Ltd and is due to complete in March 1999.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Tobacco Sponsorship

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (1) what definite offers he has received from companies willing to replace moneys currently received from tobacco companies for sports sponsorship; [52515]

(2) when the Tobacco Sponsorship Task Force last met; who attended the meeting; and what recommendations were agreed; [52514]

(3) what research his Department has evaluated into the extent to which companies would be prepared to replace tobacco sponsorship of sport. [52509]

Mr. Banks: The Task Force has not yet been formally constituted, although I have had an initial informal meeting with sports and business interest, and will hold a further meeting in the autumn when the current exercise to collect sponsorship information from the sports concerned should be completed.

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what representations he has received from arts organisations in the United Kingdom regarding withdrawal of tobacco companies' support. [52512]

Mr. Banks: In the last 15 months, my Department has received written representations from four arts organisations in the United Kingdom, expressing concern about the potential impact of any future withdrawal of support by tobacco companies.

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (1) what assessment he has made of whether the period of time set out by the EU Directive on Tobacco Advertising for the withdrawal of sports sponsorship will be complied with; [52511]

(2) if he will list those events his Department will treat as world level events in accordance with the terms of the EU Directive on tobacco advertising. [52513]

Mr. Banks: The future individual sponsorship arrangements are matters for the sports and businesses concerned, although they will have to comply with the legal requirements of the European Union Tobacco Advertising Directive. The Government's detailed proposals for implementing the Directive will be set out in a White Paper to be issued later this year.

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if he will undertake a study into the financial implications for sport of the EU Directive on Tobacco Advertising. [52508]

Mr. Banks: I have no plans to do so. I have set up a Task Force of sports and business interests to help identify and secure alternative sponsors.

Compliance Cost Assessments

Mr. Lansley: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if he will list those compliance cost assessments since 1 May 1997 in which there is a net reduction in compliance costs resulting from a legislative proposal. [52949]

Mr. Chris Smith *[holding answer 28 July 1998]:* My Department has not undertaken any compliance cost assessments since 1 May 1997.

Mr. Lansley: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if he will list the compliance cost assessments published by his Department since 1 May 1997. [52948]

Mr. Chris Smith *[holding answer 28 July 1998]:* My Department has not published any compliance cost assessments since 1 May 1997.

Mr. Lansley: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what cumulative net increase in compliance costs has been estimated in compliance cost assessments published by his Department since 1 May 1997. [52950]

Mr. Chris Smith *[holding answer 28 July 1998]:* My Department has not published any compliance cost assessments since 1 May 1997. There is presently no requirement on Departments to carry out compliance cost assessments where legislative proposals are expected to be cost neutral or resulting in a saving to business.

New Deal

Mr. Healey: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many people his Department is committed to employing during 1998 under *(a)* the subsidised job option and *(b)* the unsubsidised job option of the New Deal programme. [52577]

Mr. Chris Smith: My Department is currently considering how best to support the New Deal programme and will be finalising plans shortly.

Asbestos

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what guidance his Department issues to those constructing buildings for which it is responsible on the use of materials containing asbestos. [52292]

Mr. Chris Smith: For any significant construction of buildings, the Department employs professional project managers, and, where applicable, planning supervisors. They would be responsible for ensuring compliance with the Construction (Design and Management) Regulations 1994. If the project did not require notification under those regulations, they would be responsible for ensuring compliance with the Control of Asbestos at Work (Amendment) Regulations 1992, plus others where specialist work is required.

Cricket Test Matches (Live Coverage)

Mr. Grogan: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many representations he has received

opposing the Gordon Committee's recommendations to remove live coverage of cricket test matches played in England from the events listed under Part IV of the Broadcasting Act 1996; and how many of those representations have been from hon. Members. [52451]

Mr. Chris Smith: Between the publication of the report of Lord Gordon's Advisory Group on 20 March and my announcement of the revised list on 25 June, I received 699 representations opposing the Group's recommendations on Test cricket. Of the 103 hon. Members whose representations are included in that figure, 36 expressed opposition to the Gordon proposals. 67 hon. Members enclosed letters from their constituents without comment.

Football Clubs

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what assessment he has made of the impact on soccer in England of UEFA's proposed ban on multi-club ownership. [52332]

Mr. Banks: I appreciate the concern about the potential impact of the ruling, and it is very important that the integrity of football competitions is not undermined. The football authorities are best placed to decide how far the new ruling is required to ensure fair competition, and pursue as necessary with UEFA. I am discussing the implications with interested parties.

Departmental Reviews

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if he will list the reviews his Department and its predecessors, initiated in the years *(a)* 1974–75, *(b)* 1979–80 and *(c)* 1992–93. [48514]

Mr. Chris Smith *[holding answer 6 July 1998]:* The Department for Culture, Media and Sport was created in July 1997. Its predecessor, the Department of National Heritage (DNH), was created in April 1992 from parts of six Government Departments, and for that reason it is not possible to answer the question in respect of 1974–75 or 1979–80. In 1992–93, DNH initiated the following reviews: review of competitive tendering and market testing in museums and galleries; policy review of the public library service in England and Wales; review of library and information provision in rural areas; study of library services for children and young people; consultation on the future role and financing of the BBC and the Calcutt Review of Press Self-Regulation.

Information Technology

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how much his Department spent on IT itemising *(a)* personal computers, *(b)* main-frame, *(c)* mini-computers and *(d)* file servers in the last year for which figures are available. [52887]

Mr. Chris Smith: The Department for Culture, Media and Sport spent £64,962 on personal computers and £66,678 on file servers in financial year 1997–98. The Department has no mainframes or any mini-computers.

Rugby League

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what progress he has made for finding a new sponsor for the Rugby League Challenge Cup. [52718]

Mr. Banks: I will chair a Task Force to help all sports in receipt of tobacco sponsorship to identify alternative sponsors. The Task Force has not yet been formally constituted, although I have had an initial informal meeting with sports and business interests, and will hold a further meeting in the autumn when the current exercise to collect sponsorship information from the sports concerned should be completed.

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if he will make a statement on proposals for a national centre of excellence for Rugby League. [52604]

Mr. Banks: Discussions are ongoing between the Rugby Football League, the British Amateur Rugby League and the English Sports Council with a view to formulating a facilities strategy for rugby league at all levels. Fundamental to that strategy will be the identification of a national centre of excellence as a keystone to a network of local centres, and a feasibility study will shortly be launched to establish a critical path to bring the requirements of the game to fruition.

Tour de France

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what steps he has taken to bring stages of the Tour de France to the United Kingdom. [52605]

Mr. Banks: The British Cycling Federation are constantly lobbying for stages of the Tour de France to return to the United Kingdom. However, with the race's planned visits to other countries already booked for the next few years, they are concentrating their energies on promoting our own annual international stage race, the Prutour.

English Tourist Board

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many written communications he has received *(a)* in favour and *(b)* against the continued existence of the English Tourist Board. [52748]

Mr. Chris Smith: To date, we have received 178 written communications in response to press speculation, of which
(a) 176 favour the continued existence of the ETB; and
(b) 2 are against.

Sport (Women)

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what proportion of Lottery money has been apportioned to women's sport groups since 1 May 1997. [51780]

Mr. Banks *[holding answer 23 July 1998]:* All English Sports Council (ESC) Lottery awards, capital or revenue, are accessible to women's sport groups, as openness and equality are essential principles of Lottery Sport funding.

There are currently 589 female athletes benefiting from Lottery funding under the World Class Performance Programme.

Departmental Vehicles

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many of the vehicles due

for replacement by *(a)* his Department and *(b)* bodies listed in the National Asset Register in (i) 1998–99, (ii) 1999–2000 and (iii) 2000–01 will be replaced by vehicles using (1) petrol, (2) diesel, (3) natural gas, (4) electric batteries and (5) other. [52618]

Mr. Chris Smith *[holding answer 28 July 1998]:* The information for the Department (including The Royal Parks agency and the Government Art Collection) is as follows:

	Number of vehicles to be replaced each year		
Fuel Type	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–2001*
Petrol (unleaded – vehicles fitted with catalyst)	3	–	–
Diesel (vehicles fitted with catalyst)	2	5	–
Natural Gas/Electric	–	–	20
Total	5	5	20

The information for the bodies listed in the National Asset Register is not available centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Church Bells

Mr. Lansley: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if he will *(a)* provide additional funding and *(b)* amend the procedures under section 3A of the Historic Buildings and Ancient Monuments Act 1953, to allow English Heritage to fund the repair and replacement of church bells. [52402]

Mr. Banks *[holding answer 27 July 1998]:* Under the new spending plans announced on 24 July, DCMS's support for the heritage will increase by £10 million over the next three years. It will be for English Heritage to allocate funding between its various grant schemes. There are no plans to amend procedures under section 3A of the Historic Buildings and Ancient Monuments Act 1953. Nevertheless, funding is already available for the repair of church bells under the joint English Heritage/Heritage Lottery Fund scheme for churches and other places of worship.

British-made Films

Mr. Lansley: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what proportion of British-made films he estimates will be accepted into general cinema distribution in 1998. [53039]

Mr. Chris Smith *[holding answer 28 July 1998]:* My Department cannot forecast the future distribution of British films. However, the report of the Film Policy Review, "A Bigger Picture", sets out a strategy to strengthen the distribution of British films.

Sir Rodney Walker

Mr. Wyatt: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if he will list the directorships and other declarable interests in sports-related companies held by Sir Rodney Walker, Chairman of the UK Sports Council. [50741]

Mr. Banks *[holding answer 16 July 1998] [pursuant to his reply, 22 July 1998, c. 550–51]:* The information provided was incomplete, the full answer is as follows.

Sir Rodney Walker has the following directorships and other declarable interests in sports-related companies:

Chairman—Rugby Football League

Chairman—Leicester City Plc

Chairman—Brands Hatch Leisure Plc

Trustee—London Marathon Charitable Trust

Governor—Sports Aid Foundation

Vice President—Youth Charter for Sport

Chairman—Resero Technology Systems Ltd.

The Council has procedures for Members to declare potential conflicts of interest when decisions come before them and to make appropriate arrangements to handle any potential conflicts which arise.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Civil Servants (Criticism)

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what representations he has received from civil service trade unions about the recent public criticisms of civil servants in the Department of Trade and Industry by the hon. Member for Edinburgh, South (Mr. Griffiths). [52867]

Mr. Kilfoyle: None.

DEFENCE

Animal Experiments

Mrs. Gilroy: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on his policy on the use of animals in defence research. [54399]

Mr. Spellar: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Aberdeen North (Mr. Savidge) on 27 July 1998, *Official Report*, column *40*.

Cost-effectiveness

Mr. McWilliam: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what proposals he has to ensure that his Department remains open to innovative proposals from industry for more cost-effective ways of meeting defence requirements. [54143]

Mr. Spellar: The close involvement of Industry in conducting the Strategic Defence Review has been of considerable value to MOD. We are determined to build on this to foster closer and more co-operative relationships for the future. With this in mind, I am pleased to be able to announce that, following consultation with Industry, a MOD "Code of Practice on the Handling of Innovative Proposals" has been published today. The code explains what innovative proposals are, how my Department will deal with them, what they should include, and to whom they should be addressed.

A copy of the Code has been placed in the Library of the House.

Royal Naval Hospital Haslar

Mr. Viggers: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what has been the capital expenditure at the Royal Hospital Haslar and its predecessor the Royal Naval Hospital Haslar in each of the last 10 years. [53022]

Mr. Doug Henderson: This is a matter for the Chief Executive of the Defence Secondary Care Agency. I have asked the Chief Executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Major General C. G. Callow to Mr. Peter Viggers, dated 29 July 1998:

1. I am replying to your Question to the Secretary of State for Defence about capital expenditure at the Royal Hospital Haslar over the past 10 years as this matter, falls within my area of responsibility as Chief Executive of the Defence Secondary Care Agency.

During the financial year 1997/98, £0.939M was expended on capital works. Unfortunately, prior to that financial year, it is not possible to accurately separate capital expenditure from the Hospital's day to day running costs. However, we estimate that capital expenditure costs were approximately:

	£ million
1996–97	13.6
1995–96	7.8
1994–95	2.6
1993–94	3.0
1992–93	1.7
1991–92	1.7
1990–91	1.7
1989–90	1.6
1988–89	1.6

Agency Newsletters

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 29 June 1998, *Official Report*, columns *14–15*, for what reasons Post Notes, the staff newsletter of the Defence Postal and Courier Agency, is classified restricted; and if his Department plans to remove this classification. [53372]

Mr. Spellar: This is a matter for the Chief Executive of the Defence Postal and Courier Services Agency. I have asked the Chief Executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Richard Bugler to Mr. Matthew Taylor, dated 29 July 1998:

I am replying to your question to the Secretary of State for Defence concerning the Agency newsletter 'Post Notes', as this matter falls within my area of responsibility in the absence, on leave, of the Chief Executive of the Defence Postal and Courier Services Agency (DPCSA).

The Chief Executive recently took the decision to classify 'Post Notes' 'Restricted' because he was concerned for the security of both the civilian and military personnel of the Agency, whose personal details and movements are sometimes given in the newsletter. There was some evidence to suggest that the unauthorised reproduction of articles and notes from the newsletter was more widespread than was intended for what is essentially an in-house staff journal. There are currently no plans to remove this classification.

Armed Forces Pay Review Body

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he will publish the Supplementary report of the Armed Forces Pay Review Body. [50665]

Mr. Doug Henderson: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister yesterday to my hon. Friend the Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody), 28 July 1998, *Official Report*, column *132*.

Army Recruits

Mr. Öpik: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what percentage of regular soldiers were recruited from (i) former territorial army personnel, (ii) the public, including school leavers and (iii) former Army cadets in each of the last three years; and if he will make a statement. [51029]

Mr. Doug Henderson: The percentage origins of regular soldiers are as follows:

percentage

	1995–96	*1996–97*	*1997–98*
(i) Former TA personnel[1]	7.6	7.6	5.4
(ii) The public (including schools leavers)	70.7	71.9	76.8
(iii) Former Army or Combined Cadet Force service	22	20.5	17.8

[1] These figures do not include Reservists mobilised for service in Bosnia, or ex-TA personnel on special S Type engagements

The year 1997–98 represented the best year in numerical terms for recruiting soldiers to the Army since 1991. The increase was largely from among members of the public, reflected in the higher percentage received from this group last year, shown in the table. We are encouraged by this progress, which demonstrates that improving recruitment has been, and continues to be, one of our top priorities.

NATO Expenditure

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what estimate he has made of the current and planned levels of expenditure on NATO commitments over the planning period; and if he will make a statement. [51890]

Mr. Doug Henderson *[holding answer 24 July 1998]:* The estimated costs of UK forces declared to NATO, and associated support costs, is some £13 billion in the current financial year. We expect the level of expenditure in the coming years to be broadly constant. These forces contribute to a number of missions, under NATO, non-NATO, or national command, in support of the Government's security and defence policy. The UK's annual net contribution to NATO's common budgets, at current exchange rates, and other command and HQ costs, are currently some £220 million.

The costs of the UK contribution to NATO operations in the Balkans for 1997–98 are still being collated.

The Strategic Defence Review stated that NATO will continue as the cornerstone of our defence planning, and that we intend to build on our role as a leading European member of the Alliance.

Atomic Weapons Establishments

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 15 July 1998, *Official Report*, column *186*, regarding the Atomic Weapons Establishment, if he will place in the Library

a list of the titles of the research projects, specifying the university concerned, and the duration and value of each project. [53159]

Mr. Spellar: Details of the research projects, their duration and values are commercially confidential and I must, therefore, withhold this information in accordance with Exemption 13 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information relating to Third party commercial confidences.

As I said in my answer of the 15 July 1998, *Official Report*, column *186*, I will write to my hon. Friend regarding the universities involved and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Mr. Alan Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list each incident involving *(a)* radioactive and *(b)* toxic material at (i) AWE Burghfield and (ii) AWE Aldermaston in the last five years. [52162]

Mr. Spellar: The information, in the form requested, is classified and I am, therefore, withholding it in accordance with Exemption 1 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information relating to Defence, Security and International Relations.

However, in total over the last five years, there have been 802 incidents involving radioactive material, 12 of which have been injury incidents and 642 incidents involving toxic material, 281 of which have been injury incidents. All members of staff at AWE are encouraged to report incidents of all types as part of a safety awareness campaign and the majority of the injuries reported are of a very minor nature, such as cuts or abrasions.

These figures compare very favourably with industry in general and, over the past 5 years there has been a year on year reduction in the number of injury incidents. In fact, AWE have recently been awarded a Gold Award for workplace safety by the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the effect of the reduced warhead production programme on radioactive emissions from AWE, Aldermaston. [52212]

Mr. Spellar: Activities such as decommissioning and maintaining safety standards within facilities make up by far the largest proportion of discharges from AWE, Aldermaston. The reduction in the number of warheads announced in the Strategic Defence Review is expected to have a minimal effect on emissions from the site.

Mr. Alan Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the facilities intended to be decommissioned at AWE Aldermaston; and if he will make a statement on progress in decommissioning each of these facilities. [52163]

Mr. Spellar: Buildings A37 and A50 at AWE, Aldermaston are currently undergoing decommissioning. Building A1.1 and parts of A45 are being prepared for decommissioning by Post Operative Clear Out, POCO. There will be a rolling programme of POCO and decommissioning as buildings come out of use in the future.

Mr. Alan Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will estimate the total amount of radioactive waste to be generated as a result of decommissioning operations at AWE Aldermaston; how much of this waste is intended to be stored on-site; and what the total estimated cost of decommissioning will be. [52164]

Mr. Spellar: The current estimate of the amount of radioactive waste expected to result from the decommissioning of buildings at AWE, Aldermaston is based on a relatively small sample of completed work. It is, therefore, subject to confirmation. Measures to reduce the amount of waste generated during decommissioning can be expected to improve as more experience is gained.

Nonetheless, the current estimate is that a total of 39,000 cubic metres of radioactive waste will be generated in the next 10 years at AWE, Aldermaston. Of this, 3,000 cubic metres is expected to be categorised as Intermediate Level Waste and will be stored on site. The estimated cost of the associated decommissioning work over the 10 year period is some £460m.

Territorial Army

Mr. Brazier: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many Territorial Army battalions and regiments are commanded by *(a)* TA commanding officers and *(b)* regular army commanding officers, broken down by arm and service, and what were the figures (i) one, (ii) two and (iii) three years ago. [53257]

Mr. Doug Henderson: The information is as follows:

	Regular COs				*TA COs*			
	1995	*1996*	*1997*	*1998*	*1995*	*1996*	*1997*	*1998*
Royal Armoured Corps	2	3	2	2	3	2	5	5
Royal Artillery	3	2	2	1	3	4	4	5
Royal Engineers	7	5	6	7	2	4	3	2
Royal Signals	6	8	7	5	5	3	4	6
Infantry	28	32	29	26	8	4	4	7
Army Air Corps	—	1	1	1	—	—	—	—
Royal Logistic Corps	4	4	5	6	4	3	2	1
Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers	3	3	3	3	1	2	2	2
Army Medical Service	1	3	5	4	16	14	12	13
University Officer Training Corps	14	12	12	14	5	7	7	5

All figures are as at mid July which is the date at which COs would normally take up appointment. The figures for Infantry excluding SAS(V), the Gibraltar Regt. and the Royal Irish (Home Service).

Mr. Prior: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what effect the implementation of the Strategic Defence Review will have upon the number of Territorial Army soldiers *(a)* serving in Norfolk and *(b)* based in Norwich. [53182]

Mr. Doug Henderson: Following the announcement of the results of the Strategic Defence Review, work has now commenced to establish the future organisation and structure of the Territorial Army. It is too early to say how this work will affect the numbers of TA soldiers serving in any particular area, but we expect to be in a position to make detailed announcements during the Autumn.

Soldiers (Imprisonment)

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many serving soldiers sentenced to imprisonment or detention in the last 10 years have been *(a)* discharged and *(b)* retained. [48362]

Mr. Doug Henderson *[holding answer 8 July 1998]:* Details of those discharged and retained following the imposition of a custodial sentence are not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence in what circumstances the Army Board may decide to discharge a soldier serving a term of imprisonment after that soldier has been retained by his commanding officer; what rules would govern such discharges; and how many such decisions have been made in the last 10 years. [48365]

Mr. Doug Henderson *[holding answer 8 July 1998]:* Under the terms of Queen's Regulations for the Army, paragraph 9.404, a soldier is to be discharged if he has been sentenced to a term of imprisonment. Commanding Officers do not have the authority to retain soldiers in such circumstances, though they can make a submission to the chain of command for a soldier's retention if there are believed to be exceptional reasons for doing so. It is not required that the Army Board consider these cases, although the Board will adjudicate when the chain of command submits a case to them.

Guardsmen Wright and Fisher

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 5 May 1998, *Official Report*, columns *282–83*, by an officer of what rank and on what date the decision was taken to retain Guardsmen Fisher and Wright following their conviction. [48363]

Mr. Doug Henderson *[holding answer 8 July 1998]:* The future of Guardsmen Fisher and Wright is a matter for decision by the Army Board. The Board has not yet made any decision regarding the future in the Army of Guardsmen Fisher and Wright.

Sri Lankan Army Staff College

Mr. Gardiner: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the support in terms of *(a)* finance, *(b)* personnel and *(c)* advice which his Department is supplying to the Sri Lankan Army Staff College at Batafanda. [50940]

Mr. Doug Henderson *[holding answer 17 July 1998]:* My Department currently provides one Colonel as an instructor at the Sri Lankan Army Staff College. The cost of this post, some £116,991 per annum, is shared between the FCO and MOD and includes elements to cover the Colonel's pay and allowances, his national insurance and pension contributions, local overseas allowances, loan service pay and incidental movements costs. The Colonel is currently serving on a one year tour of duty.

Trident

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if each missile on board Trident submarines will carry the same number of warheads; and if he will make a statement. [52217]

Mr. George Robertson: I am withholding the information requested under Exemption 1 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information relating to defence, security and international relations.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the (i) minimum and (ii) maximum range of the Trident missile as deployed in accordance with the plans announced in the Strategic Defence Review. [52213]

Mr. George Robertson: The maximum range of the Trident D5 missile is in the region of 6,000 miles. I am withholding further details of the performance of the Trident missile under Exemption 1 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information relating to defence, security and international relations.

Mr. Alan Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many days each of Britain's Trident submarines has spent on patrol in each of the last four years. [52168]

Mr. George Robertson: In each of the last four years the number of days that each Trident submarine spent on patrol is as follows:

	1995	*1996*	*1997*	*1998*
Vanguard	211	132	184	65
Victorious	0	169	181	89
Vigilant	0	0	0	49
Vengeance			(in build)	

The remaining patrol days in 1995 and 1996 were covered by our last Resolution class submarines. The figures for 1998 cover the period up to 22 July.

Mr. Alan Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what were the reasons for the payments made to the US Government under the heading Trident Refit Feasibility Study; and if he will list the total amount to be paid for this item. [52166]

Mr. Spellar: The feasibility studies were carried out on behalf of the United Kingdom into the emergency dry-docking of United Kingdom Trident submarines in the United States. This has nothing to do with refitting. The studies were undertaken to determine the practicability of conducting an emergency docking and essential repairs in the event that United Kingdom Trident submarines suffered damage or failure while deployed in the United

States for their work-up trials. The total amount we expect to pay for these studies is in the region of £850,000, subject to exchange rate variations.

Mr. Alan Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when it is intended to roll-out the fourth Trident submarine. [52183]

Mr. George Robertson: The fourth Trident submarine, HMS Vengeance, is due to be rolled out on 19 September 1998.

Nuclear Materials (Recycling)

Mr. Alan Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to recycle the nuclear material extracted from retired nuclear weapons; and if he will make a statement. [52169]

Mr. Spellar: The amount of nuclear material declared in the Strategic Defence Review includes that to be extracted from retired nuclear weapons. This will be retained for Defence purposes.

Plutonium Contamination

Mr. Alan Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the plutonium contamination incident at AWE, Aldermaston on 15 December 1997; and if he will place in the Library copies of his Department's reports on this incident. [52160]

Mr. Spellar: This matter is currently the subject of a prosecution of the Atomic Weapons Establishment plc. and Hunting-BRAE Ltd., the Atomic Weapons Establishment's managing contractor, by the Nuclear Installations Inspectorate. The matter, is therefore, sub judice and I must withhold details under Exemption 4 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information, relating to Law Enforcement and Legal Proceedings.

HMS Spartan

Mr. Maples: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what estimate he has made of the cost of cancelling the planned refit of HMS Spartan at Rosyth. [52737]

Mr. George Robertson *[holding answer 28 July 1998]:* We estimate that the irrecoverable costs which would have arisen from the cancellation of HMS Spartan at Rosyth would have amounted to about £60 million. In addition, we estimate that the cost of reimbursing Babcock Rosyth Defence Limited, the owners of the Dockyard, for their redundancy costs would have been about £30 million.

Royal Marine Reserve

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the future role of the Royal Marine Reserve following the Strategic Defence Review. [52762]

Mr. George Robertson: No changes are planned to the role of the Royal Marines Reserve following the Strategic Defence Review.

Cycling

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what proportion of the employees of his Department and of the employees of each agency for which he is responsible cycle to work; and what measures he plans to increase that proportion. [52681]

Mr. Spellar *[holding answer 28 July 1998]:* Information on the number of Ministry of Defence and Defence Agency personnel that cycle to work is not available. However, this data and much more covering a very large number of MoD sites will be gathered during the preparation of departmental Green Transport Plans.

HMS Splendid

Mr. Maples: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what has been the cost of cancelling the refit of HMS Splendid at Devonport. [52738]

Mr. George Robertson *[holding answer 28 July 1998]:* No costs have been incurred to-date in respect of the decision to cancel HMS Splendid's refit, which had been planned to take place at Devonport in 2003. Devonport Management Limited, the owners of the Dockyard, are required, as far as is possible, to mitigate the loss of the refit. In addition, we may decide to re-profile Devonport's allocated workload to take account of the peaks and troughs in the programme, thereby reducing the effect of the cancellation. Once this work has been completed, nearer to 2003, we anticipate that the irrecoverable costs associated with the loss of Splendid will be minimal, but it is too early to say. It is also too early to say whether any redundancy costs, for which MOD might be liable, will arise.

Armed Forces Historical Branches

Mr. Keith Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to combine the Royal Navy, Army and Royal Air Force historical branches. [52800]

Mr. Doug Henderson *[holding answer 28 July 1998]:* The three Service Historical Branches are collocated and work closely together. There are currently no plans to create a Defence Historical Branch.

Departmental Research

Mr. Fabricant: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the cost of all research undertaken by his Department since May 1997, excluding the cost of green papers and other public consultation documents drafted by his officials; and if he will list in each case the organisations which undertook that research. [52702]

Mr. Spellar: The latest information on expenditure on defence research can be found in Table 2.1 of "Science, Engineering and Technology Statistics 1998", published on 13 July 1998 (CM 4006). A complete list of all organisations supplying research to MOD is not held. However, the principal sources of research for the MOD are the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency, the Atomic Weapons Establishment, and the Defence Clothing and Textiles Agency, although much of the research activity itself is subcontracted to industry.

Defence Medical Services

Mr. Viggers: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what proposals from Defence Costs Study 15 on defence medical services remain outstanding. [53023]

Mr. Doug Henderson: There are no proposals outstanding from Defence Costs Study 15. Some recommendations have been subject to further work in the light of subsequent studies.

West Indies Guard Ship

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the future of the West Indies Guard Ship. [52655]

Mr. Doug Henderson *[holding answer 27 July 1998]:* We will continue to deploy a West Indies Guard Ship (WIGS). However, following the adjustments in destroyer and frigate numbers as part of the Strategic Defence Review we are adopting a more flexible approach to some of our peacetime Naval tasks, including that in the Caribbean, designed to make more efficient use of our naval assets.

We will maintain a very high level of commitment to the Caribbean with a destroyer or frigate deployed as WIGS for a large part of the year. It will be present during the whole of the hurricane season with flexibility to increase coverage at other times by adjusting other commitments, if necessary. During that part of the year when a destroyer or frigate is not in the Caribbean, a destroyer or frigate will be earmarked to deploy there at short notice, and when other ships deploy to the region, they will be used to cover some of the WIGS tasks.

We aim to maintain the effectiveness of our counter drugs efforts by ensuring that the WIGS programme is focused more on counter-drugs operations, and by involving other RN maritime assets in this work when they are in the region.

Depleted Uranium

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment his Department has made of the advantages of remediating depleted uranium contaminated battlefields in Kuwait and Iraq. [43051]

Mr. Doug Henderson: The Ministry of Defence has made no assessment of the advantages of remediating areas in Kuwait and Iraq in which depleted uranium (DU) based ammunition was fired during the Gulf conflict; nor has any specific review of the environmental and health effects of firing this ammunition in the Gulf been undertaken by MOD. The Government do not have any information concerning the levels of DU currently present in Kuwait or southern Iraq and cannot, therefore, comment on this matter in any detail. The use of the DU rounds by UK forces was not in conflict with the United Nations Charter or any other International agreement or convention. In the use of these rounds and other weaponry, my Department complies strictly with international law.

Divisional Headquarters, Shrewsbury

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he plans to announce his decision on the future of the divisional headquarters in Shrewsbury. [50551]

Mr. Doug Henderson: No proposals on the future of the divisional headquarters at Shrewsbury have been made to Ministers. Closure of the headquarters is not, however, an option being considered under the review by the Army of its divisional and district structure in the UK.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Jobseeker's Allowance

Mr. David Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what financial help towards housing costs is available to those claiming jobseeker's allowance who *(a)* are tenants and *(b)* have a mortgage. [52372]

Mr. Denham: For those Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) claimants who are tenants, help with housing costs is mostly provided through the Housing Benefit scheme. For those with a mortgage, help for those who are eligible is included in their JSA payment.

Where tenants are receiving income-based JSA they are "passported" to maximum Housing Benefit. Deductions may be made from the maximum Housing Benefit where non-dependents are involved. Tenants who are receiving contribution-based JSA have to make a claim for Housing Benefit on low-income grounds from their local authority.

Those receiving income-based JSA receive a contribution towards the interest payable on loans to purchase the home and certain home improvements and some other housing costs which are not met by Housing Benefit. It does not cover all mortgage liabilities, for example capital repayments, endowment premiums, insurance or help with arrears. There is no help with mortgage payments for those who are only entitled to contribution-based JSA.

War Pensions

Mr. Mates: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry which local authorities in England and Wales do not disregard war pensions totally when assessing housing benefits and local authority charges; what amount of disregard these local authorities currently apply; which political party controls the local authorities concerned or, where there is no overall control, which party has the most seats on the council; if he intends to extend the statutory requirement to disregard only the first £10 of a war pension in England and Wales; what assessment he has made of procedures in *(a)* Northern Ireland and *(b)* Scotland; and if he will make a statement. [52572]

Mr. Denham: I refer the hon. Member to the Written Answer given by my hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Withington (Mr. Bradley) to my hon. Friend the Member for Wythenshawe and Sale, East (Mr. Goggins) on 29 July 1997, *Official Report*, column *231*.

Mandatory disregards for War Disablement and War Widow's Pensions already exist in Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit. This is in recognition of the special nature of these pensions, and ensure pensioners receive preferential treatment. For example, a war pensioner can currently have between £10 and £175 of his pension disregarded on a statutory basis.

Child Support Agency

Mr. Prior: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how much the Child Support Agency cost to run in the last financial year. [53555]

Mr. Denham: The cost of running the Child Support Agency in 1997/98 was £210.6 million.

Mr. Prior: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will estimate the costs to the Child Support Agency of the implementation of the Green Paper, "CHILDREN FIRST: a new approach to child support". [53572]

Mr. Denham: The Government are consulting over their proposals for reforming the current child support scheme and the detailed arrangements will not be decided until that process has been concluded. It follows that we cannot, at this early stage, estimate the full costs to the Child Support Agency of moving to a radically simpler system. However, excluding computer costs which may form part of a wider Departmental programme, transitional costs could be in the order of £30 million spread over two to three years.

Mr. Pearson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when the new procedural instructions will be put in place for the payment of arrears in cases of CSA maladministration. [52245]

Mr. Denham: We expect the Child Support Agency to provide a consistent, fair and efficient service to all its clients. We have set out proposals for radical reform in our Green Paper "Children First: a new approach to child support" (Cm 3992).

The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the Chief Executive, Mrs. Faith Boardman. She will write to my hon. Friend.

Letter from Faith Boardman to Mr. Ian Pearson, dated 28 July 1998:

I am replying to your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security about new procedural instructions for payment of arrears in the Child Support Agency.

The Agency is extending its special payments scheme to make provision in certain circumstances for payments of arrears to be made to parents with care. Where there is clear evidence that the Agency's maladministration has caused the arrears to accrue we will consider the payment of arrears to the parent with care in advance of maintenance being received from the non-resident parent.

The criteria to be used for considering such payments are expected to be finalised shortly. These have been developed in consultation with the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration. Once the criteria have been agreed, procedures for the consideration and payment of arrears will be written as a matter of urgency so that payments that are appropriate can be made without any further delay.

Once available, guidance will be placed in the Library.

I hope this is helpful.

Pensioner Incomes

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many single pensioners and pensioner couples he expects to qualify for the guaranteed minimum income who would not qualify for income support if it were increased only in line with prices. [52411]

Mr. Denham: The information is in the table.

IS Pensioner Benefit Units

Thousand

Year	*Floaters-on from April 1999 increases* Singles	Couples
1999–2000	55	10
2000–01	50	10
2001–02	50	10

Notes:
1. All estimates exclude cases in residential care and nursing homes as insufficient information is available on these cases to be able accurately to model the additional cases who may float-on under the increases
2. Estimates have been based upon latest Income Support forecasts, following the changes announced as part of the Comprehensive Spending Review, and information from the 1995–96 Family Resources Survey
3. Under Income Support rules, one partner in a couple need be aged over 60 years to be classed as a couple pensioner benefit unit
4. Estimates have been rounded to the nearest 5,000 cases

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the estimated additional cost of the guaranteed minimum income compared with that of uprating income support for pensioners in line with prices, assuming no increase in take-up; and by how much this figure would be increased if full take-up were achieved. [52413]

Mr. Denham: The table illustrates the estimated additional expenditure effect of increasing the Income Support rates above the normal price uprating for:
(a) existing cases and those who "float on" as a result of the increase and;
(b) those pensioners who become entitled as a result of activity to increase take-up.

Estimated expenditure effects of increases to Income Support rates from April 1999

£ million, cash prices

Year	*Increases to IS rates based on current take-up rates*	*Increases to IS rates based on 85 per cent. take-up expenditure*
1999–2000	265	275
2000–01	270	305
2001–02	270	330

Notes:
1. All estimates exclude cases in residential care and nursing homes as insufficient information is available on these cases to be able to accurately model the additional cases who may float-on under the increases
2. Estimates have been based upon latest Income Support forecasts, following the changes announced as part of the Comprehensive Spending Review, and information from the 1995–96 Family Resources Survey
3. Estimates relate to the expenditure effects in Income Support only
4. Estimates have been rounded to the nearest £5 million
5. Take-up estimates are based on achieving 85 per cent. take-up expenditure by the end of year 3.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security by how much the guaranteed minimum income will be higher for older pensioners. [52412]

Mr. Denham: The current rates of Income Support will be increased by £4.60 per week for single pensioners aged 75 to 79, and by £4.70 per week for pensioners aged 80 and over.

The full range of the increases is given in the table.

£

Age	Current rate: single	Rate from April 1999	Current rate: couple	Rate from April 1999
60–74	70.45	75.00	109.35	116.60
75–79	72.70	77.30	112.55	119.85
80+[1]	77.55	82.25	117.90	125.30

[1] The rate for pensioners aged 80+ also applies to pensioners aged 60 and over, who are disabled

Mr. Goggins: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will estimate the full year cost of disregarding the first £10 of income from *(a)* savings and *(b)* private pensions when calculating means-tested benefits for all pensioners. [52573]

Mr. Denham: No account is taken of actual income from savings. It is not possible to provide information on personal pensions as they cannot be identified separately from other types of annuity income in the Family Resources Survey. Such information as is available is in the table.

Estimated annual expenditure across the income related benefit system from disregarding the first £10 of income from occupational pensions

£ million

Benefit	Cost 1998–99 prices
Income Support	70
Housing Benefit	95
Council Tax Benefit	45
Total	210

Note:

Costs have been rounded to the nearest £5 million

Source:

Costs in Income Support were obtained from the 1998–99 Income Support Simulation Model, based on the May 1996 Quarterly Statistical Inquiry, and those for Housing Benefit/Council Tax Benefit were calculated from the 1998–99 Policy Simulation Model, which is based on the 1995–96 Family Resources Survey

Disability Living Allowance

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will investigate the procedures and regulations followed by the Independent Tribunal Service in relation to the appeal for a disability living allowance appeal lodged on 17 June 1997 by William Kirane of Caernarfon; and if he will review the reply sent by Mr. Peter Mathison of the Benefits Agency dated 25 June sent in response to representations made by the right hon. Member for Caernarfon to the Secretary of State for Social Security of 23 April. [53563]

Mr. Denham: The operation of the appeals system is a matter for the Independent Tribunal Service. However, one of the purposes of the changes which will be introduced under the Social Security Act 1998 is to speed up the hearing of appeals.

In respect of the reply sent previously concerning the case of William Kirrane of Caernarfon, I have asked Peter Mathison to look into the matter and to write to you again.

Mr. Etherington: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the estimated average cost of *(a)* a review of a DLA application and *(b)* an appeal against a DLA award. [52780]

Mr. Denham: The administration of Disability Living Allowance is a matter for Peter Mathison, Chief Executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to my hon. Friend.

Letter from Peter Mathison to Mr. Bill Etherington, dated 28 July 1998:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question asking what is the estimated average cost of (a) a review of a Disability Living Allowance (DLA) application and (b) an appeal against a DLA award.

The information requested is not readily available since the costs will be made up of a variable number of items, depending on the circumstances of the case.

Two of the major costs are staff and medical evidence. If a review is requested under 3 months, the staffing costs would be £23.51 per review. If a review is requested over 3 months, the staffing cost would be £16.68. The cost of an appeal would be £34.82.

Costs attributable to obtaining further medical evidence, depends on the nature of the evidence required. The cost of obtaining a General Practitioners Factual Report is £17.00. The cost of obtaining an Examining Medical Practitioners Report is £56.90.

Tribunal costs will also vary. An average cost, however, is £85.28 per hearing, derived by dividing the whole cost of setting up a Tribunal, £343.28, by the number of listings per day.

I hope you find the reply helpful.

National Insurance

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what proportion of the population claiming social security benefits have *(a)* never paid national insurance contributions and *(b)* not paid sufficient national insurance contributions to qualify for the contributory benefit claimed; and if he will quantify the total expenditure for *(a)* and *(b)* for (i) 1996–97 and (ii) 1997–98 and the estimated expenditure for (1) 1998–99, (2) 1990–2000, (3) 2000–01 and (4) 2001–02. [52545]

Mr. Denham: The information could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what proportion of those over the retirement age have *(a)* not paid any national insurance contributions and *(b)* paid insufficient to qualify for a full contributory pension. [52526]

Mr. Denham: The information is not available in the form requested. Such information as is available is as follows.

There are 10.4 million people over pension age residing in Great Britain. Of these 6.7 million receive a full contributory pension based on either their own or their

spouse's contributions, and 3.3 million receive a pension at less than the full rate.

Sources:

1. 5 per cent. sample of the Pensions Strategy Computer System, at September 1997
2. Population projections at June 1997 produced by the Government Actuary's Department.

Mr. Rooney: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what were the receipts from National Insurance contributions split between (i) employers and (ii) employees in *(a)* cash terms and *(b)* at June 1998 prices for each year since 1982–83. [53209]

Mr. Denham: The information is in the table.

Great Britain—class 1 and class 1A national insurance contributions

£ billion

	Cash terms				*June 1997 prices*			
		Class 1				*Class 1*		
Year	*Employee*	*Employer*	*Class 1A*	*Total*	*Employee*	*Employer*	*Class 1A*	*Total*
1982–83	8.3	12.2	0.0	20.5	16.4	24.3	0.0	40.7
1983–84	9.2	12.1	0.0	21.3	17.5	22.9	0.0	40.4
1984–85	9.9	11.9	0.0	21.8	17.9	21.6	0.0	39.4
1985–86	10.7	12.4	0.0	23.1	18.3	21.1	0.0	39.4
1986–87	11.5	13.5	0.0	25.0	19.0	22.3	0.0	41.3
1987–88	12.6	15.0	0.0	27.5	20.0	23.8	0.0	43.8
1988–89	13.9	17.0	0.0	30.9	20.9	25.4	0.0	46.3
1989–90	14.4	19.1	0.0	33.5	20.0	26.6	0.0	46.7
1990–91	14.3	20.9	0.0	35.2	18.1	26.5	0.0	44.6
1991–92	14.9	21.8	0.0	36.7	18.1	26.4	0.0	44.5
1992–93	15.2	22.2	0.4	37.8	17.8	26.1	0.5	44.4
1993–94	15.2	23.6	0.4	39.2	17.5	27.3	0.5	45.3
1994–95	17.8	23.4	0.5	41.6	20.0	26.3	0.6	46.8
1995–96	19.0	24.4	0.5	43.9	20.7	26.5	0.5	47.7
1996–97	19.5	25.7	0.5	45.7	20.7	27.3	0.5	48.5
1997–98	21.3	27.1	0.5	48.8	21.9	27.8	0.5	50.3

Notes:
1. Figures may not sum to totals shown due to rounding
2. Class 1A figures are in respect of employers only

Source:
Government Actuary's Department

Benefit Fraud

Mr. Love: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what estimate he has made of the extent of benefit fraud for each of the benefits provided through the Benefits Agency in the current year; and if he will make a statement on plans to tackle fraud. [53252]

Mr. Denham: Figures estimating the extent of benefit fraud for each of the benefits provided through the Benefits Agency (BA) are not available for the current year. Reliable estimates of the level of fraud within individual benefits are informed by the BA's Benefit Review programme. These reviews are a snapshot of the level of fraud at the time the review was carried out, and these estimates can change. The first review of each benefit sets a baseline to establish the nature and extent of incorrectness, including fraud and abuse, and repeat exercises enable the Benefits Agency to identify changes in those patterns over time. The programme of Benefit Reviews of all major benefits began in 1994 and the table details the findings of all the reviews of BA benefits completed so far.

The Government are determined to reduce the level of fraud and have set out their new comprehensive anti-fraud strategy in the Green Paper "Beating Fraud is Everyone's Business: Securing the Future". The strategy will focus on minimising the opportunity to commit fraud in the first place with improved benefit design and tighter operational procedures. We will also seek to establish an environment conducive to anti-fraud work and to work in partnership with others across central and local government and in public bodies and the private sector. A key element is the development of better measures of the amount of fraud, and the savings which flow from particular preventive and detective activities.

Estimates of the extent of fraud in benefits provided through the Benefits Agency

Benefit	*Percentage of claims where fraud is confirmed or strongly suspected*	*Estimated level of fraud*	*Results announced*
Income Support (First Review)	9.7	£1.4 billion	July 1995
Unemployment Benefit	7.8	£86 million	July 1995
Retirement Pension	up to 0.13	up to £40 million	March 1996
Invalid Care Allowance	6.5	£37 million	July 1996

Estimates of the extent of fraud in benefits provided through the Benefits Agency

Benefit	*Percentage of claims where fraud is confirmed or strongly suspected*	*Estimated level of fraud*	*Results announced*
Disability Living Allowance	12.2	£499 million	February 1997
Income Support (Second Review)	11.1	£1.77 billion	July 1997
Child Benefit/Child Benefit (Lone Parent)	[1]5.4	[2]£184 million	July 1998

[1] Presented as 1.7 per cent. 'fraud' and 3.7 per cent. 'high suspicion of fraud' in the Child Benefit (CHB) review report
[2] Presented as £51.6 million 'fraud' and £132.5 million 'high suspicion of fraud' in the CHB review report

Notes:
1. Information is based on the results of Benefit Reviews completed so far
2. The total figures from each of the reviews cannot be added together to give total overpayments. This is because an unquantified proportion of the estimate for fraud will not result in losses/overpayments overall. For example, non-entitlement to Invalid Care Allowance can result in payment of a higher rate of another benefit such as Income Support
3. As explained in the Green Paper "Beating Fraud is Everyone's Business: Securing the Future", estimating fraud in Disability Living Allowance presents particular difficulties. This is because entitlement depends upon care and mobility needs which are not easily estimated other than through the formal adjudication process. As a result, the estimates of confirmed and strongly suspected fraud for DLA will include errors by customers

Mr. Love: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a statement on the performance of the London Organised Fraud Investigation Team indicating *(a)* the number of cases (i) investigated, (ii) completed, (iii) rejected and (iv) resulting in prosecutions and *(b)* the level of (i) claimant fraud, (ii) landlord fraud, (iii) landlord and claimant fraud and (iv) overpayment; what assessment he has made of the effectiveness of the team against its agreed objectives; and if he will make a statement. [53582]

Mr. Denham: The London Organised Fraud Investigation Team (LOFIT) was established in December 1996 as a specialist dedicated team to investigate and combat organised fraud in Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit in London.

The latest available performance figures are for the period from 2 December 1996 to 31 March 1998. During this period, 73 cases were referred to LOFIT. Of these cases, 47 have been, or are being, investigated; 13 cases have been completed; 26 cases were rejected; and 4 reached prosecution stage. The table shows investigation cases categorised by type of fraud and total amount of overpayment identified.

	Number of cases	*Overpayments identified (£)*
Claimant	13	192,890
Claimant and landlord collusion	10	729,340
Landlord	18	407,144
Multiple identity cases not included above	6	87,719
Total	47	1,417,093

The planned end of year Value For Money study by the Audit Commission is in its final stages and will be published shortly. We have also arranged for the Benefit Fraud Inspectorate to undertake a joint study with the Association of London Government to evaluate the effectiveness of LOFIT in tackling organised fraud and in working with other organisations in the field.

Mr. Duncan Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many cases of benefit fraud have been detected in each month since 1 May 1997. [53109]

Mr. Denham: Tackling fraud and abuse is a top priority for the Government. Questions on Benefits Agency operational matters are the responsibility of its Chief Executive, Peter Mathison. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Peter Mathison to Mr. Iain Duncan Smith, dated 28 July 1998:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question about the number of cases of benefit fraud which have been detected in each month since 1st May 1997.

The figures in the attached table detail the number of successful investigations carried out by Benefit Fraud Investigation Service month by month since May 1997.

Benefits Agency Security Investigation Service (BASIS) investigates fraud of an organised or systematic nature which tends to involve longer periods of investigation and results are only available for the year. BASIS carried out 1,742 successful investigations for the period April 1997 to March 1998.

I hope you find this reply helpful.

Benefit fraud investigation service successful investigation figures[1] since 1 May 1997

	Number
May 1997	45,409
June 1997	42,961
July 1997	48,059
August 1997	41,565
September 1997	47,875
October 1997	48,822
November 1997	46,389
December 1997	42,028
January 1998	48,486
February 1998	41,913
March 1998	39,631
April 1998	46,513
May 1998	38,145
June 1998	41,531

[1] Figures are provisional and subject to change

Income Support

Mr. Goggins: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will estimate for 1999–2000 *(a)* the additional cost, *(b)* the additional income to parents with care and *(c)* the likely overall reduction in income support payments to parents with care if a £10 maintenance disregard is introduced in April 1999. [52537]

Mr. Denham: The additional cost of a £10 maintenance disregard for parents with care on Income Support would be £100 million in 1999–2000, or £80 million if the Child Maintenance Bonus were also to be abolished. The average gain to parents with care would be around £8.50 a week. There would be no reduction in Income Support payments, although maintenance in excess of £10 a week would continue to be taken into account as now.

World Day for the Eradication of Poverty

Mr. Goggins: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans his Department has to mark 17 October as the World Day for the Eradication of Poverty. [53006]

Mr. Denham: The Government are making tackling poverty a priority for every day through their policies designed to help people into work where appropriate and to make extra help available where it is not, such as the guaranteed minimum income recently announced for pensioners.

Widowers and Widows Benefit

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans he has to equalise benefits between widowers and widows; and if he will make a statement. [53366]

Mr. Denham: I refer my hon. Friend to the Written Answer I gave to the hon. Member for Edinburgh, West (Mr. Gorrie) on 23 June 1997, *Official Report*, column *413*.

Low Income Gas Users

Mr. Rendel: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how much money was paid to British Gas on behalf of low income gas users in the last year for which figures are available in the form of interim payments; how many overpayments were made; how much of the overpayment has been recovered; and to what other companies interim payments are made on behalf of low income customers. [52343]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 27 July 1998]:* The information is not available in the format requested. The available information is as set out.

In 1997–98 £59.4 million was paid to British Gas in the form of interim payments. We also have the facility to make payments to the following companies:

Scottish Gas
Eastern Electricity
East Midlands Electricity
London Electricity
Manweb
Midlands Electricity
Northern Electricity
Seeboard
Scottish Hydro-electric
Scottish Power
South Wales Electric
South Western Electric
Southern Electric
United Utilities
Yorkshire Electricity.

Benefits Office, Evesham

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what assessment he has made of the impact of the closure of the Evesham Benefits Office on the service available to residents of the Vale of Evesham; and if he will make a statement. [52843]

Mr. Denham: The administration of the Benefits Agency is a matter for Peter Mathison, its Chief Executive. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Peter Mathison to Mr. Peter Luff, dated 28 July 1998:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question, asking what assessment she has made of the impact of the closure of the Evesham Benefits Office on the service available to residents of the Vale of Evesham.

The Benefits Agency (BA)'s Evesham caller office was open on a part-time basis of 2 days per week (5½ hours a day), which offered a service limited to customer enquiries and the provision of advice and information. This office was closed at the end of March 1998 following an extensive consultation exercise. During this exercise the BA identified that services to the customer could be improved with closer working with the Local Authority and by using existing facilities at Worcester BA office and Evesham Employment Service Jobcentre (ESJ).

Since the introduction of Jobseekers Allowance in October 1996 there is a full-time BA presence in Evesham ESJ and BA representatives in ESJs are prepared and equipped to deal with enquiries from other customers.

Since the closure of the caller office, the level of enquiries from Evesham customers has been carefully monitored. There has been no noticeable effect on telephone enquiries or personal callers to the Worcester BA office, or on the level of callers to the BA representative located in the Evesham ESJ.

The Evesham "One Stop Shop", a facility run by the Local Authority, had undertaken to boost its service following the closure of the caller office, and was provided with training and leaflets to this end. The number of enquiries dealt with by the "One Stop Shop" increased from 311 for three months prior to the closure to 390 in the three months ending 30 June 1998. However, this relates to *all* enquiries, not just BA queries. Nevertheless, the staff there report a greater demand for BA leaflets since the closure of the Evesham caller office. It is perceived therefore that the number of enquiries on BA matters has also increased to some extent. The "One Stop Shop" is able to cope with this extra volume of business.

I hope that this is helpful.

Winter Fuel Payments

Mr. Duncan Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many failed winter fuel payments there were in the current year; and what assessment he has made of the reasons for failed payments. [53177]

Mr. Denham: Winter Fuel payments are one of a number of initiatives the Government have taken to help vulnerable people, especially the elderly, keep warm in the winter. Originally a total of £400 million was committed for two years (97/98 and 98/99), to help pensioners with fuel bills to pay.

As announced to the House by my right hon. Friend the then Secretary of State on 17 July 1998, *Official Report*, columns 703–05 a further £0.5 billion has been allocated to extend the scheme beyond next winter. This will provide each eligible pensioner household with a £20 Winter Fuel payment.

The administration of Winter Fuel payments is a matter for Peter Mathison, Chief Executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Peter Mathison to Mr. Iain Duncan Smith, dated 28 July 1998:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question asking how many failed winter fuel payments there were and what assessment has been made of the reasons for the failed payments.

The making of winter fuel payments to almost 10 million pensioners, in over seven million households, before the end of March 1998 has been a challenging task for the Benefits Agency (BA). This has been achieved whilst maintaining normal benefit business.

By 31 January 1998 we had issued £72,080,700 to 1,441,614 of the poorest pensioners, those receiving Income Support (IS) or income-based Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA). By the end of March we had issued a further £122,930,850 to a further 8,326,715 pensioners.

Three different methods of payment have been used to make the payments to all eligible pensioners. A number of factors were taken into account in determining the appropriate method. The factors included: the normal method of payment used by the customer to receive their benefit; the ability of the relevant benefit system to make one-off payments by a number of different methods; the speed in which payments could be made; and, the cost and timescales required to introduce new methods of payment on individual computer systems. Payments were made based on information held on our computer systems during week commencing 5 January 1998. Payments have been made by the following three routes:

Automated Credit Transfer direct to the pensioner's bank or building society account where the qualifying benefit is paid in this way (except where the qualifying benefit was Income Support, income-based Jobseeker's Allowance, Invalid Care Allowance, an industrial injury benefit, or one administered by the War Pensions Agency);

Payable order sent to the pensioner's home address, where the qualifying benefit is Invalid Care Allowance, an industrial injury benefit, or one administered by the War Pensions Agency; otherwise,

Girocheque sent to the pensioner's home address or the Post Office where the pensioner collects their qualifying benefit.

The decision to send girocheques to the pensioners' Post Office was based on the fact that these customers represented by far the largest qualifying group and this was considered the most secure method of payment for them.

However, not all those payments sent to the Post Offices were collected by the pensioners concerned. We have estimated that around 107,600 (2 per cent. of the volume issued) were not collected and these girocheques were returned to the nearest BA office, after 1 May 1998.

BA District offices have been investigating the reasons for the non-collection, which have included recent death, hospitalisation, absence on holiday or the pensioner using a different Post Office. This is a time consuming process. Our deadline for the clearance of the payments which were returned was 30 June 1998. Feedback from the BA's District offices indicate that the majority of payments have now been made.

As stated previously, according to our records, all payments should now have been made. The total amount of money paid out in Winter Fuel Payments to pensioners is £195,011,550. Priority was given to making the payments of £50 to the poorest pensioners, those receiving IS or income-based JSA.

Other eligible pensioner households were entitled to a payment of £20. If there was more than one eligible pensioner in the household, each eligible pensioner was entitled to £10. In order to establish whether a payment of £20 or £10 was appropriate it was necessary to establish eligible pensioners, correctly identify pensioner households, and determine the amount each should receive. To achieve this it was necessary to correlate data in around fifteen million computer records, involving fifteen qualifying benefits, across nine computer systems.

The legislation states that the decision on whether a £10 or £20 payment was due would be based on 'official records'. Where pensioners live alone, or are the only eligible pensioner in a household, they were entitled to £20; otherwise, they were entitled to £10, including each person in a pensioner couple if they were both in receipt of a qualifying benefit.

The £20 and £10 payments were issued in March 1998 following the data correlation exercise. Due to the huge volume of these payments, over 8 million, they were issued on a staged basis throughout March. Around 5 million of these payments were made by girocheque to the Post Office network and the BA liaised closely with the Post Office Counters Limited to try and ensure the prompt receipt of the payments by the pensioners concerned.

All eligible pensioners should now have been issued with a Winter Fuel Payment, with the exception of a small number where BA is having difficulties in ascertaining the reason for non-collection from the Post Office. Where someone has not received a payment but is expecting one, they should contact the office which normally deals with their pension or benefit.

Thank you for the opportunity to explain the position. I hope you find this reply helpful.

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) what is her Department's deadline for the clearance of all overdue winter fuel payments; [51938]

(2) how his Department determines the priorities for payment of the winter fuel payment; [51937]

(3) if he will make a statement on the factors underlying the delays in paying out the winter fuel payment of £20; [51939]

(4) what is the value of the backlog of the winter fuel payment to pensioners; [51940]

(5) how much money has been paid out in the winter fuel payment to pensioners; and how much is still owing. [52008]

Mr. Denham: Winter Fuel payments are one of a number of initiatives the Government have taken to help vulnerable people, especially the elderly, keep warm in the winter. A total of £400 million has been committed for two years (1997–98 and 1998–99), to help pensioners with fuel bills to pay.

As announced to the House by my right hon. Friend the then Secretary of State on 17 July 1998, *Official Report*, columns 703–05, a further £0.5 billion has been allocated to extend the scheme beyond next winter. This will provide each eligible pensioner household with a £20 winter fuel payment.

The administration of winter fuel payments is a matter for Peter Mathison, Chief Executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Peter Mathison to Mr. Michael Colvin, dated 28 July 1998:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Questions concerning winter fuel payments scheme.

The making of winter fuel payments to almost 10 million pensioners, in over seven million households, before the end of March 1998 has been a challenging task for the Benefits Agency (BA). This has been achieved whilst maintaining normal benefit business.

By 31 January 1998 we had issued £72,080,700 to 1,441,614 of the poorest pensioners, those receiving Income Support (IS) or income-based Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA). By the end of March we had issued a further £122,930,850 to a further 8,326,715 pensioners.

Three different methods of payment have been used to make the payments to all eligible pensioners. A number of factors were taken into account in determining the appropriate method. The factors included: the normal method of payment used by the customer to receive their benefit; the ability of the relevant benefit system to make one-off payments by a number of different methods; the speed in which payments could be made; and, the cost and timescales required to introduce new methods of payment on individual computer systems. Payments were made based on information held on our computer systems during week commencing 5 January 1998. Payments have been made by the following three routes:

Automated Credit Transfer direct to the pensioner's bank or building society account where the qualifying benefit is paid in this way (except where the qualifying benefit was Income Support, income-based Jobseeker's Allowance, Invalid Care Allowance, an industrial injury benefit, or one administered by the War Pensions Agency).

Payable order sent to the pensioner's home address, where the qualifying benefit is Invalid Care Allowance, an industrial injury benefit, or one administered by the War Pensions Agency; otherwise,

Girocheque sent to the pensioner's home address or the Post Office where the pensioner collects their qualifying benefit.

The decision to send girocheques to the pensioners' Post Office was based on the fact that these customers represented by far the largest qualifying group and this was considered the most secure method of payment for them.

However, not all those payments sent to the Post Offices were collected by the pensioners concerned. We have estimated that around 107,000 (2% of the volume issued) were not collected and these girocheques were returned to the nearest BA office, after 1 May 1998.

BA District offices have been investigating the reasons for the non-collection, which have included recent death, hospitalisation, absence on holiday or the pensioner using a different Post Office. This is a time consuming process. Our deadline for the clearance of the payments which were returned was 30 June 1998. Feedback from the BA's District offices indicate that the majority of payments have now been made.

As stated previously, according to our records, all payments should now have been made. The total amount of money paid out in Winter Fuel Payments to pensioners is £195,011,500. Priority was given to making payments to the poorest pensioners, those receiving IS or income-based JSA.

Other eligible pensioner households were entitled to a payment of £20. If there was more than one eligible pensioner in the household, each eligible pensioner was entitled to £10. In order to establish whether a payment of £20 or £10 was appropriate it was necessary to establish eligible pensioners, correctly identify pensioner households, and determine the amount each should receive. To achieve this it was necessary to correlate data in around fifteen million computer records, involving fifteen qualifying benefits, across nine computer systems.

The legislation states that the decision on whether a £10 or £20 payment was due would be based on 'official records'. Where pensioners live alone, or are the only eligible pensioner in a household, they were entitled to £20; otherwise, they were entitled to £10, including each person in a pensioner couple if they were both in receipt of a qualifying benefit.

The £20 and £10 payments were issued in March 1998 following the data correlation exercise. Due to the huge volume of these payments, over 8 million, they were issued on a staged basis throughout March. Around 5 million of these payments were made by girocheque to the Post Office network and the BA liaised closely with the Post Office Counters Limited to try and ensure the prompt receipt of the payments by the pensioners concerned.

I hope you find this reply helpful.

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) how many pensioners have returned overpayments of winter fuel payment to her Department; [53030]

(2) how many winter fuel payments were the subject of administrative error; [53032]

(3) in how many cases official records used for the distribution of winter fuel payments have been found to be incorrect; [53031]

(4) how many pensioners have complained to his Department about incorrect calculation of their winter fuel payments. [53033]

Mr. Denham: Winter fuel payments are one of a number of initiatives the Government have taken to help vulnerable people, especially the elderly, keep warm this winter. Originally, a total of £400 million was committed for two years (97–98 and 98–99), to help pensioners with fuel bills to pay.

As announced to the House by my right hon. Friend the then Secretary of State on 17 July 1998, *Official Report*, column 703–05, a further £0.5 billion has been allocated to extend the scheme beyond next winter. This will provide each eligible pensioner household with a £20 winter fuel payment.

The administration of Winter Fuel Payments is a matter for Peter Mathison, Chief Executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Peter Mathison to Mr. Christopher Chope, dated 28 July 1998:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Questions concerning winter fuel payments.

The making of winter fuel payments to almost ten million eligible pensioners, in over seven million households, before the end of March 1998 was a challenging task for the Benefits Agency. This was achieved whilst maintaining normal business.

Around one and a half million of the poorest pensioners, those receiving income Support (IS) or income-based Jobseekers's Allowance (JSA), received their payment of £50 during January. Other eligible pensioners were entitled to a payment of £20 or £10. Where they lived alone, were the only eligible pensioner in a household, or were of no fixed abode, they were entitled to £20; otherwise, they were entitled to £10.

In order to establish other eligible pensioners, correctly identify pensioner households, and determine the amount each should receive, it was necessary to correlate data. This involved around fifteen million computer records, fifteen qualifying benefits, across nine computer systems. Where only one eligible person was identified as living at an address a payment of £20 was made. Where more than one eligible person was identified as living at an address a payment of £10 was made.

In excess of 9.7 million Winter Fuel Payments were made automatically by 31 March 1998.

Three different methods of payment have been used to make the payments to all eligible pensioners. A number of factors were taken into account in determining the appropriate method. The factors included: the normal method of payment used by the customer to receive their benefit; the ability of the relevant benefit system to make one-off payments by a number of different methods; the speed in which payments could be made; and, the cost and timescales required to introduce new methods of payment on individual computer systems. Payments were made based on information held on our computer systems during week commencing 5 January 1998.

Where official Departmental records were not correct or incomplete, it was possible that the amount of some payments may not have corresponded with the actual circumstances. For example, there were cases where two eligible pensioners lived at the same address and in the same household, but the address details held on the relevant benefit computer records were incorrect or incomplete for either or both of them. In such cases, the data correlation exercise may not have identified more than one eligible person at an address and in accordance with the provisions of the legislation each were entitled to a payment of £20. There is no overprovision in such instances, but any voluntarily offer to repay any amount would be accepted.

Out of the 1.5 million £50 payments made to IS and income-based JSA pensioners in January we are aware that some payments were incorrectly made or duplicated. We know that 9,357 payments were made where information held within official records indicated payment was inappropriate. A further 211 duplicate payments were made to those pensioners who transferred from IS to Income-based JSA during the qualifying week of 5 January 1998. Of the relevant payments this represents a 0.68 per cent. error rate. In financial terms the total cost of these errors amounts to £488,400, and again this represents 0.68 per cent. of the total sum issued of £72,080,700.

In addition we also know that due to a computer operator error, 40,801 IS payments were sent out with an incorrect issue date on them. All these girocheques were replaced automatically within 72 hours. To date we are aware that 438 pensioners have cashed both the original and replacement payments.

Information relating to the number of returned payments is currently being collated. I will provide this figure as soon as it becomes available.

Information relating to the number of cases where official records have been found to be incorrect is not available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Although a dedicated helpline is available to the public, the number of complaints we have received regarding the issuing in error of winter fuel payments is not recorded separately.

I hope you find this reply helpful.

Family Credit (Scotland)

Mr. Rendel: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people currently claim family credit in Scotland. [53171]

Mr. Denham: The administration of Family Credit is a matter for Mr. Peter Mathison, Chief Executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Peter Mathison to Mr. David Rendel, dated 28 July 1998:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question asking how many people currently claim Family Credit (FC) in Scotland.

The information is not available in the format requested. FC is administered centrally by the FC Unit in Preston and, as such, statistics are produced on a national basis.

A periodic scan of the FC computer system produces details of the numbers of families in receipt of FC, at that particular date, with each local Benefits Agency (BA) office area. Such information serves as a "snap-shot" of the position at the date of the scan and does not provide details of the number of families in receipt of the benefit annually.

The latest scan was conducted on 30 April 1998. On that date a total of 69,565 people were in receipt of FC in the areas covered by the BA's Scottish offices. Please note that this figure is provisional and subject to change.

I hope that this is helpful.

Internet

Mr. Cotter: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is her Department's policy on the imposition of tariffs on trade over the Internet. [52903]

Dawn Primarolo: I have been asked to reply.

Supplies made over the Internet are treated as services and as such are liable to VAT but not to Customs duty. Goods ordered via the Internet but supplied physically, from outside the EU, are treated as a normal importation and are liable to duty and VAT at the appropriate rate.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Calf Processing Aid Scheme

Mrs. Dean: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what action he will take when the operation in the United Kingdom of the calf processing aid scheme becomes voluntary on 30 November. [54381]

Mr. Nick Brown: 1.2 million calves have been processed under the Scheme since April 1998. The UK has thus made the most significant contribution to reducing beef output in Europe. The obligation to operate this Scheme or the Early Marketing Scheme for Veal Calves expires on 30 November 1998 and it seems unlikely that many Member States will opt to slaughter young calves, that scheme alone being available thereafter on a voluntary basis.

Throughout its life in the UK, the Calf Processing Aid Scheme has been criticised from a number of quarters. It has also inflated the cost of calves for beef production to the detriment of beef finishers.

After widespread consultation with industry interests, my colleagues and I have decided that it would be inappropriate to maintain this Scheme in the UK. Its continuation would distort calf prices in the short term and artificially constrain the production of home-reared beef in the medium term. It must be borne in mind that we will continue to make a very significant contribution to balancing the European beef market by operating the Over Thirty Months Scheme for cattle, at very considerable expense to the UK Exchequer.

The Government have therefore decided that the Scheme will close on 30 November 1998.

Mr. Paice: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, pursuant to the oral statement by the hon. Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr. Rooker) of 14 July 1998, *Official Report*, column 262, on what information he based his statement that the decision to close the Calf Processing Aid Scheme on 30 November 1998 was taken before the General Election. [53001]

Mr. Rooker *[holding answer 28 July 1998]:* The EU Agriculture Council meeting on 28–30 October 1996 decided to introduce compulsory measures to reduce the potential surplus of beef. Member States were accordingly required to operate either the Calf Processing Aid Scheme or the Early Marketing Scheme for Veal. It was decided that both Schemes should operate for a period of two years only, i.e. from 1 December 1996 until 30 November 1998. The UK representative voted in favour of this decision in the Council.

Beef Export Ban

Mr. Drew: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will report progress in lifting the ban on beef exports from the United Kingdom. [54380]

Mr. Nick Brown: In June the EU Commission made a proposal for a Decision that would allow the restarting of beef exports on a UK basis from animals born after 1 August 1996. Some progress has been made in discussions of the proposal, but agreement will not now be possible before the summer break.

One element of the Commission's proposal is that before beef exports resume a cull of offspring of BSE cases should have been completed. I am anxious that this should not delay the renewal of exports. To this end I am today announcing that from early August the culling of all offspring born on or after 1 August 1996 to BSE cases will begin on a voluntary basis. Details of how the voluntary cull will operate are today being placed in the library of the House.

Farmers will receive the market value for their animals, in some cases taken from a scale rather than individual valuations. These offspring will be slaughtered at the Government's expense. I believe that, with the active support of the NFU and other farming bodies, rapid progress can be made in tackling the cull.

Payments for offspring surrendered on a voluntary basis will rest on the sole authority of the Estimates and the confirming Appropriation Act. The voluntary cull will be superseded by a compulsory offspring cull as soon as agreement is reached in Brussels on the Date Based Export Scheme (DBES) and powers exist to make UK regulations. Farmers will be compensated for the market value of their animals under the compulsory cull on the same basis as the voluntary cull, ensuring equal treatment for owners of BSE cases' offspring whether slaughtered under the voluntary or compulsory phases of the cull.

SEAC's advice is that the UK's existing controls to protect the consumer are sufficient. None the less, I believe that the prompt start of the offspring cull will minimise the time between agreement being reached on the DBES and exports resuming.

Comprehensive Spending Review

Mrs. Dean: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what are his Ministry's spending plans for the next three years following the Comprehensive Spending Review; and if he will make a statement. [54382]

Mr. Nick Brown: The results of the Comprehensive Spending Review for MAFF, and the spending plans that have resulted from them, were summarised in Chapter 18 of the White Paper on "Modern Public Services for Britain: Investing in Reform" (Cm 4011). The key figures for MAFF are as follows:

£ million

	1998–99	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*	*2001–02*
Domestic (England)	685	744	711	751
of which:				
Current budget	551	589	590	572
Capital budget	134	155	121	179
BSE (UK)[1]	689	495	466	459

[1] Includes Intervention Board expenditure

These figures do not include payments made by the Intervention Board under the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). I am making a separate statement today about the Intervention Board's spending plans. A major uncertainty at this stage is the impact that Agenda 2000 will have on our spending plans. Details of the additional provision needed to meet the UK's Agenda 2000 commitments will not be known until the negotiations in Brussels have been concluded.

MAFF will have a new aim:

"To ensure that consumers benefit from competitively priced food, produced to high standards of safety, environmental care and animal welfare and from a sustainable, efficient food chain; and to contribute to the well-being of rural and coastal communities".

MAFF will also have the following key targets for delivery by the end of the Parliament:

- set up the Food Standards Agency and establish a new role for MAFF;
- resolve the problem of BSE and take action against other animal diseases;
- press for reform of the Common Agricultural Policy and reduce its cost to consumers and taxpayers;
- work to sustain and enhance an attractive and accessible countryside;
- encourage the restructuring of the farming and fishing industries.

I should like to explain in more detail how the CSR settlement will impact on MAFF's programmes over the next three years and assist the Ministry in pursuing its new aim and delivering the reforms set out in the White Paper.

Protecting public health

Protection of the public will continue to be a top priority. The White Paper explained that food safety would be put on a new footing through the establishment of the Foods Standards Agency (FSA) and that MAFF would have new targets for reducing the incidence of animal diseases that have implications for human health.

We have made it clear that over time the Government will recover from the food industry more of the costs of financing food safety work and protecting the public, in a way that is administratively simple and fair to small business. For the CSR period, the Government intend to recover from industry the new costs associated with the FSA. The final amount to be recovered cannot be determined until nearer the launch of the Agency, but over the CSR period it will not exceed £50 million a year.

Sustaining and enhancing the countryside

Another key priority is caring for the environment. We will continue to expand the areas under agreement under the major agri-environment schemes. Subject to the approval of the European Commission we propose from next year:

- to enhance the payment rates under the Organic Aid scheme on the lines of the recommendations which were published in April. I will announce the full details as soon as possible. As explained

in the April announcement, I plan that those who joined the existing scheme on or after 2 April will be able to switch to the new scheme on the first anniversary of their agreement;

to introduce new upland options into the Countryside Stewardship scheme and to make those new options available as part of the planned upland experiments in the Forest of Bowland and on Bodmin Moor;

to keep open the pilot Arable Stewardship scheme for a second and third year in 1999 and 2000; and

to fund improvements to the six Environmentally Sensitive Area (ESA) schemes which are under review this year on lines similar to the improvements made in the 16 ESAs which were reviewed in 1996 and 1997.

The Government remain wholly committed to maintaining the environment and social fabric in the hills, but have concluded that the support mechanisms should be modified to address those objectives more specifically.

The Hill Livestock Compensatory Allowances (HLCA) scheme will continue until it is replaced by new arrangements flowing from the Agenda 2000 proposals. These proposals currently envisage a move away from payments based on the number of sheep and cattle to a system of area-based payments with more clearly defined environmental objectives. We will consult extensively on our proposals to ensure that all interests are taken into account.

We will bring the Nitrate Sensitive Areas scheme to a close. Existing agreements will run their course and applications already received will be processed and authorised under the existing rules. Since the last application period under the present scheme closed on 6 July, no further applications will be considered. However, we will also consider the scope for retaining at least some of the benefits gained under the Scheme, including the possibility of future enhancements to the Countryside Stewardship Scheme.

Rural development

We will continue to encourage rural development in the various Objective 5b areas with both EU and national funds.

In addition, we shall (as the CSR White Paper indicated) be taking steps to improve co-ordination of the MAFF and DETR countryside programmes to ensure that the Government's countryside and rural policy objectives are fully met.

Flood defence and coastal protection

The level of investment in grant aid for flood and coastal defences will increase significantly, unlocking the door to more new schemes over and above those which we have already indicated that we will consider for grant aid in 1999–2000. This demonstrates our determination to provide increased protection for the developed and natural environment which is currently at risk from flooding and erosion.

Conserving fish stocks and securing a sustainable future for the fishing industry

We will continue to conserve fish stocks for future generations and encourage a reduction in excess catching capacity in the fishing fleet.

There will be additional provision for the commissioning of a new marine research vessel to replace the two aging vessels currently operated by the Centre for Environment, Fisheries and Aquaculture Science (CEFAS). This will enhance MAFF's contribution to conserving fish stocks and reducing marine pollution.

New provision will also be made towards restructuring of the fishing fleet, to complement the effort control arrangements already introduced. We will also be continuing the range of other grant assistance currently available to the fishing industry and the ports in which it is based.

Securing a more economically rational CAP

MAFF will continue to press for reform of the CAP to reduce production related subsidies, redirect support towards environmental and social objectives and cut the cost of the CAP to consumers and taxpayers. Reform along these lines, as acknowledged in the CSR White Paper, will result in a period of transition for British farmers. The Government will help with this restructuring where it sensibly can.

I have decided, however, not to introduce at this stage an early retirement scheme for farmers. While the response to our consultation showed clear support for the principle of an early retirement scheme, the limitations imposed by the current EU rules were regarded by the majority of respondents as inappropriate to the UK and a major bar to uniform and effective uptake. I consider that the Agenda 2000 rural development proposals should provide the flexibility to introduce a scheme better adapted to UK circumstances and we will take forward this work under those proposals.

There will be additional funding to modernise the administration of CAP payments to farmers. A new integrated IT system, incorporating a Geographical Information System (GIS) to control area data for CAP schemes, will enable the Ministry's Regional Service Centres to deliver payments more efficiently and cost-effectively. And they will help safeguard the taxpayer's interest.

R&D

We will be seeking a greater contribution from the industry to the funding of that part of the Ministry's research programme from which industry benefits directly. The Postgraduate Agricultural and Food Studentships Scheme will be closed to new applicants. However, we shall continue to fund a substantial and wide-ranging research programme in support of the Department's aim and objectives, ensuring that priority areas such as food safety and consumer protection are maintained.

BSE

Expenditure on BSE will continue to fall as the incidence of the disease in cattle declines. After widespread consultation with industry interests, my colleagues and I have decided that it would be inappropriate to maintain the Calf Processing Aid Scheme in the UK. Its continuation would distort calf prices in the short term and artificially constrain the production of home-reared beef in the medium term. It must be borne in mind that we will continue to make a very significant contribution to balancing the European beef market by operating the Over Thirty Months Scheme for cattle, at very considerable expense to the UK Exchequer. The Government have therefore decided that the Calf Processing Scheme will close on 30 November 1998.

The Government have also decided that 1998–99 will be the last year in which the UK participates in the EU Surplus Food Scheme. We have been disappointed in the uptake of this scheme and we know that charitable organisations distributing beef under it have found the rules overly bureaucratic.

Conclusion

MAFF's spending plans over the next three years demonstrate the Government's continuing commitment to protecting consumers, caring for the environment and creating the conditions for a competitive and sustainable industry. Focusing on the needs of the consumer will restore confidence in food. That in turn will benefit the farming industry.

Mr. Evans: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) when he plans to publish the conclusions of his recent consultation on agricultural restructuring; [53188]

(2) if he will list those who responded to his consultation document on restructuring the United Kingdom beef sector on 18 March. [53201]

Mr. Rooker: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my right hon. Friend to my hon. Friend the Member for Burton (Mrs. Dean), *Official Report*, columns *341–45*.

A list of those who responded to the consultation document on Agricultural Restructuring issued on 18 March was placed in the Library of the House on 24 June.

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what are the Intervention Board's spending plans for the next three years following the Comprehensive Spending Review settlement; and if he will make a statement. [54384]

Mr. Nick Brown: The results of the Comprehensive Spending Review for the Intervention Board (IB) are incorporated into Chapter 18 (MAFF) of the White Paper on "Modern Public Services for Britain: Investing in Reform". The key figures for IB are:

£ million

	1998–1999	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*	*2001–02*
CAP (non-BSE programme)	2,616	2,503	2,458	2,658
of which:				
Current budget	2,582	2,422	2,369	2,569
Capital budget	34	81	89	89
CAP (BSE programme)	591	436	417	412
of which:				
Current budget	486	375	364	359
Capital budget	105	61	63	53
CAP Administration (non-BSE)	46	45	46	46
of which:				
Current budget	44	43	44	44
Capital budget	2	2	2	2
CAP Administration (BSE)	13	22	22	22
of which:				
Current budget	13	22	22	22
Capital budget	0	0	0	0

The role of IB is to operate the Common Agriculture Policy Guarantee Section with the UK as economically, efficiently and effectively as possible in accordance with the policies laid down by Agriculture Ministers. I have commented separately on BSE in my answer covering MAFF.

CAP Programme Expenditure

CAP expenditure in the UK is annually managed Expenditure and will be subject to review. The forecasts take into account known changes in scheme operations and anticipated levels of activity.

The capital budget consists almost entirely of intervention purchases of cereals, beef and milk and milk products.

Information Technology

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how much his Department spent on IT itemising *(a)* personal computers, *(b)* main-frame, *(c)* mini-computers and *(d)* file servers in the last year for which figures are available. [52882]

Mr. Morley: In 1997–98, the Department (core-MAFF and Agencies) spent some £3.6 million on the procurement of personal computers, and £3.1 million on mini-computers/file servers. There was no expenditure on mainframe computers. Including ancillary/related equipment (eg printers, cabling and network hardware), total capital costs amounted to some £11 million.

These figures (which are VAT inclusive) exclude related consultancy, support and running costs, as provision of this information would incur disproportionate cost. However, as a further indication of expenditure on IT technology in core-MAFF (only), total IT programme expenditure for 1997–98 amounted to some £41 million.

New Deal

Mr. Healey: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many people his Department is committed to employing during 1998 under *(a)* the subsidised job option and *(b)* the unsubsidised job option of the New Deal programme. [52588]

Mr. Morley: The Ministry has signed up to the New Deal programme but has not given any commitment to employ a specified number of young people under either category.

Forest of Dean

Mrs. Organ: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what factors underlay the decision not to include the Forest of Dean as an area to receive part of the £11 million grant to farmers involved in tourism. [52043]

Mr. Morley: The figure of £11m refers to the total cost of four farm tourism projects approved under the Northern Uplands Objective 5b Structural Funds Programme. The European Commission designated the areas eligible for Objective 5b support in 1994 using criteria which required areas to have a low level of GDP along with a high share of agricultural employment in total employment, a low level of agricultural income and a low population density and/or a significant depopulation trend. A number of other economic, social and environmental factors were also taken into account. The Forest of Dean was not among the areas designated. Only those who live and work within a designated area are able to receive grant from projects supported under an Objective 5b programme.

Drift Nets

Mr. Cox: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food which EU countries permit the use of drift nets. [52055]

Mr. Morley: Drift nets are widely used from the Baltic to the Mediterranean to catch a range of fish species. Because their use is permitted under European Community rules, all Member States must permit the fishermen of other Member States to use drift nets in their waters where there are rights of access. However, the June 1998 Fisheries Council agreed to ban from the end of 2001 the use of drift nets by Community fishermen to catch certain species, including tuna, swordfish, sharks and cephalopods. These particular drift net fisheries are responsible for a high level of casualties among dolphins and other non-target species.

Tobacco (EU Subsidies)

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what was the total cost to the EU of subsidies for tobacco production in the EU per individual member state for the most recent five years for which figures are available. [52106]

Mr. Rooker: Expenditure on subsidising tobacco production for the last five years to the nearest £ million is as follows:

	1993	*1994*	*1995*	*1996*	*1997*
Belgium	8	4	3	3	2
Germany	36	22	21	20	20
Greece	431	326	332	302	254
Spain	86	92	102	113	89
France	54	60	66	71	59
Italy	291	302	268	328	287
Austria	n/a	n/a	0	1	0
Portugal	11	4	11	11	13
Total (EU)	916	810	802	852	725

Note:
Totals may not add, due to rounding
Source:
EAGGF Guarantee annual reports

Departmental Reviews

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the reviews his Department and its predecessors, initiated in the years *(a)* 1974–75, *(b)* 1979–80 and *(c)* 1992–93. [48519]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 6 July 1998]:* The following is a list of published review reports initiated in the years 1979–80 and 1992–93. No published reports of reviews initiated in 1974–75 have been identified.

1979–80:

Consultation Paper on the review of inland and coastal fisheries in England and Wales. MAFF, Welsh Office, 1981.

Mineral, trace element and vitamin allowances for ruminant livestock. The report of an interdepartmental Working Party set up to consider the findings contained in the ARC (1980) Technical Review "The nutrient requirements of Ruminant Livestock". ADAS, MAFF, DAFS, FANI, UKASTA, BVA, ADAS, 1983.

Review report on food safety and food quality and spoilage. MAFF, 1981.

Review of statistical services. MAFF, 1982.

Survey of mycotoxins in the United Kingdom: the fourth report of the Steering Group on Food Surveillance. HMSO, 1980.

Survey of vinylidene chloride levels in food contact materials and in foods: the third report of the Steering Group on Food Surveillance. HMSO, 1980.

1992–93:

Food Advisory Committee review of food labelling: table of recommendations and the government's final response. Food Advisory Committee, 1992.

Hill livestock compensatory allowances: review of the economic conditions in the hills and uplands 1992. MAFF, 1993.

Report on the review of the emulsifiers and stabilisers in food regulations. HMSO, 1992.

Report on the review of the use of additives in foods specially prepared for infants and young children. HMSO, 1992.

A review of radioactivity in the Irish Sea: a report prepared for the Marine Pollution Monitoring Management Group. MAFF, Directorate of Fisheries Research, 1992.

Sources of mortality and associated life-cycle traits of selected benthic species: a review. MAFF, Directorate of Fisheries Research, 1993.

Review of the rules for sewage sludge application to agricultural land: food safety and relevant animal health aspects of potentially toxic elements: report of the Steering Group on Chemical Aspects of Food Surveillance. MAFF, 1993.

Review of the rules for sewage sludge application to agricultural land: soil fertility aspects of potentially toxic elements: report of the Independent Scientific Committee. MAFF, 1993.

Departmental Vehicles

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list for *(a)* his Department and *(b)* bodies listed in the National Asset Register, how

many vehicles are currently (i) owned and (ii) leased; if he will indicate their (A) fuel types and (B) engine cubic capacities; and how many vehicles are expected to fall due for replacement in each of the years (1) 1998–99, (2) 1999–2000 and (3) 2000–01. [49228]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 6 July 1998]:* The Department and its Agencies currently own 533 vehicles—none is leased. Detailed information about engine capacities, fuel type and projected replacement dates is not maintained centrally and could be provided only at a disproportionate cost.

Bovine Tuberculosis

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what plans he has to change the method by which the incidence of TB in cattle is calculated to one based on cattle numbers. [52857]

Mr. Rooker: The definition of incidence in EU legislation has recently changed, but it is still based on the number of confirmed herd breakdowns as a percentage of the total number of herds. We will be reviewing the testing frequencies to be used in different parts of the country on this basis.

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what plans he has to extend the trial areas in which badgers can be culled. [53021]

Mr. Rooker: An independent scientific group was established in February this year to advise on the implementation of recommendations in the Krebs Report, including the design of the culling trial which will produce scientifically robust results. The Group's advice has just been presented to Ministers. An announcement will be made once this advice has been fully considered.

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment he has made of the incidence of TB in cattle in areas where badgers are rare. [53013]

Mr. Rooker: A report by Wilson, Harris and McLaren entitled "Changes in the British badger population 1988 to 1997", published in 1997 by the People's Trust for Endangered Species, shows the areas of lowest badger main sett density in Great Britain to be Scotland and East Anglia, with the north of England also being estimated to be relatively low. Outside areas of high incidence of TB in cattle in the west of England and in south Wales, the incidence of TB in cattle herds in Great Britain is less than 0.1 per cent. However, Professor Krebs concluded that there was a considerable local variation in risk of TB incidents and recommended that further work should be done to assess the reasons for this.

Office of Veterinary and Phytosanitary Inspection

Mr. Evans: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list each establishment producing meat in third countries which exports to the United Kingdom, indicating when it was last inspected by the Office of Veterinary and Phytosanitary Inspection or its approved agents. [53191]

Mr. Rooker: Lists of the many hundreds of establishments in third countries from which imports of fresh meat are permitted can be found at the Ministry's Internet site. We do not have information on the dates on which these establishments were last inspected by or for the European Commission.

Mr. Evans: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how frequently the Office of Veterinary and Phytosanitary Inspection visits plants in each country of the EU. [53199]

Mr. Rooker: Regular inspections and audits covering all parts of the food production chain are carried out by the Commission's inspectorate. They involve visits to all EU Member States and to countries outside the EU. Most visits are carried out by small, multidisciplinary, inspections teams. We do not have data on the frequency of visits to each member state.

Animal Waste

Mr. Evans: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, pursuant to his answer of 3 July 1998, *Official Report*, columns *317–18*, what guidance his Department has issued on how the livestock industry will dispose of waste in a safe and sustainable manner. [53234]

Mr. Rooker: In March 1998, the Department wrote to representatives of the farming industries, asking them to urge their members to continue to use knackers' yards or hunt kennels to dispose of their fallen stock, particularly for larger animals. The letter reminded them that, if carcases are buried on-farm, the provisions in the Code of Good Agricultural Practice for the Protection of Water (published in 1991) must be followed to minimise the risk of causing water pollution. On 2 July 1998, the Department issued a guidance note on the disposal of animal waste, including burial.

Mr. Evans: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on his Department's consultation with farming representatives on disposal of fallen stock. [53194]

Mr. Rooker: It is for the livestock industry to take responsibility for disposing of its waste in a safe and sustainable manner, and to work out how best to achieve this. Nevertheless, the Department is willing to facilitate a solution and met with representatives of the National Farmers' Union, the National Farmers' Union of Scotland, the Farmers' Union of Wales, the Ulster Farmers' Union, the Tenant Farmers' Association, the British Pig Association, the National Sheep Association and the National Cattle Association on 9 February 1998, and with the National Farmers' Union on 19 March 1998, to discuss the disposal of fallen stock and possible future arrangements. Officials are continuing to maintain contact with the National Farmers' Union.

Mr. Evans: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on his policy towards the building of incineration plants. [53195]

Mr. Rooker: The Government recognise that, in the absence of a viable market for some animal waste products, incineration plants could play a useful role in their disposal. Such plants must, however, comply with all relevant environmental legislation and be subject to the usual requirements of Local Planning Authorities.

Meat Imports

Mr. Evans: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the inspection, approval and monitoring of establishments producing meat in third countries. [53200]

Mr. Rooker: Council Directive 72/462 provides for lists of establishments from which Member States may authorise the importation of fresh meat or meat products to be drawn up by the Commission and considered by the Standing Veterinary Committee. In deciding whether an establishment should appear on the lists, particular account is taken of the guarantees offered by the third country with regard to compliance with Community rules; regulations with regard to administration of substances which might affect the wholesomeness of the meat; the establishment's compliance with the conditions for approval of fresh meat plants situated in the Community; and the organisation, powers and supervision of the country's meat inspection services. The Directive also provides for inspections to be carried out on the spot by veterinary experts of the Member States and the Commission to verify whether the conditions for approval of establishments are being applied in practice.

Mr. Evans: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list each occasion when an approved border inspection post has refused meat imports from third countries. [53192]

Mr. Rooker: It is not possible to list all occasions on which meat has been rejected at a Border Inspection Post, except at disproportionate cost. But in the first quarter of this year 186 consignments of products of animal origin (which included meat) were rejected at Border Inspection Posts. The numbers of rejections because of failure to comply with national legislation concerning specified risk material are set out in the Ministry's monthly BSE Enforcement Bulletin, copies of which can be found in the Library of the House.

Mr. Evans: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the means by which the European Commission enforces harmonised Community rules in third countries. [53197]

Mr. Rooker: The principal means by which Community standards are upheld in third countries is through the negotiations of bilateral and multi-lateral trade agreements by the Commission on behalf of the European Union.

Mr. Evans: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what plans he has to ensure that consumers are informed of the country of origin of imported meat by labelling. [53240]

Mr. Rooker: Food labelling rules already require the place of origin of any food, including meat, to be given if omitting it could mislead the purchaser about the true place of origin of that food.

More specifically, the labels on pre-packaged poultrymeat must give an indication of the country of origin when it is imported from outside the Community and we are currently taking steps to require this information to appear on labels, tickets or notices near where unpackaged poultrymeat is offered for sale. Poultrymeat produced in the Community must include the registered number of the slaughterhouse or cutting plant which supplied the produce (except where cutting and boning is carried out at the place of sale). These registered numbers are prefixed with the initials of the member state concerned.

Livestock Carcases (Classification)

Mr. Evans: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, pursuant to his answer of 6 July 1998, *Official Report*, column *415*, if he will list the criteria used to measure the performance of British livestock. [53180]

Mr. Rooker: The criteria used to classify carcases of livestock are set out in Council Regulation 3220/84 (as amended) for pigs; Council Regulation 2137/92 (as amended) for sheep; and Council Regulation 1208/81 (as amended) and Commission Regulation 2930/81 (as amended) for cattle.

Genetically Modified Maize

Mr. Baker: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food following the Court of Appeal judgment on Tuesday 21 July, Regina v Watson, if he will instruct NIAB to de-tassle the genetically modified maize at Hood Barton. [52850]

Mr. Rooker *[holding answer 28 July 1998]:* No. The Court of Appeal drew a clear distinction between the health and safety implications of releasing genetically modified organisms dealt with by the Environment Protection Act 1990 and the National List regime, which is essentially concerned with marketing. The Court rejected the application to order destruction of the genetically modified maize. Moreover, it said explicitly that the Minister himself could not properly destroy or require destruction of these plants under the National List regime.

Seed Listings

Mr. Baker: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, pursuant to his answer of 14 May 1998, *Official Report*, columns *198–99*, how many National Seed List applications have been made since 14 May; and how many of those *(a)* are now listed, *(b)* were unsuccessful and *(c)* are still awaiting approval. [52848]

Mr. Rooker *[holding answer 28 July 1998]:* Since 14 May 1998 a total of 11 National List applications have been made. As indicated in my answer of 14 May 1998, DUS tests and VCU trials are conducted on such applications pursuant to Regulation 11 (1) of the Seeds (National List of Varieties) Regulations 1982 as amended. Such tests and trials normally involve a minimum of two growing seasons and therefore in answer to *(a)* none is currently listed, *(b)* none is yet unsuccessful, and *(c)* none will be considered for approval until completion of the necessary tests and trials.

Mr. Baker: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, pursuant to his answer of 14 May 1998, *Official Report*, columns *198–99*, on which date in 1995 the decision was made not to require applicants for National Seeds Lists to comply with Regulation 11(3) and by whom; and for what reasons the information was deemed of little value. [52847]

Mr. Rooker *[holding answer 28 July 1998]:* The requirement to submit the results of replicated trials was introduced (in 1979 initially) to reduce the volume of National List applications for the common species to a manageable level. Its purpose was to encourage breeders to screen varieties before entering them into the statutory system and to deter them from entering varieties which had little chance of addition to the National List, at a time when the trialling system was overloaded and also heavily subsidised by the tax payer.

A fundamental review of the National List trials system was undertaken in 1992, in consultation with plant breeders. Following this, a streamlined system of trials for Value for Cultivation and Use (VCU) was introduced, which reduced the burdens on the trials system. The staged reintroduction of fees for official VCU trials in 1994 and 1995 reinforced these measures. The requirement to submit the results of replicated trials had no value once the pressure on the system was relieved. So far as we can tell from the records, no formal decision was taken that applicants need not comply with Regulation 11(3), though industry representatives were aware that the requirement was not enforced as the need for it no longer existed. It appears that enforcement of the requirement finally ceased on or around April 1995.

Seed and Biotechnology Companies

Mr. Baker: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the dates of each meeting he or other members of his Department have had with *(a)* seed and *(b)* biotechnology companies since 9 July 1998 and in each case the names of those met. [52849]

Mr. Rooker *[holding answer 28 July 1998]:* The meetings listed have taken place between officials and Ministers with seed and biotechnology companies since 9 July 1998.

The then Minister, the right hon. Jack Cunningham MP, met Mr. H. Grant and Ms A. Foster from Monsanto on 15 July.

Officials met on 15 July with Mr. J. Gilbert from Germinal Holdings and Mr. N. Bark from British Seed Houses, and on 24 July with Mr. H. Manning from AgrEvo and Mr. M. Coy from the English Sugar Beet Seed Company.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Carbon Monoxide Poisoning

Mr. Breed: To ask the President of the Board of Trade who will have responsibility for investigating cases of carbon monoxide poisoning following the introduction of competition into the domestic gas market. [50928]

Mr. Battle: I am advised that Regulation 7(14) of the Gas Safety (Management) Regulations 1996 places a specific duty on the person who has supplied the gas to cause an investigation to be carried out to establish, as far as is reasonably practicable, the cause of the escape and accumulation of the carbon monoxide gas. During last Autumn and Winter, my Department circulated a safety advice leaflet on the dangers of carbon monoxide, through doctors' surgeries and direct to 19 million households with their gas bills. A new campaign is planned for later this year, to coincide with the onset of colder weather.

Energy Review

Mr. Gummer: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what discussions she has had with environmental groups since her statement on the Government's energy review on 25 June 1998, *Official Report*, columns 1169–85. [51282]

Mr. Mandelson: My office has received six written representations from environmental groups since the statement. None has sought a meeting.

Mr. Redwood: To ask the President of the Board of Trade, pursuant to her oral statement of 25 June 1998, *Official Report*, columns 1169–72, when she expects to announce the conclusions of her Department's energy review. [52636]

Mr. Mandelson *[holding answer 27 July 1998]:* My Department is giving careful consideration to all the contributions we have received in response to the Consultation Document dated 25 June 1998. It is our intention to reach and announce conclusions on the Review shortly, after assessing the material we have received.

UK Firms' Competitiveness

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what steps his Department is taking to improve the competitiveness of UK firms. [52390]

Mr. Mandelson *[holding answer 27 July 1998]:* Improving productivity is at the heart of the Government's drive to improve the competitiveness of UK companies.

The responsibility for this lies largely with business itself, but Government have a role in partnership with business. It is for this reason that my predecessor set up six business-led working parties last year to make recommendations about how such a partnership can help to promote competitiveness. I am also co-hosting, with the Chancellor, a series of seminars on the UK's productivity gap over the Summer and Autumn.

This work will contribute to a White Paper on competitiveness to be published in the Autumn.

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what research her Department has evaluated into the competitiveness of UK firms, with particular reference to their funding, management and production functions. [52391]

Mr. Mandelson: My Department monitors research into factors affecting competitiveness, including funding, management, and production functions. The results are used to produce reports such as the Competitiveness UK document 'Benchmarking for Business' published in November last year.

Foresight Programme

Mr. Cotter: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what financial assessment she has made of the outcome of the Foresight Programme. [53084]

Mr. Battle: The Foresight Programme develops visions of the future to guide today's decision-makers and stimulate innovation. It aims to increase wealth creation and enhance quality of life but, given the nature of its objectives, it will inevitably be some time before its ultimate impacts can objectively be assessed.

In the meantime, it is clear that Foresight is creating new networks of people from business, academe, and Government working together for mutual advantage. Well over £350 million has also been committed since 1995 to public and private sector collaborative research programmes and projects reflecting Foresight priorities. These include:

Nineteen new LINK programmes worth some £160 million which have been launched in Foresight priority areas.

The Foresight Challenge Competition which brought together £30 million of public funds with over £60 million from the private sector in a range of projects, some involving businesses with no history of collaboration with the science base and

The Foresight LINK Awards which have stimulated an exciting range of proposals for further projects. £10 million of public funds will be matched by at least the same amount from the public sector.

Animal Experiments

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what assessment she has made of the impact on the United Kingdom science base and the competitiveness of the United Kingdom's science-based industries of the burden of regulation on applications for research and development projects involving animals. [50701]

Mr. Battle *[holding answer 27 July 1998]:* It is important that the use of animals in regulated procedures is properly controlled to ensure that animals are used only where it is fully justified. Applications need to be carefully scrutinised and processed. There is a responsibility to ensure that alternatives which replace or reduce animal use, and which refine procedures to minimise suffering, are used wherever possible.

We do not consider that scientific research and the competitiveness of the UK's science-based industries is unduly hampered. The Animal Procedures Committee is carrying out a review of the operation of the Animals (Scientific procedures) Act 1986 which is due to be published later this year.

Management Costs

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what assessment she has made of the impact of management costs on the competiveness of UK firms. [52392]

Mr. Mandelson *[holding answer 27 July 1998]:* My Department has not made any assessment of the impact of management costs on the competitiveness of UK firms. The focus of my Department's work in this area is on the '*quality*' of management in companies.

EU Structural Funds

Mr. Redwood: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what proportion of EU structural funding for the United Kingdom will go to rural areas in *(a)* 1998, *(b)* 1999 and *(c)* 2000. [52596]

Mr. Mandelson *[holding answer 27 July 1998]:* Rural areas of the United Kingdom receive funding under Objective 1 in the Highlands and Islands, and under Objective 5b and the LEADER Community Initiative. Structural Funds allocations for these programmes for both 1998 and 1999 are some 9 per cent. of the total Structural Funds allocation to the United Kingdom. Allocations for 2000 are not yet known. Part of the funding under the national Objective 3, 4, and 5a programmes and under the Northern Ireland Objective 1 programme, also goes to rural areas; however, the amount is not separately identifiable without incurring disproportionate cost.

Mr. Redwood: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how much EU structural funding rural areas of the United Kingdom received in *(a)* 1995, *(b)* 1996, *(c)* 1997. [52595]

Mr. Mandelson *[holding answer 27 July 1998]:* Rural areas of the United Kingdom receive funding under Objective 1 in the Highlands and Islands, and under Objective 5b and the LEADER Community Initiative. Structural Funds allocations for these are shown in the table. Part of the funding under the national Objective 3, 4, and 5a programmes and under the Northern Ireland Objective 1 programme also goes to rural areas; however, the amount is not separately identifiable without incurring disproportionate cost.

Structural funds allocations to UK rural areas—1998 prices

million ecu

	1995	*1996*	*1997*
Highlands and Islands SPD	50	53	56
UK Objective 5b SPDs	136	156	157
LEADER Community Initiative	13	15	15
Total	199	224	228

Gas Industry

Mr. Redwood: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what external forecasts on job losses in the gas industry resulting from the moratorium on gas-fired power status she has evaluated. [52601]

Mr. Mandelson *[holding answer 27 July 1998]:* A great deal of material has been submitted to my Department in response to the Consultation Document dated 25 June 1998, and it is being evaluated.

Inward Investment

Mr. Redwood: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what mechanisms prevent the Scottish and Welsh Offices from competing against *(a)* each other and *(b)* her Department for inward investment. [52597]

Mr. Mandelson *[holding answer 27 July 1998]:* Neither Scotland, Wales, or any other part of the UK do not compete with my Department for inward investment. The Invest in Britain Bureau chairs the Committee on Overseas Promotion, part of whose role is to monitor rules agreed by Departments to avoid wasteful competition between the inward investment agencies of Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland, and the English regions.

Mr. Redwood: To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1) if she has completed her discussions on the co-ordination of inward investment; and when she expects to announce her conclusions; [52598]

(2) when the Concordat on Inward Investment will be published. [52599]

Mr. Mandelson *[holding answer 27 July 1998]:* There will be an announcement when, through collective discussion and agreement, Ministers have concluded arrangements which will ensure that offers made to inward investors are value for money for the taxpayer and fair to all parts of the UK.

European Regional Aid

Mr. Redwood: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how much European regional aid the UK received in each of the last five years; and how much is forecast in the next three. [52603]

Mr. Mandelson *[holding answer 27 July 1998]:* Total allocations to the United Kingdom under the EU Structural Funds for the last five years (1994–98) and for 1999 are shown in the table. No decisions on funding post-1999 have yet been made.

Total structural funds allocations to the UK (including community initiative)

billion ecu, 1998 prices

Year	*Total*
1994	1.83
1995	2.28
1996	2.39
1997	2.48
1998	2.50
1999	2.60

Electricity Industry

Mr. Redwood: To ask the President of the Board of Trade when she expects to announce the conclusions of her review of the pool price for electricity. [52602]

Mr. Mandelson *[holding answer 27 July 1998]:* The recent Report on Pool Price Increases in Winter 1997–98 is a matter for the Director General of Electricity Supply.

Nuclear Material

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if she will set out the number of withdrawals of nuclear materials from safeguards that have been notified to the relevant authorities under the 1978 United Kingdom-EURATOM-IAEA tripartite safeguards agreement since it entered into force; how many were permanent withdrawals; what quantities and types of nuclear material were involved in the permanent withdrawals; and if she will provide details of the purpose to which the materials involved in the permanent withdrawals were put in each case. [53096]

Mr. Battle: A total of 591 advance notifications of the withdrawal of nuclear material from safeguards have been made in accordance with the provisions of Article 14 of the UK/Euratom/IAEA Safeguards Agreement. The majority of these have involved either the temporary withdrawal of the material concerned or, in the case of permanent transfers to MOD sites, the withdrawal from safeguards of material such as depleted uranium for source shielding or small amounts of other nuclear materials for R&D or analytical purposes.

As part of the Strategic Defence review, the Government have indicated that future withdrawals of nuclear material from safeguards will be limited to small quantities of material not suitable for explosive purposes, and that information on these withdrawals will be published from time to time.

Post Office

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what action she will take to increase investment in the Post Office. [52094]

Mr. Mandelson: Individual decisions in investment within the Post Office are for the Post Office Board within the overall framework of financial targets set by Government. We plan to give the Post Office greater commercial freedom so that it can meet the challenges of domestic and international markets. The second phase of the Post Office Review, which my predecessor announced on 6 April 1998, *Official Report*, column *63*, will be making recommendations on the Post Office's future structure, organisation, and financing that will best deliver greater commercial freedom for the Post Office within the public sector. In the meantime, my right hon. Friend the Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett) announced, with immediate effect, limited freedoms for the Post Office to enter into joint ventures in the domestic market in a similar way to those they have in the international market. Further details are set out in the Government's observations to the Trade and Industry Select Committee on the third report of the 1997/98 session on the Post Office, which was published by the Committee on 14 April.

Private Office Staff

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many private office staff have left the offices of each Minister in his Department in the past 12 months. [52859]

Mr. Mandelson: Twelve staff out of a total of 53 have left private offices in the Department of Trade and Industry over the past 12 months. This movement rate of 23 per cent. is slightly lower than the average for DTI Headquarters as a whole, which is 28 per cent.

Gas Storage Bullets

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if she will instruct OFGAS to draw up plans for the removal of pressurised gas storage bullets from residential areas; and if she will make a statement. [52324]

Mr. Battle: Gas storage bullets are a means of providing the short-term storage capacity necessary to handle short-term (within the day) fluctuations in demand for gas, and are an integral part of the gas transportation system. In order to fulfil this function, they must be situated near to the gas consumer. Their location is an operational matter for the public gas transporter concerned, subject to planning considerations and to meeting the requirements of safety legislation enforced by

the HSE. The HSE has the power to prohibit any activity, including the storage of gas, if it involves the risk of serious personal injury.

Research Studentships

Dr. Kumar: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if she will make a statement on the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council financial level of research studentships for postgraduate students. [52071]

Mr. Battle *[holding answer 24 July 1998]:* I am pleased to announce that additional funds are being made available to the Research Councils. As a result, from this Autumn, the minimum stipend for a Research Council student will be £6,455 which, for the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council, is £1,000 above the previously planned level. The Government attach much importance to the investment which the Research Councils' provision for post graduate students represents.

The Research Councils will be publishing further details, and I will ensure that my hon. Friend receives a copy.

Written Answers

Mr. Redwood: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what has been the average time taken by her Department to provide a substantive reply to a written question tabled for answer on the first available named day since 1 May 1997. [52334]

Mr. Mandelson: The information is not readily available in the form requested. However, up to 24 July, my Department has answered 77.33 per cent. of the named questions within five sitting days of the named day, with 29.24 per cent. of these being answered on the day.

Dounreay

Sir Robert Smith: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how much spent fuel, in tonnes, is currently in storage in the Dounreay nuclear establishment; and of this total how much is *(a)* fast reactor spent fuel, *(b)* UK research reactor spent fuel and *(c)* foreign research reactor spent fuel. [48029]

Mr. Battle: There are 58 tonnes of spent fuel in storage at Dounreay. Of this, fast reactor fuel, including breeder material, accounts for 99 per cent. This includes a small amount (less than half a per cent.) from foreign fast reactors. The remaining 1 per cent. comes from foreign power reactors. There is no spent fuel from other UK research reactors, and the only spent fuel from other foreign research reactors is the 4.364 kilogrammes from Georgia.

Compliance Cost Assessments

Mr. Lansley: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what cumulative net increase in compliance costs has been estimated in compliance cost assessments published by his Department since 1 May 1997. [52943]

Mr. Mandelson *[holding answer 28 July 1998]:* The net cumulative increase in compliance costs, as estimated in final compliance cost assessments published by my Department between 1 May 1997 and 31 May 1998, is as follows:

Title of regulation	*Compliance Costs (£)* *Recurring*	*Non recurring*
The Supply of Beer (Tied Estate) (Amendment) Order 1997	62,360	144,720
The Telecommunications (Voice Telephony) Regulations 1997	20,000 to 60,000	180,000
The Wireless Telegraphy (Control of Interference from Videosenders) Order 1997	375,000 to 450,000	—
The Fireworks (Safety) Regulations 1997	1,700,000	810,000
The Copyright and Rights in Database Regulations 1997	3,500,000	17,500,000
The Telecommunications (Interconnection) Regulations 1997	250,000	250,000 to 300,000
The Consumer Credit (Increase of Monetary Limits) (Amendment) Order 1998 The Consumer Credit (Further Increase of Monetary Amounts) Order 1998 The Consumer Credit (Realisation of Pawn) (Amendment) Regulations 1998	40,000	60,000
The Offshore Petroleum Production and Pipelines (Assessment of Environmental Effects) Regulations 1998	10,000,000	—
The Packaging (Essential Requirements) Regulations 1998	11,372,000	5,021,000
The Package Travel, Package Holidays and Package Tours (Amendments) Regulations 1998	2,000,000 to 4,000,000	—
The Restriction on Agreements and Conduct (Specified Domestic Electrical Goods) Order 1998	2,200,000 to 4,400,000	250,000 to 500,000
Total	31,519,360 to 35,834,360	24,215,720 to 24,515,720

Mr. Lansley: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will list the compliance cost assessments published by his Department since 1 May 1997. [52942]

Mr. Mandelson *[holding answer 28 July 1998]:* Details of all published compliance cost assessments are contained in the bi-annual Command Papers of Compliance Cost Assessments. Details of final compliance cost assessments published by my Department between 1 May 1997 and 31 May 1998 are as follows:

June 1997

The Supply of Beer (Tied Estate) (Amendment) Order 1997

July 1997

The Telecommunications (Voice Telephony) Regulations 1997

The Wireless Telegraphy (Control of Interference from Videosenders) Orders 1997

September 1997

The Fireworks (Safety) Regulations 1997

November 1997

The Copyright and Rights in Database Regulations 1997

December 1997

The Telecommunications (Interconnection) Regulations 1997

The Insurance Companies (Accounts and Statements) (Amendment) Regulations 1997

April 1998

The Consumer Credit (Increase of Monetary Limits) (Amendment) Order 1998;

The Consumer Credit (Further Increase of Monetary Amounts) Order 1998; and The Consumer Credit (Realisation of Pawn) (Amendment) Regulations 1998

The Offshore Petroleum Production and Pipelines (Assessment of Environmeatal Effects) Regulations 1998

May 1998

The Packaging (Essential Requirements) Regulations 1998

The Package Travel, Package Holidays and Package Tours (Amendment) Regulations 1998

The Restriction on Agreements and Conduct (Specified Domestic Electrical Goods) Order 1998.

Mr. Lansley: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will list those compliance cost assessments since 1 May 1997 in which there is a net reduction in compliance costs resulting from a legislative proposal. [52944]

Mr. Mandelson *[holding answer 28 July 1998]:* There is presently no requirement for Departments to carry out compliance cost assessments where regulatory proposals are expected to be cost neutral or result in a saving to business. However, between 1 May 1997 and 31 May 1998 my Department laid eight amending regulations which resulted in compliance cost savings to business. These are as follows:

The Wireless Telegraphy (Network User Stations) (Exemption) Regulations 1997

The Gas Act 1986 (Exemption) Order 1997

The Insurance Companies (Accounts and Statements) (Amendment) Regulations 1997

The Restrictive Trade Practices (Non-Notifiable Agreements) (Sale and Purchase, Share Subscription and Franchise Agreements) Order 1997

The Restrictive Trade Practices (Non-Notifiable Agreements) (Turnover Threshold) Amendment Order 1997

The Cosmetic Products (Safety) (Amendment) Regulations 1997

The Wireless Telegraphy (Licence Charges) (Amendment) Regulations 1998

The Trade Marks (Amendment) Rules 1998.

Motor Industry

Mr. Prior: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment he has made of the number of jobs in the UK which are dependent upon the motor industry. [53185]

Mr. Battle: It is estimated that 714,600 jobs at the end of March 1998 were directly reliant on the UK automotive industry: 222,300 in vehicle and component manufacturing and 492,300 in the retail, distribution, servicing and repair (but excluding petrol sales) sectors.

Source:
Labour Market Trends.

Mr. Prior: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many jobs in Britain are accounted for by the production of cars and automobile components. [53184]

Mr. Battle: The vehicle and component manufacturing sectors at the end of March 1998 were estimated to employ 222,300 people in the United Kingdom.

Source:
Labour Market Trends.

WALES

NHS Staff Absences

Ms Julie Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many working days were lost through sickness, ill health or injury by NHS staff in Wales for the latest year for which figures are available; and what was the estimated total cost of those lost days. [51237]

Mr. Ron Davies *[holding answer 17 July 1998]:* The information requested is not available centrally and could be collected only at disproportionate cost. However, deaths and injuries at work are reported to the Health and Safety Executive. Based on provisional estimates, there were 686 cases reported to them relating to NHS employees in Wales in 1997–98. However, the HSE do not collect the number of working days lost due to injuries more generally, or to sickness absence.

Social Exclusion

Mr. Caton: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) what are the Government's priorities for expenditure in tackling social exclusion in Wales; [52429]

(2) how much money will be dedicated to tackling social exclusion in Wales in 1999–2000; [52426]

(3) what assessment he has made of the factors underlying differences in his Department's spending priorities for tackling social exclusion in Wales relative to those in *(a)* England and *(b)* Scotland; [52431]

(4) what initiatives his Department *(a)* has taken and *(b)* proposes to take to tackle social exclusion in Wales; [52435]

(5) what funding will be made available for tackling social exclusion in Wales in 1998–99. [52450]

Mr. Ron Davies: The Social Exclusion Programme for Wales—"People in Communities"—was launched on 1 May. It aims to tackle social exclusion in a co-ordinated way through community development with an emphasis on action research. We have invited local authorities to put forward bids from which we will select, this autumn, around six pilot communities on which the programme will focus. The programme has been drawn up in response to the particular needs of Wales, and taking account of existing development programmes. We have, however, taken note of the work of the Social Exclusion Unit in England in devising our programme for Wales.

£750,000 is being made available for the initial twelve month development phase. This will enable the six or so selected communities to undertake an extensive needs assessment to identify local priorities for action. In the second stage of the programme, funding will be made available through mainstream Programmes, and my Department will be seeking ways to ensure that pilot communities have access to a wide range of sources of support.

We want to identify and to promote what works in securing long-term and sustainable community-based regeneration. We will look, for example, at the way we bring on board initiatives such as Employment Zones and New Deal Pilot Projects, or handle Capital Challenge and

Strategic Development Scheme money. We will aim to disseminate good practice as widely as possible across Wales.

In addition to the "People in Communities" Programme, my Department is taking account of the impact on social exclusion in developing policies in other areas such as the "Better Health Better Wales" Green Paper and housing policy.

My Department is also taking forward for Wales the commitments given in relation to England in the Social Exclusion Unit report on Exclusions and truancy to reduce levels of permanent and fixed term exclusions from school and unauthorised absence.

Rough Sleeping

Mr. Caton: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales which health authorities in Wales have dedicated resources for initiatives related to the problem of rough sleeping; how much they spent in the last year for which figures are available; and on what projects. [52430]

Mr. Ron Davies: The information requested is not held centrally. I understand that Bro Taf, Iechyd Morgannwg and Gwent Health Authorities directly support projects, including the provision of GP sessions and district nurse hours, to help meet the health needs of people sleeping rough.

Millennium Stadium

Mr. John Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what steps he is taking to ensure the effective supervision of the Millennium Stadium project and its timely completion; and if he will make a statement. [47243]

Mr. Ron Davies: On 3 July in response to proposals from Millennium Stadium PLC, I announced that I would be prepared to make available a grant of £3 million towards the River Walk project, which is necessary to ensure the timely operation of the stadium at full capacity for the Rugby World Cup finals next year. My Department is in discussion with the company on the detail of those proposals including the company's plans to make fresh appointments to the PLC Board. The Chairman of Millennium Stadium PLC has assured me that the construction of the new stadium will be completed on time.

Information Technology

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how much his Department spent on IT itemising *(a)* personal computers, *(b)* main-frame, *(c)* mini-computers and *(d)* file servers in the last year for which figures are available. [52890]

Mr. Hain: The Welsh Office has a Private Finance Initiative contract for the supply of IT services to the desk. These services consist of personal computer workstations, a suite of office automation products, the underlying network infrastructure, hardware and software maintenance and education and training. The inclusive cost for 1997–98 was £3.878 million. The contract serviced 1,965 personal computers and 27 file servers at the end of the year. In addition, in 1997–98 the Department spent £0.031 million on a mainframe computer and £0.892 million on minicomputers.

Reviews

Mr. Alan Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what internal and external reviews have been established by him; and what is the remit, starting and concluding date of each. [53097]

Mr. Ron Davies: I will write to my hon. Friend as soon as possible and place a copy of my reply in the Library of the House.

Landfill Sites

Mr. Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the size and location of landfill sites in Wales; and if he will make a statement on his plans to tackle pollution from these sites. [53690]

Mr. Ron Davies: Details of landfill sites which are licensed or registered as exempt from licensing are available in public registers held by the Environment Agency at its principal Area Offices. The Agency monitors these sites on a regular basis and if pollution is detected, they will take appropriate action.

Full information is not available on landfill sites that closed prior to the introduction of licensing. However, when the new contaminated land regime is implemented in Wales, this will provide for the identification of such sites, and for their remediation where necessary.

North Wales Coast

Mr. Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many incidents of illegal dumping of dredged material have been recorded off the North Wales coast in each of the last 20 years. [53691]

Mr. Ron Davies: None.

A licence is required under the Food and Environment Protection Act 1985 to dispose of dredged material at sea: licences involving deposits in waters adjacent to Wales are issued on my behalf by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food.

Data on illegal dumping are not readily available prior to 1991 when amendments to the 1985 Act introduced under the Environmental Protection Act 1990 required information about convictions to be held on a public register. Since 1991 a number of alleged breaches of licence conditions and other infringements under the Act have been investigated but none has involved the disposal of dredged material off the North Wales coast.

Mr. Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales which *(a)* organisation's and *(b)* company's working computer models of the hydrographic regimes of the North Wales coastal region have been commissioned by the Environment Agency. [53686]

Mr. Ron Davies: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply given to him on 23 July 1998, *Official Report*, column *629*.

Clinical Psychologists

Mr. Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the current waiting time for a child to be referred to a clinical psychologist in each of the health authorities in Wales. [53688]

Mr. Ron Davies: The information requested is not available centrally.

Welsh Language Board

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what plans he has to make changes to the membership of the Welsh Language Board prior to the establishment of the National Assembly. [53369]

Mr. Ron Davies: I have no such plans at present. The terms of office of none of the Board's members expires before or soon after the establishment of the National Assembly.

Waiting Lists

Mr. Öpik: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many patients in each health authority area were waiting for treatment under the NHS in January each year since 1992 for *(a)* six months and under, *(b)* six to 12 months, *(c)* 12 to 18 months and *(d)* over 18 months; and if he will make a statement. [48189]

Mr. Ron Davies: Information on waiting lists by area of residence was not collected in January until 1997. Data for 31 March are therefore, provided for each year since 1992.

Health authority waiting lists, by length of wait, 1992–96
Numbers waiting for treatment as an inpatient or daycase

Length of wait	*31 March 1992*[1]	*31 March 1993*[1]	*Waiting list at 31 March 1994*	*31 March 1995*	*31 March 1996*
Clwyd Health Authority					
Less than 12 months	7,597	7,990	8,518	9,071	8,441
12–18 months	[2]—	[2]—	641	453	270
More than 18 months	[2]—	[2]—	86	74	41
12–24 months	900	625	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—
More than 24 months	87	1	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—
Total	8,584	8,616	9,245	9,598	8,752
Dyfed Health Authority (an amalgamation of East Dyfed and Pembrokeshire Health Authority figures)					
Less than 12 months	7,940	7,679	8,651	8,277	8,778
12–18 months	[2]—	[2]—	900	570	837
More than 18 months	[2]—	[2]—	288	109	130
12–24 months	1,330	883	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—
More than 24 months	0	48	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—
Total	9,270	8,610	9,839	8,956	9,745
Gwent Health Authority					
Less than 12 months	9,165	8,313	8,797	8,391	9,327
12–18 months	[2]—	[2]—	846	306	962
More than 18 months	[2]—	[2]—	207	2	185
12–24 months	1,170	1,586	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—
More than 24 months	456	23	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—
Total	10,791	9,922	9,850	8,699	10,474
Gwynedd Health Authority					
Less than 12 months	4,084	3,974	4,534	4,943	4,738
12–18 months	[2]—	[2]—	481	93	224
More than 18 months	[2]—	[2]—	62	22	6
12–24 months	626	513	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—
More than 24 months	233	1	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—
Total	4,943	4,488	5,077	5,058	4,968
Mid Glamorgan Health Authority					
Less than 12 months	8,662	8,636	10,102	11,643	10,301
12–18 months	[2]—	[2]—	780	846	848
More than 18 months	[2]—	[2]—	375	203	148
12–24 months	503	1,332	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—
More than 24 months	1,004	130	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—
Total	10,169	10,098	11,257	12,692	11,297
Powys Health Authority					
Less than 12 months	1,756	1,722	1,775	2,334	2,697
12–18 months	[2]—	[2]—	105	0	66
More than 18 months	[2]—	—	1	0	6
12–24 months	102	202	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—
More than 24 months	0	5	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—
Total	1,858	1,929	1,881	2,334	2,769

Health authority waiting lists, by length of wait, 1992–96
Numbers waiting for treatment as an inpatient or daycase

Length of wait	*31 March 1992*[1]	*31 March 1993*[1]	*Waiting list at 31 March 1994*	*31 March 1995*	*31 March 1996*
South Glamorgan Health Authority					
Less than 12 months	6,585	6,264	7,295	7,582	8,567
12–18 months	[2]—	[2]—	915	785	827
More than 18 months	[2]—	[2]—	311	156	255
12–24 months	849	998	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—
More than 24 months	263	89	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—
Total	7,697	7,351	8,521	8,523	9,649
West Glamorgan Health Authority					
Less than 12 months	5,542	5,102	6,467	6,174	5,934
12–18 months	[2]—	[2]—	437	339	260
More than 18 months	[2]—	[2]—	258	100	53
12–24 months	994	620	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—
More than 24 months	208	5	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—
Total	6,744	5,727	7,162	6,613	6,247

Notes:
[1] Indicates that complete data in respect of GP fundholding practices were not reported until March 1994
[2] Indicates that the requested breakdown by time of wait is not available

Health authority waiting lists, by length of wait, 1997–98
Numbers waiting for treatment as inpatient or daycase

Length of wait	*31st March 1997*	*Waiting list at 31st March 1998*
Gwent Health Authority		
Less than 12 months	11,998	11,894
12–18 months	1,534	1,654
More than 18 months	612	809
Total	14,144	14,357
Bro Taf Health Authority		
Less than 12 months	15,672	15,588
12–18 months	1,371	2,092
More than 18 months	378	844
Total	17,421	18,524
Dyfed Powys Health Authority		
Less than 12 months	11,644	13,346
12–18 months	1,274	895
More than 18 months	180	187
Total	13,098	14,428
North Wales Health Authority		
Less than 12 months	12,530	15,094
12–18 months	275	808
More than 18 months	42	77
Total	12,847	15,979

Health authority waiting lists, by length of wait, 1997–98
Numbers waiting for treatment as inpatient or daycase

Length of wait	*31st March 1997*	*Waiting list at 31st March 1998*
Morgannwg Health Authority		
Less than 12 months	9,491	9,495
12–18 months	418	433
More than 18 months	190	203
Total	10,099	10,131

Agricultural Payments

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what factors underlie the delays in payments of *(a)* HLCA, *(b)* sheep annual premium and *(c)* suckler cow premium. [53246]

Mr. Ron Davies: Payments were delayed because of the need to comply with additional EC finance data requirements, requirements under the SCP Scheme to administer a BSE-related compensation scheme, and to process Agrimonetary compensation schemes under SAP and SCP on top of the usual business commitment. The need to complete Integrated Administration and Control System (IASC) Whole Farm Inspections was also a delaying factor.

HEALTH

Cancer Services

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has for a centralised audit to ensure Calman-Hine plans are being implemented across the country. [50214]

Mr. Milburn *[holding answer 13 July 1998]:* We are committed to improving the quality of and speed of access to cancer services, including breast and cervical screening and palliative care, to deliver a consistently high standard of care for all patients and thereby maximise their chance of cure and increase their quality of life. The measures set out in *A First Class Service* will strengthen our capacity to monitor and evaluate all aspects of care; providing information which can be used to improve standards still further. We will work with the National Cancer Forum, regional and professional groups and the voluntary sector to ensure that we meet national quality and evidence-based clinical standards within the National Service Framework for the provision of cancer screening and the ongoing implementation of the Calman/Hine recommendations.

Correspondence

Mr. Ian Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans his Department has to correspond electronically with *(a)* hon. Members and *(b)* members of the public. [49851]

Ms Jowell *[holding answer 13 July 1998]:* I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster on 17 July 1998, *Official Report,* column *315,* regarding corresponding electronically with hon. Members.

The Department has set up a number of mechanisms to correspond electronically with members of the public. On the central DH internet site, a number of specific email boxes are available covering a number of areas, including open government, research and development and the regional offices. In addition, a number of committees, including the Royal Commission for the Long Term Care of the Elderly, the Committee on Carcinogenicity of Chemicals in Food, Consumer Products and the Environment, the Committee on Mutagenicity of Chemicals in Food, Consumer Products and the Environment also have email boxes. Among the Department's Agencies, the Medical Devices Agency have an email mailbox for general inquiries, the Medicines Control Agency have an email mailbox for the Committee on Safety of Medicines, and National Health Service Estates has an email mailbox used for complaints and general inquiries.

The Department's internet site also has a number of web pages with electronic feedback forms, including those for the Chief Medical Officer, performance tables, NHS Annual Report 95/96, as well as a general feedback form for the whole site.

As well as the range of specific email boxes the Department has, it is also currently examining the setting up of a corporate email box for general correspondence.

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he intends to reply to the letters to him dated 16 March, 18 May and 22 June from the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton with regard to support of the section 64 funding application by HIV Alliance. [53259]

Mr. Dobson: I have replied today to my right hon. Friend's letter of 16 March 1998. The Department has no record of receiving the letters dated 18 May or 22 June, but I understand that they were reminders relating to his earlier letter.

Departmental Staff

Mr. Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how staff numbers in his Department have varied between 1 May 1997 and 31 March 1998. [48879]

Ms Jowell: Staff in post information is provided to the Cabinet Office on a quarterly basis from 1 April each year so is not available for the exact dates requested. It is provided in the table for the nearest available dates. For the purposes of staff in post information, staff are counted as full-time equivalent (FTE)[1] not headcount.

	1 April 1997[2]	*1 April 1998*
Permanent staff		
Departmental (excluding agencies)	3,682.7	3,491.2
Medicines Control Agency	389.2	435.2
Medical Devices Agency	117.7	132.7
NHS Pensions Agency	362.6	403.4
NHS Estates Agency	144	133
Casual staff		
Departmental (excluding agencies)	73.4	90.9
Medicines Control Agency	25	44
Medical Devices Agency	8.6	3.6
NHS Pensions Agency	9	18.5
NHS Estates Agency	3	6

[1] In FTE part-time staff are counted as a proportion of full-time hours worked

[2] Civil Service Staff in Post Summary, copies of which are available in the Library or on the internet at www.open.gov.uk/co/cseg/pmcsd/stats/apr97int.htm

Lariam

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health on the basis of what prior trials and other research Lariam (Mefloquine) was granted marketing authorisation in the UK in 1989; and if he will make a statement. [48749]

Ms Jowell: The decision to grant a marketing authorisation for lariam (mefloquine) was based on all the available evidence, published or unpublished and whether or not favourable to the application. The data submitted by the company were assessed by the Medicines Control Agency, who sought the advice of the Committee on Safety of Medicines (CSM), the Government's independent drug safety advisory body. The CSM was satisfied as to the safety, quality and efficacy of the product, the sole criteria under both European Community and national legislation.

Breast Implants

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many silicone gel breast implants were undertaken in the past five years by *(a)* the NHS and *(b)* the private sector. [51676]

Mr. Boateng *[holding answer 22 July 1998]:* The available information is in the table. We record the number of episodes in which a breast implant was inserted; whether the implants were filled with silicone-gel or another material is not known. There are no equivalent figures for the private sector.

Number of episodes by primary operation; ordinary admissions and day cases combined, National Health Service hospitals, England

Year	*Breast implants*
1991–92	1,514
1992–93	1,680
1993–94	1,234
1994–95	1,320
1995–96	1,435

Source:
Hospital Episode Statistics OPCS4R Codes B30.1 Insertion of prosthesis for breast, B31.2 augmentation mammoplasty and B31.8 other specified plastic operations on breast

We have accepted the recommendation of the Independent Review Group on Silicone Gel Breast Implants for the compulsory registration of details of each breast implant and explant operation with the National Breast Implant Registry. This will, over time, give fuller data on the annual number of operations carried out in the United Kingdom.

Smoking

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what funding his Department is currently providing to initiatives to tackle *(a)* under-age smoking, *(b)* teenage smoking and *(c)* passive smoking. [52154]

Ms Jowell: In 1998/99, we are funding:

the "Respect" anti-smoking campaign at a cost of £1 million, which is targeting 11–15 year olds, addressing why young people start smoking and seeking to create a positive lifestyle as relevant to the two thirds of teenagers who don't smoke as to the third who do; and

the Health Education Authority's adult anti-smoking campaign at a cost of £5.5 million, which especially targets young people (and in particular women) in the 16–24 age range.

Both the teenage and adult smoking education campaigns include information on the dangers associated with passive smoking.

Our future plans to tackle smoking prevalence will be set out in the forthcoming White Paper on Tobacco Control.

Group B Streptococcus

Mrs. Organ: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many babies were born with meningitis as a result of the mother carrying the Group B streptococcus bacteria in each of the last three years. [52039]

Mr. Boateng: The figures presented are derived from laboratory reports of culture-confirmed cases in England presenting in the first week of life. This may not be a complete estimate of neonatal disease due to Group B streptococci since not all cases are reported to the Public Health Laboratory Service. The laboratory reports are either from blood or cerebrospinal fluid or other specimens which indicate meningitis as a clinical feature.

The disease in neonates may present as bacteraemia or meningitis or both. It is difficult to establish, beyond doubt, whether Group B streptococcal infection is the result of vertical transmission, but infection in the first week of life is highly likely to have been acquired from the mother. This association decreases as the age of the baby increases.

Year	*Number of reports*
1995	243
1996	220
1997[1]	258

[1] Data for 1997 are provisional at this stage. Data supplied by Public Health Laboratory Service

Mrs. Organ: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will carry out a comparative cost analysis of conducting a standard urine test for all pregnant mothers to detect Group B streptococcus and the cost of treatment for babies born with meningitis; [52040]

(2) if a standard urine test is carried out for all pregnant women to determine if they are Group B streptococcus carriers. [52042]

Mr. Boateng: The National Screening Committee considers the effectiveness and feasibility of individual population screening programmes and advises Ministers about their introduction. It is currently not known whether the introduction of screening for asymptomatic urinary infection (including Group B streptococcus) would be beneficial in reducing the risk of meningitis in new-born babies, but all the related research evidence will be taken into account by the National Screening Committee's Antenatal sub-group in its forward programme, before making recommendations to Ministers.

The standard urine test given to all pregnant women checks for, among other things, signs of protein which may indicate the presence of an infection. If an infection is indicated, a urine sample is sent for further laboratory investigation which would identify women who are Group B streptococcus carriers.

HIV-AIDS

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the percentage change in the number of HIV positive cases has been over the last five years. [52225]

Ms Jowell: The number of new HIV diagnoses reported each year has remained constant at about 2,500 but the number of deaths among people with HIV infection has fallen, especially since the introduction of combination antiretroviral therapy. This increasing life expectancy means that the number of HIV-infected people in the population has increased but data are not available to calculate the percentage change.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the percentage change in the number of HIV-positive cases in the next five years. [52228]

Ms Jowell: Projections for AIDS cases and severe HIV disease for 1995 to 1999 were published in November 1995 and work is currently under way to evaluate the effect on these projections of introducing combination therapy.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients have been unable to take up places in HIV wards in the United Kingdom over the last five years owing to a lack of beds. [52438]

Ms Jowell: The Department is aware that the length of in patient stays needed by people with HIV/AIDS has been declining since the introduction of combination therapies. The Department does not have any evidence that any patient with HIV has been denied in-patient treatment because of a lack of beds.

Laura Moffatt: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment his Department has made of advances in drug treatments for people with HIV/AIDS; and what plans he has to introduce drug resistance testing for people with HIV/AIDS to ensure that new drug treatments are used as cost effectively as possible across the whole of the United Kingdom. [52300]

Ms Jowell: We are aware of the continued success of combination therapies in the treatment of people with HIV/AIDS, in that the onset of symptoms is delayed, more people are being managed on an out patient basis and the number of deaths has fallen. The latest surveillance data show that the numbers of deaths from HIV/AIDS in the United Kingdom have declined since 1995 and this decline in deaths has accelerated with the introduction of combination therapies in 1996. Between 1995 and 1997, the numbers of deaths fell by nearly two thirds, from 1533 to 525, in men and by nearly a half, from 234 to 125, in women.

The issue of testing for drug resistance—as are all the complicated issues around the prescribing and monitoring of combination therapies—is one for the physician in discussion with the patient. The current clinical guidelines on the use of combination therapies, issued by the British HIV Association, contain guidance in the event of drug failure due to resistance, and how best to avoid this. The Department continues to monitor developments in drug treatment and draws such guidelines to the attention of health authorities in the annual guidance circular on HIV/AIDS.

Stroke Patients

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients were admitted to hospital in *(a)* the North West and *(b)* England in each of the past five years having suffered a stroke. [52289]

Mr. Boateng: The information is shown in the table for the financial years 1992–93 to 1996–97 (the latest year for which figures are available).

Primary diagnosis of stroke—number of admissions in North West Regional Office (RO) and England, National Health Service hospitals, England

	1992–93	*1993–94*	*1994–95*	*1995–96*	*[1]1996–97*
North West RO[2]	16,059	17,453	17,628	13,442	12,874
Other ROs	98,661	102,517	103,932	81,582	73,940
England	114,720	119,970	121,560	95,024	86,814

Notes:
[1] 1996–97 is derived from ungrossed Hospital Episode Statistics data
[2] For the years 1992–93 and 1993–94 data for North Western and Mersey regions were amalgamated
1992–93 to 1994–95—ICD-9 codes: 430–438
1995–96 and 1996–97—ICD-10 codes: 160–164, 167.2–167.9, 169
Because of the change in classification, data for 1995–96 and 1996–97 may not be directly comparable with earlier years
1992–93 and 1995–96 data are grossed for both coverage and unknown/invalid clinical data
Source:
Department of Health, Hospital Episode Statistics

NHS Costs

Dr. Vis: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the total cost to the NHS of *(a)* treating non-United Kingdom residents for all medical care and *(b)* providing abortion services to Irish citizens in the last year for which figures are available. [52180]

Mr. Milburn: The information requested is not held centrally.

Juveniles (Secure Accommodation)

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answers of 11 March 1998, *Official Report*, column *203* and 18 March 1998, *Official Report*, column *614*, how many places in local authority secure accommodation the Government plan in addition to those referred to in his answers. [52382]

Mr. Boateng: The review of juvenile secure accommodation was completed at the end of March and we have decided now on a programme of further work to be undertaken. A summary has been placed in the Library. This further work will include consideration of the creation of a new mechanism to determine the volume of places provided in juvenile secure accommodation, the cost of these and the standards which apply. It is proposed that the Youth Justice Board should take on this responsibility which should help ensure the appropriate volume and geographical spread of secure places.

Compliance Cost Assessments

Mr. Lansley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list those compliance cost assessments since 1 May 1997 in which there is a net reduction in compliance costs resulting from a legislative proposal. [52959]

Ms Jowell *[holding answer 28 July 1998]:* There is presently no requirement on Departments to carry out compliance cost assessments where legislative proposals are expected to be cost neutral or resulting in a saving to business.

Two compliance cost assessments which identified savings were:

Proposal for a Council Directive on the Advertising of Tobacco Products

The Medicines for Human Use and Medical Devices (Fees & Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 1998.

Medical Devices Agency

Mr. Rogers: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will publish the 1997–98 Annual report and Accounts of the Medical Devices Agency. [54139]

Ms Jowell: We have received the Report and Accounts of the Medical Devices Agency and copies have today been laid before both Houses of Parliament in accordance with the requirements of Sections 5(2) and 5(3) of the Exchequer and Audit Departments Act 1921.

Plymouth Hospitals NHS Trust

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the remit of the independent inquiry into the situation at Plymouth Hospital NHS Trust concerning the postgraduate qualifications of a thoracic surgeon; who will chair the inquiry; which individuals he has appointed to the inquiry; when it will report; to whom it will report; and what plans he has to extend the investigation into similar instances in other NHS trusts. [53255]

Mr. Milburn: On Thursday 23 July 1998, my right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State announced the establishment of an independent review of the investigation by Plymouth Hospitals National Health Service Trust into concerns raised about Mr. Joe Rahamim and the thoracic surgical services at the trust. The membership of the review team, its remit and its terms of reference will be announced shortly.

Adoption

Ms Beverley Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he is taking to prevent individuals from evading established procedures by making private arrangements for the adoption of children from overseas. [52199]

Mr. Boateng: Guidance issued by the Department to social services departments and voluntary adoption agencies sets out the arrangements put in place for adoption from overseas. The procedures are designed to safeguard the welfare of children who are to be adopted, and to assist with the process of obtaining entry clearance for such children to enter the United Kingdom. The Department makes no secret of its opposition to the use of private home study reports, which attempt to circumvent the proper procedures for intercountry adoptions. The commissioning of private home study reports has recently been found to be illegal by a recent High Court judgment. The Department continues to oppose privately commissioned home study reports both in its guidance and in correspondence.

Officials continue to liaise with authorities overseas seeking their co-operation in accepting only those homestudy reports which have been prepared by social services departments in the United Kingdom and are accompanied by the Department of Health's Certificate of Eligibility. In addition, officials are negotiating with a number of countries to obtain formal agreements about the handling of adoption applications. An agreement with Romania came into force earlier this year. These agreements are drafted on the principles and procedures outlined in the 1993 Hague Convention on Protection of Children and Co-operation in Respect of Intercountry Adoption.

Applications to courts in the United Kingdom to adopt children under the Adoption Act 1976 who have been adopted overseas with the help of a privately commissioned home study report are normally referred to the High Court.

Ms Beverley Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will introduce legislation to enable the United Kingdom to ratify the 1993 Hague Convention on intercountry adoption. [52200]

Mr. Boateng: Legislation to ratify the 1993 Hague Convention on Protection of Children and Co-operation in Respect of Intercountry Adoption will be introduced when Parliamentary time allows.

Sunburn and Sunstroke

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will estimate the annual cost to the National Health Service of treating sunburn and sunstroke in each of the last three years. [53142]

Ms Jowell: There has been no study specifically into the costs to the National Health Service of sunburn and sun stroke. However, sunburn is a risk factor for certain types of skin cancer, notably the most dangerous form, malignant melanoma. It has been estimated that in 1992/93 in England, malignant melanoma accounted for 0.06 per cent. of total hospital in and out patient expenditure of about £16,200 million[1]. There are about 3–4,000 new cases of malignant melanoma and approximately 1,300 deaths from this cancer in England each year.

[1]Source: "Burdens of Disease", NHSE, 1996.

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people received treatment in National Health Service hospitals for sunburn and sunstroke in each of the last three years. [53141]

Mr. Milburn: The information shown in the table is for in-patient treatment in National Health Service hospitals for the financial years 1994–95 to 1996–97 (the latest year for which figures are available), and is based on Finished Consultant Episodes, which represent the number of episodes of care under individual consultants.

	Primary diagnosis	
Year	*Sunburn*	*Heatstroke and sunstroke*
1994–95	385	38
1995–96	156	82
1996–97	88	42

Notes:

ICD Coding

1. 1994–95—ICD-9 codes—Contact dermatitis due to solar radiation (sunburn)—692.0; heatstroke and sunstroke—992.0

2. 1995–96 and 1996–97—ICD-10 codes sunburn L55; heatstroke and sunstroke T67.0. Because of the change in classification, data for 1995–96 and 1996–97 may not be directly comparable with 1994–95

3. 1994–95 and 1995–96 data are grossed for both coverage and unknown invalid clinical data

4. 1996–97 is derived from ungrossed HES data, and may not be directly comparable with earlier years

Source:

Department of Health, Hospital Episode Statistics (HES)

Estimated number of Finished Consultant Episodes (FCEs) by primary diagnosis: ordinary admissions and day cases combined, NHS hospitals, England.

Bradford (Funding)

Mr. Rooney: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what additional funds have been allocated to the Bradford area since 1 May 1997 over and above previous plans listed by (i) capital and (ii) revenue, indicating for each whether they were subject to a bidding process. [53211]

Mr. Milburn: The table shows Bradford Health Authority's share of the additional resources announced to date since 1 May 1997. These additions were all for revenue and comprise proportions of:

The extra £10 million for breast cancer services announced in May 1997

The extra £1 billion announced in July 1997

The extra £300 million announced in October 1997

The extra £500 million announced in March 1998

Bradford health authority—additional funding—1997–98

Purpose	*Addition (£000)*
Winter pressures[1]	1,700
GMS Cash Limited—salaried doctor scheme	37
Breast cancer services[1]	93
Initial revenue allocation for 1998–99 includes an additional £11.229m growth/uplift, £6.323m higher than sustainable under the previous plan	6,326
Waiting list addition	2,883
Whole systems support for waiting lists[1]	659
Total	11,698

[1] Regional budgets were established pro rata to the general allocations of their health authorities. Health authorities submitted proposals to regional offices for spending the regional budgets

Women Doctors

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will estimate the proportion of (i) all and (ii) women medical graduates from medical schools who are practising medicine 10 years after qualification *(a)* full-time and *(b)* part-time. [52862]

Mr. Milburn: Studies commissioned by the Department in respect of medical students who graduated in 1983 (the latest cohert for which data are currently available) show that, in 1993, the patterns of employment of those doctors working in the National Health Service were:

Percentage

	Women	*Total*
Full time employment	57.6	81.35
Part time employment	42.4	18.7

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to encourage women doctors back to work in *(a)* hospitals and *(b)* primary care. [52863]

Mr. Milburn: The increasing numbers of women in medical schools and at all levels within the medical profession is producing more demand for flexible working and training opportunities in the National Health Service, including facilities for taking a career break and then returning to practice. There is also a more general trend in the economy which is seeing a greater demand from both men and women for working arrangements which reflect domestic and family responsibilities; and we are committed to supporting working parents in balancing the demands of their work and home life.

A number of measures are already in place to make the NHS a more "family friendly" place for women doctors to work. The new arrangements for flexible training, which were introduced with the specialist registrar (SpR) grade, devolved the funding of flexible training to the postgraduate deans where it could be more responsive to local and specialty demands. The National Training Number (NTN) allows new entrant SpRs who want to train flexibly to have a place reserved for them so that they can take up training as quickly as possible without further competitive barriers. If a complete career break is needed, they have a "passport" back into training via their personal NTN which they hold throughout training. Trusts are continuing (under the New Deal on Juniors' Hours) to introduce working patterns and practices that enable doctors to balance the demands of work with family life. The Quality Framework for hospital and community medical staffing, which was issued as a draft compendium of guidance in April last year, emphasises the need for trusts to develop flexible working and training arrangements as part of their medical workforce planning.

Over the past year, we have introduced a new retainer scheme and a salaried general practitioner scheme for NHS general practitioners each of which will encourage women doctors back to work in primary care.

Information about the career paths and working needs of women doctors is collected regularly through the Medical Careers Research Group, whose work is funded by the Department and informs the medical workforce planning process. A separate survey is also under way at present, examining the working preferences and career development needs of doctors now in higher specialist training. The results are intended to inform the design of hospital consultant posts, helping to ensure that women doctors with family responsibilities are able to work within the NHS at a level commensurate with their skills and abilities. The Department is also funding a support network for consultants who are working part-time.

A number of initiatives are under way to support family friendly working and to encourage women doctors to return to the NHS. The *Don't Waste Doctors* project in the North West Region looked at ways to prevent doctors from leaving the service, or to bring them back. In Wessex, a pilot scheme has been running to assess the needs of unemployed GPs and to help them back into the NHS. We hope that both schemes will provide models for wider use. The Department has also funded trials of a self-rostering software package in the NHS. Most of the participants in the trials have been nurses, but the package may have much wider application. This scheme is currently being carefully evaluated, and a report is expected early in the autumn.

Health Authorities (Overspending)

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list those health authorities which overspent in 1997–98. [52864]

Mr. Milburn: No health authorities overspent their cash limits in 1997–98.

Radiotherapy

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to replace cobalt sources with linear acceleration machines in radiotherapy units. [52813]

Mr. Boateng: We have made no central plans, as this is a matter for local decision making. A report about availability of radiotherapy was published by the Royal College of Radiologists on 8 July 1998; it provides valuable information for the local planning of services. The report indicates that in 1997 there were 22 cobalt machines in use in the United Kingdom, of which only 3 were less than five years old. This suggests that recent purchases have been of linear accelerators; it is expected that this trend will continue as cobalt machines reach the end of their useful lives and are replaced.

Breast Cancer

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will provide a list of the measures which NHS trusts have taken using the funding made available for breast cancer services in 1997–98. [52812]

Mr. Boateng: Over 300 projects are being supported by the £10 million made available recurrently in 1997–98 for improvements to breast cancer services. These focus primarily on rapid access to diagnostic services, speedy access to treatment and the provision of high quality care delivered in line with published guidance by specialist multi-professional, multi-disciplinary teams.

Health authorities are monitoring achievement of all the approved funding and will provide a comprehensive report to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State this autumn on the measurable improvements delivered in the services they provide.

Health Spending

Miss Widdecombe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the projected annual average percentage increase in health spending between 1999–2000 and 2001–02 for *(a)* England and *(b)* the United Kingdom. [53130]

Mr. Milburn: The projected annual average real-terms percentage increase in National Health Service Total Expenditure between 1999–2000 and 2001–2002 is 4.2 per cent. net in England. The United Kingdom net figure is 4.0 per cent.

Radiotherapists

Miss Widdecombe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on his plans to increase the number of radiotherapists in the National Health Service. [53144]

Mr. Milburn: The Department maintains an overview of the supply of trained personnel for the National Health Service.

Local employers should plan the numbers of radiotherapists (doctors) and therapy radiographers needed to deliver their radiotherapy services. These plans are used in assessing levels of training needed to produce the required numbers of fully-trained staff for the future.

At the same time, Specialty Workforce Advisory Group (SWAG) advises the National Health Service Executive and the Welsh Office on the number of higher specialist trainees needed, to ensure an adequate supply of properly trained doctors in each specialty. It carries out annual reviews of each specialty's need for consultants. SWAG has identified the specialty of radiotherapy (or clinical oncology) as having significant shortages.

For 1998–99, SWAG recommended further increases in the number of higher specialist trainees, in radiotherapy. It has recommended that these increases be treated as a priority.

NHS Waiting Lists

Miss Widdecombe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many patients were suspended from National Health Service waiting lists for reasons other than clinical unfitness for surgery in *(a)* 1996 and *(b)* 1997; [53016]

(2) what projection he has made of the number of patients who will be suspended from National Health Service waiting lists for reasons other than clinical unfitness for surgery in 1998; [53015]

(3) what proportion of the estimated reduction in waiting lists based on provisional figures is accounted for by *(a)* administrative clean-up and *(b)* reprioritisation of the list; and if he will make a statement; [53140]

(4) if he will estimate the number of patients who have been removed from waiting lists since 2 May 1997 without their consent and without having received the treatment originally intended; and if he will make a statement. [53008]

Mr. Milburn: Information is not available centrally in the form requested.

Cancer Surgeons

Miss Widdecombe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if cancer surgeons are currently receiving higher rates of remuneration for waiting list operation surgery than for other surgery performed as part of their regular duties; [53007]

(2) if he will make a statement on pay disparities between health authorities for cancer surgeons. [53014]

Mr. Milburn: The national salary rates applicable from 1 April 1998 for hospital consultants are specified in Advance Letter (MD) 1/98, copies of which are available in the Library. The salary rates apply to all consultants on national terms regardless of the speciality concerned. However, under arrangements introduced by the previous administration, trusts do have the flexibility to employ consultants on individual contracts of employment which may be remunerated on a higher basis than national terms and conditions of service. Trusts must ensure that the expenditure incurred represents good value for money and it will be open to scrutiny by auditors at the end of the financial year.

GP Resignations

Miss Widdecombe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will estimate the number of GP resignations since the publication of his White Paper; and if he will make a statement. [53020]

Mr. Milburn: Information on the number of general practitioner resignations and their causes is not held centrally.

Spending Statistics

Miss Widdecombe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the annual percentage average increase in health spending between 1990–91 and 1992–93 for *(a)* England and *(b)* the United Kingdom. [53143]

Mr. Milburn: The information is in the table.

Real Terms Growth in National Health Service total expenditure

Percentage

	1990–91 and 1992–93
England (net)	6.3
England (gross)	5.8
United Kingdom (gross)	5.8

Notes:

1. UK net figure is not available on a comparable basis
2. Consistent with Gross Domestic Product deflator figures used in the Comprehensive Spending Review White Paper

Miss Widdecombe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the actual annual average percentage increase in overall health spending for *(a)* the United Kingdom and *(b)* England in real terms between 1979–80 and 1996–97. [53131]

Mr. Milburn: The information requested is in the table.

Percentage

	Real terms annual average growth in NHS total expenditure between 1979–80 and 1996–97
England net	3.1
England gross	3.3
UK gross	3.1

Notes:

1. United Kingdom net figure is not available on a comparable basis
2. Consistent with the Gross Domestic Product deflator figures used in the Comprehensive Spending Review White Paper

Miss Widdecombe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the projected annual average percentage increase in overall health spending for *(a)* England and *(b)* the United Kingdom in real terms between 1997–98 and 2001–02. [53133]

Mr. Milburn: The projected annual average real terms percentage increase in National Health Service total net expenditure between 1997–98 and 2001–02 is 4.1 per cent. in England and 3.9 per cent. in the United Kingdom.

Millennium Compliance

Miss Widdecombe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the planned timescale for the verification of equipment replaced or altered in order to achieve year 2000 compliance for all systems within the Health Service and his Department. [53179]

Mr. Milburn: Chief Executives of health authorities and trusts have been instructed to ensure that by 31 December 1998 they have identified and resourced effective solutions for all Year 2000 problems that would otherwise compromise the safety of patients and staff, and the continuity of services.

In addition, chief executives have been instructed to ensure that by 30 September 1999 all parts of the National Health Service are fully prepared with compliant equipment or effective contingency plans in place.

The Department plans to complete Year 2000 compliance testing on all business critical systems by September 1999.

The plans were analysed by the Central Information Technology Unit and the Central Communications Technology Agency and their conclusions reported to the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster. He arranged for the completed questionnaires and a summary to be placed in the Library and published on the internet. An update on the progress by the Department will be available in the autumn.

Ashford Hospital

Mr. Wilshire: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will make it his policy to oppose further transfers of services from Ashford (Middlesex) hospital to St. Peter's hospital, Chertsey; [53219]

(2) if he will make a statement on the future of the intensive care unit at Ashford (Middlesex) hospital. [53215]

Mr. Milburn: Ashford and St. Peter's Hospitals National Health Service Trust was established on 1 April 1998 from the merger of two neighbouring acute NHS trusts. The trust is currently reviewing its services and the configuration of these between the two sites at Ashford and St. Peter's. We expect the trust and its health authorities to consider the interests of patients in any changes to service delivery. There will be public consultation on any significant service changes.

The trust is reviewing the capabilities of both hospital sites in view of the need to provide hospital services, including intensive care, that are fit for the 21st century. The trust must be able to meet accreditation standards for training doctors, and must be able to deliver high quality treatment and care. In considering its reconfiguration plans, the trust will be expected to maintain a broad range of services on site for the local population.

Mental Health Act 1983

Ms Southworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to review the Mental Health Act 1983; and if he will make a statement. [53678]

Mr. Dobson: I am setting up a review of the Mental Health Act 1983. The aim of this review will be to ensure that mental health legislation supports the safe and effective delivery of modern patterns of clinical and social care for people with a mental disorder, and to ensure that we achieve a proper balance between individual rights and the requirements of the safety of both the individual and the wider community.

As a first step in this process, I am going to appoint a small team of experts to advise me on the areas of the current legislation which need to be revised or

supplemented to support effective, modern mental health services. The group will comprise representatives from the legal profession, professional groups involved in the delivery of mental health services and user/public interests, and they will report to me next spring. I will specifically want their advice to include consideration of possible measures such as compliance orders and community treatment orders.

We aim to ensure that the legal framework that we will put in place for the new millennium is appropriate to deliver a full range of services in line with our proposals for a national service framework for mental health services, and will provide a prompt and effective legal basis to ensure individuals get supervised care if they fail to comply with their medication or if their condition deteriorates for any other reason.

Written Answers to Questions

Thursday 30 July 1998

NORTHERN IRELAND

Resettlement Grants

Mr. Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many people have been awarded resettlement grants each year since 1972 to relocate to avoid the troubles in Northern Ireland; what was the average resettlement grant; what criteria govern eligibility for such a grant; and if she will make a statement. [52770]

Mr. Paul Murphy: This is a matter for the Northern Ireland Housing Executive whose Chief Executive has advised me that the information requested is as follows (for the purposes of the question Resettlement Grant has been interpreted as reference to Emergency Grant):

Emergency grant

Year	*Number of people*	*Fixed amount of grant* £
1995–96[1]	59	175
1996–97	200	180
1997–98	180	184
April-June 1998	35	189

[1] The information from 1972 would be available only at disproportionate cost

Criteria

Emergency Grant is payable to public and private sector tenants who are awarded A1 status (Intimidation) under the Housing Executive's Housing Selection Scheme as a result of civil disturbance, bomb damage, sectarian intimidation and subsequently permanently rehoused in the public or private sector.

Guardsmen Fisher and Wright

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans she has to meet members of the families of Guardsmen Fisher and Wright or their representatives; what requests she has received on this matter; and what was her response. [53598]

Mr. Ingram: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has no plans to meet with members of the families of Guardsmen Fisher and Wright. She met my hon. Friend the Member for Carrick, Cummock and Doon Valley (Mr. Foulkes), Constituency MP for the Fisher family, on Tuesday 10 March 1998. She also met my hon. Friend the Member for Cinlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) on Thursday 22 January 1998. The purpose of these meetings was not to discuss the detail of the cases but rather to explain the Northern Ireland life sentence review process and how it applied to the Guardsmen's cases.

Mr. Peter McBride

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland on what occasions *(a)* she and *(b)* her officials have met members of the family of the late Mr. Peter McBride or their representatives; and on what occasions (i) the case of Guardsmen Fisher and Wright and (ii) the death of Mr. Peter McBride were discussed. [53597]

Mr. Ingram: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State met representatives of the McBride family on Wednesday 8 July 1998. The details of the life sentence review of these cases were not discussed.

Benefit Information

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what guidance she plans to issue to the Benefits Agency on its forthcoming obligations under the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 to produce generic benefits information and information on individual benefits in a range of formats which blind and partially sighted people can access. [54069]

Mr. McFall: The Northern Ireland Disability Council and the Department of Health and Social Services will shortly be consulting on proposals for a revised Code of Practice and supporting regulations to take account of the next phase of implementation of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995. The Code of Practice will give practical guidance to service providers on how to prevent discrimination against disabled people in accessing the goods, facilities or services they provide.

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what assessment she has made of the difficulties which blind and partially sighted people experience in obtaining access to information on benefits. [54068]

Mr. McFall: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Social Security Agency under its Chief Executive, Mr. Chris Thompson. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Chris Thompson to Rev. Martin Smyth, dated 29 July 1998:

I have been asked to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question about what assessment has been made of the difficulties which blind and partially sighted people experience in obtaining access to information on benefits.

The Social Security Agency has not yet carried out any formal assessment of the needs of blind and partially sighted people. However, as you are aware the Benefits Agency are looking into the needs of these customers as part of the research for "Project Access". The findings of this project will be considered by the Social Security Agency.

However, I am giving further consideration to the issue in Northern Ireland and I will write to you again shortly.

Ulster Hospital

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what effect the recent events at Drumcree had on the availability of theatres at the Ulster Hospital for emergency casualties; and if she will make a statement. [54071]

Mr. McFall: The Ulster Hospital has six theatres, all of which could be utilised in an emergency situation. On Saturday, 11 July and Monday, 13 July two emergency theatres were utilised, while on Sunday, 12 July and Tuesday, 14 July one theatre was used.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Driving Offences

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for North-East Derbyshire (Mr. Barnes) of 14 July 1998, *Official Report*, columns *103–04*, on driving offences, if he will provide similar figures in respect of motorists in Gloucestershire for the most recent five years for which figures are available. [52286]

Mr. Michael: Figures for the years 1993–96 are as follows. The data for 1992 have been archived and are not readily available. Figures for 1997 are not yet available.

Number of proceedings and findings of guilt for certain motoring offences in England and Wales and the Gloucestershire Police District 1992–96

	Gloucestershire Police		England and Wales	
	Proceedings	Findings of guilt	Proceedings	Findings of guilt
1993				
Dangerous driving	134	84	11,373	6,185
Driving etc. after consuming alcohol or taking drugs	680	577	105,158	91,198
Speed limit offences	2,011	1,912	110,571	100,157
Failing to comply with traffic signals	145	113	35,306	30,061
Other offences of neglect of traffic directions[1]	452	379	12,788	9,062
Neglect of pedestrian rights[2]	63	53	18,500	8,466
1994				
Dangerous driving	151	94	11,097	6,194
Driving etc. after consuming alcohol or taking drugs	975	834	104,690	89,700
Speed limit offences	2,082	2,005	114,338	105,063
Failing to comply with traffic signals	610	563	29,152	24,266
Other offences of neglect of traffic directions[1]	236	179	12,306	8,770
Neglect of pedestrian rights[2]	91	84	9,209	7,439
1995				
Dangerous driving	128	88	10,906	6,408
Driving etc. after consuming alcohol or taking drugs	1,197	1,069	105,407	92,505
Speed limit offences	2,730	2,627	128,409	118,974
Failing to comply with traffic signals	1,433	1,346	29,695	24,480
Other offences of neglect of traffic directions[1]	82	53	10,706	7,596
Neglect of pedestrian rights[2]	93	83	8,643	6,898
1996				
Dangerous driving	119	63	10,017	5,750
Driving etc. after consuming alcohol or taking drugs	1,068	979	107,931	95,705
Speed limit offences	3,734	3,586	139,565	130,039
Failing to comply with traffic signals	2,265	2,141	30,220	25,307
Other offences of neglect of traffic directions[1]	67	42	9,320	6,672
Neglect of pedestrian rights[2]	44	37	8,132	6,487

[1] Includes failure to comply with the directions of a police constable as well as failure to comply with traffic signs

[2] Includes driving in a playstreet and other contraventions of street playground orders as well as offences connected with 'Zebra' crossings. 'Pelican' crossings and traffic lights at pedestrian crossings.

Asylum Seekers

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer to the right hon. Member for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley) of 20 July 1998, *Official Report*, column *380*, on asylum seekers, if he will list the more efficient working practices referred to in the answer; and if the plans for computerisation of casework are those plans in respect of which the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, the hon. Member for North Warwickshire (Mr. O'Brien), undertook to write to the hon. Member for Hertsmere in his answer of 7 May, *Official Report*, column *452*. [52222]

Mr. Mike O'Brien *[holding answer 27 July 1998]:* We have in hand organisational changes in the Immigration and Nationality Directorate, which will result in a new Integrated Casework Directorate. This will handle the casework currently dealt with in five separate Directorates. We will get rid of the present hierarchical system of decision-making, in which wasteful duplication often causes delay.

We will devolve decision-making to the appropriate level, in teams which will deal with a case from start to finish. The teams will be fully supported by up-to-date information and we will have in place quality assurance mechanisms to audit decisions. We are well on the way to establishing this new Directorate. A pilot of the working methods will start in August.

The computerisation plans referred to in my answer to the right hon. Member for Caernarfon of 20 July are the same plans about which I undertook to write to the hon. Member for Hertsmere in my answer of 7 May. We still await proposals from Siemens Business Services for completing the next stage of the computerisation; the company has indicated that these will be available by 28 August.

Mr. Gale: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to provide central Government funding to local authorities for the *(a)* social services, *(b)* health and *(c)* education costs incurred by asylum seekers. [53725]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: Under the proposals set out in the White Paper published by my right hon. Friend on 27 July, from April 1999 the Home Office will have a budget for the cost of providing food, shelter and daily living expenses for asylum seekers. Detailed arrangements for the management of this budget have not yet been made. No changes are proposed in the funding of health care, education or other facilities used by asylum seekers.

Mr. Gale: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what statutory authority determines the United Kingdom's ability to return asylum seekers who have travelled to the United Kingdom through safe third countries directly to their country of origin. [53724]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The Secretary of State may decide to consider the asylum application of any person who claims asylum in the United Kingdom, notwithstanding the fact that they may have previously travelled through one or more safe third countries, and, if he refuses the claim, he may seek to return the person to their country of origin under the provisions of the Immigration Act 1971 (and in particular paragraphs 8–10 of schedule 2 to that Act). Once the person has been notified of the Secretary of State's decision, they may not, under Schedule 3 to the 1993 Asylum and Immigration Appeals Act and Part II of Schedule 2 to the 1971 Act, be returned whilst any appeal they may have made against the decision to grant or vary leave to enter or remain is pending.

In practice, the Dublin Convention affects our ability to return people to third countries.

Mr. Gale: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his oral statement of 27 July 1998, *Official Report*, columns 35–53, what external legal advice he has sought on the applicability of the provisions of the Dublin Convention as they relate to those of the Geneva Convention concerning asylum seekers. [53723]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary has received external legal advice on various matters which have arisen during the course of legal challenges to decisions to transfer asylum seekers to other member states under the Dublin Convention. The Dublin Convention is primarily concerned with the issue of which European Union (EU) member state is to consider an asylum application made within the EU; it does not deal with the merits of that claim, which are the concern of the 1951 Geneva Convention.

Mr. Wilshire: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many passengers arriving at Heathrow Airport in each month since 1 May 1997 have sought asylum upon arrival; what was their country of origin; and how many of them remain in the United Kingdom. [53826]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: Information relating to persons who applied for asylum on arrival at Heathrow airport between 1 May 1997 and 31 May 1998, by nationality and month, is given in the table.

The available information is that, as at 30 June 1998, some 740 of those asylum seekers had been granted leave to enter as recognised refugees or on other grounds and a further 800 had been removed or departed voluntarily.

In addition, a number of the applicants will be awaiting a decision on their claim or the outcome of an appeal.

Applications received for asylum, excluding dependants, on arrival at Heathrow airport by Nationality from 1 May 1997 to 31 May 1998

	May 1997	*June 1997*	*July 1997*	*August 1997*	*September 1997*	*October 1997*	*November 1997*
Europe							
Bulgaria	5	5	10	15	*	5	10
Cyprus	10	15	15	10	10	25	35
Poland	20	20	20	20	20	25	30
Romania	—	5	*	*	*	*	*
Turkey	15	10	15	10	10	10	10
Former USSR	40	45	45	45	30	50	35
Former Yugoslavia	15	15	20	30	30	40	60
Americas							
Colombia	160	40	10	5	5	5	5
Ecuador	45	120	225	20	*	5	*
Africa							
Algeria	5	10	10	5	10	10	10
Angola	5	10	—	5	5	*	5
Ethiopia	5	5	5	*	*	*	*
Gambia	*	—	—	—	—	*	—
Ghana	5	5	5	5	5	5	—
Ivory Coast	—	5	*	*	*	*	5
Kenya	5	5	25	10	25	35	30
Liberia	5	—	*	*	—	*	—
Nigeria	10	10	10	10	20	15	20
Sierra Leone	5	5	5	10	10	10	5
Somalia	30	25	20	25	45	40	30
Sudan	5	5	15	5	15	5	5
Tanzania	—	*	5	5	5	*	*
Togo	—	—	—	*	—	*	—
Uganda	5	5	*	5	5	10	10
Zaire	10	10	10	15	10	15	10

Applications received for asylum, excluding dependants, on arrival at Heathrow airport by Nationality from 1 May 1997 to 31 May 1998

	May 1997	June 1997	July 1997	August 1997	September 1997	October 1997	November 1997
Middle East							
Iran	25	15	15	25	30	25	30
Iraq	40	35	70	65	60	45	50
Lebanon	5	5	5	5	20	10	5
Asia							
Afghanistan	35	45	55	70	80	75	80
China	30	25	25	20	15	30	40
India	20	15	10	15	10	5	15
Pakistan	15	20	50	45	50	55	25
Sri Lanka	50	35	40	40	40	45	40
Others[1]	40	55	50	70	85	100	55
Total	670	620	775	620	650	710	670

	December 1997	January 1998	February 1998	March 1998	April 1998	May 1998	Total
Europe							
Bulgaria	15	10	5	5	10	10	100
Cyprus	35	10	5	*	—	*	175
Poland	75	70	75	80	115	70	640
Romania	—	—	5	5	*	*	25
Turkey	20	20	20	15	5	15	170
Former USSR	70	35	30	55	75	60	615
Former Yugoslavia	135	55	30	30	65	25	540
Americas							
Colombia	15	25	25	10	*	10	315
Ecuador	10	5	*	*	5	5	440
Africa							
Algeria	20	*	*	5	10	5	100
Angola	5	5	5	5	*	*	50
Ethiopia	5	5	*	10	*	*	40
Gambia	—	*	—	—	—	—	5
Ghana	5	5	5	5	*	5	55
Ivory Coast	—	*	—	*	—	—	15
Kenya	15	35	20	25	15	20	270
Liberia	*	—	*	*	—	—	15
Nigeria	15	30	15	25	20	30	230
Sierra Leone	5	5	5	5	5	5	75
Somalia	35	45	35	35	25	15	405
Sudan	5	10	5	5	5	10	90
Tanzania	*	5	*	5	*	*	30
Togo	—	—	—	—	—	—	*
Uganda	*	*	5	5	5	5	50
Zaire	10	15	10	20	15	10	160
Middle East							
Iran	40	35	35	25	25	25	345
Iraq	75	60	45	65	40	35	680
Lebanon	10	5	5	5	5	5	95
Asia							
Afghanistan	110	50	55	95	75	70	890
China	50	45	30	40	25	45	415
India	20	15	10	15	10	10	170
Pakistan	30	35	35	40	45	35	475
Sri Lanka	70	40	45	50	65	90	655
Others[1]	100	65	85	95	105	75	980
Total	995	740	640	775	775	680	9,320

[1] Includes all other nationalities not identified in the table

Firearms Compensation

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how much compensation has been paid as a result of the ban on the ownership of handguns to date; [52830]

(2) what the staff and overhead costs have been to date of operating the compensation scheme for owners of handguns; and what estimate he has made of the total costs.

Mr. Michael: The estimated total cost of operating the compensation scheme over two years is £3.0 million. The staff costs to date are £1.2 million out of total Firearms Compensation Section capital and running costs expenditure of £2.08 million. £53.8 million has been paid in compensation so far.

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what measures he proposes to expedite the payment of Category C claims under the Firearms Compensation Scheme. [52361]

Mr. Michael *[holding answer 29 July 1998]:* The Firearms Compensation Section (FCS) is taking all possible steps to clear the remaining Option C payments under the large calibre handgun surrender scheme and the ex gratia surrender scheme for small-calibre pistols as quickly as possible, having regard to the need to scrutinise claims closely to ensure that payments are made in accordance with the requirements of the compensation scheme and to guard against fraud. A number of measures are being taken to increase the processing rate, while maintaining these safeguards.

Two examining teams have been allocated specifically to dealing with the numerically few but very complex claims from firearms dealers, which present particular problems relating to the evidence of value of the surrendered goods, and consideration is being given to alternative forms of evidence where a dealer is unable to provide the precise evidence of value required by the terms of the scheme. The FCS is working closely with dealers and their representatives to resolve the outstanding issues as quickly as possible.

Arrangements have been made with the Forensic Science Service to identify unfamiliar items included in compensation claims, so that a quick decision can be made on their eligibility for compensation, and we are looking at the scope for flexibility within the scheme to make offers of payment other than through the time-consuming process of independent valuation in suitable cases. We are also streamlining administration where possible to reduce unnecessary work, for example by returning the evidence of value to claimants on request, rather than automatically, and by simplifying the database of values used by FCS as a payment guide by reducing the range and values of guns and equipment recorded.

The staff resources devoted to the operation of the compensation scheme have increased to 56, including 11 Agency staff. Given the expertise required to operate this complex part of the scheme, staff numbers have reached the maximum practical level, and recruitment efforts are aimed at sustaining that level. Staff are working regular weekend overtime in order to complete the task as quickly as possible.

Because of the complexity of dealers' claims and the wide variety of guns and equipment surrendered under Option C, much of it ineligible, progress with the payment of claims has been initially slow since work started full time on these claims at the end of May. The processing rate is expected to increase as the measures outlined above take effect and, although it no longer appears possible to clear all the claims by the end of the year, payment offers should be made on the great majority of claims by that time. We will work continuously to reduce this timescale if at all possible.

The Agency staff who have been registering the claims received under the statutory compensation scheme for small-calibre pistols surrendered in February 1998 have completed their work and will begin the processing of Option A and B claims under this scheme at the beginning of August. This work will continue in parallel with the work on the remaining Option C claims under the large calibre and ex gratia schemes.

Mr. David Heath: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many applications for Option C compensation for firearms remain outstanding in the Avon and Somerset Police Authority area. [53430]

Mr. Michael: There are currently 578 claims from the Avon and Somerset Police Force area where payment has not yet been made under Option C of the compensation scheme. The great majority of these have already received a payment under Options A or B. In 22 of these cases, an offer of payment has been made and is awaiting acceptance by the claimant.

British Nationality (Applications)

Mr. Etherington: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the average time taken to process applications to his Department on *(a)* Form ELR, *(b)* Form FLR (m), *(c)* Form FLR (s), *(d)* Form FLR (o), *(e)* Form SET (m), *(f)* Form SET (f), *(g)* Form SET (o), *(h)* Form AN and *(i)* travel document applications. [52779]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The average time taken to process postal applications received by staff in the Immigration and Nationality Directorate's caseworking groups for further, indefinite and exceptional leave to remain (excluding refugees) is:

ELR: 147 days
FLR(M): 240 days
FLR(S): 111 days
FLR(O): 116 days
SET(M): 119 days
SET(F): 177 days
SET(0): 150 days.

In the second quarter of 1998, these types of case amounted to 46 per cent. of all decisions.

In the same period, a further 30 per cent. of decisions were dealt with by the Public Inquiry Office, which resolves over 90 per cent. of inquiries and applications on the same day, and a further 24 per cent. of decisions on postal applications were dealt with under the fast track procedures introduced last year for applications identified as straightforward. In the first six months of 1998, these procedures enabled cases to be processed within three days of receipt.

Settlement applications are also made by refugees, using the form SET(0). The average time taken to deal with these applications is two weeks.

The average time taken to process an application for a travel document is between 12 and 14 weeks.

The average time taken to process an application for naturalisation using the form AN is 19.8 months.

Ms Ryan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many applicants refused British nationality have been detained prior to removal since 1 January. [53329]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: No one would be detained on the sole ground that they had been refused British nationality. It is possible that someone detained as an illegal entrant or deportee might also have been refused British nationality, but we have no records to determine this.

Freemasons

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps he has taken to implement the measures outlined in the Government's response to the Third Report of the Home Affairs Committee Session 1996–97, on Freemasonry in the Police and Judiciary; if he will set his proposed timetable for any remaining steps; and if he will make a statement. [52917]

Mr. Michael: I wrote to the United Grand Lodge of the Freemasons on 27 March, requesting the Freemasons Society to disclose names of its members working within those professions and occupations listed in the Government's response to the Third Report. The United Grand Lodge replied on 24 April without providing this information. On 11 May, I wrote to the United Grand Lodge informing the Freemasons that the Government would press on with the process of implementing their policy of declaration and registration. The categories in relation to which the Government are currently considering implementation of its policy are: police; all members of the Judiciary, including the lay magistracy; Crown Prosecution Service legally qualified staff; Probation; Prison Service; Coroners; and members of police authorities.

Since May, officials have been discussing the mechanics of how to implement this policy, including a timetable for establishing a voluntary register and its format. The first step in the implementation process is the collation of names of serving office-holders and employees. This has already begun. As far as new office-holders and employees are concerned, including those transferring to new posts, relevant Departments are considering how to revise their recruitment procedures in order to meet the terms of the Government's policy. This process will continue in parallel with the implementation of arrangements for serving office-holders and employees.

Voluntary Workers

Mr. Öpik: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what plans he has to provide greater assistance to voluntary organisations and charities when they wish to screen the police records of their personnel; and if he will make a statement; [52774]

(2) what targets his Department has set for the percentage of voluntary workers working in contact with vulnerable groups, who will have had their records screened by the police; and if he will make a statement. [52775]

Mr. Michael: We have decided to implement Part V of the Police Act 1997 which provides for the establishment of a Criminal Records Agency. Once established, the Agency will be responsible for the issue of the three forms of certificates described in the Act. Priority will be given to the issue of Enhanced Criminal Record Certificates which will be available for those applying for positions which involve regular caring for, training, supervising or being in sole charge of persons under eighteen. The Agency will also issue Criminal Record Certificates, for posts or purposes which are exceptions to the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974, including duties involving regular contact with persons under eighteen; and Criminal Conviction Certificates, for general employment purposes. Consideration is being given to the arrangements for charging and the phasing in of certificates.

At present, only a limited number of voluntary organisations have access to criminal record checks. The establishment of the Criminal Records Agency will enable all voluntary organisations to consider which of their posts and personnel require police record checks and the type of certificate to be sought. It will be for organisations to decide this on the individual circumstances involved, assisted by a Code of Practice to be developed in consultation with interested parties. Any application to the Agency for disclosure of information will then require the consent of the person on whom the check is sought.

Alcopops

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the impact of the new code of practice relating to the marketing of alcopops; and what measures are in place to continue to monitor the behaviour of industry in its marketing of alcopops. [53694]

Mr. George Howarth: The Ministerial Group's statement last July welcomed the Portman Group's revised code on packaging and marketing alcohol products. The statement also set out recommended action by all interests. The Group plans to review progress this autumn, and will consider then both the impact of the new code and the question of further monitoring.

Prostitution

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what recent surveys have been undertaken by his Department to obtain information on the number of young people involved in prostitution. [53698]

Mr. Michael: Information on the numbers of persons cautioned and convicted of offences involving prostitution is collected on a continuous basis for our Cautions and Court Proceedings databases. No separate survey has been carried out by my Department.

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what services his Department provides to *(a)* police and *(b)* local authorities to encourage young people to abandon prostitution; and if he will make a statement; [53701]

(2) how many young *(a)* females and *(b)* males are recorded as having been involved in prostitution in England and Wales in each of the last three years; and what measures his Department has taken to counter child prostitution. [53696]

Mr. Michael: The Information requested is given in the table.

Persons aged 10 to 17 cautioned and convicted for prostitution related offences[1] by sex—England and Wales, 1994–1996

	Cautions		*Convictions*	
Year	*Male*	*Female*	*Male*	*Female*
1994	8	303	0	142
1995	3	263	4	101
1996	6	291	3	177

[1] Includes offences of soliciting by a man or a woman and kerb crawling

The Government recognise that children involved in prostitution are primarily victims of abuse and that those who exploit and use them should be treated as child abusers. We are determined to ensure that there are effective inter-agency arrangements to help children who have become involved in prostitution to leave it and to ensure that abusers are punished.

Against this background, we are taking a number of specific measures. First, the Department of Health and the Home Office are preparing new comprehensive guidance for the police and local authorities on the treatment of children in prostitution in collaboration with the police and social services. This guidance will build on the ground-breaking guidelines produced and piloted by the Association of Chief Police Officers, in consultation with others, on the treatment of children involved in prostitution. It will also take full account of the new juvenile justice arrangements in the Crime and Disorder Bill [*Lords*] and the responses to the Department of Health consultation paper 'Working Together To Safeguard Children: New Government Proposals for Inter-Agency Co-operation'.

We will be consulting interested organisations on draft guidance later in the year.

Second, I announced on 15 June 1998, *Official Report*, column 10, that there will be a review of all sexual offences with the aim of ensuring that the framework of the sexual offences and penalties is coherent and effective. The review will cover the offences and penalties for those who use and abuse children who become involved in prostitution.

Third, we have introduced measures in the Crime and Disorder Bill which may help in dealing with the problem of children who have become involved in prostitution. For instance, the Bill places a duty on local authorities and the police, in partnership with other agencies, to carry out an audit of crime and disorder in their area. This should help to determine the extent of the involvement of children in prostitution in a local area, on the basis of which the partners will be able to devise a strategy for dealing with the problem.

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* men and *(b)* women have been convicted of living on the immoral earnings of prostitution in each of the last three years. [53697]

Mr. Michael: Information taken from the Home Office Court Proceedings database, including number of cautions, is given in the table.

Number of persons cautioned or convicted in all courts of living on immoral earnings of prostitution by sex, 1994–96
England and Wales

	1994		*1995*		*1996*	
Offence	*Males*	*Females*	*Males*	*Females*	*Males*	*Females*
Convictions						
Living on earnings of prostitution or exercising control over prostitution[1]	60	10	43	8	38	4
Living wholly or in part on the earnings of male prostitution[2]	—	—	1	—	3	—
Cautions						
Living on earnings of prostitution or exercising control over prostitution[1]	3	9	1	4	1	4
Living wholly or in part on the earnings of male prostitution[2]	—	—	—	—	—	—

[1] Sexual Offences Act 1956, Secs. 30 and 31
[2] Sexual Offences Act 1967, Sec. 5(1)
Source:
Home Office Court Proceedings Database

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what financial support his Department currently provides to organisations encouraging young people to leave prostitution. [53699]

Mr. Michael: The Home Office does not directly fund organisations which encourage young people to leave prostitution. This is essentially a local function. Central Government do provide grants to local probation committees through the probation service, some of which may be used on work which encourages young people to leave prostitution. Details of how the money is spent are not held centrally.

The Department of Health awards both core and project grants to a number of organisations each year through the General Section 64 Scheme (S64). Barnardos is receiving funding over three years to contribute to the cost of a National Development Officer who will evaluate present and proposed services for children who are involved in or at risk of sexual exploitation, including commercial sexual exploitation, and to support various projects.

Police (School Contact)

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what initiatives he proposes to promote contact between the local police forces and schools. [53577]

Mr. Michael: Liaison between local police forces and schools provides an important first contact with the police for young people and the opportunity to create positive relationships. Her Majesty's Inspector of Constabulary's thematic inspection of police community relations, whose report was published last October, found clear evidence that the use of schools liaison officers had a positive effect on police/community relations and recommended that the value of such officers to foster links and enhance the image of the police should be recognised by forces. Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary will be conducting a follow up inspection of 15 forces in the autumn to assess progress.

Joint guidance issued by the Department for Education and Employment and the Home Office last December on schools security covers police assistance to schools in helping them to develop security strategies and in responding to incidents on school premises. It should also help promote partnerships between local police forces and schools.

A range of measures in the Crime and Disorder Bill [*Lords*] will encourage joint working between the police and education services, including schools. For example, use of the new power for the police to remove truants will involve the drawing up of strategies by the local education authority and schools in conjunction with the police to address identified local truancy problems while schools will have an important role in the local crime and disorder reduction partnerships and in the development of Youth Action Groups.

Police (Norfolk)

Mr. Prior: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many and what percentage of police officers in Norfolk took voluntary early retirement in the last year for which figures are available; and what was the national average. [53576]

Mr. Michael: Statistics are not held in the specific form requested, but the number of voluntary resignations from Norfolk Constabulary in 1997–98 was 12, which was 14 per cent. of the total who ceased to serve in the force of that year. This compares with a total of 924 voluntary resignations from forces in England and Wales, also 14 per cent. of the total who ceased to serve in that year, and 712 or 14 per cent. from provincial forces in England and Wales (excluding the Metropolitan Police). Voluntary resignations do not include early retirement with an ill-health pension, which is for management to determine.

Mr. Prior: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many working hours were lost by the Norfolk Police due to sick leave in the last year for which figures are available, and what was the national average. [53575]

Mr. Michael: Information on police sick leave is collected on the basis of days lost rather than hours. In 1997–98, 15,053 police days were lost through sickness in Norfolk Constabulary (4.6 per cent. of the total working days), compared with a national average in England and Wales of 37,084 police days (5.6 per cent.) and a provincial average (excluding the Metropolitan Police) of 28,573 police days (5.3 per cent.).

Constitutional Change

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what has been the total cost to date of his Department's role in educating and informing the public on constitutional changes introduced by the Government. [53557]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The White Paper "Rights Brought Home—The Human Rights Bill", which preceded the Human Rights Bill, cost £1,800.

We have made a grant of £15,000 to the Institute for Citizenship to support their "Get the Vote Out! Europe 1999" campaign.

On-line Lotteries

Mr. Coaker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will report the outcome of consultation on the draft Bill to restrict the operation of on-line lotteries; and if he will make a statement. [54148]

Mr. Michael: We published the draft Lotteries (Frequent Draws) Bill on 7 January for comments. We received responses on behalf of 127 organisations and individuals.

Among those we consulted, 46 respondents supported legislation. These included other gambling sectors, churches, regulators and organisations concerned with problem gambling. 74 respondents opposed legislation, predominantly charitable organisations which had hoped for an additional source of finance for their sector. The remaining seven respondents were neutral or expressed no overall view.

Most of those in favour of legislation supported or accepted the draft Bill's proposal for a limit of one draw a day in all premises. Most of those against it suggested that we should await research on the effect of rapid on-line lottery draws or a general review of gambling legislation.

We have concluded that on-line lotteries do need to be brought under proper statutory controls. We intend to legislate when the legislative programme allows.

As previously proposed, the legislation will be used to limit on-line lottery draws to one a day in any particular premises, with the detailed provisions being amended in the light of points made in consultation.

We also consulted on possible increases to stake and proceeds limits. As previously indicated, it will not be appropriate to proceed with that matter until legislation restricting the frequency of on-line lotteries is in place. In the light of the consultation, we will further consider whether such increases are desirable in due course.

I am making available an analysis of the responses to the consultation and paper setting out the Government's views on the main points raised. I have placed copies of these documents in the Library, together with the responses.

Sexual Offences

Dr. Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he anticipates that the review group

looking into abuse of trust in the context of sexual relationships with people aged under 18 years will report. [53916]

Mr. Michael: The Working Group will look both at preventing unsuitable people from working with children and at abuse of trust. It is due to report by the end of the year at the latest, and I have asked the Group to give priority to looking at issues concerning abuse of trust.

Dr. Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects his review of discriminatory provisions of existing sexual offences laws to be complete; with whom the review group is consulting; and when it commenced its deliberations. [53917]

Mr. Michael: We are considering how best this review can be undertaken. Its membership and terms of reference will be published in due course.

Age of Consent

Dr. Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department with which sponsors of the Age of Consent amendment to the Crime and Disorder Bill [*Lords*], he held discussions prior to 28 July. [53932]

Mr. Michael: Over a period of time, I have had discussions with Stonewall and with a wide variety of individuals and organisations with an interest in the age of consent. My right hon. Friend and I also had a number of conversations with several of the sponsors of the age of consent amendment.

Passport Office

Mr. Livsey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he next proposes to review future options on the Passport Office in Newport, Gwent. [53280]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: There are no plans to review options on the Passport Office at Newport. The Passport Agency undertook a review of the role and location of its offices in 1995 and concluded that its six regional passport offices (sited in Belfast, Glasgow, Liverpool, London, Newport and Peterborough) were able to meet anticipated levels of demand in the most effective way and there was no case for altering the number or location of offices. This remains the Agency's position and we are not considering any changes.

Sussex Police

Mr. Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what progress was made by the Sussex Constabulary in the recruitment of more police officers from ethnic minorities in the last year for which figures are available; [53439]

(2) what progress was made by the Sussex Constabulary in the recruitment of more women constables in the last year for which figures are available. [53438]

Mr. Michael: In 1997, Sussex Police recruited 39 female officers and 2 officers from ethnic minorities (the information is given in the table). The Chief Constable tells me that the Sussex Police Force is aware of the under-representation in the force of female and ethnic minority officers, and is exploring means of removing any barriers to recruitment. Vacancies will be published in local and national ethnic newspapers.

Number of female and ethnic minority recruits to Sussex Police in 1997 and 1998 (to date)

	Start of 1997	*End of 1997*	*1998 (to date)*
Force establishment	3,109	3,056	3,060
Female officers	464	484	504
Female recruits	—	39	[1]44
Ethnic minority officers	21	23	23
Ethnic minority recruits	—	2	2

[1] 28 female candidates still being processed

Welsh Language Scheme

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department on what date his Department received notification from the Welsh Language Board in relation to the need to prepare a Welsh language scheme; on what date his Department and the Board held consultations on such a scheme; when a scheme was formally submitted to the Board; and if it has been approved. [53350]

Mr. Straw: The Welsh Language Board asked the Home Office to prepare a draft scheme in September 1996. A number of consultations have taken place with the Welsh Language Board on working drafts of the scheme since then.

The Welsh Language Board has seen and commented on the most recent working drafts and a final version of the scheme is currently in development for submission to the Welsh Language Board for approval.

Correspondence

Mr. Wilshire: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects to reply to the letter from the hon. Member for Spelthorne, dated 28 May, concerning Mr. S. Wolf of Shepperton, reference 10766/98. [53786]

Mr. Michael: I replied to the hon. Member on 26 July.

Surrey Fire and Rescue Service

Mr. Wilshire: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will meet Spelthorne Borough Council to discuss Surrey County Council's proposed changes to their provision of fire services in the borough. [53790]

Mr. George Howarth: I have written to the hon. Member to explain that I would be prepared to consider further written representations from Spelthorne Borough Council. Because of the technical nature of the issues involved, it is normally more appropriate for representations against changes to the provision of fire cover to be made in writing. However, I have asked to be informed if there are particular reasons why points which the Borough Council might wish to make could be made to me direct only at a meeting.

Mr. Wilshire: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the proposed strike action by the staff of Surrey Fire and Rescue Service; and if he will hold talks with Surrey County Council and the Fire Brigades Union. [53791]

Mr. George Howarth: Responsibility for resolving this local dispute rests primarily with the County Council, as the fire authority, and its employees, and I have no plans to hold talks with either the County Council or the Fire Brigades Union. To ensure the continuing safety of the public, my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary has, however, agreed with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence that, at the request of the County Council, military personnel should be deployed, when needed, to provide emergency fire cover.

Youth Justice

Mr. Hope: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what advice he has received from the Youth Justice Task Force. [54869]

Mr. Straw: The Youth Justice Task Force delivered its final report, which incorporates all the advice it has given, this month. That advice has helped frame the youth justice measures now reflected in the Crime and Disorder Bill [*Lords*] and provides a steer for the early work of the new Youth Justice Board for England and Wales. Copies of the Task Force's final report have been placed in the Library and will be made available on the internet. The Task Force has now been wound up.

Terrorism Legislation

Mr. Michael J. Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when the consultation paper on future legislation against terrorism will be published. [54876]

Mr. Straw: Work on the preparation of the consultation paper is well advanced and we now envisage that it will be published in the autumn.

Prison Service

Mr. Salter: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the performance of Her Majesty's Prison Service in 1997–98. [54878]

Mr. Straw: I am pleased to report that I have today laid before Parliament the Prison Service's Annual Report and Accounts. Copies have also been placed in the Library.

Ms Kingham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to conduct a quinquennial review of the Prison Service Agency. [54883]

Mr. Straw: The Prison Service was established as a Next Steps Executive Agency on 1 April 1993. Since then there have been a number of changes to the relationship between the Service and the main Home Office. Most importantly, as promised in the Labour Party manifesto, since the general election the Government have acted to take proper Ministerial responsibility for the Service. Against this background and taking the opportunity of the quinquennial review of Next Steps Agencies which is now due, I am today announcing an evaluation of the performance of the Agency, reconsideration of Prior Options relating to Agency Status and, if appropriate, a review of the existing framework document.

The terms of reference for the review are as follows:

to conduct an evaluation of the performance of the Agency since its inception;

in the light of this evaluation to consider whether, among the available options, Agency Status remains the most cost effective way of achieving Home Office aims within the context of proper Ministerial responsibility; and

if the review concludes that the Prison Service should continue to function as an Executive Agency, to consider what changes, if any, are required to the framework document and financial memorandum in light of the findings of the review and the changes we have made to the arrangements for Ministerial responsibility for the Service; if, however, the review concludes otherwise, to recommend the transitional arrangements necessary to facilitate transformation of the Service from Executive Agency to another organisational entity.

The review will be conducted by officials from the main Home Office working with officials in the Prison Service. It will draw on and take account of other relevant work, for example the Prison Service Review which was published earlier in the year and the Prison-Probation Review.

I welcome the views of all interested parties and, in particular, the review team will seek the views of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Prisons, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Probation, the Parole Board and the Prison Ombudsman. My noble Friend the Lord Williams of Mostyn is today writing to the Chairman of the Boards of Visitors National Advisory Council, the Home Office Trade Union Side, the Prison Service Trade Union Side, the Prison Officers Association, the Prison Governors' Association, the Secretary of the Prison Service Joint Industrial Council, the Association of Chief Probation Officers, the National Association of Probation Officers, the Central Probation Council and the Directors of the Prison Reform Trust, the Howard League for Penal Reform and the National Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders, inviting their views. We shall also be seeking the views of the Criminal Justice Consultative Council and organisations associated with it.

It is hoped to publish the outcome of the review around the end of the year.

Horserace Betting Levy

Mr. Coaker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he intends to publish the third report on the impact of the National Lottery on the horserace betting levy. [54882]

Mr. George Howarth: An update on the impact of the National Lottery on the horserace betting levy has been published today and will be placed in the Library. This fulfils an undertaking made during the passage of the National Lottery Bill.

The paper, which has been prepared by the Economics Unit of the Home Office, examines continuing trends in off-course betting expenditure, on which the Levy closely depends.

The statistical analysis indicates that, in 1997, off-course betting expenditure was about 12.8 per cent. below the level it would have reached in the absence of the National Lottery. Horserace betting accounts for about 69 per cent. of off-course betting expenditure, and therefore the levy yield is likely to have been similarly affected. This can be only an approximate figure, and the effect of the Lottery may vary over time.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Youth Justice

32. **Mr. Ian Bruce:** To ask the Attorney-General if he will make a statement on the effectiveness of the Government's fast track prosecution of juveniles. [51720]

The Attorney-General: Since the Government announced their commitment to tackle delays in the youth justice system, there has been a significant increase in the number of court areas operating or planning to introduce fast-tracking schemes. From a figure shortly after the election of 12 youth court areas operating fast track schemes, there are now over 150 youth court areas either operating or planning to introduce schemes. The effect of these schemes cannot be fully evaluated yet but it is clear that real efforts are being made at a local level to respond. An example of a successful scheme is North Hampshire where the average time between charge and sentence has been reduced from 133 days to 89. The Government are confident that, taken together with the measures contained in the Crime and Disorder Bill, they will lead to a significant reduction in delays in the youth justice system.

Court Waiting Times

33. **Mr. Bill O'Brien:** To ask the Attorney-General what representations he has received concerning the length of time between the arrest and conviction of offenders; and if he will make a statement. [51721]

The Attorney-General: I have not received any representations on this subject. The Lord Chancellor's Department and the Court Service collect statistics on the time taken by cases dealt with in the magistrates' courts and the Crown Court respectively. The latest figures show a decrease in the time taken from charge or summons to completion for defendants in indictable—including triable either way—cases in magistrates' courts, and a slight increase in disposal times in the Crown Court for cases committed for trial.

The Crime and Disorder Bill includes measures to reduce delay throughout the whole process.

Prosecution Policy

34. **Mr. David Heath:** To ask the Attorney-General under what circumstances community interest is taken into account by officers of the Crown Prosecution Service in determining whether to proceed with a prosecution. [51722]

The Attorney-General: The twin criteria set out in the Code for Crown Prosecutors require, first, that there should be sufficient evidence to afford a realistic prospect of conviction; and, secondly, that prosecution should be in the public interest. The prevalence of an offence in a particular area is a factor which should be taken into account and may require a prosecution where otherwise that might not be the case. The Crown Prosecution Service expects to work in conjunction with the statutory partnerships provided for by the Crime and Disorder Bill to implement local strategies for reducing crime and disorder.

Crown Prosecution Service

35. **Mr. Mitchell:** To ask the Attorney-General when he proposes to allow barristers employed by the Crown Prosecution Service to represent it in all courts. [51724]

The Attorney-General: All CPS lawyers, whether barristers or solicitors, are able to appear as advocates in the magistrates' courts. Bar Council and Law Society rules govern the exercise of rights of audience in the higher courts by employed barristers and solicitors respectively. Employed solicitors were granted limited rights of audience in the higher courts in February 1997. Employed barristers have not yet been granted the same limited rights. My noble and learned Friend the Lord Chancellor has recently published a consultation paper on the future of rights of audience which contains proposals for modernising the system and removing the current restrictions which discriminate between barristers and solicitors, and between employed lawyers and those in private practice. I support these proposals and welcome the publication of the consultation paper.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Attorney-General what representations he has received on his proposals for the reorganisation of the Crown Prosecution Service. [51719]

The Attorney-General: My Statement to the House on publication of the Glidewell Report invited comments from interested parties. The numerous responses so far received reflect the same warm welcome which the Report initially received. I have been particularly pleased to note wide acceptance for the "whole system approach" to criminal justice issues which this Government have adopted as well as for the proposed restructuring of the CPS into 42 Areas.

Task Forces

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Attorney-General if he will list the task forces and advisory groups composed of independent members which have been set up by his Department since 1 May 1997, indicating in each case *(a)* their remit, *(b)* their membership, *(c)* how many members are (i) scientists, (ii) engineers, (iii) small business people or representatives of small businesses, *(d)* any remuneration members receive for their services and *(e)* their budget. [53285]

The Attorney-General: On 12 June 1997 I established the Review of the Crown Prosecution Service under the chairmanship of the right hon. Sir Iain Glidewell, a retired Lord Justice of Appeal. He was assisted by Sir Geoffrey Dear (a retired HM Inspector of Constabulary) and Mr. Robert McFarland, a retired Chief Executive of a multi-national company. Their Report was published on 1 June 1998.

The terms of reference for the Review were set out in my written answer to the House on 12 June 1997, *Official Report*, column *533*. Sir Iain Glidewell was remunerated according to the daily sitting rate established for retired members of the Court of Appeal who discharge judicial duties and that was £556.00 per day. Sir Geoffrey Dear and Mr. Robert McFarland were each remunerated at the rate of £440.00 per day each. Subject to some outstanding items, the overall cost of the review was £652,466.00.

Crown Counsel

Mr. Stott: To ask the Attorney-General if the working party which he established to review the system of appointing counsel to act for the Government in civil cases has reported to him. [54617]

The Attorney-General: In February I established a working party to review the system of appointment counsel to act for the Crown in civil cases and to monitor the use of barristers appointed to act. The working party was chaired by the then Solicitor General (Lord Falconer QC) and included representatives from the Bar Council (Laura Cox QC and Lincoln Crawford), the two First Treasury Counsel (Philip Sales and Jonathan Crow) and officials from the Government Legal Service.

The working party has now reported to me and I have accepted their recommendations. I am grateful to the members of the working party for their thorough consideration of the appointment process. A copy of the working party's report has been placed in the Library of each House of Parliament.

Rape Prosecutions

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Attorney-General what further steps he plans to take to assist the Crown Prosecution Service to bring successful prosecutions in rape cases, with particular reference to the gathering of evidence. [53588]

The Attorney-General: The gathering of evidence in all criminal investigations is a matter for the police. The Crown Prosecution Service reviews and conducts cases in accordance with the Code for Crown Prosecutors, once the police investigation is complete. The Home Office is conducting research on the attrition rate in rape cases, the results of which will be published. The Crown Prosecution Service will carefully consider the results of that research to identify whether changes need to be made to Crown Prosecution Service guidance or practice.

Welsh Language Scheme

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Attorney-General on what date his Department received notification from the Welsh Language Board in relation to the need to prepare a Welsh language scheme; on what date his Department and the Board held consultations on such a scheme; when a scheme was formally submitted to the Board; and if it has been approved. [53352]

The Attorney-General: The Crown Prosecution Service launched its Welsh Language policy on 11 April 1994 and was commended for this by the Welsh Language Board. On 14 October 1997, an informal discussion took place between members of the Crown Prosecution Service and the Welsh Language Board on the preparation of a formal Crown Prosecution Service Welsh Language Policy in accordance with the provisions of the Welsh Language Act 1993. On 30 October 1997, the Welsh Language Board wrote to the Director of Public Prosecutions to invite the Crown Prosecution Service to prepare a Welsh Language Scheme and submit it to the Board for approval by 31 July 1998. The Director confirmed that the Crown Prosecution Service was happy to comply and the draft Welsh Language Scheme was submitted to the Welsh Language Board for approval on 17 July 1998. When the Board's comments have been received, the Crown Prosecution Service will advertise the details of the draft Scheme for comment from interested parties.

Information Technology

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Attorney-General how much his Department spent on IT, itemising *(a)* personal computers, *(b)* main-frame, *(c)* mini-computers and *(d)* file servers in the last year for which figure are available. [52894]

The Attorney-General: For the financial year 1997–1998 the figures for IT hardware spending for my Departments were:

	Expenditure (£)			
	[1]*a*	*b*	*c*	[2]*d*
Crown Prosecution Service	523,476	—	—	23,265
Serious Fraud Office	44,000	—	—	53,000
Treasury Solicitor	181,577	—	—	31,930
Government Property Lawyers Agency	19,498	—	—	715
Legal Secretariat to the Law Officers	52,172	—	—	16,089
Total expenditure		945,722.00		

[1] Includes printers
[2] Includes other hardware

TREASURY

Home Births

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many children in *(a)* 1990 and *(b)* 1998 were born at home; and if he will make a statement. [52923]

Ms Hewitt: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the Director of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Tim Holt to Mr. Martyn Jones, dated 30 July 1998:

As Director of the Office for National Statistics (ONS), I have been asked to reply to your parliamentary question on the number of children born at home in 1990 and 1998.

The numbers of children born at home in England and Wales in 1990 and 1997, the latest year for which figures are available, are shown in the table below.

Numbers of children born at home, England and Wales

Year	*Number*
1990	7,317
1997	14,351

Debt (Foreign Governments)

Mr. Canavan: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what steps he is taking to ensure greater transparency and public access to information on debts owed by other Governments to the United Kingdom Government. [53233]

Ms Hewitt: ECGD publishes details on its recoverable claims on other countries in its Annual Report and Trading Accounts.

The Government are pressing the IMF and World Bank to consider the case for publishing in a timely and systematic way all key surveillance and programme documents, including publication of Press Information Notices for all Article IV consultations, publications of all letters of intent and policy framework papers, and publication of Country Assistance Strategies (CASs).

Weekly Wages

Mr. Love: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list for *(a)* the United Kingdom, *(b)* Greater London and *(c)* each constituency in Greater London the average weekly wage for (1) manual, (2) non manual and (3) all workers. [53558]

Ms Hewitt: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the Director of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Tim Holt to Mr. Andrew Love, dated 30 July 1998:

As Director of the Office for National Statistics (ONS), I have been asked to reply to your recent parliamentary question on average weekly wages.

The latest available information, from the New Earnings Survey 1997, is contained in the attached tables. These tables are voluminous and copies of them are being placed in the Library of the House rather than reproduced in Hansard.

Euro

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) how much his Department will spend in 1998 on informing the public about the introduction of the euro; [53832]

(2) what resources his Department will allocate towards public education in respect of the introduction of the euro; [53702]

(3) what resources his Department will allocate in 1999 to educating and informing the public about the introduction of the euro. [53833]

Ms Hewitt: The Government's communication campaign on the euro is not a general public education campaign but is specifically targeted at ensuring UK businesses, especially small and medium sized firms, are aware of the implications of the introduction of the single currency from 1 January 1999 and have the information they need to address the issues arising from this.

To meet this objective, the Treasury Euro Preparations Unit has received Summer Supplementary Estimate provision of £7.5 million to help raise business awareness during 1998–99. No expenditure has been authorised beyond this.

Banking (Micronesia)

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what steps he has taken to seek to improve the standard of banking regulation in Micronesia. [53968]

Ms Hewitt: Banking regulation in the Federated States of Micronesia is the responsibility of the Micronesian authorities. The UK, however, supports moves to strengthen national financial systems, and is working in various international groupings to encourage improved standards of banking regulation and supervision.

Financial Services

Mr. Love: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the progress of his plans for reform of financial services regulation. [54816]

Mr. Byers: The Government have today published a draft of the Financial Services and Markets Bill for consultation, together with a consultation paper and explanatory material.

The draft Bill will give effect to the proposals to reform the financial services regulatory structure, announced in broad terms by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer in his statement to Parliament of 20 May 1997, *Official Report*, columns 537–46. It is intended that the draft Bill will make the Financial Services Authority the single, statutory regulator for the United Kingdom's financial services industry. It equips it with all the statutory functions and powers needed to operate a single regime for authorisation and regulation of financial services business. It allows it to operate with great flexibility whilst ensuring that any burdens or restrictions imposed by regulation are proportionate to the benefits.

The Bill will provide the framework for single ombudsman and compensation schemes and a single appeals tribunal. It will introduce important new powers to deal with market abuse. It will also provide for a major element of external accountability for the regulation of Lloyd's.

The first stage of the legislative process was completed when the Bank of England Act 1998 came into force on 1 June, transferring the prudential supervision of banks to the FSA. Publication of the draft Bill is the next, important stage in the process. Full public consultation will be beneficial to ensure that the new system is efficient and effective. Comments are sought on any aspects of the Government's plans to implement the modernisation of financial services regulation by 30 October 1998. The Government also welcome the likelihood that the Treasury Select Committee will wish to be involved in the consultation.

Copies of the draft Bill and the other documents have been placed in the Vote Office and the Library of the House and can be found on the HM Treasury website (http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk).

Since 1 June, the Financial Services Authority has made considerable progress in bringing together operations under the Banking Act 1987 and the Financial Services Act 1986. The Government have now decided, with the agreement of the Authority, that it should take further steps towards the full integration of financial services regulation that will be completed when the legislation is enacted. Accordingly, it will take responsibility for supporting the Building Societies Commission, the Friendly Societies Commission and, in relation to credit unions, the Chief Registrar of Friendly Societies in the exercise of their functions, and for acting on behalf of the Treasury in the conduct of insurance supervision under the Insurance Companies Act 1982, as soon as the necessary arrangements can be made.

To this end the Government propose to make an order under the Deregulation and Contracting Out Act 1994 to contract out the relevant insurance supervision functions to the Authority. The Authority will enter into contracts with the Treasury and with the Building Societies

Commission, the Friendly Societies Commission and the Chief Registrar of Friendly Societies setting out its responsibilities in these areas. These arrangements will be in place to enable the Authority to take on these additional responsibilities in January 1999.

Tax Law Rewrite Project

Mr. Caplin: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what further developments there have been on the Tax Law Rewrite project. [54877]

Dawn Primarolo: The Tax Law Rewrite project aims to bring clarity to our direct tax legislation, making the law more accessible to taxpayers and their advisers. The Inland Revenue have today published the project's second Exposure Draft, containing draft clauses relating to savings and investment income of individuals and a detailed commentary. Numerous innovative techniques have been adopted; in particular, the rewritten legislation incorporates easier to understand language, a more logical structure and shorter sentences. Copies have been placed in the Libraries of the House.

This Exposure Draft is the first of six planned for 1998–99. We are committed to proceeding with them all on the basis of the full and open consultation that has been the hallmark of this project from the beginning. I urge everybody with an interest in tax law to take this further opportunity to comment.

Teenage Mothers

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many children have been born to mothers under the age of 20 years in each year since 1990. [52919]

Ms Hewitt: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the Director of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Tim Holt to Mr. Martyn Jones, dated 30 July 1998:

As Director of the Office for National Statistics (ONS), I have been asked to reply to your parliamentary question on the number of children who have been born to mothers under the age of 20 years in each year since 1990.

The numbers of live births to mothers aged under 20 in England and Wales for the years 1990 to 1996 are published in Table 3.1 of the annual reference volume 1996 Birth Statistics FM1 No. 25. This publication is available in the House of Commons Library.

In England and Wales during 1997, the latest year for which figures are available, there were 46,316 live births to mothers aged under 20.

International Debt Relief

Mr. Soley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what percentage of the international debt relief total is owed to the United Kingdom *(a)* Government and *(b)* financial institutions. [52246]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 28 July 1998]: (a)* World Bank figures state that the total debt owed by the twenty countries identified by the IMF as eligible for debt relief under the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) initiative is about $100 billion, of which the UK government is owed about $1.3 billion.

(b) The Government do not keep records of the debts held by private sector financial institutions.

Compliance Cost Assessments

Mr. Lansley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list those compliance cost assessments since 1 May 1997 in which there is a net reduction in compliance costs resulting from a legislative proposal. [52962]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 28 July 1998]:* There is presently no requirement on Departments to carry out compliance cost assessments where legislative proposals are expected to be cost neutral or result in a saving to business.

Mr. Lansley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the compliance cost assessments published by her Department since 1 May 1997. [52961]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 28 July 1998]:* Details of compliance cost assessments published by the Chancellor's departments are contained in the 6 monthly command paper of compliance costs assessments.

Between 1 May 1997 and 30 June 1998 twelve compliance costs assessments covering the period have been published:

The Building Societies Act 1997 (Commencement No. 1) Order 1997;

The Financial Services Act 1986 (Extension of Scope of Act) Order 1997;

The Gaming Duty Regulations 1997.

The Industrial and Provident Societies (Credit Unions) (Amendment of Fees) Regulations 1998

The Friendly Societies (General Charge and Fees) Regulations 1998.

The Building Societies (General Charge and Fees) Regulations 1998.

The Industrial and Provident Societies (Amendment of Fees) Regulations 1998.

The Bank of England Act 1998.

Arising out of the Finance (No. 2) Bill 1998:

The Modernisation of the Transfer Pricing Legislation

The Controlled Foreign Companies Legislation and Self Assessments

A Modern System for Corporation Tax Payments

The Capital Gains Tax Reform.

Statistical Areas

Mr. Denis Murphy: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) which Government departments were charged with drawing up the criteria in respect of the review of NUTS 2 statistical areas; and what criteria were used in each area; [51838]

(2) what consultations were undertaken with Her Majesty's Government, by Eurostat in respect of the review of NUTS 2 statistical areas, with specific reference to Northumberland and Durham. [51839]

Ms Hewitt: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the Director of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Tim Holt to Mr. Denis Murphy, dated 30 July 1998:

As Director of the Office for National Statistics (ONS), I have been asked to reply to your recent parliamentary questions on the new NUTS-2 statistical areas for the UK.

Following a public consultation exercise in Summer 1996, the Government Statistical Service Committee on Regional Statistics drafted proposals for a new NUTS structure for the UK which were submitted to Eurostat in July 1997. The document "*Proposals for the UK Nomenclature of Territorial Units (NUTS) (May 1997)*" describes the departments involved and the criteria taken into account, including those principles applied by Eurostat. Copies of this document are available in the House of Commons library.

Throughout the subsequent negotiations, Eurostat stressed that in their view the UK proposals contained too many NUTS-2 areas and that changes from the old structure were unjustified. Within the North East, the old structure contained two NUTS-2 areas—(i) Cleveland and Durham, and (ii) Northumberland and Tyne & Wear. The proposals suggested the creation of three NUTS-2 areas within the North East—(i) Cleveland and Darlington, (ii) Durham and Northumberland, and (iii) Tyne & Wear. The sizes of the existing two areas, in population terms, were already smaller than the EU average, and creating three areas would reduce the UK average further. Also, in Eurostat's view this proposal was not consistent with their criteria.

We continued to press the case for the UK proposals in respect of the North East throughout the negotiations. However, after a lengthy impasse, Eurostat made it clear that this proposal was not going to be accepted. In order to reach agreement for the UK as a whole, we had to accept their position. In the absence of an agreement, Eurostat, with whom the final decision on the classification rests, would have continued to use the existing NUTS-2 structure for the UK with virtually no change in any region.

The NUTS structure finally agreed with Eurostat was published in a News Release on 29 June, and copies are also available in the House of Commons Library.

Inflation

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer by what date he plans to reduce inflation to its target level. [53433]

Ms Hewitt: Under the monetary policy framework introduced in May 1997, the Government's role is to set the inflation target. The Bank of England is responsible for taking operational decisions to meet the inflation target.

The inflation target is 2½ per cent. at all times. However, monetary policy affects inflation with a lag and the actions taken by the MPC will not yet have had their full effect on inflation.

Written Answers

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what percentage of written parliamentary questions tabled for answer by his Department on a named day under S.O. No. 22(4) have been answered substantively on the named day since 1 May 1997; and if he will make a statement. [53453]

Ms Hewitt: 30.1 per cent. (473 out of 1,569).

Employees Over 60

Mr. Chope: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many *(a)* men and *(b)* women aged over 60 years were employed by (i) his Department and (ii) his Department's agencies on 1 January. [53070]

Ms Hewitt: The numbers of *(a)* men and *(b)* women aged over 60 years employed by (i) HM Treasury and (ii) the Chancellor's other departments and agencies on 1 January 1998, or as near as possible where figures at that date are not readily available, are as follows:

Department or Agency	*Men*	*Women*
HM Treasury	3	9
Debts Management Office	0	0
Office for National Statistics	16	24
National Savings	23	40
Royal Mint	48	0
HM Customs and Excise	250	146
Inland Revenue	39	36
Valuation Office Agency	8	6

Mr. Chope: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many *(a)* men and *(b)* women employed by (1) his Department and (2) his Department's agencies have contracts of employment which permit them to retire after their 60th birthday. [53047]

Ms Hewitt: The numbers of *(a)* men and *(b)* women aged over 60 years employed by (1) HM Treasury and (2) the Chancellor's other departments and agencies who have contracts of employment permitting them to retire after their 60th birthday are as follows:

Department or Agency	*Men*	*Women*
HM Treasury[1]	5	27
Debts Management Office	0	0
Office for National Statistics	39	95
National Savings	13	33
Royal Mint[1]	783	172
HM Customs and Excise	8,934	9,257
Inland Revenue	0	0
Valuation Office Agency	0	0

[1] These figures include staff who are already over 60

Euro Preparations Unit

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish a breakdown of the £1 million initial information programmes budget for the Euro Preparations Unit. [53736]

Ms Hewitt: The Euro Preparations Unit was established last December, with an initial programmes budget of £1.1 million which was allocated to:

- printing and publishing of information, including business preparations factsheets, to help UK business prepare for the introduction of the single currency on 1 January 1999;
- development of a communications campaign strategy;
- running Ministerial EMU awareness seminars and regional conferences;
- conducting surveys to assess the level of preparedness amongst UK small and medium sized firms.

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what steps he has taken to ensure the impartiality of publications which are *(a)* published and *(b)* distributed in the United Kingdom with the aid of public funds, as part of the information campaign on the single currency; [53731]

(2) if he will list the publications produced by the Euro Preparations Unit since December 1997. [53742]

Ms Hewitt: The information is as follows:

"EMU: Report from the Business Advisory Group"—January 1998

"EMU: The euro and your business"—March 1998

"EMU: Steps for 1999"—May 1998

"business preparations for the euro"—June 1998

"getting ready for the euro"—first report July 1998

"Local Government Preparations for the euro"—July 1998.

All these publications, except "EMU: Steps for 1999" and "Local Government Preparations for the euro", focus on helping UK businesses understand the strategic and practical implications of the launch of the single currency on 1 January 1999.

All the publications are factual and impartial in that they neither promote nor denigrate the euro. The Government have been assisted by the Business Advisory Group and the Information Steering Committee in preparing these booklets.

"EMU: Steps for 1999" is aimed at organisations in both the private and public sectors. The booklet sets out the steps that the Government are taking to prepare for the introduction of the single currency. Our most recent publication, "Local Government Preparations for the euro", aims to help local government prepare for the launch of the euro.

Individual Savings Accounts

Mr. Loughton: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he proposes to announce the final regulations regarding the launch of ISAs. [53711]

Ms Hewitt: Regulations will be laid before the House as soon as possible after the Finance Bill receives the Royal Assent.

Mr. Loughton: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) if he will estimate how many ISA providers will be in place by April 1999; [53768]

(2) how many approaches he has had from financial companies wishing to register as ISA providers; [53767]

(3) what minimum target his Department has set for approved ISA providers to be reached before the new system goes live on 6 April 1999. [53769]

Ms Hewitt: ISAs will not be available until 6 April 1999 but those who wish to become ISA managers will be able to seek approval from an earlier date to be specified in the regulations. Based on the existing number of PEP and TESSA providers, it is expected that around 500–600 bodies will become ISA managers. No minimum target number of approved managers has been set and the Revenue aims to complete the approval process, for all those who apply promptly and meet the qualifying conditions, in good time for April 1999.

"Talking about the Euro"

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received about the nature of the European Commission document "Talking about the Euro". [53739]

Ms Hewitt: The Chancellor has received no such representations.

Comprehensive Spending Review

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 24 July 1998, *Official Report*, column *750*, how many of the 45 surveys referred to were published prior to the publication of the Comprehensive Spending Review; and how many of the surveys published after the publication of the Comprehensive Spending Review were more pessimistic than the assumptions used by the Treasury in the EFSR. [53914]

Ms Hewitt: The most recent edition of the Treasury's regular comparison of independent forecasts was published in July. It is available in the House of Commons Library and more widely via the Treasury's Internet site.

Twenty-seven out of the forty-five surveys were new in July and so followed the Economic and Fiscal Strategy Report which set out the key information on the new spending plans, subsequently confirmed in the Comprehensive Spending Review. The average forecast for growth in 1999 in these new forecasts is almost exactly in line with the Treasury assumption adopted in the Economic and Fiscal Strategy Report. Around half of them show higher growth, and around half are lower.

Unemployment

Mr. Loughton: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what recent changes he has made to his estimate of future unemployment levels in UK manufacturing. [53766]

Mr. Byers: In line with the convention adopted by previous Governments, the Government do not publish any forecast of unemployment.

Interest Rates

Mr. Loughton: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer under what circumstances he would consider taking control over interest rates from the Bank of England. [53435]

Ms Hewitt: The Bank of England Act 1998 has given the Bank of England operational responsibility to set interest rates to meet the Government's inflation target. The Treasury's reserve powers are set out in Chapter 11, part II, section 19 of that Act.

Personal Social Services

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will set out for each year from 1998–99 to 2001–02 the increase in Personal Social Services in *(a)* cash terms, *(b)* real terms and *(c)* as a percentage adjusted for the amount provided in Special Transitional Grant in 1998–99 and subsequently increased in line with the Government's inflation assumptions. [52609]

Mr. Boateng *[holding answer 27 July 1998]:* I have been asked to reply.

After allowance has been made for the transfer of responsibility for asylum seekers from the Department of Health to the Home Office, the increases in total

resources from 1998–99 to 2001–02 for personal social services in England are as set out in the table.

	Planned provision (million)	*Cash increase (percentage)*
1998–99	8,387	—
		6.2
1999–2000	8,915	3.6
		5.5
2000–01	9,408	3.0
		5.3
2001–02	9,906	2.7

The figures are for total provision. Thus, figures for 1998–99 include the special transitional grant, and all other revenue grants in that year, except support for asylum seekers.

ENVIRONMENT, TRANSPORT AND THE REGIONS

Social Landlords

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has to change the low cost home ownership incentive schemes offered by registered social landlords and to enable more registered social landlords to offer flexible tenure schemes. [54622]

Ms Armstrong: We plan to simplify the range of low cost home ownership schemes available through Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) in England by offering a new scheme based on the Homebuy scheme that has run successfully in Wales since 1994.

Qualifying tenants will receive interest-free equity loans to meet 25% of the cost of buying a home of their own. Funding for the scheme will be provided by the Housing Corporation, and RSLs will be able to bid for funds from their Approved Development Programme (ADP).

Homebuy will replace two existing schemes, the Tenants Incentive Scheme and Do-It-Yourself Shared Ownership. It will open to RSL tenants, those nominated from the local authority waiting list who would otherwise receive permanent social housing and local authority tenants, subject to appropriate eligibility rules.

In common with the two schemes it replaced Homebuy will be available only in areas where the scheme can help relieve a shortage of social housing by assisting tenants or those on the waiting list into home ownership.

Homebuy will not normally be offered in areas where there is no shortage of social housing. Support through the ADP for the development and sale of dwellings by RSLs on shared ownership terms will continue.

I believe that Homebuy will prove to be an attractive scheme for tenants, and I have asked the Housing Corporation to consult interested parties on detailed proposals for the new scheme. I will be laying a Statutory Instrument before the House in due course to add Homebuy to the permitted purposes of RSLs.

We also plan to give RSLs greater scope to offer flexible tenure schemes to help households who have bought on shared ownership terms and who face repossession because of a change in their financial circumstances. Working within rules set by the Housing Corporation RSLs will be allowed to use recycled Social Housing Grant to buy back from shared owners some or all of the equity of their property.

Flexible tenure schemes are already offered by a small number of RSLs and enabling more to do so will be an important step in avoiding homelessness and maintaining stable communities. I have also asked the Housing Corporation to consult on detailed proposals for this new measure.

English Partnerships

Mr. Ian Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a report on the progress of English Partnerships. [54623]

Mr. Caborn: I have today laid before Parliament English Partnerships' Annual Report and Accounts for 1997–98, which sets out their achievements last year. The Report provides details of the Agency's £315 million development programme and illustrates the varied range of their projects across the English regions. It explains that 545 projects were approved in 1997–98 and a total of over 2000 have been completed in the Agency's first four years. The Agency's key outputs for 1997–98 were as follows:

Outputs for 1997–98	
Jobs created/safeguarded	29,000
Land regenerated (Ha)	1,350
Private finance attracted (£m)	767
Housing units facilitated	7,540
Commercial/industrial floorspace developed (sq.m)	860,000

City Challenge

Mr. Ian Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when his Department's research on the final evaluation of City Challenge will be published. [54624]

Mr. Caborn: The first output from the final evaluation of City Challenge, "What Works; Learning the Lessons", is published today. Copies of the report have been placed in the House Library. This report is based on a preliminary review of the monitoring data and interviews with representatives of City Challenge Partnerships. The full evaluation report is due in October 1998.

Business Aviation

Ms Moran: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what research his Department has undertaken into business aviation in the South East; and if he will make a statement. [54627]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The Department of Transport and the Department of Trade and Industry published a report on Business Aviation in 1995. My Department has also recently let a consultancy contract for a study of business aviation in the South East, to update that earlier report. The consultants are undertaking a two-part study which

should provide consistent background information, amongst other things, on the size of the current market, likely future demand, and availability of facilities and capacity, against which local and Central Government, airport operators, business aviation operators and other interested parties can base future decisions about the provision of Business Aviation.

The first part of the study, which involved an audit of demand and capacity, has not been completed and copies of the interim report have been placed in the House of Commons Library.

Opencast Coal

Mr. Healey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement about progress with the review of planning policy on opencast coal and the appeal cases which are currently before him for decision. [54686]

Mr. Caborn: Planning policy for coal extraction, including opencast coal mining, is set out in Minerals Planning Guidance Note 3 (MPG3). Following the completion of the Energy Fuels Review, my Department will be preparing a revised draft of MPG3 for England which will be issued this autumn for a period of full consultation with all interested parties. This revised draft will take into account our pre-election commitments on opencast coal, the responses to our consultation in 1997 on Labour's 10-point plan for opencast coal, and, when available, the final conclusions of the Energy Fuels Review on the future of coal as a fuel for UK power generation.

Meanwhile, my Department has issued the Secretary of State's decisions on 4 opencast appeal cases which have been delayed whilst the Energy Fuels Review has been in progress. It would not have been reasonable to delay these any longer. In deciding future cases after the publication of the revised draft of MPG3 for England, its emerging policies, as well as those in the current MPG3, will in appropriate cases be relevant considerations both for mineral planning authorities and for the Secretary of State, and as such will need to be taken into account.

Greater London Authority

Ms Buck: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions where the Greater London Authority will be located; and if he will make a statement. [54811]

Mr. Raynsford: We have now drawn up a list of eight possible locations for London's new Mayor and Assembly. This has been selected from information on over 50 buildings, new developments and sites sent to Knight Frank, our agents.

They are:

Camelford House, SE11 (refurbishment of a Thamesside building)

Canary Wharf, E14 (site WF-9—overlooking the Thames and the City)

Dean Ryle Street Building, SW1 (refurbishment—formerly part of Westminster Hospital)

London Bridge City, SE1 (a site between Tower Bridge and London Bridge on the Thames)

Regent's Place, Euston Road, NW1 (new development close to Regents Park)

St. George's Court, New Oxford Street, WC1 (refurbishment of a former Ministry of Defence building)

Vauxhall Cross, SE11 (the Effra site by Vauxhall Bridge)

Victoria House, Bloomsbury Square, WC1 (refurbishment).

The next step will be to provide the owners, managers and developers of these buildings and sites with details of the GLA's likely requirements and to invite them to submit details on how they can fulfil these, how quickly and at what cost. Some of the eight options are also being considered for other uses and may fall out. Some will need planning and other approvals and these will need to be considered by the appropriate authorities. If other possible locations come forward in the next few weeks, these too will be considered.

I anticipate that there will be strong competition to provide the high quality building which the Mayor and Assembly deserve. I hope to announce the final decision around the end of the year.

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions on what date he plans the elections for the Greater London Authority to take place. [53586]

Mr. Raynsford: As stated in paragraph 1.28 of the White Paper "A Mayor and Assembly for London" (Cm 3897), elections for the Mayor and the Assembly could be held in the autumn of 1999 or in Spring 2000. We hope to announce our preferred date in the autumn.

Flooding (Midlands)

Mr. Andy King: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will provide financial assistance to *(a)* Warwick District Council, *(b)* Wychavon District Council and *(c)* Northamptonshire Police Authority under the Bellwin scheme in respect of costs incurred following the severe flooding on the weekend of 9 to 12 April. [54815]

Ms Armstrong: I am satisfied that financial assistance under the Bellwin scheme is justified in these cases. Schemes will, therefore, be established under section 155 of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989. Grant will be paid to each authority to cover 85 per cent. of eligible costs which are above a threshold and which have been incurred by the authority in dealing with the flooding.

Sefton

Ms Christine Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when he will announce his decision on the Local Government Commission's recommendations on the future of local government in the Metropolitan Borough of Sefton; and if he will make a statement. [54873]

Ms Armstrong: I am today announcing that we have decided to accept the Local Government Commission's recommendation for no change in the structure of local government in Sefton. I believe this will be the most satisfactory way forward for the whole of Sefton in terms of effective and convenient local government. We have also decided to accept the Commission's recommendations for minor changes to electoral arrangements in the borough.

World War II Bombs, Chippenham

Mr. Corbett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will provide financial assistance to North Wiltshire District Council under the Bellwin scheme in respect of costs incurred following the discovery of two World War II bombs in Chippenham on 12 and 13 February. [54874]

Ms Armstrong: I am satisfied that financial assistance under the Bellwin scheme is justified given the exceptional circumstances in this case. A scheme will, therefore, be established under section 155 of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989. Grant will be paid to cover 85 per cent. of eligible costs which are above a threshold and which have been incurred by North Wiltshire District Council in dealing with this incident.

Environmental Information

Mr. Burgon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he has reached conclusions on his review of policy on environmental information for consumers, and on the Financial Management and Policy Review of the United Kingdom Ecolabelling Board; and if he will make a statement. [54155]

Mr. Meacher: These reviews have been taking place against a background of helpful developments at EU level. EU institutions have recently been considering the future direction of the EU ecolabelling scheme, while interest has been growing in a more integrated approach to policy on consumer products and the environment. The UK Presidency tabled these issues for discussion at the Council of Ministers in June. There was a very constructive debate, which gave some clear guidance about future revision of the ecolabelling regulation and confirmed a close interest among member states in work being developed by the Commission on an integrated policy for products and the environment.

Against this background, the Government propose to look afresh at ways of stimulating a more sustainable market in consumer products, including more effective ways of informing consumers about the benefits. This will involve consideration of a range of approaches depending on the specific characteristics of products and the way they are consumed. I shall be issuing a strategy paper later this summer which will set out our analysis of the issues, our view on the part that can best be played by different instruments, and some specific propositions for future action on which we will be seeking views.

To help take matters forward, I intend setting up a new advisory panel to assist my Department across the range of product-related issues. The panel will be asked to advise on the development of strategic product policies, priorities and mechanisms for national approaches to labelling, and practical action to raise the standard of information available in the market. Membership of the panel will be drawn from a range of stakeholder interests, and make use of experience already available within the UK Ecolabelling Board (UKEB).

On the "prior options review" of UKEB itself, copies of the report are being placed in the Library of the House. The text is also available on request from my Department and will be placed on its Internet site.

UKEB was set up under the European Communities Act 1972 with the sole purpose of administering the EU ecolabelling scheme. Unfortunately, that scheme has had only limited impact in the market; the level of take-up is still low and is not expected to increase dramatically in the foreseeable future. The review found that UKEB has done a good job in these difficult circumstances. I endorse this view and pay tribute to the dedicated work done by the Board members and staff of UKEB to advance the EU ecolabelling scheme. However, in the circumstances of low market take-up of the label, and bearing in mind that UKEB's duties could not be widened without new legislation, the Government would not feel justified in retaining an executive Non-Departmental Public Body solely to administer this function.

The Government will therefore be formally winding up UKEB later this year, at which point the role of "UK Competent Body" under the EU ecolabelling regulation will be taken on by my Department while wider policies are being developed. The new advisory panel will be asked to assist the Department in this work by offering advice on strategic ecolabelling issues. The EU scheme is a valuable voluntary instrument, with potential for influencing consumer choice across the single market, but experience has shown that it will need to operate within a wider framework of measures if it is to make a significant contribution. In aiming to develop a more comprehensive approach to consumer products and the environment, the Government hope to unlock more of the potential which schemes such as this offer.

Water and Sewerage Services

Mr. Burgon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what analysis his Department has undertaken of the incidence effects of changing the basis of charging for domestic water and sewerage services. [54136]

Mr. Meacher: My Department will today publish research carried out by the consultancy firm Maxwell Stamp to examine the incidence effects of changing the basis for charging for domestic water and sewerage services in England and Wales. The alternatives to the current rateable value based bills examined as part of this research are council tax based charges, flat rate charges and a number of measured tariffs.

This research was taken into account when writing the "Water Charging in England and Wales—A New Approach" Consultation Paper, and will also inform our decisions in light of responses to that Consultation Paper.

Packaging Waste Regulations

Mr. Burgon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will be consulting on options for amending the Producer Responsibility Obligations (Packaging Waste) Regulations 1997; and if he will make a statement. [54156]

Mr. Meacher: I am today placing in the Library a copy of the Government's consultation document on amendments to the Producer Responsibility Obligations (Packaging Waste) Regulations 1997.

The consultation document puts forward a number of options and proposals for modifying the Regulations and many of those reflect the recommendations made at the end

of June by the Advisory Committee on Packaging (ACP), chaired by Sir Peter Parker. The ACP undertook a review of the Regulations in the first part of this year and have, in particular, advised that, at this early stage, adjustments to the Regulations should be kept to the minimum in order to minimise uncertainty, and encourage investment in the collection and reprocessing infrastructure for packaging recycling and recovery. The Government also need to be assured that the requirements of the Regulations will be sufficient to enable the UK to meet the targets in the EC Directive on Packaging and Packaging Waste in 2001. The options and proposals in the paper are therefore designed to ensure the smooth working of the Regulations in order to meet our objectives.

The document invites views on the options presented for changes to the Regulations. Decisions on any changes to the system will be made on the basis of the views received in response, and will of course be subject to Parliamentary approval later in the year.

Hon. Members may wish to note that this document is relevant to a number of the issues that were raised by the Environment, Transport and Regional Affairs Committee in its Sixth Report, *Substantial Waste Management*. The Government are preparing a full response to the Committee's recommendations, including those relating to the management of packaging waste, and hope to publish it shortly.

Housing (Unsafe Structures)

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement concerning the case of R *v.* Bristol City Council ex parte Everett (*The Times* 21 May 1998) with reference to the implications for the health and safety of tenants whose properties may be structurally unsafe. [50738]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 16 July 1998]:* The circumstances of this case do appear to be somewhat special. I understand that it is likely that there will be an appeal and no further comment would be appropriate at this stage.

House-Builders Federation

Mr. Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will list the meetings held between Ministers in his Department and the House-Builders Federation in the last six months and the dates of those meetings. [52266]

Mr. Raynsford: I met representatives of the House-Builders Federation on 23 February and addressed a luncheon at their annual general meeting on 7 April.

Wind Farms

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what representations he has received regarding the proximity of wind turbines to bridleways and other public rights of way and their impact on equine welfare. [52097]

Mr. Raynsford: One, from the British Horse Society.

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will assess the advantages and disadvantages of amending PPG 22 to introduce a minimum required distance between wind farms and bridleways and other public rights of way. [52098]

Mr. Raynsford: Planning Policy Guidance notes are not intended to be prescriptive. We have no evidence that the existing guidance is not robust enough in this area. Planning Policy Guidance note 7, 'The Countryside—Environmental Quality and Economic and Social Development', already alerts local planning authorities to take into account the impact of proposed developments on public rights of way when deciding planning applications. Experience indicates that properly designed and maintained wind turbines are a safe technology.

London Underground

Mr. Ottaway: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what contingency plans he has to finance London Underground in the event that his public/private partnership plans are not in place by 2000–01. [52175]

Ms Glenda Jackson: London Transport is developing plans to award one, two or three infrastructure contracts to finance, maintain and modernise the Underground's infrastructure by April 2000. If it appears that this timetable will not be achieved, the Government will consider with LT what interim funding arrangements may be necessary.

Coach Services (London)

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what estimate he has made of the number of services interchanging at London coach terminals for passengers in transit to locations outside London. [52750]

Ms Glenda Jackson: Coach services interchange at several locations in London including Victoria Coach Station, Bulleid Way, Heathrow Airport, King's Cross, and Russell Square. The Government do not compile information about these services. However, I understand that, according to recent sample surveys, around 30 per cent. of passengers departing from Victoria Coach Station were estimated to have transferred from other coach services in and around the station.

Hospital Transport Services

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what discussions he held with the Secretary of State for Health over hospital transport services prior to the publication of the Integrated Transport White Paper. [52317]

Ms Glenda Jackson: Ministers and officials in both Departments have been working closely on issues relating to hospital transport services prior to the publication of the Integrated Transport White Paper, and will continue to do so.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what assessment he made of the advantages of including hospital transport services within the scope of the Integrated Transport White Paper. [52318]

Ms Glenda Jackson: Hospital transport services are included in the Integrated White Paper as part of a wider initiative to encourage employers to adopt green transport plans in an effort to change travel habits of employees. Hospitals have a vital role to play in sending the right messages to their communities by acting responsibly on health issues. We are, therefore, strongly encouraging health facilities to produce green transport plans.

A3, Hindhead

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what representations he has received about pollution, traffic congestion and consequent environmental damage arising from traffic on the A3 at Hindhead. [52319]

Ms Glenda Jackson: We have receive a considerable number of representations in response to the Roads Review consultation about pollution, traffic congestion and environmental damage arising from traffic on the A3 at Hindhead. In addition, over the last twelve months the Highways Agency has received a number of representations relating to traffic congestion in this location.

Drinking Water

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (1) what was the cost of removing *(a)* pesticides, *(b)* nitrates and *(c)* phosphates from water supplies to make them potable, in (i) 1994–95, (ii) 1995–96, (iii) 1996–97 and (iv) 1997–98; [52546]

(2) what was the cost of removing from water supplies phosphate derived from *(a)* point sources and *(b)* diffuse sources to make them potable, in (i) 1994–95, (ii) 1995–96, (iii) 1996–97 and (iv) 1997–98. [52547]

Mr. Meacher: The costs in England and Wales of removing pesticides and nitrates from drinking water for 1994–95, 1995–96 and 1996–97 are listed. This information is derived from companies' July returns and published annually by Ofwat on CD-ROM, copies of which are in the Library of the House. Information for 1997–98 is not yet available. There is not normally a requirement to remove phosphates from drinking water supplies from *(a)* point sources and *(b)* diffuse sources; indeed in some cases phosphates are added to reduce plumbo-solvency.

Expenditure on nitrate and pesticide removal at water treatment works (in millions of pounds, at 1997–98 prices)

Year	*Nitrates*	*Pesticides*
1994–95	20	134
1995–96	9	155
1996–97	5	117

Source:
Table 37 July Returns

Ospar Commission

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement on the outcome of the Ospar meeting in Sintra, Portugal. [52713]

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement on the outcome of the ministerial conference of the Ospar Commission in Portugal. [52752]

Mr. Meacher: The first Ministerial meeting of the Ospar Commission for the protection of the marine environment of the North East Atlantic successfully reached agreement on a wide range of issues, thereby laying the foundation for an agreed international programme of work to implement the Ospar Convention.

We agreed a decision to end the potential opt-out for France and the United Kingdom on the dumping of radioactive waste. We adopted a new annexe to the Convention to authorise the Commission to adopt programmes and measures to control human activities that can have an adverse impact on the marine environment, with safeguards to ensure that there is no duplication or contradiction of work in other international forums, especially in respect of the management of fisheries. We adopted a binding decision to ban the dumping of all steel installations. This decision also bans the dumping of concrete installations and leaving both steel and concrete installations in place, but provides for possible derogations for sea-disposal of concrete installations and leaving in place the footings of steel installations over 10,000 tonnes. Consideration of the possibility of such derogations is subject to agreed assessment and international consultation procedures.

Looking ahead, we adopted long-term strategies to guide the work of the Commission on:

- hazardous substances (where the ultimate aim will be concentrations in the marine environment near background values for naturally occurring substances and close to zero for man-made synthetic substances, and the goal for 2020 will be to make every endeavour to move towards the target of cessation of discharges, emissions and losses by the date);
- radioactive substances (where the ultimate aim will be concentrations in the marine environment near background values for naturally occurring substances and close to zero for artificial radioactive substances; in achieving this objective, we shall take into account legitimate uses of the sea, technical feasibility and radiological impacts to man and biota; the goal for 2020 will be the reduction of discharges, emissions and losses to levels where the additional concentrations in the marine environment above historic levels, resulting from such discharges, emissions and losses, are close to zero);
- eutrophication (where the aim is to eliminate eutrophication where it occurs in the North East Atlantic and to prevent further occurrences); and
- the protection of ecosystems and biological diversity (where the first aim will be the entry into force of the new Annexe, and the identification of human activities that need to be addressed under it, and the preparation of programmes and measures to do so, along with promoting the establishment of a network of marine protected areas).

We also agreed, now that the decision on the disposal of disused offshore installations has been adopted, to develop a similar strategy, for adoption at next year's meeting of the Commission, on setting environmental goals for the offshore oil and gas industry and establishing improved management mechanisms to achieve them.

Finally, we approved the work on the production of a Quality Status Report on the North East Atlantic by 2000 to provide a sound, scientific basis for identifying and prioritising future tasks and for revising the strategies at the next Ministerial meeting of the Commission in 2003.

A copy of the Sintra Statement, summing up the conclusions of the Ministers, is being put in the Library.

The agreements which we reached at Sintra are good for the environment, good for jobs and good for the UK's reputation abroad, as underlining, in the World Year of the Oceans, our commitment to protecting our common heritage in the oceans.

Mobile Homes

Mr. Cotter: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for St. Ives (Mr. George) of 16 June 1997, *Official Report*, column 39, on council tax for mobile homes, if he will make a statement on progress with his discussions on possible changes to the existing structure of valuation bands. [53085]

Mr. Raynsford: The consultation paper 'Improving local financial accountability' invited views on whether there is a case to change the council tax. The deadline for responses was 1 June. Our proposals will be set out in a White Paper shortly.

Noise Insulation

Mr. Fitzpatrick: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will list the decibel noise levels at which noise protection funding has been made available since 1968. [52896]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The Noise Insulation Regulations 1975 were made retrospective to roads opened to traffic on or after the 17 October 1969. The qualifying noise level as described in my previous answer has remained unchanged since it was originally introduced.

Mr. Fitzpatrick: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions at what decibel level Government funding is available for noise insulation. [52895]

Ms Glenda Jackson: Government funding is available only in cases where the noise level is expected to exceed a specified noise level and to have risen by at least 1 decibel above the prevailing noise level as the result of the creation or alteration of a trunk road. The level of road traffic noise specified in the Noise Insulation Regulations 1975 (as amended in 1988) is 68 decibels measured as an average level exceeded for 10 per cent. of the time between the hours of 6 am and midnight.

A13 Underpass

Mr. Fitzpatrick: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement on the plans for the A13 underpass development at Prince Regent Lane. [52834]

Ms Glenda Jackson: Following the decision in 1996 to adopt a slightly more southerly alignment for the A13 Prince Regent Lane Improvement, a full environmental assessment is being carried out and we hope to hold a full public consultation on the new alignment in the Autumn.

Trains (Capacity)

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement on the number of trains operated by Virgin Rail classed as short trains. [52768]

Ms Glenda Jackson: Virgin Trains is required by the franchise agreements for West Coast Trains and CrossCountry Trains to use all reasonable endeavours to provide sufficient capacity on each train that it operates. For certain services, notably peak service to and from London Euston and Birmingham New Street, there is a more detailed capacity requirement in the Passenger Service Requirement (PSR). The Office of Passenger Rail Franchising checks twice a year that Virgin plans to deliver sufficient capacity. It also monitors what actually happens on a four weekly basis. Failure to achieve 97.5 per cent. of the planned capacity in a four week period is a breach of the Franchise for the West Coast; the equivalent figure for the CrossCountry is 94 per cent. There was no breach of these limits in 1997–98. In addition, Virgin West Coast must pay a penalty for every train that is short of the planned number of seats. It paid a total of £167,907 to the Franchising Director in 1997–98.

Rail Operators (Targets)

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will take steps to ensure that the Director of Passenger Rail Franchising uses his powers to the full extent to ensure that rail operators meet the targets set. [52769]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The Objectives, Instructions and Guidance which we issued to the Franchising Director in November last year require him to manage franchises in a way which ensures the prompt and effective delivery of the terms of the franchise agreements and he uses his powers to that end. As our White Paper on the Future of Transport makes clear, we intend to set up a Strategic Rail Authority with stronger powers of enforcement and to seek more demanding performance standards for franchise operators.

Planning Inquiries

Mr. Lansley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many decisions after receipt of planning inspector's reports have been delayed for longer than *(a)* three, *(b)* six and *(c)* nine months in the last three years. [52399]

Mr. Raynsford *[holding answer 27 July 1998]:* The Department holds information on the number of appeal and call-in cases outstanding at the end of each quarter which have been with the Department, following receipt of an inspector's report, for 8 weeks or more in the case

of appeals, and 13 weeks or more in the case of call-ins. The latest available figures relate to the quarter ending 30 September 1997. In the three years up until this date, the returns provide the following information:

	Outstanding for 13 weeks or more	*Outstanding for 26 weeks or more*	*Outstanding for 39 weeks or more*
1 October 1994 - 30 September 1995	26	10	32
1 October 1995 - 30 September 1996	11	12	16
1 October 1996 - 30 September 1997	40	25	21
Total	77	47	69

Each case is recorded in this table only once (ie cases outstanding for 39 weeks or more are not also recorded as being outstanding for 13 and 26 weeks). Some cases outstanding for less than 26 weeks and decided between quarterly returns will not be included in these figures.

Incinerators

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many incinerators in the United Kingdom have emitted levels of dioxins above the statutory level set by his Department in each of the past 10 years. [52827]

Mr. Meacher: There has been a statutory emission limit for dioxins only since January 1998 when a direction was issued by my Department to the Environment Agency in relation to hazardous waste incinerators so as to implement the EU Hazardous Waste Incineration Directive. However, the Environment Agency and its predecessor body (HM Inspectorate of Pollution) have set their own dioxin limits in authorisations for certain incinerators in England and Wales for several years. Information from the Environment Agency is that the statutory emission limit has not been exceeded at any incinerator to which it applies, and that their own/HMIP's limits have been exceeded at two incinerators.

Ecolabelling

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Arundel and South Downs (Mr. Flight) of 15 June 1998, *Official Report*, columns *39–40*, if he will make a statement on the conclusions of the discussion on the European Community's ecolabelling system at the Council of Ministers meeting of 16 and 17 June. [53828]

Mr. Meacher: The United Kingdom Presidency initiated an orientation debate at the Council of Ministers on 17 June, which was successful in enabling member states to exchange views on the Commission's Proposal for a Council Regulation to revise the Community's existing eco-label award scheme. The debate focused on two aspects of the Proposal which had been of particular concern to member states. These were the proposal for future administration of the scheme of a new "European Ecolabelling Organisation", financed by member states; and the proposal to withdraw national eco-labels within five years in the case of product areas covered by the European eco-label. The Council had a useful discussion of these points, and related policy issues, in the light of which the Commission indicated that it would be revising its Proposal.

I also refer the hon. Gentleman to a reply by my right hon. Friend the Minister for the Environment to a question by my hon. Friend the Member for Bradford, West (Mr. Singh) on 24 June 1998, *Official Report*, column *542*, on the overall outcome of this Council of Ministers.

Compliance Cost Assessments

Mr. Lansley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will list the compliance cost assessments published by his Department since 1 May 1997. [52936]

Mr. Meale *[holding answer 28 July 1998]:* Between 1 May 1997 and 31 May 1998, twenty nine compliance cost assessments have been published by my Department. These are:

Date	*Title*
May 1997	The Road Vehicles (Construction and Use) (Amendment) (No. 3) Regulations 1997
May 1997	The Merchant Shipping (Mandatory Ships' Routeing) Regulations 1997
June 1997	The Road Vehicles (Construction and Use) (Amendment) (No. 5) Regulations 1997 (implementing a Council Directive on the approximation of the laws of member states relating to roadworthiness tests for motor vehicles and their trailers (exhaust emissions))
June 1997	The Road Vehicles (Construction and Use) (Amendment) (No. 5) Regulations 1997 (implementing a Council Directive on measures to be taken against air pollution by motor vehicles)
June 1997	The Control of Trade in Endangered Species (Fees) Regulations 1997
July 1997	The Motor Vehicles (Tests) (Amendment) (No. 2) Regulations 1997
July 1997	The International Carriage of Perishable Foodstuffs (Amendment) Regulations 1997
September 1997	The Motor Vehicles (Driving Licences) (Amendment) (No. 4) Regulations 1997
September 1997	Proposal for a Council Directive on statistical returns in respect of carriage of goods and passengers by sea
September 1997	The Merchant Shipping (Carriage of Cargoes) (Amendment) Regulations 1997
October 1997	The Airports (Groundhandling) Regulations 1997
December 1997	The Scheme for Construction Contracts (England and Wales) Regulations 1997
December 1997	Proposal for a Council Recommendation on a parking card for people with disabilities
February 1998	The Surface Waters (Dangerous Substances) (Classification) Regulations 1998
February 1998	The Civil Aviation (Canadian Navigation Service) (Second Amendment) Regulations 1998

Date	Title
February 1998	The Department of Transport (Fees) (Amendment) Order 1998
March 1998	The Control of Lead at Work Regulations
March 1998	The Environmental Protection (Prescribed Processes and Substances) (Amendment) (Hazardous Waste Incineration) Regulations 1998
March 1998	The Mines (Notice of Abandonment) Regulations 1998
March 1998	Merchant Shipping (Fees) (Amendment) Regulations 1998
March 1998	The Fishing Vessels (Life Saving Appliances) (Amendment) Regulations 1998
March 1998	The Fishing Vessels (Safety Provisions) (Amendment) Rules 1998
March 1998	The Merchant Shipping (Crew Accommodation) (Fishing Vessels) (Amendment) Regulations 1998
April 1998	The Merchant Shipping (Fire Protection: Small Ships) Regulations 1998
April 1998	The Merchant Shipping (Fire Protection: Large Ships) Regulations 1998
April 1998	The Merchant Shipping (Oil Pollution Preparedness, Response and Co-ordination Convention) Regulations 1998
May 1998	The Merchant Shipping (Convention on Limitation of Liability for Maritime) (Amendment) Order 1998
May 1998	The Hovercraft (Application of Enactments) (Amendment) Order 1998 (shared CCA with the above)
May 1998	The Motor Vehicles (Driving Licences) (Amendment) (No. 3) Regulations 1998

Single Regeneration Budget

Mr. Love: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement on the conclusions of the regeneration spending review indicating revised priorities for the single regeneration budget. [53684]

Mr. Caborn: The CSR announcement on 14 July 1998, *Official Report*, columns *187–94*, included a re-shaped Single Regeneration Budget. This is one of two strands of the New Deal for Regeneration, the other being the New Deal for Communities.

The re-shaped SRB will receive over £2.3 billion over 3 years, of which £800 million is new money. In order to make a real and sustainable difference in the most deprived areas, 80 per cent. of new resources will be targeted on the areas of greatest need. This will provide for over 50 major new schemes of about £20 million to be running by the end of this parliament.

The balance of resources (20 per cent.) will be used to tackle pockets of need elsewhere, including in rural areas, where SRB resources will combine with the former Rural Challenge resources of the Rural Development Commission to form an integrated rural regeneration element of the SRB.

The re-shaped SRB will include an emphasis on strengthening local partnerships and on value for money:

- a new emphasis on partnership capacity building so that the local community is equipped to fully participate in the regeneration of its area
- partnerships will have to demonstrate that local communities are directly involved and supportive of schemes
- the release of funding will depend on adequate management systems including project appraisal.

East Midlands Airport

Mr. Todd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans the Department has to regulate noise nuisance from East Midlands Airport if the airport obtains permission to extend its activities. [53343]

Ms Glenda Jackson: None. It is our policy that noise nuisance from airports should, wherever possible, be discussed and resolved locally. The planning system allows measures for alleviation of noise associated with new development to be agreed where appropriate. We announced in the White Paper "A New Deal for Transport" our intention to consult on detailed proposals for legislation on aircraft noise.

Passenger Train Services

Mr. Prior: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what measures the Government will propose to the Director of Opraf to increase the number of passenger train services that run according to schedule. [53564]

Ms Glenda Jackson: Last November, we issued new Objectives, Instructions and Guidance to the Franchising Director which require him to secure a progressive improvement in the quality of passenger railway services and to maintain a comprehensive and rigorous programme of performance monitoring. As announced in our White Paper "A New Deal for Transport", we will amend the Railways Act 1993 so that financial penalties for poor performance can be imposed much faster and past infringements penalised. Train operators will also be judged on their current performance before any new contracts are agreed.

Cycling (London)

Mr. Robathan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what assessment he has made of the impact of security restrictions on cycle parking in Central London on the level of cycle use. [53687]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The City of Westminster have made representations to the Metropolitan Police about the need for properly constituted cycle parking facilities to be improved in the Whitehall area, while paying proper regard to considerations of public safety. A number of new locations have been suggested, and the Police currently have the matter under review. I welcome the prospect of such improvements, as being consistent with Government policy to encourage the use of cycles as a healthy, sustainable and environmentally friendly mode of transport.

A12 Relief Road

Mr. Amess: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what is the projected completion date, and what was the original

estimated date, for completion of the A12 relief road between Leytonstone and Redbridge roundabout and what factors underlie the differences [53704]

Ms Glenda Jackson: I have asked the Chief Executive of the Highways Agency, Mr. Lawrie Haynes, to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Lawrie Haynes to Mr. David Amess, dated 30 July 1998:

The Minister for Transport in London has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question about the A12 Hackney to M11 Link Road scheme.

The section of the scheme between the Green Man Roundabout at Leytonstone and the Redbridge Roundabout began in September 1993. The original four year contract had been extended due to complications in the diversion of public utilities equipment and, more recently, difficulties with the provision of specialist mechanical and electrical equipment.

We now expect completion of this section of the scheme around the turn of the year but this is not expected to affect the overall scheme completion date.

Eastern Regional Development Agency

Mr. Amess: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what level of resources the Eastern Region RDA will receive; when it will be paid; and what conditions will be applied to its use. [53583]

Mr. Caborn: Resources for individual RDAs will be announced later this year and expenditure programmes will be transferred to them in April 1999. The conditions applied to the use of the resources will be set out in the Financial Memoranda and other guidance issued to RDAs when they are established following enactment of the Regional Development Agencies Bill, which is currently before Parliament.

Speed Limits

Mr. Casale: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what is the Government's policy towards the introduction of 20 mile per hour speed limits outside schools. [52137]

Ms Glenda Jackson: We have recently consulted on proposals to provide freedom for local traffic authorities to make 20 mph limits without the need to obtain central government consent. The responses to the consultation are currently being considered. Under the proposed new system it will be for the authorities to decide where to place 20 mph speed limits; but we would recommend that schools should be set in the context of their surrounding areas and local experience of traffic problems rather than being treated in isolation.

Task Forces

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will list the task forces and advisory groups composed of independent members which have been set up by his Department since 1 May 1997 and in each case *(a)* their remit, *(b)* their membership, *(c)* how many members are (i) scientists, (ii) engineers and (iii) small business people or representatives of small businesses, *(d)* any remuneration members receive for their services and *(e)* their budget. [53145]

Ms Glenda Jackson: There are six Task Forces and three Advisory Groups with independent members which have been set up by my Department since 1 May 1997. I have today placed in the Library of the House the information requested for each of these bodies.

Employees Over 60

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many *(a)* men and *(b)* women employed by (1) his Department and (2) his Department's agencies have contracts of employment which permit them to retire after their 60th birthday. [53053]

Ms Glenda Jackson: Staff in DETR (Central) with contracts of employment which permit them to retire after their 60th birthday.

Men: 404

Women: 763.

Staff in the Department's agencies with contracts of employment which permit them to retire after their 60th birthday.

Men: 2,840

Women: 3,298.

Driving Test Centres

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what was the cost of the building lease for the *(a)* Crosby, *(b)* Norris Green, *(c)* Southport, *(d)* Garston and *(e)* St. Helens driving centres in the last year for which figures are available. [53814]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The licence payment under the Memorandum of Terms of Occupation held with the Employment Services Agency for Crosby was £13,416 p.a. Under similar arrangements with the Department for Social Services, the licence payment for the driving test centre at Southport was £3,420 in 1997–98. Lease costs for the test centres at Norris Green and St. Helens were £3,600 and £3,480 respectively. Garston is a freehold property.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement on the long-term future of *(a)* Southport, *(b)* Norris Green, *(c)* Garston and *(d)* St. Helens driving test centres; how many years are left before the leases expire for each driving test centre; and what penalty clauses are associated with the leases. [53815]

Ms Glenda Jackson: Under the terms of the Driving Standard Agency's agreement with the Department of Social Security the lease on the driving test centre at Southport will expire on 31 March 2001. The Agency's test centres at Norris Green and St. Helens are purpose built premises with ground leases that will expire on 15 March 2081 and 15 November 2080 respectively. The test centre at Garston is freehold.

If any of these centres were to close, then the Agency would seek to assign or sell its interest in the property. If an alternative occupant or purchaser could not be found, the penalty would be having to pay the continuing cost of the property.

The Agency keeps its test centre estate under regular review to ensure that centres can provide tests of a satisfactory standard whilst maintaining acceptable local levels of service in a cost effective manner.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what factors led to the closure of Crosby Driving Test Centre. [53812]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The Crosby driving test centre had to close because the major occupier of the building—the Employment Service Agency—required the Driving Standards Agency to vacate the premises.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what assessment he has made of the advantage of establishing regional driving test centres to replace existing test centres. [53811]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The Driving Standards Agency has made no assessment of replacing the current network of local driving test centres with centres serving each region.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement on the income generated by the *(a)* Crosby, *(b)* Norris Green, *(c)* Southport, *(d)* Garston and *(e)* St. Helens driving test centres relative to the expenditure associated with the each test centre. [53810]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The table compares the income from car driving test fees with the property and staff costs at each of the test centres in the financial year 1997–98:

£

Test centre	*Income from car test fees*	*Property and staff costs*
Crosby	123,910	109,249
Norris Green	174,707	121,069
Southport	104,486	45,872
Garston	139,883	111,053
St. Helens	110,375	69,491

Private Hire Vehicles

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions following the introduction of a licensing scheme for private hire vehicles in London, if he will review the legislative provisions which prohibit any signage on private hire vehicles. [54526]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The Private Hire Vehicles (London) Act 1998 will repeal the London Cab Act 1973. The question of signage on private hire vehicles in London will be dealt with in regulations under section 30 of the 1998 Act. We shall consult before making regulations.

Millennium Compliance (Train Operators)

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what responsibility OPRAF have to ensure that systems used by train operating companies are millennium compliant. [54529]

Ms Glenda Jackson: OPRAF has no specific responsibility for this. Millennium compliance is the responsibility of the train operating companies. OPRAF has a clear interest in the delivery of train operators' obligations and would be concerned with any failure to deliver, whatever the cause.

Mark 1 Rolling Stock

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what discussions his Department has had with OPRAF regarding the phasing out of Mark 1 rolling stock. [54520]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The Department has had regular discussions with the Office for Passenger Rail Franchising (OPRAF), which have touched on many different railway matters including the use of Mark 1 rolling stock.

Airlines (Gatwick-Channel Islands)

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will list the airlines operating between Gatwick and the Channel Islands in each of the last five years. [54528]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The following list of airlines operating between Gatwick and the Channel Islands has been compiled using information supplied by the Civil Aviation Authority:

Calendar Year	*Airlines*
1997	Air Atlantique Atlantic Cargo—Jersey
	Air UK—Jersey
	Airworld Aviation Ltd.—Jersey
	Aurigny Air Services—Jersey
	BAC Express Airlines Ltd.—Jersey
	Caledonian Airways—Jersey
	Channel Express (Air Svs)—Jersey/Guernsey
	City Flyer Express—Jersey/Guernsey
	Jersey European Airways (UK)—Jersey/Guernsey
	SATA—Jersey
	Titan Airways—Jersey
1996	Airworld Aviation Ltd.—Jersey
	Aurigny Air Services—Jersey/Guernsey
	Channel Express (Air Svs)—Jersey/Guernsey
	City Flyer Express—Jersey/Guernsey
	Jersey European Airways—Jersey/Guernsey
	Jersey European Airways (UK)—Jersey/Guernsey
	Leisure International—Jersey
	Monarch Airlines—Jersey
	Sabre Airways Ltd.—Jersey/Guernsey
	Titan Airways—Jersey/Guernsey
1995	Air Atlantique Atlantic Cargo—Jersey
	Air UK—Jersey
	Aurigny Air Services—Jersey
	BAC Express Airlines Ltd.—Jersey
	Channel Express (Air Svs)—Jersey/Guernsey
	City Flyer Express—Jersey/Guernsey
	European Air Charter—Jersey
	Excalibur Airways—Jersey
	GB Airways Ltd.—Jersey
	Jersey European Airways—Jersey/Guernsey
	Palmair Flightline—Guernsey

Calendar Year	Airlines
1994	Air 2000—Jersey
	Air UK—Jersey/Guernsey
	Ambassador Airways Ltd.—Jersey
	Aurigny Air Services—Jersey/Guernsey
	BAC Express Airlines Ltd.—Jersey/Guernsey
	Britannia Airways—Jersey
	British Midland—Jersey
	British World Airlines Ltd.—Jersey
	Channel Express (Air Svs)—Jersey/Guernsey
	City Flyer Express—Jersey/Guernsey
	European Air Charter—Jersey
	Excalibur Airways—Jersey/Guernsey
	Jersey European Airways—Jersey/Guernsey
	Leisure International—Jersey
	Monarch Airlines—Jersey
1993	Air Columbus—Jersey
	Air UK—Jersey/Guernsey
	Aurigny Air Services—Jersey
	Britannia Airways—Jersey
	British World Airlines Ltd.—Jersey
	Channel Express (Air Svs)—Guernsey
	City Flyer Express—Jersey/Guernsey
	Excalibur Airways—Jersey
	Jersey European Airways—Jersey/Guernsey
	Monarch Airlines—Jersey
	Nouvelair Tunisie—Jersey
	Sterling European Airlines—Jersey

Notes:
1. The list includes all services both Scheduled and Charter and Passenger and Cargo
2. Air Taxi operations have been excluded
3. The list is based on the Last/Next airport, this means that the Channel Islands airport may not be the ultimate destination of the aircraft

Airlines (Slots)

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will list the number of slots held by airlines at *(a)* Gatwick, *(b)* Heathrow and *(c)* Stansted in each of the last 10 years. [54527]

Ms Glenda Jackson: Information on the slots allocated is collected and held by Airport Co-ordination Ltd., but it is not readily available for the last 10 years.

Airports (South-East England)

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if the ownership of the south-east of England airports will be considered as part of his Department's work on the aviation White Paper. [54523]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The question of the three main London airports being under the same ownership was raised by the Environment, Transport and Regional Affairs Committee in its report this week on Regional Air Services. The Government will be addressing this point as part of their response to Parliament in the normal way.

The Knowledge Examination

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what factors underlie the increase in the time taken by applicants for the knowledge examination to progress from *(a)* initial talk to first appearance and *(b)* first appearance to becoming licensed. [54524]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The increase in time over the years between initial talk and first appearance has been due to different factors at different times. These include the introduction of a requirement to learn all the designated runs before a first appearance, rather than only a proportion, in order to reduce the overall time taken to complete the Knowledge; the limited number of knowledge examiners at various times; the introduction of a written test which must be passed before the first appearance, in order to reduce the demand on Knowledge examiners' time; and the increasing complexity of the information candidates need to learn, arising from changes in London traffic management systems.

The increase in time between first appearance and becoming licensed is partly due to the increasing complexity of what needs to be learned, but also to the significant increase in the number of candidates studying for the Knowledge. The Public Carriage Office have recently recruited extra examiners.

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how long the average waiting time was for the first appearance for the knowledge examination in *(a)* 1980, *(b)* 1985, *(c)* 1990, *(d)* 1995 and *(e)* 1997. [54525]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The answer of 3 March 1998, *Official Report,* column *549,* gave comparisons of the period of time between initial talk and first appearance for the years 1987, 1992 and 1997. The Public Carriage Office do not keep separate records of the period between the first appearance being requested and being granted.

Correspondence

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when he expects to reply to the letter from Mr. Moore of 15 April on the Vehicle Inspectorate. [53915]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The Vehicle Inspectorate has no record of a letter from Mr. Moore dated 15 April. If the letter concerns operational matters for which the Inspectorate is responsible and the hon. Member would like to send a copy to the Chief Executive, Mr. Newey would be happy to reply.

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when he will reply to the letters of 11 May and 1 July from the hon. Member for Bognor Regis and Littlehampton regarding a constituent. [53896]

Ms Armstrong: The former Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, my hon. Friend the Member for Wallasey (Angela Eagle), replied on 28 May. I responded to another letter dated 11 May from the hon. Member on 8 June.

Channel Tunnel Rail Link

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what are the Government's proposals for the route of the cross-channel rail link line from the coast to London. [53591]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The route of the Channel Tunnel Rail Link between Cheriton in Kent and St. Pancras in the London Borough of Camden is set out in the Channel Tunnel Rail Link Act 1996.

MFV Gaul

Mr. Alan Johnson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 24 June 1998, *Official Report*, column *532*, who was given access to the National Maritime Institute report (Project 207001) on the 'Gaul' following its completion; and to whom it was distributed. [52362]

Ms Glenda Jackson: Departmental records show that thirty copies of the Report were printed. We do not have a complete distribution list but we believe copies were provided to the interested parties, who were the builders, Brooke Marine Ltd., and the owners, British United Trawlers, and Hellyer Brothers, a subsidiary company of British United Trawlers, and to Messrs. Graham & Rosen, solicitors acting on behalf of the next of kin. Copies were also sent to the solicitors representing Brooke Marine Ltd. and British United Trawlers. The Department of Trade and Industry retained an unspecified number of copies.

Teesside Development Corporation

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what was the cost of *(a)* providing and *(b)* erecting obelisks in memory of Teesside Development Corporation at sites in Teesside. [53394]

Mr. Caborn: £151,000.

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (1) if he will make a statement on the structural problem identified in the Tees Barrage and ancillary works by external consultations appointed by the Teesside Development Corporation; [53444]

(2) if he will make a statement on the current contractual obligations of the main contractors for the Tees Barrage. [53393]

Mr. Caborn: These matters are now the responsibility of the Commission for the New Towns. I will write to my hon. Friend when I have made further inquiries.

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will ensure that the audit of the accounts of Teesside Development Corporation for the year ended 31 March includes a full financial and technical audit of the TDC's activities over its lifespan and is made public. [53360]

Mr. Caborn: The audited financial statements for the year ended 31 March 1998 were published earlier this month.

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (1) if he will list the members of *(a)* the newly formed Teesside Environmental Trust and *(b)* its board and their former links with the Teesside Development Corporation; [53446]

(2) if he will investigate the contractual agreements made between the Teesside Environmental Trust, the Teesside Development Corporation and Messrs H. J. Banks Ltd in the last three months of the Teesside Development Corporation's life. [53445]

Mr. Caborn: I will write to my hon. Friend.

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what was the cost of the press and television advertising campaign that the Teesside Development Corporation undertook in the last six months of its life. [53395]

Mr. Caborn: These costs were contained within the approved marketing budget of the Corporation.

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (1) if he will investigate the links between former employees of Teesside Development Corporation, the Hartlepool Marina and the projected tall ships centre; [53397]

(2) if he will investigate the links between Mandale Properties Ltd. and former employees of Teesside Development Corporation. [53396]

Mr. Caborn: My right hon. Friend has no reason to do so.

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will investigate the arrangements whereby the Teesside Development Corporation arranged loans from a merchant bank via intermediaries for the purposes of funding development at Middlesbrough Docks and at the Teesside Park Retail Centre; and if he will list the size of the loans. [53359]

Mr. Caborn: Such financial arrangements were a matter for the Board of the Corporation.

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will investigate the arrangements for *(a)* the market testing and *(b)* the disposal of remaining land within the Teesside Development Corporation's ownership at the Teesdale site and at Hartlepool Marina. [53440]

Mr. Caborn: These arrangements were a matter for the Board of the Development Corporation and are now the responsibility of its successor, the Commission for the New Towns.

Aircraft (Disease Transmission)

Mr. Letwin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 21 July 1998, *Official Report*, column *466*, what research underlay his conclusions that no evidence exists to suggest a link between cabin air quality, flow rates and the spread of disease. [53898]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The research which indicates that there is no evidence of a link between cabin air quality, flow rates and the spread of disease is as follows:

1. Report No. DOT-P-15-89-5. December 1989. Airliner cabin environment: Contaminant measurements, health risks, and mitigation options (Section 8).

2. "Methods and Results of the Measurements of Aerogenic Micro-biological Contamination in Airplane Cabin Air"—Opinion of the Institute for Hygiene and Environmental Medicine, Medical University of Lubeck, Germany. December 1995. (unpublished).

3. "Report on VOC Measurements during the Flights Frankfurt-Dallas-Frankfurt on 19/21 June 1995 and Frankfurt-New York-Frankfurt on 17/19 July 1995—Fraunhofer-Institut fur Umweltchemie und Okotoxikologie, Schmallenberg, Germany. December 1995. (unpublished).

4. "Toxicological Evaluation of Cabin Air Concentrations". Prof. Dr. Med. Th. Eikmann, Institut fur Hygiene und Umweltchemie Universilat Giessen, Germany. December 1995. (unpublished).

5. National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health January 1993. HETA 90–226–2281. Health hazard evaluation report. Alaska Airlines.

The transmission of disease in an aircraft cabin cannot be eliminated. However, there is no evidence to show that technical changes in aircraft cabin environment have increased that risk, or that the risk is as great as infection from any public environment.

Quarrying (Dartmoor)

Mr. Letwin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if it is his policy to prevent further quarrying on Dartmoor. [53813]

Mr. Raynsford: The Government's policy on minerals extraction in National Parks is set out in Minerals Planning Guidance Note 6. The Government consider that major developments should take place in National Parks only in exceptional circumstances. Because of the serious impact that working them may have on the natural beauty of these areas, the Government consider that all minerals applications must be subject to the most rigorous examination and that all mineral developments should be demonstrated to be in the public interest before being allowed to proceed.

The Government have therefore welcomed the recent announcement by the Quarry Products Association of a review of the industry's activities within National Parks.

Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency

Mr. Livsey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what he next proposes to review the options for the future of the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency. [53315]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency and the services it provides are currently being reviewed as part of a project intended to improve and to modernise the delivery of the services the Department provides for drivers, vehicle keepers and vehicle operators.

Workplace Parking Taxation

Mr. Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what account he took in his proposals for applying the workplace parking taxation of the position of nursing staff who are charged for parking in hospital staff car parks. [53437]

Ms Glenda Jackson: We are aware that some employers already charge their staff for car parking.

Mr. Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will introduce arrangements to exempt *(a)* nursing staff and *(b)* teaching staff from workplace parking taxation. [53465]

Ms Glenda Jackson: We shall issue a consultation document shortly that will discuss, among other things, possible exemptions to a levy on workplace parking.

Persistent Inquirers

Mr. Sanders: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions which of his Department's agencies have procedures to identify persistent inquirers for information. [53945]

Ms Glenda Jackson: All my Department's Executive Agencies have signed up to the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information and treat all requests for information as a request made under the Code. Each Agency has its own arrangements for monitoring such requests but none has specific arrangements to identify persistent inquiries for information.

Carbon Dioxide Emissions

Mr. Stunell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will introduce measures to reduce carbon dioxide emissions from new cars; and if he will make a statement. [54159]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The Government are pursuing a number of measures which will help to reduce the level of carbon dioxide emissions from new cars and the entire car fleet. In the last Budget on 17 March 1998, *Official Report*, columns 1097–112, the Chancellor announced our commitment to the continuation of the fuel duty escalator raising fuel prices by six per cent. per annum in real terms. This encourages drivers to purchase more fuel efficient vehicles as well as use fuel more efficiently.

We also strongly support the European Commission's Strategy on CO_2 from cars which aims to reduce the emissions of CO_2 from new cars sold in the EU to an average of 120 grammes per kilometre, by 2005 or 2010 at the latest. This represents a cut of about a third on the current average. The Commission are continuing their negotiations with the car industry to secure a voluntary agreement which will help to achieve the Strategy. It is hoped that these negotiations will be resolved successfully fairly soon.

We have also set up the Cleaner Vehicles Task Force which aims to create a partnership between the Government and the private sector to promote environmentally friendly vehicles which people actually want to drive and buy. The Task Force will encourage the production, marketing and sales of vehicles which are cleaner and more fuel efficient.

Trunk Roads

Dr. George Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (1) what assessment he has made of the advantages and disadvantages of upgrading the whole of the Core National Trunk Road Network (Cm 3950) to dual carriageway standards or better; [53705]

(2) if he will publish a map of the Core National Trunk Road Network (Cm 3950) showing sections *(a)* constructed to dual carriageway standards or better and *(b)* in current programmes designated for upgrading to such standards; [53706]

(3) if he will list for each Shire County *(a)* in total and *b)* by constituency (i) the number of miles of road identified as part of the Core National Trunk Road Network (Cm 3950) and (ii) the percentage of such road mileage constructed or in programmes to be constructed to dual carriageway standard or better. [53703]

Ms Glenda Jackson: Further details on the core network and on plans for taking forward improvements will be announced when we publish the Roads Review Report. Inclusion in the core network does not automatically mean that the road should be of dual-carriageway standard. Our approach to upgrading will be to consider problems on the core network and to assess options against our new criteria.

Birmingham Northern Relief Road

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what *(a)* environmental and *(b)* other appraisal methods were used by his Department when assessing the forecasts produced by MEL on the Birmingham Northern Relief Road in 1991. [53958]

Ms Glenda Jackson: I do not have access to papers relating to the previous administration's decision to appoint MEL as concessionaire for the BNRR. Our own decision to approve the proposed scheme was made in the light of evidence put before the Public Inquiry and the Inspector's Report on that evidence.

Welsh Language Scheme

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions on what date his Department received notification from the Welsh Language Board in relation to the need to prepare a Welsh language scheme; on what date his Department and the Board held consultations on such a scheme; when a scheme was formally submitted to the Board; and if it has been approved. [53353]

Mr. Meale: The Welsh Language Board (WLB) invited DETR to prepare a Welsh language scheme in a letter dated 13 August 1997.

The first discussions on a scheme were held with WLB on 2 December 1997, and there have been a number of subsequent contacts.

A draft scheme has been prepared and is currently being cleared within the department. DETR hopes to hold final discussions on the text with WLB shortly, prior to putting the scheme out to public consultation.

Heathrow Airport

Mr. Wilshire: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what consultation he held with *(a)* local hon. Members and *(b)* local authorities before he announced his proposals to change the preferred direction for night flight approaches at Heathrow Airport. [53346]

Ms Glenda Jackson: We have neither decided upon nor announced any such proposals. I informed the House on 24 July 1998, *Official Report*, column *1413*, of that. It is expected that this subject will be included in the second consultation later this year on night restrictions at Heathrow, Gatwick and Stansted airports.

DEFENCE

Training Exercises (Denmark)

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when the last training exercise involving the shooting of pigs in Denmark was carried out; why Denmark was chosen as the location; and if he has any plans to carry out similar exercises in the future. [45511]

Mr. Doug Henderson: The last training exercise involving the shooting of pigs in which UK Service personnel took part was in May 1998. The pigs had been anaesthetised and the exercise was designed to train medical personnel in resuscitation and surgical techniques for treating wounds inflicted by different calibre weapons. The exercise was organised by the Danish Armed Forces' Medical Services and the UK, together with NATO allies and other nations, was invited to participate. However, Ministers in this Government had not previously had this training drawn to their attention, and so UK participation was immediately suspended pending a review of my Department's training methods.

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the *(a)* costs, *(b)* aims and *(c)* outcome of the Operation Danish Bacon NATO exercise. [45485]

Mr. Doug Henderson: The costs of Exercise Danish Bacon are borne in the main by the organisers, the Danish Armed Forces' Medical Services. The costs incurred by my Department have been the travel and subsistence of UK Service participants and the costs of the animals they used—£550 each. The Exercise is designed to train military medical personnel in resuscitation and surgical techniques for treating those wounded by different calibre weapons. However, Ministers of this Government had not previously been made aware of this activity, and ordered its immediate suspension pending a review of this practice.

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence at what level authorisation was given for the participation of British troops in animal experiments in Jaegerspris, Denmark. [45492]

Mr. Doug Henderson *[holding answer 15 June 1998]:* British troops do not participate in animal experiments in Denmark. UK military surgical teams have, however, participated in training exercises organised by the Danish Armed Forces' Medical Services which involved the use of pigs that had been anaesthetised. The exercises provided training in resuscitation and surgical techniques for treating wounds inflicted by different calibre weapons. Authorisation for British participation in these exercises came from senior military medical officers.

Ministers of this Government had not previously been made aware of this activity, and ordered its immediate suspension pending a review of this practice.

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the occasions since 1 May 1997 when British troops have participated in animal experiments abroad; and on which of these occasions such experiments would not have been permitted in the United Kingdom. [45494]

Dr. Reid *[holding answer 15 June 1998]*: I am not aware of any participation by British troops in animal experiments either overseas or in the UK since 1 May 1997.

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his policy in respect of the participation of British troops in experiments which involve firing high-velocity weapons at suspended pigs. [45493]

Mr. Doug Henderson *[holding answer 15 June 1998]*: British troops do not participate in animal experiments which involve firing weapons at pigs. However, UK military surgical teams have participated in training exercises organised by the Danish Armed Forces' Medical Services which involved firing different calibre weapons at pigs. The purpose of the exercises was to provide training in resuscitation and surgical techniques for treating wounds inflicted by such weapons. Ministers in this Government had not previously had this training drawn to their attention and therefore directed that UK participation be immediately suspended pending a review of this practice.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on British Army training exercises involving the killing of animals; at which locations such training has taken place over the last 10 years; and if he will make a statement. [45768]

Mr. Doug Henderson *[holding answer 15 June 1998]*: Some courses or training exercises run by the British Army include instruction in survival techniques which involves the slaughter of live animals. This type of training has taken place in the UK, Europe and in countries such as Kenya, Brunei and Belize over the last 10 years. Training of Army Catering Corps personnel in butchery techniques has also involved the slaughter of live animals in the UK.

In addition, members of the UK Defence Medical Services have participated each year in exercises in Denmark organised by the Danish Armed Forces' Medical Services. These exercises have involved the use of pigs to provide training in resuscitation and surgical techniques for treating wounds inflicted by different calibre weapons. Ministers of this Government had not previously been made aware of this activity, and ordered its immediate suspension pending a review of this practice.

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the shooting of live pigs by British soldiers in Denmark. [46080]

Mr. Doug Henderson: UK military surgical teams have participated in training exercises organised by the Danish Armed Forces' Medical Services which involve Danish marksmen shooting different calibre weapons at pigs. The purpose of the exercises is to provide training in resuscitation and surgical techniques for treating wounds inflicted by such weapons.

Ministers of this Government had not previously been made aware of this activity, and ordered its immediate suspension pending a review of this practice.

Defence Evaluation and Research Agency

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on allegations of *(a)* harassment, *(b)* breach of contract and *(c)* sexual discrimination concerning staff in the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency. [52046]

Mr. Spellar: MOD does not tolerate or condone any form of harassment, discrimination or persecution of individuals or groups in the workplace and has formal processes in place to facilitate the handling of complaints. Civil servants also have the right to appeal to the Civil Service Appeal Board on more serious matters. This applies as much to staff in the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency as to any other MOD employees.

All allegations are subject to these processes and are dealt with on a confidential basis. It would therefore be inappropriate to identify complainants or their complaints, or to comment on them.

Atomic Weapons Establishments

Mr. Alan Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on decommissioning operations at *(a)* AWE, Foulness and *(b)* AWE, Cardiff. [52158]

Mr. Spellar: Although AWE vacated the Foulness site in December 1997, trials work has continued in support of the nuclear warhead programme via a contractual arrangement between AWE and the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency, DERA. In addition, a number of existing facilities are being retained until the 31 March 2002 on a care and maintenance basis for use in those trials, and against possible future requirements by AWE. A programme of Post-Operative Clear Out, limited decommissioning and demolition was carried out by AWE prior to December 1997. A Land Quality Statement has been lodged with DERA against which future decommissioning of the rest of the site will be done.

A price has recently been agreed with AWE plc for the decommissioning of the Cardiff site.

Colonel Andrew Gale

Sir John Stanley: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what duties were performed by the Defence Attaché in Accra and accredited also to Sierra Leone in 1997–98; [52027]

(2) what duties were performed by Colonel Andrew Gale whilst on service in West Africa. [52030]

Mr. George Robertson *[holding answer 23 July 1998]*: Lieutenant Colonel Gale was, from November 1994 until January 1998, Defence Adviser to the British High Commissioner in Accra, Ghana, with non-resident accreditation to Togo, Cote d'Ivoire and Sierra Leone. As Defence Adviser, his duties were to advise the Ambassador/High Commissioner on military matters, including on the security situation, and report information back to the MOD. Lt. Col. Gale spent most of his time working in Accra, but would have visited the other countries within his area of responsibility about twice each year.

Lt. Col. (local Colonel) Gale is currently serving in Sierra Leone, on secondment to the United Nations, as the Military Adviser to the United Nations Secretary General's Special Representative.

Lieutenant Colonel Peter Hicks

Sir John Stanley: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what duties were performed by Lieutenant Colonel Peter Hicks whilst on service in West Africa; [52031]

(2) what duties were performed by the military intelligence liaison officer deployed to Conakry and Sierra Leone in 1998; [52028]

(3) what duties were performed by the military liaison officer deployed to Sierra Leone and Conakry in 1997. [52029]

Mr. George Robertson *[holding answer 23 July 1998]:* Major (local Lieutenant Colonel) Peter Hicks visited Sierra Leone for a short familiarisation visit, along with others from the MOD, from 3 to 8 March 1997. On 15 February 1998, Major Hicks deployed to Conakry, Guinea, as a military liaison officer in preparation for possible service in Sierra Leone should the democratically elected government be restored. He was transported, along with the British High Commissioner, to Freetown by HMS Cornwall on 5 March, and returned to the UK on 17 March. Major Hicks's duties in Conakry and Sierra Leone were to provide military advice to the High Commissioner, to liaise with other UK military personnel in the country and to report military information to the MOD. He subsequently visited Sierra Leone from 27 April to 8 May as a follow-up to his earlier period of service.

Asbestos

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what guidance his Department issues to those constructing buildings for which it is responsible on the use of materials containing asbestos. [52312]

Mr. Spellar: The use of asbestos materials is strictly controlled. Guidance is given in the extant Defence Estate Organisation (DEO) Technical Specification 036 "Heating, Hot and Cold Water, Steam and Gas Installations for Buildings" (October 1997), which clearly states that asbestos materials shall not be installed.

The DEO has issued a further Technical Bulletin, Design and Maintenance Guide 16, "Asbestos Based Materials" (April 1997), which details the mandatory requirements and procedures for handling asbestos.

New Deal

Mr. Healey: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many people his Department is committed to employing during 1998 under *(a)* the subsidised job option and *(b)* the unsubsidised job option of the New Deal programme. [52575]

Mr. Spellar: My Department is committed to making an appropriate contribution to the New Deal programme both on the Service and Civilian networks.

Although the Services are not committed to employing specific numbers of young people through the unsubsidised job option, they are working closely with New Deal personal advisers and Further Education Colleges to identify what self-development is required to make young people more confident and self reliant, and thus influencing their choice of career towards the Armed Forces. The Services are not employing young people through the subsidised job option.

On the Civilian side, New Deal opportunities are considered whenever recruitment campaigns are undertaken. Responsibility for recruitment is delegated to line management areas. We will be monitoring use of the scheme and expect details of the first 6 months to be available from October.

Biological Warfare

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what investigations his Department has conducted into whether information from the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment, Porton Down, was passed to the biological warfare programme organised by South Africa's former apartheid regime in the last 15 years; when this investigation was started and finished; what were the results of this investigation; what action has been taken in the light of this investigation; and if he will make a statement. [53158]

Mr. Spellar: We are aware of allegations that classified information from the Chemical and Biological Defence Sector of the Defence and Evaluation Research Agency at Porton Down was obtained by the former South African Government. These claims are being investigated. It is not our policy to comment on investigations in progress.

Trident

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what proportion of the overall procurement of Trident D5 missiles will act as a processing margin; [52133]

(2) how many Trident D5 missiles have been test fired to date; and what proportion of the overall numbers procured are expected to be test fired over the programme's life. [52134]

Mr. George Robertson *[holding answer 28 July 1998]:* To date, six Trident D5 missiles have been test fired as part of the work up of the three Vanguard class submarines currently in operational service. On current plans, a further eight missiles will be test fired over the life of the Trident programme. A further four missiles will constitute a processing margin.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if his Department will arrange inspections to demonstrate that 48 warheads per Trident submarine have now been deployed. [52135]

Mr. George Robertson *[holding answer 28 July 1998]:* The Government's decision in the Strategic Defence Review to reduce the number of Trident warheads deployed on RN nuclear submarines to 48 was based on our assessment of the minimum necessary UK deterrent force. In the absence of a wider arms control

context involving reciprocal obligations from other nuclear states we do not propose to initiate outside inspection to verify this self-imposed limit.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what will be the impact on the number of Trident D5 missiles normally carried on each of the Trident submarines in the operational cycle of the decision not to purchase more than 58 D5 missiles overall. [52132]

Mr. George Robertson *[holding answer 28 July 1998]:* The Strategic Defence Review concluded that the 58 Trident missiles already purchased are sufficient for credible deterrence over the lifetime of Trident. I am withholding details of the number of missiles carried on our Trident submarines on deterrent patrol under exemption 1 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what has been the minimum number of nuclear warheads deployed on each Trident submarine since HMS Vanguard entered service. [52815]

Mr. George Robertson: HMS Vanguard first deployed on patrol with slightly fewer than 60 warheads, prior to the Trident force also assuming a sub-strategic role. The other two Trident submarines currently in service have typically deployed on deterrent patrol with 60 warheads. I am withholding details of the numbers of warheads carried for the sub-strategic role under Exemption 1 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information relating to Defence, Security and International relations.

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence on how many occasions since HMS Vanguard entered service more than 65 warheads were deployed on a Trident submarine at sea. [52814]

Mr. George Robertson: None.

Mr. Savidge: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what progress has been made in discussions with the United States of America on the decision not to proceed with the United Kingdom's planned final Trident missile purchase. [54813]

Mr. George Robertson: Our decision not to proceed with the planned final Trident missile body buy will have implications for the UK/US procurement programme and the long term Trident support arrangements of both countries. We have, therefore, agreed with the United States that, to safeguard production capabilities, we will continue with the planned procurement of missile components. Some of these will be required by the UK as in-service spares; the remainder we will sell back to the United States in future years for use in their continuing production programme. This arrangement has been enshrined in a Memorandum of Understanding that the Deputy Secretary for Defence and I have signed.

Overall our decision to maintain our Trident missile inventory at 58, rather than increasing it to 65 as previously planned, will require the write off of surplus expenditure to the value of some £40 million, over half of which results from advance commitments to the final buy by the previous Government. Our decision is expected to save in the region of £50 million.

Permanent Under-Secretary

Mr. Keith Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if an open competition was held for the appointment of his Department's Permanent Under-Secretary. [52801]

Mr. George Robertson *[holding answer 28 July 1998]:* No. There was, however, internal competition across Government Departments to select a new Permanent Under-Secretary in my Department.

Accommodation

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many residential dwellings are owned by his Department; how many are currently vacant; and what has been the average length of time they have been vacant. [53910]

Mr. Spellar: As at 30 June 1998, the Ministry of Defence either owned or leased, mainly from Annington Homes, 67,463 family dwellings in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, of which 13,922 are currently vacant. Information on the average length of time a property has been vacant is not available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. Additionally, between 260 and 300 houses are managed by Commands for civilian occupancy but vacancy rates are not held centrally.

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many service families are accommodated in privately owned homes; and what is the average annual rent of these properties. [53911]

Mr. Spellar: The number of Service families accommodated in privately owned rental properties in England, Scotland and Wales is 914. The approximate average annual rent for this type of property is £9,500. The figures exclude houses leased by MOD from Annington Homes.

Surplus Property

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what steps are being take by his Department to implement the National Audit Office's recommendation in paragraph 3.16 of its report identifying and selling surplus property (HC 776, session 1997–98) regarding the timetable for completing the land quality assessments of major sites; and if he will make a statement. [53378]

Mr. Spellar: As the Report says, the Ministry of Defence has set in train a programme of Land Quality Assessments and intends to complete assessments of all major sites within 10 years. We are reviewing the scope for reducing the timetable and shall consider any recommendation the Public Accounts Committee might make on the matter following its investigation.

Defence Council

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 7 May 1998, *Official Report*, column *437*, if he will place in the Library a list of the items discussed at each of the meetings of the Defence Council since 1 August 1997. [53374]

Mr. George Robertson: The items discussed at the Defence Council meetings held since 1 August 1997 are as follows:

Date	*Meeting*
24 September 1997	Strategic Defence Review
27 November 1997	Mid-year Performance Report
	NATO Command Structure Review
18 December 1997	Strategic Defence Review
26 January 1998	Long Term Costings 1998
23 February 1998	Strategic Defence Review
2 April 1998	Strategic Defence Review
	1998 Departmental Plan
20 July 1998	End of Year Performance Report
	Future Programme of Business for Defence Council Meetings

Performance Report

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects to publish the next edition of his Department's Performance Report. [53376]

Mr. George Robertson: I expect the Ministry of Defence's Departmental Performance Report for 1997–98 to be published in the Autumn.

Chiefs of Staff

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence on what dates the Chiefs of Staff have met since 1 January. [53373]

Mr. George Robertson: Since 1 January 1998, the Chiefs of Staff have met on the following dates:

15 January 1998
27 January 1998
10 February 1998
17 February 1998
24 February 1998
10 March 1998
31 March 1998
28 April 1998
13 May 1998
10 June 1998
23 June 1998
7 July 1998
21 July 1998

Nuclear Stocks

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the stocks of tritium currently held by his Department. [51683]

Mr. Spellar: No. To reveal such information would be contrary to national defence and security interests. I am therefore withholding details under Exemption 1 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if the stock of plutonium and highly enriched uranium listed in the Strategic Defence Review included the armoury currently located in operational nuclear weapons. [51684]

Mr. Spellar: The details of defence stocks of plutonium and highly enriched uranium published in the Strategic Defence Review included material in our nuclear weapons and nuclear submarine reactors.

Task Forces

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the taskforces and advisory groups composed of independent members which have been set up by his Department since 1 May 1997 and in each case *(a)* their remit, *(b)* their membership, *(c)* how many members are (i) scientists, (ii) engineers and (iii) small business people or representatives of small businesses, *(d)* any remuneration members receive for their services and *(e)* their budget. [53147]

Mr. Spellar: I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Employees Over 60

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many *(a)* men and *(b)* women aged over 60 years were employed by (i) his Department and (ii) his Department's agencies on 1 January. [53064]

Mr. Spellar: The numbers of staff aged over 60 years employed by the Ministry of Defence at 1 January 1998, excluding those employed by MOD agencies, were 2,212 men and 617 women. The numbers aged over 60 employed by MOD agencies at 1 January 1998 were 2,442 men and 467 women.

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many *(a)* men and *(b)* women employed by (1) his Department and (2) his Department's agencies have contracts of employment which permit them to retire after their 60th birthday. [53058]

Mr. Spellar: Civil servants have no formal contract of employment. However, under the Principal Civil Service Pension Scheme civil servants have an entitlement to retire at age 60, which is the earliest age at which they may receive their full accrued pension benefits. Notwithstanding the entitlement to retire at 60, MOD policy prescribes normal retirement ages for each grade, based on the employment needs of the Department. This gives staff in particular grades an expectation to retire at an age beyond their 60th birthday, if they choose to do so.

The numbers of staff employed by the MOD who have an expectation to retire after their 60th birthday, excluding those employed by MOD agencies, on 1 January 1998 were 17,592 men and 12,937 women. The numbers of staff employed by the MOD agencies on 1 January 1998 who have an expectation to retire after their 60th birthday, were 21,480 men and 11,320 women.

Royal Navy Careers CD-ROM

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will assess the advantages of introducing a similar package to the Royal Navy Careers CD-ROM for all the armed forces. [53801]

Mr. Doug Henderson: I will write to my hon. Friend and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Recruiting Shortages

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what new initiatives he is taking to address the shortage of recruits in the Army [53802]

Mr. Doug Henderson: I will write to my hon. Friend and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

RAF (Recruitment)

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what new initiatives he is taking to increase the number of recruits to the RAF. [53803]

Mr. Doug Henderson: I will write to my hon. Friend and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Enhanced Surveillance Radar

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the Enhanced Surveillance Radar recently developed at the Defence Evaluation Research Agency; and what plans he has to use this technology in the armed forces. [53806]

Mr. Spellar: The Enhanced Surveillance Radar, ESR, has been designed by the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency and built by GEC Marconi Avionics. It is an airborne surveillance radar and has been developed to meet the needs of a number of military research and development programmes for high-quality, high-resolution, radar data and also for in-flight, real time demonstration of new radar techniques. Currently undergoing commissioning trials, it is envisaged that the ESR will support MoD work on the Airborne Stand Off Radar, ASTOR, programme.

Welsh Language Scheme

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence on what date his Department received notification from the Welsh Language Board in relation to the need to prepare a Welsh language scheme; on what date his Department and the Board held consultations on such a scheme; when a scheme was formally submitted to the Board; and if it has been approved. [53349]

Mr. Spellar: The Welsh Language Board wrote on 1 May 1998 inviting my Department to prepare a Welsh language scheme. My officials have held discussions with the Board on a number of occasions, and once a draft of the scheme is finalised, we will hold a period of public consultation. The scheme will be submitted to the Welsh Language Board by 31 March 1999 for approval.

Overseas Visits

Mr. Wilshire: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list those who have accompanied (i) him and (ii) his departmental Ministers on overseas visits since 1 January indicating *(a)* the venue of the visit, *(b)* the purpose of the visit, *(c)* the names of those involved, *(d)* the job of those involved, *(e)* the reasons why they were included in the visit and *(f)* the cost to public funds. [53843]

Mr. Doug Henderson: I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Gulf Veterans

Mr. Frank Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when a new Head of the Gulf Veteran's Medical Assessment Programme will be appointed. [54620]

Mr. Doug Henderson: Following an open competition we have now appointed Professor Harry Lee to be the Head of the Gulf Veterans' Medical Assessment Programme (MAP). Professor Lee has had a distinguished medical and academic career specialising in general medicine, renal medicine and infectious diseases. He is scheduled to take up his post at the MAP on 1 September.

Defence Housing Executive

Mr. Ernie Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement about Defence Agency status for the Defence Housing Executive. [54872]

Mr. Spellar: Currently, the responsibility for managing, allocating and maintaining suitable housing for the families of Service personnel posted within Great Britain lies with the Defence Housing Executive. The Department owns or leases some 64,000 houses across the country which are controlled by the DHE staff of some 1,200 through a network of 24 Area offices, 7 Regional offices and one Headquarters office.

A "prior options" study is being undertaken to establish whether Agency status or other options would be appropriate. I should welcome comments from interested parties. These should be sent to:

Air Marshal Sir Peter Squire KCB DFC AFC RAF
Deputy Chief of the Defence Staff (Programmes and Personnel)
Ministry of Defence
Room 5327
Main Building
Whitehall
London
SW1A 2HB.

Soldiers (Scotland)

Mr. Jim Murphy: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many soldiers are currently based in Scotland; and what was the *(a)* lowest and *(b)* highest level in the past five years. [53279]

Mr. Doug Henderson: On 1 June 1998, the total number of regular Army officers and soldiers, including trainees, assigned to units based in Scotland was 3,433.

Comparable strength figures for the last five years are available only in respect of 1 July, and are given in the table:

Year	*Strength*
1 July 1997	2,953
1 July 1996	3,453
1 July 1995	2,587
1 July 1994	3,444
1 July 1993	3,163

The continual movement of Army units and personnel means that the total Army presence in Scotland fluctuates throughout each year. I regret, therefore, that a more detailed breakdown of figures could be provided only at disproportionate cost and effort.

Asset Sales

Mr. Keith Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the one-off departmental asset sales, with cash values, which will offset the reduction of defence expenditure from £915 million to £685 million by 2002. [50961]

Mr. Spellar *[holding answer 17 July 1998]:* I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence to the hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Mr. Maples) on 23 July 1998, *Official Report*, column *605*.

Defence Projects

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what defence projects are currently being undertaken with the Government of *(a)* Belgium, *(b)* France, *(c)* Germany, *(d)* Italy, *(e)* Spain and *(f)* the United States of America; what are their durations; what are their total costs; and what percentage of work on the current defence projects being carried out with each Government takes place within the United Kingdom. [51929]

Mr. Spellar: I will write to the hon. Member with such information as is available and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Warheads

Mr. Alan Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on progress to date in dismantling WE177 and Chevaline warheads. [52179]

Mr. George Robertson: 97 per cent. of WE 177 warheads have now been dismantled and the programme will be completed by the end of August 1998. Chevaline warhead dismantlement has not started yet and will do so once the WE 177 dismantlement programme has been completed.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence on what date the *(a)* WE177 and *(b)* Chevaline warhead dismantling programme is expected to be completed. [52250]

Mr. George Robertson: 97 per cent. of WE177 warheads have now been dismantled and the programme will be completed by the end of August 1998.

With regard to Chevaline warheads, I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Truro and St. Austell (Mr. Taylor) on 7 May 1998, *Official Report*, columns *436–37*.

Agency Newsletters

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what are the current security classifications of the newsletters produced for the staff of *(a)* the Medical Supplies Agency, *(b)* the Naval Training and Recruiting Agency, *(c)* the Defence Secondary Care Agency, *(d)* the Meteorological Office and *(e)* the Defence Intelligence Staff; how often each newsletter is produced; and when each newsletter was first produced. [53380]

Mr. Spellar: Where these matters fall to the Chief Executives of the Agencies concerned. I have asked them to write direct to the hon. Member.

The Defence Intelligence Staff publishes three staff newsletters. "The Mole" is published monthly for its Headquarters staff in London, at a Restricted security classification, and was first produced in July 1997. "Compass" is published monthly for the staff of the Military Survey Agency, is unclassified, and was first produced in June 1996. "Lynx" is published quarterly for the staff of the Joint Air Reconnaissance Intelligence Centre, is unclassified, and was first published in Autumn 1996.

Letter from John Chadwick to Mr. Matthew Taylor, dated 30 July 1998:

I am replying to your Question to the Secretary of State for Defence about the newsletters produced for the staff of the Naval Recruiting and Training Agency (NRTA) in my capacity as Chief Executive of the NRTA.

I have to advise you that no regular newsletter is currently produced for the staff of my Agency.

Letter from Major General C. G. Callow to Mr. Matthew Taylor, dated 30 July 1998:

AGENCY NEWSLETTERS

1. I am replying to your letter to the Secretary of State for Defence about Agency Newsletters as this matter, in respect of my Agency, falls within my area of responsibility as Chief Executive of the Defence Secondary Care Agency (DSCA).

2. The DSCA staff magazine is an unclassified publication that is published quarterly. It was first produced in a limited format in December 1995 for those staff already working in the Defence Medical Services who were to become part of the DSCA when it launched in April 1996.

Letter from Peter Ewins to Mr. Matthew Taylor dated 30 July 1998:

I am replying to your Question to the Secretary of State for Defence regarding what are the current security classifications of the newsletters produced for the staff of the Meteorological Office; how often each newsletter is produced; and when each newsletter was first produced. The information you require is as follows:

Name	*Classification*	*How often*	*First Produced*
Mercury	Unclassified	11 per year	November 1985
Comet	Unclassified	Weekly	January 1996

Mercury contains articles, information and letters covering a wide range of topics of interest to our staff. *Comet* brings together our administrative instructions plus staff items such as Job Opportunities within The Met. Office and other government departments.

Letter from B. E. Nimick to Mr. Matthew Taylor, dated 30 July 1998:

I am replying to your Question to the Secretary of State for Defence about the Medical Supplies Agency newsletters, as this matter falls within my area of responsibility as Chief Executive of the Medical Supplies Agency.

Within the Agency there are two types of newsletter. The first is intended for distribution to all regular customers of the Medical Supplies Agency. This Newsletter is used to inform customers about our procedures, supply problems and general information relating to medical supply.

The second type of newsletter is a Core Brief. This is distributed to managers at the Agency Headquarters and Agency Distribution Centres, for dissemination to all staff. The Core Brief informs all Agency staff of future plans, target and progress.

The current security classification of the Newsletter and Core Brief is unclassified.

Our Newsletter is produced approximately every four months with the first issue being made in May 1997.

The Core Brief is produced once every two to three months with the first issue being produced in November 1996.

Fibre Optic Tank Camouflage

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the timescale for the introduction of fibre optic camouflage on tanks. [53807]

Mr. Spellar: We have no current plans to apply fibre optic camouflage to tanks.

NETMA

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the proposed partnership with Norway in the inter-Governmental buying agency NETMA. [53800]

Mr. Spellar: NETMA, the NATO Eurofighter and Tornado Management Agency, represents the interests of the Governments participating in these collaborative programmes. Norway has a requirement to replace her F5 aircraft and is currently evaluating Eurofighter and F16 as possible replacements. Norway may wish to participate in the Eurofighter programme by becoming a member of the NATO Agency. It is for Norway to decide what best meets her requirements.

Shoeburyness Ranges

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 27 July 1998, *Official Report*, column *39*, what factors led him to exclude the income from the ETC and the demilitarisation facility in his calculation of the income accruing to the ranges at Shoeburyness; and if he will make a statement. [53822]

Mr. Spellar: The income from the ETC and the demilitarisation facility were shown separately so that a direct comparison of the income achieved by the range at Shoeburyness could be made with the income achieved by the other ranges. Similarly, the income from the operation of airfield was not included in the West Freugh income.

The income achieved by the ETC and the demilitarisation facility is not income achieved by the Shoeburyness range, but is income achieved at the Shoeburyness site.

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he intends to make a decision on the proposed transfer of work from Shoeburyness to Eskmeals. [53824]

Mr. Spellar: We expect to make a decision shortly.

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the total income accruing to the Shoeburyness and Eskmeals ranges in respect of all income raising activities in each of the past five years and separately identifying that part of the site income which stems from the strategic pricing initiative. [53823]

Mr. Spellar: The total income accruing to the Shoeburyness and Eskmeals ranges in respect of all income raising activities in each of the previous three years is as follows:

£000

	Shoeburyness	*Eskmeals*
1995–96	25,603	5,365
1996–97	17,834	5,180
1997–98	20,896	8,759

Information on a comparable basis prior to the inclusion of the ranges in the Trading Agency in 1995 is not available.

The income accruing to the Shoeburyness and Eskmeals ranges in respect of the Strategic Pricing Initiative which operated for 1997–98, and is included in the above figures, was as follows:

£000

	1997–98
Shoeburyness	6,244
Eskmeals	600

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 27 July 1998, *Official Report*, column *39*, for what reasons in his summary of the income accruing to the various ranges, he included in note 1 the SPI total of £600,000 within the income of the Eskmeals range and in note 3 deducted the SPI total of £6,244,000 from the total income of the Shoeburyness establishment; and if he will make a statement. [53821]

Mr. Spellar: The reported income for the Eskmeals range of £8.759K included the Strategic Pricing Initiative, SPI, support of £600K as this was for a specific facility within the range.

The reported income for the Shoeburyness range of £14,223K was reported net of the contribution from the SPI, as the support payment contributed to the costs of the Shoeburyness site which includes the Environmental Test Centre and the demilitarisation facility as well as the range.

Agency Savings

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what savings he estimates will accrue from the creation of *(a)* the Defence Transport and Movements Agency and *(b)* the Defence Storage and Distribution Agency. [53805]

Mr. Spellar: We estimate that the creation of the Defence Transport and Movements Agency will save £5.014 million over a ten-year period. The creation of the Defence Storage and Distribution Agency (Non-Explosive) will result in estimated savings of £62.1 million over the same period, with further estimated savings of £4.1 million as a result of the incorporation of storage and distribution activity for all explosive items into a division of the Naval Bases and Supply Agency.

Non-Departmental Public Bodies

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the non-departmental public bodies in existence on 1 May 1997 that *(a)* have been disbanded, *(b)* will be disbanded in the next 12 months, *(c)* have had their functions transferred to (i) another non-departmental public body and (ii) a democratically elected body, *(d)* have been renamed but continue to perform a similar role and *(e)* have been unchanged; if he will indicate in (c) (ii) the relevant successor body; what new non-departmental public bodies have been established since 1 May 1997; and how many non-departmental public bodies his Department currently is responsible for. [53855]

Mr. Spellar: The Ministry of Defence had seventeen Non Departmental Public Bodies on 1 May 1997, and the same seventeen currently remain unchanged as NDPBs. None has been disbanded, and there are no current plans for any to be disbanded in the next 12 months; none has had its functions transferred and none has been renamed while continuing to perform the same role. The Royal College of Defence Studies Advisory Board and the Royal Military College of Science Advisory Council are, however, currently having their status as NDPBs re-examined. MOD's NDPBs are as follows:

Fleet Air Arm Museum

Royal Naval Museum

Royal Marines Museum

Royal Naval Submarine Museum

National Army Museum

Royal Air Force Museum

Oil and Pipelines Agency

Advisory Committee on Conscientious Objectors

Dartmoor Steering Group and Working Party

Defence Scientific Advisory Council and Committees

Independent Board of Visitors for the Military Corrective Training Centre

National Employer Liaison Committee

Nuclear Powered Warships Safety Committee

Nuclear Weapons Safety Committee

Review Board for Government Contracts

Royal College of Defence Studies Advisory Board

Royal Military College of Science Advisory Council.

Defence Intelligence Service

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the impact of partial privatisation of the Defence Intelligence Service on security. [53804]

Mr. George Robertson: The statement of requirements issued to companies bidding to provide support services to the Defence Intelligence Service under Public/Private partnership arrangements stipulated in detail the security criteria to be met. These are no less stringent than those applying to staff and contractors already working in the organisation. Compliance with these requirements will be a contractual condition and will be carefully monitored.

Plutonium Discharges (Aldermaston)

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what unplanned discharges of plutonium took place from Aldermaston in December 1997; with what consequences; and if he will make a statement. [53432]

Mr. Spellar: There were no unplanned discharges of plutonium from AWE Aldermaston in December 1997.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Departmental Reviews

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will list the reviews her Department, and its predecessor, initiated in the years *(a)* 1974–75, *(b)* 1979–80 and *(c)* 1992–93. [48525]

Mr. Foulkes *[holding answer 6 July 1998]:* In 1992–93 the Overseas Development Administration published the following reports: "Review of the factors influencing the uptake and impact of ODA-supported renewable natural resource research projects", "Review of agricultural research supported by ODA (Natural Resources and Environment Department) during the period 1988–1991: report of the review panel meeting held at Sevenoaks, Kent January 1992".

I regret that information requested for 1974–75 and 1979–80 is not held centrally and could be collected only at disproportionate cost.

Fiji

Mr. Öpik: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development (1) what assistance her Department has provided to Fiji in terms of *(a)* healthcare provision, *(b)* education facilities and *(c)* information technology in the last five years; and if she will make a statement; [52053]

(2) what projects her Department has sponsored in Fiji over the last five years; and if she will make a statement. [52054]

Mr. Foulkes: I will write to the hon. Gentleman with details of activities in Fiji funded over the past five years. British development assistance to the Pacific island countries is now provided from a single budget under a regional allocation rather than individual country programmes. The emphasis is upon two key sectors—education and rights and good governance—with particular emphasis upon three least-developed partner countries (Kiribati, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu), with assistance also to regional organisations and institutions.

Refugees

Mr. Streeter: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assessment she has made of access for aid agencies to refugees along the Guinea-Sierra Leone border. [52470]

Mr. Foulkes *[holding answer 27 July 1998]:* The Department for International Development makes regular assessments of access for aid agencies to refugees in this area in conjunction with the Office for Coordination

of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) and non-governmental organisations.

There were problems of access for a period of four weeks during June and July, but from a recent OXFAM assessment and from NGOs working in the camps it is reported that there were sufficient food supplies available during this period. We understand that a humanitarian aid corridor has now been opened, with effect from 11 July.

Information Technology

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how much her Department spent on IT, itemising *(a)* personal computers, *(b)* main-frame, *(c)* mini-computers and *(d)* file servers in the last year for which figures are available. [52891]

Mr. Foulkes: The amounts spent by DFID on IT during 1997–98 were as follows:

IT: £2,056,598

including, inter alia:

(a) Personal computers: £126,421

(b) Main-frame: £0

(c) Mini-computers: £802,879

(d) File servers: £93,136.

Indonesia

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, pursuant to the answer of the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs of 6 June 1995, *Official Report*, column *37*, and the answer of the President of the Board of Trade on 15 June 1998, *Official Report*, column *98*, in relation to the Cikampek to Padalarang toll road project in Indonesia, what expenditure has been *(a)* allocated and *(b)* incurred by her Department to date; what impact assessment has been made of the delay to the project on the effectiveness of her Department's support for the project; and if she will place in the Library copies of the project appraisal, monitoring and evaluation reports to date. [52900]

Clare Short: I will write to my hon. Friend.

Departmental Research

Mr. Fabricant: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will list the cost of all research undertaken by her Department since May 1997, excluding the cost of green papers and other public consultation documents drafted by her officials; and if she will list in each case the organisations which undertook that research. [52709]

Mr. Foulkes: The term research covers a wide range of activities from scientific and engineering research through to consultancies and public opinion surveys. The information requested is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Non-departmental Public Bodies

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will list the non-departmental public bodies in existence on 1 May 1997 that *(a)* have been disbanded, *(b)* will be disbanded in the next 12 months, *(c)* have had their functions transferred to (i) another non-departmental public body and (ii) a democratically elected body, *(d)* have been renamed but continue to perform a similar role and *(e)* have been unchanged; if she will indicate in (c) (ii) the relevant successor body; what new non-departmental public bodies have been established since 1 May 1997; and how many non-departmental public bodies her Department currently is responsible for. [53861]

Mr. Foulkes: The information requested is as follows:

(a) None

(b)(i) The Crown Agents Holding and Realisation Board will be wound up within the next year.

(ii) Subject to passage of the necessary legislation, it is intended that the Commonwealth Development Corporation will be transformed from a public corporation into a company governed by the Companies Act.

(c) None

(d) None

(e) Commonwealth Scholarships Commission

Advisory Committee on Overseas Economic and Social Research

Know-How Fund Advisory Board

Overseas Service Pensions Scheme Advisory Board

India Family Pension Funds Body of Commissioners.

Since 1 May 1997, we have established one new advisory body, namely the Development Awareness Working Group. The Department is currently responsible for eight non-departmental public bodies in total.

Task Forces

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will list the task forces and advisory groups composed of independent members which have been set up by her Department since 1 May 1997, indicating in each case *(a)* their remit, *(b)* their membership, *(c)* how many members are (i) scientists, (ii) engineers, (iii) small business people or representatives of small businesses, *(d)* any remuneration members receive for their services and *(e)* their budget. [53287]

Mr. Foulkes: We established earlier this year a Development Awareness Working Group, whose terms of reference are as follows:

The Development Awareness Working Group will advise DFID on the development and implementation of its strategy on development awareness.

Specifically it will consider:

The relative priority of different target groups and organisations including schools, colleges, providers of adult education, development education groups or centres, employers and trade unions.

Key themes and messages.

The most effective materials and channels for communication.

How to measure progress in improving public awareness of development issues.

How to ensure proper coverage of different parts of the UK, as well as ethnic and religious groups.

How to set DFID activities in the context of wider UK activity on development awareness and to ensure coherence with other Government sponsored or funded activity.

The current membership of the Group is:

George Foulkes, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State

Professor Tim Brighouse

Ms Libby Grundy

Mr. Stephen McCloskey
Mr. John Sutton
Mr. Doug Bourn
Mr. Ashok Ohri
Mr. Tony Robinson
Mr. David Mackenzie
Mr. Scott Sinclair
Mr. Tom Wylie
Ms Bisi Adeleye Fayemi
Mr. Dan Rees
Ms Judith Hemery
Ms Jaya Graves
Mr. John Fisher
Ms Jane Nelson
Mr. Derek Walker
Dr. Kim Howells MP
Ms Tany Alexander
Ms Liz Cumberbatch
Ms Elenid Jones
Mr. Jon Snow
Mr. Phil Hope MP
Mr. Paddy Coulter.

Members are drawn from a range of backgrounds including formal and informal education, the media, churches, business, non-governmental organisations, youth groups and different ethnic groups. We do not have detailed information on the background of all members. However, none has been appointed specifically because of having a background in science, engineering or small business. Members of the group receive no remuneration other than travel and subsistence costs and do not control any budgets.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

EU Agricultural Subsidies

3. **Mr. Fabricant:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he next plans to meet his counterparts in Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic to discuss European Union agricultural subsidies; and if he will make a statement. [51687]

Mr. Nick Brown: The Department maintains regular contacts with representatives of all the countries which are candidates for EU accession. I hope to meet my counterparts in Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic in due course.

Flax

9. **Mr. Flynn:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what new proposals he has to increase the cultivation of flax. [51696]

Mr. Morley: Farmers who grow flax already benefit from generous support under the CAP. The key to encouraging its use is for the industry to develop new markets.

Farm Incomes

10. **Mr. Ian Bruce:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is his latest forecast of the trends in farm incomes; and what assessment he has made of the impact of the comprehensive spending review on them. [51697]

22. **Mr. Evans:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what representations he has received on the level of farm incomes in 1998–99. [51709]

Mr. Rooker: Farm income has been a matter of concern for everyone in the industry. It has therefore been raised in numerous meetings and in correspondence.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what representations he has received on farm incomes over the last 12 months. [51690]

Mr. Nick Brown: The issue of farm incomes is frequently raised. The economic circumstances of farm businesses are monitored regularly and published by the Department. Future trends are difficult to predict, but it is likely that incomes will be depressed in 1998. They are unlikely to be affected by the Comprehensive Spending Review.

Food Standards Agency

11. **Mr. Ben Chapman:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on progress towards the establishment of the Food Standards Agency. [51698]

Mr. Nick Brown: We are making good progress towards the establishment of a Food Standards Agency and intend to publish a draft Bill for consultation soon. Meanwhile, my Department and the Department of Health are working closely together to deliver an open and effective food safety policy.

17. **Dr. Gibson:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what research funding will be provided to support the Food Standards Agency. [51704]

Mr. Rooker: The Agency will take over responsibility for the existing programme of research on food safety and standards currently funded by MAFF and the Department of Health. The precise sum to be transferred to the Agency is yet to be determined.

27. **Miss McIntosh:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what recent representations his Department has received from farmers on the proposed Foods Standards Agency. [51714]

Mr. Rooker: A number of organisations representing farmers' interests commented on the Food Standards Agency White Paper. Copies of all the responses are available in the Library of the House.

Exchange Rates

12. **Mr. Gill:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what representations he has received from farmers' organisations regarding current exchange rates. [51699]

Mr. Rooker: I have regular contacts with farming organisations who keep me informed of their views on a wide range of issues, including the effect of current exchange rates on the agricultural industry.

Bovine Tuberculosis

13. **Mr. Drew:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what plans he has to improve compensation payments to those farmers affected by bovine TB. [51700]

Mr. Rooker: The question of compensation for farmers with TB outbreaks will be considered in the light of decisions being taken by the Government on taking forward the recommendations in the Krebs report.

Fish Stocks

14. **Mr. Bill O'Brien:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what representations he has received on the future of fish stocks; and if he will make a statement. [51701]

Mr. Morley: There is widespread concern about the future of fish stocks, underlining the need for cautious management.

Agricultural Competitiveness

15. **Mr. Luff:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will assess the advantages of including in his departmental objectives the requirement for a competitive agricultural industry; and if he will make a statement. [51702]

Mr. Nick Brown: The development of a competitive, sustainable UK agriculture industry is in the interests of farmers and consumers alike. It is therefore entirely consistent with the increased emphasis we place on the needs of the consumer.

Genetically Modified Foods

16. **Mr. Steen:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will disseminate widely the list his Department is collating in respect of the known suppliers of genetically modified foods. [51703]

Mr. Rooker: I assume that the hon. Member is referring to the list of suppliers of non-genetically modified soya and maize that is freely available on the MAFF internet web pages. Details of genetically modified foods assessed as safe to market under the terms of the EC Novel Foods Regulations are published in press releases and in the annual reports of the Advisory Committee on Novel Foods and Processes.

20. **Mr. Alan Simpson:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what tests are being undertaken on the interactions between genetically modified crops and the range of currently available fertilisers and herbicides, and on their consequential effects upon *(a)* human health and *(b)* biodiversity. [51707]

Mr. Rooker: A wide range of data to assess the impact on human health and the environment is being generated from field trials in which genetically modified and conventional crops are grown under standard agronomic conditions. For herbicide tolerant crops this includes treatment with the herbicide to which they are tolerant and other herbicides.

21. **Mr. Colvin:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what recent representations he has received on genetically modified food. [51708]

Mr. Rooker: I have in the past few months received representations about genetically modified foods from a wide range of organisations and the general public, including consumer and environmental groups.

Common Agricultural Policy

18. **Mr. Forth:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement about the progress made on reform of the CAP in respect of the beef sector during the UK presidency of the EU. [51705]

Mr. Rooker: I am pleased to be able to tell the right hon. Member that good progress was achieved. We presided over the first substantial political discussion of the reform proposals and, by the end of the our presidency, officials had virtually completed the first technical read-through of the Commission's detailed proposals.

Agricultural Deficit

19. **Mr. Clifton-Brown:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what steps he is taking to reduce the trade deficit in agriculture over the next three years. [51706]

Mr. Morley: The Government support a range of measures to help the UK agriculture and food industries become more competitive at home and abroad.

Organic Farming

23. **Mr. David Taylor:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what resources he is allocating over the next three years to provide advice to farmers wishing to convert to organic production; and if he will make a statement. [51710]

Mr. Morley: Free advice, including a telephone help line and on-farm advisory visits, is available from the Organic Conversion Information Service (01179 227707), funded by the Ministry. I am considering the amounts to be made available to fund this service in the light of the comprehensive spending review.

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what decisions he has taken on the recommendations of the review of the organic aid scheme; and if he will make a statement. [54385]

Mr. Nick Brown: Since we came to office, we have been determined to encourage more farmers to convert to organic production. We have made more resources available for advice to help them and I am pleased to say that many more are realising the opportunities that organic farming can offer and seeking to convert. However, conversion has costs and the additional returns cannot be realised immediately.

More support is justified for farmers during the conversion period. Subject to the agreement of the European Commission, it is my intention to increase payment rates under the English scheme to those recommended in the review which we commissioned last year.

If organic farming is to become a mainstream option, it is important to encourage larger farms to convert. For this reason, I intend to go beyond the recommendations of that review and lift the 300 hectare limit on the area

which can qualify for aid. I will also be going beyond the recommendations of the review by making the annual payment at the end of the first quarter, thus helping farmers' cash flow at a difficult time.

Sustainable Fisheries

24. **Mr. Woodward:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is the Government's policy on sustainable fisheries; and if he will make a statement. [51711]

Mr. Morley: The Government's policy is to conserve fish stocks for future generations and secure a sustainable future for the sea fishing industry.

Animal Welfare

25. **Mr. Tipping:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what steps he has taken to achieve a welfare directive for farm animals across the EU. [51712]

Mr. Morley: I am delighted to confirm that, at the conclusion of our Presidency in June, we succeeded in obtaining agreement to a Directive which sets welfare standards for all species of farm animal across the EU.

Farm Diversification

26. **Mrs. Anne Campbell:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what plans he has to encourage farmers to diversify. [51713]

Mr. Morley: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply given to our hon. Friend the Member for Chorley (Mr. Hoyle) on 28 July 1998, *Official Report*, column *225*.

Fishing Vessels

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what progress has been made on the introduction of measures to ensure that all British-registered fishing vessels maintain a real economic link with United Kingdom populations dependent on fisheries and related industries. [54383]

Mr. Nick Brown: I am pleased to announce that, following on from the Prime Minister's exchange of letters with the President of the European Commission in June 1997, the Commission has now confirmed that our proposals for ensuring an economic link between UK flagged vessels and populations dependent on fisheries and related industries are compatible with Community law.

A new licence condition will be introduced with effect from 1 January 1999 requiring all vessels to demonstrate an economic link with the UK by one of the following means:

A. landing at least 50 per cent. by weight of the vessel's catch of quota stocks into the UK,

or

B. employing a crew of whom at least 50 per cent. are normally resident in a UK coastal area,

or

incurring a given level of operating expenditure in the UK for goods and services provided in UK coastal areas,

or

D. demonstrating an economic link by other means (including combinations of the above) providing sufficient benefit to populations dependent on fisheries and related industries.

A paper setting out the new economic link requirements has been deposited in the Library of the House. Fisheries Departments will be writing to industry shortly with further details concerning the introduction of the new arrangements.

Brewing Industry

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what initiatives he has taken to support the United Kingdom brewing industry. [52635]

Mr. Morley: By its nature, the UK brewing industry has a number of important interfaces with Government. MAFF works closely with the brewers, and with other Government Departments, to promote a successful and competitive industry, responsive to its particular role in society. The Ministry makes limited contributions to relevant research and development, and has recently supported an industry initiative to enhance perceptions of the opportunities afforded by a career in the licensed retail trade. More widely, the Government have begun a comprehensive review of licensing law; and completed a review of alcohol and tobacco fraud, proposing a number of ways to protect the industry from fraud and smuggling.

Farmers (Marketing Schemes)

Mr. Paice: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list each current United Kingdom and EU scheme which will provide assistance to farmers in setting up marketing schemes together with the total sum available for each scheme and the minimum and maximum figures for individual application where applicable. [52474]

Mr. Rooker *[holding answer 27 July 1998]:* I will write to the hon. Member with the information he has requested as soon as possible. It is necessary to draw together details of schemes administered by each Agricultural Department and it will take a little time to ensure that the reply is comprehensive.

Live Animal Exports

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what representations he has made to the European Commission in support of a Community-wide ban on the export of live horses for slaughter. [51380]

Mr. Morley: The Government do not consider it a realistic objective to persuade the European Commission to propose an EU-wide ban on the export of live horses for slaughter. We support the active enforcement, in all member states, of EU rules on the welfare of livestock in transit and at slaughter, and have argued for the same rules to be strictly applied when animals are exported from the EU to third countries. We will draw to the attention of the EU Commission specific complaints relating to the EU export of horses for slaughter.

Hedgerows

Mr. Drew: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what proposals he has to provide selective assistance for the maintenance and improvement of hedgerows. [52810]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 29 July 1998]:* Payments are available for the restoration of hedges and their subsequent maintenance under the Environmentally Sensitive Areas (ESA) and Countryside Stewardship Schemes in England. In certain ESAs, there are payments for positive maintenance of hedges.

Quarantine

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he plans to bring forward reforms to the quarantine regime; and if he will make a statement. [53681]

Mr. Rooker: Ministers await the report of the Advisory Group on Quarantine which we expect to be published very shortly, most probably during the Parliamentary summer recess. A full public consultation will then be held.

Welsh Language Scheme

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food on what date his Department received notification from the Welsh Language Board in relation to the need to prepare a Welsh language scheme; on what date his Department and the Board held consultations on such a scheme; when a scheme was formally submitted to the Board; and if it has been approved. [53356]

Mr. Rooker: The Welsh Language Board invited the Ministry on 15 December 1997 to prepare a Welsh language scheme. Consultations between MAFF officials and the Welsh Language Board predate this letter and officials met the Welsh Language Board on 5 June 1998. A draft scheme has been produced. The deadline for approval of the scheme is 31 December 1998.

Growth Promoters

Mr. Walter: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what proposals he has to impose a unilateral ban on the use of growth promoters licensed by the European Union under Directive 70/524. [53713]

Mr. Rooker: The Government have noted that the Agriculture Select Committee favours a ban on antibiotic growth promoters. The Committee's report has been drawn to the attention of the Veterinary Products Committee, who will advise the Government. Further advice is also expected from the Advisory Committee on the Microbiological Safety of Food. The Government will act in the light of the advice of their scientific committees.

Meat Imports

Mr. Walter: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what proportion of United Kingdom bacon consumption is of imported meat; and from which countries such imports originate. [53714]

Mr. Rooker: In 1997, the United Kingdom was 51 per cent. self-sufficient in bacon; the main countries of origin of imported products were Denmark and the Netherlands.

Mr. Walter: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what proportion of United Kingdom un-cured pork consumption is of imported meat; and from which countries those imports originate. [53716]

Mr. Rooker: In 1997, the United Kingdom was 106 per cent. self-sufficient in pork and was therefore a net exporter. Quantities of pork were imported from Denmark, the Netherlands, Ireland and France.

Timber

Mr. Gill: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what steps he is taking to eliminate dumping of foreign timber upon the United Kingdom market. [50817]

Mrs. Roche: I have been asked to reply.

It is the responsibility of the European Commission to investigate complaints by the EU industries concerned about allegedly dumped imports into the EU. I am not aware of a complaint to the European Commission about the dumping of foreign timber.

Vitamin B6

Mr. Ian Stewart: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if the Government have yet reached a decision on their proposed controls on vitamin B6. [54810]

Mr. Nick Brown: The Government have now completed their consideration of the responses to the consultation exercise on the proposed controls on dietary supplements containing vitamin B6. Copies of the responses received have been deposited in the Library. We have also deposited copies of the responses received to the consultation by the Medicines Control Agency on its parallel proposals on controls on licensed medicines containing vitamin B6.

The Government have taken full account of the Agriculture Select Committee's report on vitamin B6 and have made their response today. (The decision on when and how this is published is a matter for the Committee).

The Government's assessment of the science remains that of the Committee on Toxicity of Chemicals in Food, Consumer Products and the Environment (COT) and our advice to the public will continue to reflect this. However, we accept that there is a case for delaying any action on vitamin B6 until the new Expert Group on Vitamins and Minerals has completed its consideration of the wider issue of the principles on which controls for ensuring the safety of vitamin and mineral supplements sold under food law can be based. This should take between eighteen months and two years. In view of this we have concluded that a decision on legislation on the level of vitamin B6 in dietary supplements should be deferred until after the Expert Group has produced its report.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Correspondence

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when she intends to reply to the letters to her dated 2 April, 15 May and 16 June from the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton, with regard to Mrs. H. Nasrin, 58 Clitheroe Road. [51463]

Mr. Denham: The delay in responding to my right hon. Friend's letters was very much regretted. Unfortunately, the Department did not receive a copy of my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary's reply to the letter regarding Mrs. Nasrin until 16 July 1998.

Mrs. Nasrin's case is a complex one. However, I hope to let my right hon. Friend have a full reply as soon as our investigations are complete.

Mr. Wilshire: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when he expects to reply to the letter from the hon. Member for Spelthorne, dated 16 May, concerning Mr. R. A. Weedon of Ashford, Middlesex, reference 3/3642/14. [53796]

Mr. Denham: A reply was sent to the hon. Member on 28 July.

Pensioners (Fuel Bills)

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to her oral statement of 17 July 1998, *Official Report*, columns 703–05, if she will estimate the respective contributions of *(a)* price reductions, *(b)* VAT reductions, *(c)* winter fuel payments and *(d)* other changes to the average lowering of pension fuel bills for single and for married pensioners (i) on income support and (ii) not on income support. [52034]

Mr. Denham: The information requested is set out in the table. Accurate consumption data are not available by type of pensioner.

Average fuel bill and estimated possible savings

	£
Fuel bill (combined electricity and gas)	614.50
Price and competition reductions	62.50
VAT reductions	17.00
Winter Fuel Payments (Income Support (IS))	50.00
Winter Fuel Payments (non-IS)	20.00
Total savings—Income Support	129.50
Total savings—non-Income Support	99.50

Notes:

1. Bills are based on average standard credit and VAT rates in force on 1 April of the financial year
2. Bills are calculated on standard consumption of 3,300 kWh for electricity and 18,000 kWh for gas
3. Price reductions include the new tariffs introduced by electricity companies in April 1998 as part of the new two year price restraints and new British Gas tariffs announced in January 1998
4. Price reductions include an estimate of a typical saving that would accrue to customers switching supplier for the 1998–99 financial year. Estimates of savings from switching supplier will vary case by case depending on when and to which supplier someone switches to
5. All figures are rounded to the nearest 50p

National Insurance

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what proportion of those of working age have never paid national insurance contributions. [52523]

Mr. Denham: The working age population is some 35,036,000. Departmental estimates show that 34,433,000 people, aged between 16 and state pension age in 1995/96, paid National Insurance contributions at some time between 1975/76 and 1995/96. However, an unknown number of these people are no longer included in the working population, because they have left the country.

For years before 1975/76 it is not possible to distinguish between contributions which were paid and those which were credited.

Sources:

Lifetime Labour Market Database

Population Estimates Unit.

Domestic Violence

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if she will evaluate the cost to her Department arising from violence within families; and if she will make a statement. [52442]

Mr. Denham: I refer the hon. Member to the written answer from my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary on Wednesday 29 July 1998, *Official Report*, column *258*.

Common Minimum Pension Age

Mr. Dawson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what estimate she has made of the net public expenditure cost for introducing a common minimum pension age of 60 years. [52912]

Mr. Denham: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave to him on 1 June 1998, *Official Report*, column *111*.

Welfare Provision

Mr. Love: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what role he intends for approved welfare providers in his plans for welfare reform; and if he will make a statement on their relationship to pension providers. [53251]

Mr. Denham: The Welfare Reform Green Paper, "New ambitions for our country: A New Contract for Welfare", proposed that the public and private sectors should work in partnership to make welfare provision. Such private-public partnerships are one of a range of possibilities currently being considered.

Employees Over 60

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many *(a)* men and *(b)* women aged over 60 years were employed by (i) his Department and (ii) his Department's agencies on 1 January. [53062]

Mr. Denham: The information requested is in the table.

Number of men and women employed by the department aged over 60 years on 1 January 1998

Business Unit	*Male*	*Female*
Benefits Agency	515	605
Contributions Agency	74	63
Child Support Agency	40	28
War Pensions Agency	17	18
ITSA	10	3
ISBs	14	8
DSS HQ	8	10
Total	678	735
Departmental Total	1,413	

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many *(a)* men and *(b)* women employed by (1) his Department and (2) his Department's agencies have contracts of employment which permit them to retire after their 60th birthday. [53043]

Mr. Denham: There are no staff currently employed within the Department who have contracts of employment which permit them to retire after their 60th birthday. However, the Permanent Secretary has discretion to retain staff beyond their 60th birthday, if they remain fully efficient and there is a need for their services.

Task Forces

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list the task forces and advisory groups composed of independent members which have been set up by his Department since 1 May 1997, indicating in each case *(a)* their remit, *(b)* their membership, *(c)* how many members are (i) scientists, (ii) engineers, (iii) small business people or representatives of small businesses, *(d)* any remuneration members receive for their services and *(e)* their budget. [53284]

Mr. Denham: The information requested is as follows:

Pension Provision Group

(a) To provide an independent analysis of the current state of pension provision in the United Kingdom and of likely future trends.

(b) Membership is drawn from pensions experts from outside the Government who come from a wide range of backgrounds and interests.

(c) None

(d) None

(e) None

Pensions Education Working Group

(a) To advise on the development of a longer term pensions awareness strategy; to establish and evaluate the telephone helpline experiment; work to develop free-standing initiatives and partnerships to implement their recommendations; to consider how to give consumers basic and comparable information in plain English on pension schemes and products.

(b) Representatives from the pensions industry, employer and employee organisations, consumer organisations, regulatory authorities and officials from various Government departments.

(c) None

(d) None

(e) None

Pension Sharing Consultation Panel

(a) To enable representatives from the key interest groups to work together with the Government to review proposals for the detailed operation of the policy.

(b) Representatives of the pensions industry, family lawyers, groups representing divorcing couples and officials from various Government Departments.

(c) None

(d) None

(e) None

Disability Benefits Forum

(a) To consider possible options for changes in the gateways to benefits for long-term sick and disabled people and carers, and how to ensure that help is directed to those who need it.

(b) Representatives from "umbrella" groups representing all areas of the disability lobby and groups representing significant numbers of disabled people. In addition, there are experts from the fields of local government and social policy as well as medical professionals with a range of expertise in the areas of long term illness and disability.

(c) None

(d) None

(e) None.

Benefits

Dr. Iddon: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) what factors underlay his decision to withdraw the offer of extra subsidy to local authorities to detect housing benefit fraud; [53277]

(2) if he will require retrospective introduction of weekly benefit savings for the 1997–98 financial year; [53274]

(3) what reasons subsidy to local authorities will be lost if housing benefit *(a)* ceases and *(b)* is reduced before a designated fraud officer becomes involved; [53272]

(4) what incentive he will provide for local authorities to detect housing benefit fraud; [53273]

(5) when he will reply to the Local Government Association representations on the Draft Weekly Benefit Savings Subsidy Guide. [53267]

Mr. Denham: This Government are committed to taking tough action against all benefit fraud including Housing Benefit. Significant incentives for local authorities to detect Housing Benefit fraud are already in place. A financial incentive scheme has been in operation since 1993 which rewards local authorities for good performance in detecting benefit fraud. Payments of additional subsidy to local authorities to reward them for their anti-fraud work has risen year on year (£5.9m in 1993–94 to £65.6m in 1997–98).

Recent National Audit Office and Audit Commission reports questioned the interpretation of the Subsidy Order by some local authorities when claiming additional subsidy for anti-fraud work. We have therefore made the criteria explicit in the 1998 Subsidy Order. To qualify for this additional subsidy authorities must show that benefit was reduced or stopped following investigation by a designated fraud officer. In each case they must show that benefit has been overpaid as a result of fraud or, in a case where benefit has not been put into payment, an attempt was made to claim fraudulently and this was prevented by their action.

The Department is still awaiting comments from the Local Government Association on the draft instructions on claiming weekly benefit savings. When received they will be considered and a reply issued as soon as possible. We have, however, already had the opportunity to consider some of the initial comments made by the Local Government Association and, as a result of this, the strengthened criteria for claiming fraud weekly benefit savings will not now be retrospective.

Benefit Fraud

Dr. Iddon: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security for what reasons housing benefit claims are to be classed as fraudulent based on the balance of probabilities. [53275]

Mr. Denham: This test has been the agreed basis for awarding additional subsidy payments since the anti-fraud incentive scheme was introduced in 1993. The criminal test would be unduly onerous for local authorities.

Dr. Iddon: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will permit local authority housing benefit officers to assess the possibility of malicious allegations before referring housing benefit fraud allegations to fraud teams. [53268]

Mr. Denham: Local authority housing officers are already free to do so.

Weekly Benefit Savings

Dr. Iddon: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if weekly benefit savings will be made available to local authorities whose tenants abandon properties. [53269]

Mr. Denham: It would not be appropriate to give local authorities additional subsidy for normal housing benefit administration activities.

Dr. Iddon: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will allow local authorities to secure abandoned properties to prevent vandalism before a fraud team investigates and for the weekly benefit saving to be protected until the investigation is concluded. [53270]

Mr. Denham: In these circumstances additional subsidy related to weekly benefit savings could be paid if, as a result of a fraud investigation, fraud was discovered and a suspended Housing Benefit claim was stopped.

Non Departmental Public Bodies

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list the non-departmental public bodies in existence on 1 May 1997 that *(a)* have been disbanded, *(b)* will be disbanded in the next 12 months, *(c)* have had their functions transferred to (i) another non-departmental public body and (ii) a democratically elected body, *(d)* have been renamed but continue to perform a similar role and *(e)* have been unchanged; if he will indicate in (c) (ii) the relevant successor body; what new non-departmental public bodies have been established since 1 May 1997; and how many non-departmental public bodies his Department currently is responsible for. [53858]

Mr. Denham: Of the 15 non-departmental public bodies (NDPBs) sponsored by the Department of Social Security on 1 May 1997 *(a)* none have been disbanded; *(b)* six will be disbanded during the second half of 1999; *(c)* none have had their functions transferred; *(d)* none have been renamed but continue to perform a similar role; and *(e)* 15 have been unchanged. Details of all other NDPBs in existence on 1 May 1997 sponsored by this Department are listed in "Public Bodies 1997".

No new NDPBs have been established since 1 May 1997 and this Department is currently responsible for 15 NDPBs.

The Government are committed to keeping the number of NDPBs to a minimum and to ensuring that those which remain are open, accountable and effective. Many of the new NDPBs established since 1 May will be essential in helping the Government deliver their Manifesto commitments.

New Deal (Disabled People)

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will provide a breakdown of the estimated expenditure of the £178 million budget for the New Deal for Disabled People which is not accounted for by funding of *(a)* innovative schemes and *(b)* personal advisers. [53891]

Mr. Denham: The New Deal for Disabled People is being funded with £195 million from the Windfall Tax, which will be used over the lifetime of the current Parliament. £5 million will fund a number of Innovative Schemes which will test new ways of helping disabled people into work, and the result of the first tranche of bids was announced on 16 July. A further £17 million (£5 million in 1998–99, and a further £12 million in 1999–2000) will be used to pilot a new Personal Adviser service for disabled people, initially in 12 areas, offering advice and support on an individual basis to disabled people who want to move towards work. Some funds will be made available for research and evaluation of the New Deal, and for publicity and information. Decisions about how the rest of the money will be spent will be made in the light of information provided by the Innovative Schemes and the Personal Adviser pilots.

Income Support

Mr. Rendel: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many pensioners in Scotland do not claim the income support to which they are entitled; and how many of those do not receive benefit payments to which they are entitled of between *(a)* £1 and £10, *(b)* £10 to £20, *(c)* £20 to £30, *(d)* £30 to £40, *(e)* £40 to £50 and *(f)* £50 and over. [53707]

Mr. Denham: There are estimated to be around 100,000 pensioners in Scotland who do not claim the Income Support to which they are entitled. Information

on the range of the amounts unclaimed by numbers of pensioners not claiming is not available in the form requested. Such information as is available is in the table.

Number of pensioners entitled to but not claiming income support in Scotland in 1995–96 by amount unclaimed

Amount unclaimed	*Number of pensioners*
£0-£9.99	50,000
£10-£19.99	30,000
£20 or more	20,000
Total	100,000

Notes:

1. Figures are rounded to the nearest ten thousand. The estimates are based on the 1995–96 Family Resources Survey and are almost certainly subject to some degree of error The highlighted estimates are based on particularly small sample sizes and should be treated with some caution
2. It has not been possible to provide the figures with the breakdowns requested because the sample sizes are too small
3. A pensioner, for Income Support purposes, is a single person aged 60 or over, or a couple (married or unmarried) where at least one of them is aged 60 or over

Lone Parents

Mr. Rendel: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many lone parents in Scotland had their benefit reduced as a result of the removal of the lone parent premium and lone parent rate of child benefit. [53738]

Mr. Denham: Recipients of the lone parent rates of family premium and child benefit at the date of removal will continue to receive the higher rates and will therefore suffer no reduction in benefit. There will be no cash losers. The estimate of the number of lone parents in Scotland at the end of 1998–99 who will have a lower level of benefit as a result of the changes is in the table.

Benefit	*Caseloads end 1998–99*
Income support	26,000
Housing benefit	5,000
Council tax benefit	4,000
Child benefit	9,000

Note:

1. Caseloads have been rounded to the nearest 1,000. Caseloads for the individual benefits cannot be added together because some cases will be affected by the changes to more than one benefit
2. Caseloads show the situation at the end of 1998–99. They do not include cases who have moved onto benefit after the changes but who have flowed off benefit before the end of 1998–99

Winter Fuel Payments

Mr. Rendel: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if the extension of the winter fuel payment scheme beyond next winter will include separate *(a)* £10, *(b)* £20 and *(c)* £50 payments per pensioner household depending on the rules of entitlement; and what will be the administration cost per payment. [53710]

Mr. Denham: Forming part of the £2.5 billion pensions package announced on 17 July 1998 *Official Report*, Column *704*, a further £0.5 billion has been allocated to extend the Winter Fuel payments scheme beyond next winter. From the winter of 1999–2000 all eligible pensioner households will receive £20.

The precise details of the extended scheme have yet to be determined, but it is expected to be similar to the existing provision which provides £20 to every eligible pensioner household not receiving Income Support. Under the existing provision, those who live alone, those who are the only eligible pensioner in a household, or are without accommodation receive a payment of £20. Otherwise, each eligible person receives a payment of £10, including each person in a couple where they are both entitled to a payment.

From April 1999, pensioners receiving Income Support will receive increased amounts of weekly benefit—three times the increase they would have got under the usual Income Support uprating rules. In addition, some pensioners with incomes at, or just slightly above, the current levels of Income Support will become entitled to Income Support.

We will also be introducing for the first time, a new delivery system to begin to help the estimated one million pensioners currently missing out on extra benefit they are entitled to.

Until the precise details of the Winter Fuel payment provision beyond next winter are determined and decisions are taken on the most appropriate and cost-effective delivery mechanisms it is not possible to establish the administration costs of each payment made.

Mr. McNulty: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when he expects to be able to announce the qualifying week for next winter's fuel payments; and when these payments will be made. [54886]

Mr. Denham: Amending regulations are presently being printed and should be laid before Parliament shortly.

We consider it important that pensioners should receive their Winter Fuel Payment in time to help towards the heaviest fuel bill when it arrives. Priority will also be given to the poorest.

Any pensioner receiving one of the qualifying benefits during the week beginning 9 November 1998 will be entitled to a payment. Using this qualifying week should enable payments of £50 to be made to the estimated 1.5 million eligible pensioners receiving Income Support or income-based Jobseeker's Allowance by the end of November and payments of £20 or £10 to the remaining 8.3 million eligible pensioners during January 1999.

The list of qualifying benefits has been extended to include all of the Industrial Injuries Benefits. This change aims to ensure everyone over state pension age receiving a Social Security benefit is entitled to a payment.

As announced by the then Secretary of State, my right hon. Friend the Member for Camberwell and Peckham (Ms Horman), Winter Fuel Payments will continue beyond next winter, with each eligible pensioner household getting £20.

Pensioners on Income Support will also benefit from an above inflation increase, from April 1999, which will ensure they have a minimum income of at least £75.50 per week for a single person. Couples and older pensioners will receive more.

Welsh Language Scheme

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security on what date his Department received

notification from the Welsh Language Board in relation to the need to prepare a Welsh language scheme; on what date his Department and the Board held consultations on such a scheme; when a scheme was formally submitted to the Board; and if it has been approved. [53351]

Mr. Denham: The Department of Social Security and its executive Agencies are individually responsible for preparation of a Welsh Language Scheme when requested by the Welsh Language Board.

The present position is summarised in the table.

Welsh Language Schemes

	Date notice received	*Public consultation period*	*Date submitted to board*	*Scheme approved*
Benefits Agency	20 December 1995	10 June 1996 to 9 August 1996	30 August 1996	20 September 1996
Child Support Agency	14 November 1995	11 December 1995 to 9 February 1996	22 February 1996	7 March 1996
Contributions Agency	18 April 1996	January to March 1997	30 October 1997	12 November 1997
DSS HQ	17 September 1997	August to September 1998	Due for submission October 1998	—
War Pensions	No notice issued	—	—	—
ITSA	No notice issued	—	—	—

Pensioners (Incomes)

Mr. Rendel: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many *(a)* single pensioners, *(b)* pensioner couples, *(c)* adults and *(d)* lone parents in (i) Scotland and (ii) the UK as a whole have an income less than half of average income. [54387]

Mr. Denham: The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is set out in the table.

Including the self-employed, the numbers of people living in households with incomes below half the Great Britain average are:

Thousand

	Before housing costs		*After housing costs*	
	Great Britain	*Scotland*	*Great Britain*	*Scotland*
Single pensioners	960	80	1,280	110
Pensioner couples	1,160	(100)	1,320	(110)
Adults	6,770	610	9,240	750
Lone parents	1,280	(190)	2,490	250

Source:
Households Below Average Income (HBAI)

Excluding the self-employed, the numbers of people living in households with incomes below half the Great Britain average, are:

Thousand

	Before housing costs		*After housing costs*	
	Great Britain	*Scotland*	*Great Britain*	*Scotland*
Single pensioners	880	(80)	1,050	(80)
Pensioner couples	1,020	(100)	1,170	(100)
Adults	5,390	510	7,600	630
Lone parents	1,050	(160)	2,310	240

Notes:
1. The data come from the Department's Households Below Average Income (HBAI) series, based on the Family Resources Survey (FRS) and covering Great Britain.
2. Figures are for 1995–96, the latest year for which data are available.
3. Figures in brackets relate to fewer than 100 families in the sample. Numbers are given to the nearest 10,000 but because they come from a sample survey they are not accurate to this degree. All results are subject to sampling error.
4. The income measure used is weekly net (disposable) equivalised income. The definition of income used follows that in the published HBAI series for FRS based results. The figures are given both before and after housing costs in line with usual HBAI practice. The figures may be sensitive to the choice of equivalence scale used.
5. The income measures for the self-employed are inherently uncertain. For this reason, results are presented both including and excluding the self-employed.
6. For all figures, half the Great Britain national average income has been used as a benchmark. Separate averages were used for the including and excluding self-employed measures.
7. A single pensioner is defined as a single adult of state pension age or over and a pensioner couple is defined as a couple, where the man is of state pension age or over.
8. The tables show the numbers of people in each cell. This means that, for example, 1,160,000 people living in pensioner couples, or 580,000 pensioner couples, in Great Britain have incomes less than half the national average before housing costs.

Source:
Households Below Average Income (HBAI).

Persistent Inquirers

Mr. Sanders: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security which of his Department's agencies have procedures to identify persistent inquirers for information. [53956]

Mr. Denham: I refer the hon. Member to the written answer given by my right hon. Friend the then Minister for Welfare Reform, on 19 May 1998, *Official Report*, column *358*.

Overseas Pensions

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what assessment he has made of the effect of the current exchange rate on overseas pensions. [54401]

Mr. Denham: Pensions and Overseas Benefits Directorate (POD) currently pays in excess of 800,000 customers in around 200 countries worldwide.

Various methods of payment are used to pay pensions abroad. Customers in 30 countries are paid by Credit Transfer in sterling. This is converted to local currency and paid directly to customers' bank accounts. Pensioners are offered a favourable rate of exchange due to the bulk buying of currency. They are not charged for this service.

Pensioners who do not receive their benefit by this method are paid in sterling and they are responsible for converting their payments to local currency.

The exchange rate is variable and subject to fluctuation. There are no provisions in legislation to allow adjustments to be made when variations occur between sterling and foreign currencies. POD monitors the exchange rates to ensure that customers continually receive a preferential rate when paid by Credit Transfer.

Incapacity Benefit

Mr. White: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what arrangements he is making for introducing the new linking rule for incapacity benefits and abolishing the 16 hour restriction on unpaid voluntary work. [54884]

Mr. Denham: The Government have a fourfold strategy for helping disabled people who want to work. We are providing the active help and encouragement people with disabilities need to move into work under the New Deal for Disabled People; removing obstacles to work from the benefits system; making sure that work pays; and promoting radical change in the workplace to ensure equality and opportunity.

We intend that the regulations introducing the new 52 week linking rule, and removing the 16 hour restriction on unpaid voluntary work, will be made in late August or early September, and will come into force from 5 October 1998 as announced in the Budget and our Green Paper "New ambitions for our country: A New Contract For Welfare" (Cm 3805). These regulations will help to remove some of the risks disabled people face from a return to work and reclaiming benefit.

The new linking rule will provide a period of 52 weeks following a return to work in which periods of entitlement to benefit on the grounds of incapacity can be linked. The rule will apply to people who leave benefit voluntarily having been incapable of work for at least 28 weeks.

The linking rule will protect a person's access to a number of the longer-term benefit rates that are payable to people who are incapable of work—for example: the short-term (higher) and long-term rates of incapacity benefit; Severe Disablement Allowance; access to the Disability Premium payable in Income Support/Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit; and Income Support mortgage interest payments. The rules will also give protection to Income Support and Jobseeker's Allowance claimants who have a partner who leaves an incapacity benefit (or NI credits awarded on grounds of incapacity) to return to work and whose benefit ceases as a consequence. In addition transitional protection in Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit will also be protected for those who reclaim in the 52 week period.

This offers reassurance that if disabled people make the move from benefits into work and reclaim benefit they will not have to requalify for higher rates of benefits payable on grounds of incapacity, as they do now.

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what would be the estimated cost to his Department of raising the earnings disregard for people on long-term incapacity benefit to *(a)* £20 and *(b)* £25. [53817]

Mr. Denham: There is no current earnings disregard for people receiving Incapacity Benefit. Recipients cannot normally do any work unless it qualifies under special rules permitting a certain amount of therapeutic or voluntary work. The Government announced in the Green Paper "New Ambitions For Our Country: A New Contract For Welfare" proposals to pilot changes to benefits to remove barriers faced by disabled people who want to work. The proposals included allowing people receiving Incapacity Benefit to do a small amount of paid work, subject to a weekly limit of £15, although the precise level has still to be finalised. The expenditure consequences of such a change will depend on the effect it has on the numbers of people leaving or staying on benefit. Information on which to base an estimate is not currently available, but will be provided by the pilots.

Departmental Research

Mr. Fabricant: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list the cost of all research undertaken by his Department since May 1997, excluding the cost of green papers and other public consultation documents drafted by his officials; and if he will list in each case the organisations which undertook that research. [52706]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 29 July 1998]:* The term research covers a wide range of activities from scientific and engineering research through to consultancies and public opinion surveys. The information is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Overseas Visits

Mr. Wilshire: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list those who have accompanied (i) him or his predecessor and (ii) his departmental Ministers on overseas visits since 1 January indicating *(a)* the venue of the visit, *(b)* the purpose of the visit, *(c)* the names of those involved, *(d)* the job of those involved, *(e)* the reasons why they were included in the visit and *(f)* the cost to public funds. [53844]

Mr. Denham: All overseas visits by Ministers are conducted in accordance with the principles set out in the Ministerial Code. Information in the form requested is not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. However, I can confirm that since 1 January 1998 Ministers in this Department have been accompanied on the following overseas visits:

Minister	*Date*	*Place visited*	*Purpose*	*Accompanied by*
Frank Field	February 1998	Athens	Pensions seminar	Private Secretary
Keith Bradley	February 1998	Vienna	Minister for Labour, Health and Social Affairs	Private Secretary and one official
Joan Ruddock	March 1998	New York	Commission of the Status of Women	Private Secretary
Keith Bradley	March 1998	USA	Welfare to work projects	Private Secretary and one official

Minister	Date	Place visited	Purpose	Accompanied by
Frank Field	April 1998	Paris	Post Office	Private Secretary
Keith Bradley	April 1998	Paris	Social Partners	Private Secretary and two officials
Frank Field	June 1998	Stockholm	Centre for Business and Policy Studies	Private Secretary
Frank Field	June 1998	Paris	OECD	Private Secretary

The total costs incurred by the Department for this period are £26,000.

SCOTLAND

Sheep Annual Premium Scheme

Mr. Charles Kennedy: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what assessment he has made of the likely impact of new regulations and attendant financial penalties in respect of the sheep annual premium scheme and hill livestock compensatory allowances on *(a)* future percentage lambing yields and *(b)* future stock improvement progress; and if he will make a statement. [51442]

Mr. Macdonald *[holding answer 21 July 1998]:* The legislation governing Sheep Annual Premium and Hill Livestock Compensatory Allowances is longstanding. Enforcement of that legislation should not impact on general flock health or lambing percentages.

Following recent representations by the Government, the European Commission has accepted our proposals aimed at reducing the frequency with which sheep on common grazings need to be gathered for the purpose of subsidy inspection.

New Deal

Mr. Healey: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many people his Department is committed to employing during 1998 under *(a)* the subsidised job option and *(b)* the unsubsidised job option of the New Deal programme. [52590]

Mr. Dewar: The Scottish Office has developed New Deal proposals to employ 50 people under the subsidised job option. We are aiming to fill these positions as soon as possible, but whether all 50 posts will be filled during 1998 depends on the number of eligible and suitable candidates identified by the Employment Service. No specific targets have been set for the numbers to be recruited under the unsubsidised option. We will of course consider eligible applicants, if they are suitable for our vacancies.

Planning Inquiries

Mr. Stunell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what steps his Department has taken to reduce the length of time taken over planning inquiries for *(a)* wind farms and *(b)* hydro-power projects; and if he will make a statement. [52445]

Mr. Macdonald: A new regulatory and best practice framework for planning inquiries for all types of development was introduced last year. This should reduce the overall time taken to determine proposals for wind farms and hydro-power projects which go to inquiry. Scottish Office officials are currently working jointly on guidance for developers for consultation with Scottish Natural Heritage and other interested parties.

Fish Farm Discharges

Mr. Charles Kennedy: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on possible funding for the Aberdeen Marine Laboratory proposed investigation over the effects of fish farm discharges on sea lochs. [52550]

Mr. Macdonald *[holding answer 27 July 1998]:* The Marine Laboratory has a programme of research associated with the impact of fish farming. It is also a potential participant in a possible new project to monitor the environmental impact of sea lice treatments. This inter-departmental project, if approved, will be subject to public tender.

Women's Aid

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will issue guidance to local authorities on support for services provided by Women's Aid. [52794]

Mr. McLeish *[holding answer 28 July 1998]:* It is for local authorities to decide whether to support such services in their area. The proposed Scottish Partnership on Domestic Violence—which will include local government representation—will be expected to recommend minimum standards of service, to be implemented as resources allow, for women experiencing domestic violence. This should help encourage consistent service delivery throughout Scotland.

NHS Efficiency Savings

Mr. Moore: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what estimates his Department has made of *(a)* the savings accruing from the cancellation of the eighth wave of GP fundholding and *(b)* other NHS efficiency savings since 1 May 1997. [53222]

Mr. Dewar *[holding answer 29 July 1998]:* There were no applications for entry to the Standard Fundholding Scheme outstanding at 1 May 1997 and, therefore, no savings were planned or made in respect of the Scheme. The Government intend to bring forward legislation which, subject to Parliamentary approval, will abolish GP Fundholding from 1 April 1999.

The estimated savings from reducing bureaucracy are set out in the table.

Year	£ million
1997–98	10
1998–99	10
1999–2000	20

New Electoral Systems

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how much his Department will be spending on its campaign to educate and inform electors in Scotland on the new electoral system to be used in the elections for their assembly. [53685]

Mr. McLeish: The Government are considering what publicity arrangements are needed to inform electors of the new voting system for the Scottish Parliament. It is not possible at this stage to provide details of these arrangements or estimated costs.

Civil Marriages

Mr. Browne: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish the results of the consultation undertaken by the Registrar General on civil marriages outwith registration offices; and if he will make a statement. [54621]

Mr. McLeish: I am placing a copy of the results of the consultation in the Library. Widespread support was expressed for the idea of extending the choice of couples to have civil marriages other than in local registration offices. The responses emphasised the need to retain the seemliness and dignity of the marriage ceremony. A number of useful comments were made about civil marriage venues which will aid the drafting of appropriate statutory provisions and of practical guidance to the registration service. The Government would wish to see the proposals carried forward, and hope that the Scottish Parliament will consider enactment of appropriate legislation.

Task Forces

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the task forces and advisory groups composed of independent members which have been set up by his Department since 1 May 1997, indicating in each case *(a)* their remit, *(b)* their membership, *(c)* how many members are (i) scientists, (ii) engineers, (iii) small business people or representatives of small businesses, *(d)* any remuneration members receive for their services and *(e)* their budget. [53281]

Mr. Dewar: I shall write to the hon. Member as soon as possible and arrange for a copy of the letter to be placed in the House Library.

Telephone Interceptions

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what factors underlie the number of telephone interceptions sanctioned by him and his predecessors since 1985. [53431]

Mr. McLeish: I refer my hon. Friend to the latest report of the Interception Commissioner (Cm 4001) in which he states:

"The great majority of warrants issued by both Secretaries of State [the Home Secretary and the Secretary of State for Scotland] are for the prevention or detection of serious crime.

Serious crime is defined in Section 10(3) of the Act as an offence involving the use of violence or resulting in substantial financial gain or involving a large number of persons in pursuit of a common purpose, or alternatively as an offence for which a person who has attained the age of 21 and has no previous convictions could reasonably be expected to be sentenced to imprisonment for a term of 3 years or more. All of the serious crime warrants which I have examined have bene concerned with offences which would rank as serious crime by any reckoning . . . All have comfortably passed the 3 years imprisonment test . . .

I am satisfied that the substantial increase in interception is due to the continuing incidence of large scale crime coupled with the greater facilities now available to the various agencies. The strict criteria laid down by the Act continue to be applied".

Pig Industry

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what representations he has received regarding the pig industry; what steps he is taking to address the concerns of the industry; and if he will make a statement. [53451]

Mr. Macdonald: My noble Friend the Under-Secretary of State recently met representatives of the Scottish Pig Industry to discuss the problems which the industry is facing at present. These problems essentially stem from over supply on the European market due to substantial expansion—including vigorous expansion in Scotland—when prices were strong. Contraction in the industry as a whole is inevitable and restructuring will be necessary. My noble Friend has commissioned a study into the Scottish industry which should assist the restructuring process. He has also called on the public, on retailers and caterers to back farm assured pigmeat and pigmeat products.

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

School Buildings (Asbestos)

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what sums from the money allocated to his Department following the Comprehensive Spending Review will be used to remove asbestos from school buildings. [51864]

Ms Estelle Morris: The removal of asbestos from school buildings is already regarded as a high priority in the allocation of capital funding for schools.

It will remain the responsibility of LEAs to determine their priorities for capital works following the Comprehensive Spending Review. The Government will continue to treat as high priority applications for funding where asbestos removal is necessary for health and safety reasons.

Playing Fields

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what was the total number of playing fields or parts of playing fields, the total acreage sold and the total revenues raised in each year since 1988. [51942]

Ms Estelle Morris: My Department does not collect this information.

School Swimming Pools

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) what was the total number of maintained schools with swimming pool facilities in use in each year since 1988; [51944]

(2) what was the total number of maintained schools with swimming pool facilities in each year since 1988. [51943]

Ms Estelle Morris: My Department does not collect this information.

Cycling

Mr. Robathan: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment, pursuant to the Government's announcement of 20 July 1998, *Official Report*, columns 784–88, on reasons to encourage cycling, when he will order the removal of the signs around his Department which forbid the leaving of bicycles attached to railings. [51934]

Mr. Mudie: There are signs on the railings at the perimeter of Sanctuary Buildings which state that "Bicycles left chained to these railings will in future be removed". These signs will not be removed as we need to continue to meet Cabinet Office Security guidance.

Apart from the security risk, bicycles chained outside Sanctuary Buildings would create a Health and Safety issue as the pavement is narrow and they would constitute a hazard.

However, the Department does provide 65 secure cycle parking spaces for its staff in London; these are adequate for current needs.

Private Schools

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many children in England he estimates are currently taught in private schools. [52088]

Ms Estelle Morris: Provisional figures show that 572,000 pupils were being taught in Independent schools in England in January 1998.

GEST Funding

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what savings have resulted from the change to 60:40 GEST funding to the Standards Fund for Cumbria. [52209]

Ms Estelle Morris: In 1997–98 Grants for Education Support and Training (GEST) supported education expenditure of £3,327,500 in Cumbria at a grant rate of mainly 60 per cent. The expenditure to be supported in Cumbria by The Standards Fund in 1998–99 is £5,659,512, at a grant rate of mainly 50 per cent. The 50 per cent. funding reflects the Government's commitment to raise standards in partnership with Local Education Authorities.

Infant Class Sizes

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what criteria he has set to judge the impact on educational standards of reducing infant class sizes to 30; and if he will publish these. [52564]

Ms Estelle Morris *[holding answer 27 July 1998]:* We believe that there is already substantial evidence that smaller infant class sizes will improve standards of education in schools and that is why we have promised that by September 2001 at the latest, no 5, 6 or 7 year old will be in an infant class of more than 30 pupils.

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will place in the Library the responses received by his Department as a result of the consultation on draft regulations on limiting infant class sizes. [52567]

Ms Estelle Morris *[holding answer 27 July 1998]:* We are currently considering the responses to our consultation on the draft class size regulations and guidance. We will place a summary of the comments we received in the Library of the House once we have completed our analysis.

Church Schools

Mr. Lansley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will commission an independent evaluation into the *(a)* effectiveness and *(b)* equity of admissions procedures to Church schools with voluntary-aided status. [52406]

Ms Estelle Morris *[holding answer 27 July 1998]:* A new framework for admissions will be established under provisions in the School Standards and Framework Act 1998, underpinned by a new statutory Code of Practice. For the first time all admission authorities—including the governing bodies of voluntary-aided schools—will be required annually to consult locally before determining their admission arrangements. Objections to those arrangements may be referred to an adjudicator, and, where they relate to religious or denominational criteria, to the Secretary of State. The decision of the Secretary of State or the adjudicator will be binding. We shall be evaluating the impact of the new admission framework once it is operating.

Class Sizes (Stoke-on-Trent)

Mr. Stevenson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) what was the pupil-teacher ratio in *(a)* primary schools, *(b)* secondary schools and *(c)* at Key Stage One in Stoke-on-Trent in each of the last five years; [53236]

(2) what was the average class size *(a)* in primary schools and *(b)* at Key Stage One in Stoke-on-Trent in each of the last five years. [53237]

Ms Estelle Morris: The available information is shown in the tables.

Pupil:teacher ratio and average class size of classes taught by one teacher in maintained schools January 1994–98
Staffordshire local education authority area

	Primary schools			Secondary schools	
Year	PTR	ACS	ACS of key stage one classes	PTR	ACS
1994	25.1	27.7	[2]—	17.5	22.1
1995	24.6	27.6	[2]—	17.4	22.0
1996	24.9	27.7	27.2	17.6	22.3
1997	24.9	27.5	26.8	17.7	22.3
1998[1]	25.2	27.3	26.4	18.0	22.4

[1] provisional
[2] not available.

Figures for Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire (excluding Stoke-on-Trent) Local Education Authority areas in January 1998 are shown in the table.

Pupil:teacher ratio and average class size of classes taught by one teacher in maintained schools January 1998[1]

Staffordshire local education authority area

	Primary schools			*Secondary schools*	
	PTR	*ACS*	*ACS of key stage one classes*	*PTR*	*ACS*
Stoke-on-Trent	25.4	27.2	26.7	17.8	22.9
Staffordshire (excluding Stoke-on-Trent)	25.1	27.4	26.3	18.1	22.3

[1] provisional

Education Expenditure

Mr. Stevenson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will make a statement on the review of SSA and area cost adjustment for education under review; and when he proposes to implement changes arising from the review. [53239]

Ms Estelle Morris: We are in the middle of a review of the SSA formula, including the area cost adjustment. We will not take final decisions on the SSA methodology for 1999–2000 until the autumn, after we have considered the views of local government as a whole.

Mr. Stevenson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will list the education standard spending assessment for those local authorities which achieved unitary status in *(a)* 1996 and *(b)* 1997. [53253]

Ms Estelle Morris: The table sets out the education SSA for 1998–99 for those local authorities which achieved unitary status in *(a)* 1996 and *(b)* 1997.

£ million

LEA	*Education SSA*
1996	
Bath and North East Somerset	54.4
Bristol	119.9
North Somerset	58.6
South Gloucestershire	78.7
Hartlepool	37.0
Middlesbrough	61.5
Redcar and Cleveland	59.6
Stockton on Tees	71.7
Kingston upon Hull	102.7
East Riding of Yorkshire	102.9
North East Lincolnshire	64.8
North Lincolnshire	56.4
York	52.8
1997	
Bournemouth	49.5
Brighton and Hove	71.8
Darlington	34.1
Derby	84.2
Leicester	121.0
Luton	78.0
Milton Keynes	83.5
Poole	44.2
Portsmouth	62.5
Rutland	10.6
Southampton	64.8
Stoke on Trent	87.0
Swindon	82.8

School Closures

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will set out the procedures to be followed by a local education authority in promoting the temporary closure of a maintained school. [52996]

Ms Estelle Morris *[holding answer 28 July 1998]:* Where a local education authority seeks to close a school maintained by it, it is required to published statutory proposals, having consulted those it considers to be appropriate in the light of guidance published by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State. Statutory proposals must also be published to establish a new school, whether or not this is in the premises of a closed school. If the school proposed to be established is a voluntary school, the proposals would need to be published by the promoters of that school. Under current legislation, proposals affecting voluntary schools fall to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for decision.

Teaching Vacancies

Ms Buck: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will list, for each local education authority, the number of applications received, on average, for each *(a)* headship and *(b)* teacher vacancy, during 1996–97 and 1997–98. [53567]

Mr. Charles Clarke: This information is not collected centrally.

Special Schools

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what assessment he has made of the effect on children's educational achievement of being placed in a special school against *(a)* their and *(b)* their family's wishes. [53381]

Mr. Charles Clarke: None: the Education Act 1996 provides that, subject to certain conditions, children with statements of special educational needs (SEN) should be educated in a mainstream school provided that is what their parents wish. Parents have a right of appeal to the independent SEN Tribunal if they are dissatisfied with a local education authority's (LEA's) decision in this respect. The Code of Practice on the Identification and Assessment of SEN encourages LEAs and others to take account of views of children themselves wherever practicable.

Mr. Ennis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many local education authorities in England have a special school catering for the age range five to 16 years for pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties and severe learning difficulties and provision for pupils 16 to 19 years with PMLD which *(a)* has more than 150 pupils on roll and *(b)* has more than 175 pupils on roll. [53554]

Mr. Charles Clarke: The information available to the Department indicates that 14 local education authorities have special schools with more than 150 pupils which cater for at least ages five to 18 and for pupils with severe learning difficulties. Nine LEAs have such schools with more than 175 pupils.

Non-Departmental Public Bodies

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will list the non-departmental public bodies in existence on 1 May 1997 that *(a)* have been disbanded, *(b)* will be disbanded in the next 12 months, *(c)* have had their functions transferred to (i) another non-departmental public body and (ii) a democratically elected body, *(d)* have been renamed but continue to perform a similar role and *(e)* have been unchanged; if he will indicate in (c) (ii) the relevant successor body; what new non-departmental public bodies have been established since 1 May 1997; and how many non-departmental public bodies his Department currently is responsible for. [53863]

Mr. Mudie: Of the non-departmental public bodies (NDPBs) in existence on 1 May 1997:

(a) the NDPB that has been simply disbanded is the Supported Employment Consultative Group;

(b) the Funding Agency for Schools will cease funding activities in the next 12 months, and will be disbanded late 1999;

(c)(i) the functions of the now-disbanded National Advisory Council for the Employment of People with Disabilities have been transferred to the National Disability Council. The National Council for Vocational Qualifications and the School Curriculum and Assessment Authority have been merged to form the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority. The Race Relations Employment Advisory Group has been disbanded, and is intended to be shortly replaced by the Race Relations Education and Employment Forum;

(c)(ii) No functions have been transferred to a democratically elected body;

(d) the Education Assets Board is being renamed as the Education Transfer Council and the National Council for Educational Technology has been renamed as the British Educational Communications and Technology Agency;

(e) unchanged NDPBs not mentioned above are the Centre for Information on Language Teaching and Research, the Construction Industry Training Board, the Engineering Construction Industry Training Board, the Equal Opportunities Commission, the Further Education Funding Council, the Higher Education Funding Council for England, Investors in People UK, Remploy Ltd., Student Loans Company, Teacher Training Agency, Registered Inspectors Appeals Tribunal and Special Educational Needs Tribunal.

New non-departmental public bodies established since 1 May 1997 are the Disability Rights Task Force, New Deal Task Force and Skills Task Force.

My Department is responsible for 20 non-departmental public bodies.

The Government are committed to keeping the number of NDPBs to a minimum and to ensuring that those which remain are open, accountable and effective. Many of the new NDPBs established since 1 May will be essential in helping the Government deliver their Manifesto commitments.

Employees Over 60

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many *(a)* men and *(b)* women aged over 60 years were employed by (i) his Department and (ii) his Department's agencies on 1 January. [53051]

Mr. Andrew Smith: As at 1 January 1998, 31 men and 17 women aged 60 and over were employed by the Department. In the case of the Employment Service, figures are not readily available from Personnel Systems for 1 January, but can be provided from data collected at 10 March 1998. At this point, some 72 men and 186 women aged 60 years and over were employed by the Agency.

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many *(a)* men and *(b)* women employed by (1) his Department and (2) his Department's agencies have contracts of employment which permit them to retire after their 60th birthday. [53052]

Mr. Mudie: Where a clear business need for any member of the Department or its Agencies to continue beyond age 60 exists, and providing that individual meets the necessary criteria for fitness and effectiveness, that member of staff may be enabled to continue beyond their 60th birthday. Only members of the Senior Civil Service (SCS) have contracts of employment which provide specifically for them to retire at 60 years of age, but 60 is also the normal minimum retirement age for all members of the Department and its Agencies. The terms and conditions of all members of the Department and its Agencies thus provide for staff to retire after their 60th birthday—in the case of the Senior Civil Service, only with the agreement of their Permanent Head of Department.

Total numbers of Senior Civil Service members in the Department are *(a)* 79 men and *(b)* 22 women. In the Employment Service, there are *(a)* 25 men and *(b)* 7 women members of the SCS. [There are also *(a)* 10 men and *(b)* 1 woman SCS members in Government Offices.]

Total numbers of staff in the Department (including the Senior Civil Service and Government Offices) are *(a)* 1,945 men and *(b)* 2,125 women; and in the Employment Service, *(a)* 9,541 men and *(b)* 23,987 women.

Access Funds

Mr. Love: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what resources will be available for access funds for students in further and higher education institutions in England in 1998–99; and when he proposes to issue new guidance on the use of the funds. [54812]

Mr. Mudie: The Government are committed to widening participation and improving access to higher education. We are determined that students should have the support they need to take up or stay on courses of

higher education. We are making available £56 million through the Access Funds for students in further and higher education in England for the academic year 1998–99. This includes £3 million (£2m in 1998–99 financial year) which we are providing to help remit the fees of part-time under-graduate students who lose their jobs after their course has started.

The total sum is being allocated between the two Funding Councils for England as shown. The allocations take account of adjustments between the higher education access fund and the further education access fund to help part-time higher education students who are studying at further education institutions.

	£ million
Higher Education Funding Council for England:	45.76
of which: Undergraduate fund	39.44
Postgraduate fund	5.50
Further education fund	0.82
Further Education Funding Council:	10.24
Total	56.00

Disability Discrimination Act

Mr. Stephen Twigg: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment when he proposes to consult further on provisions in the Disability Discrimination Act 1995. [54814]

Ms Hodge: The National Disability Council and the Government have today launched a joint consultation exercise on the duties under Part III of the Act to be implemented in October 1999. The duties will require service providers to make reasonable adjustments to enable disabled people to make use of their goods, facilities and services. The Council is consulting on its draft proposals for a Code of Practice and the Government on proposals for supporting regulations and draft regulatory impact assessment (an estimate of the costs and benefits of the new provisions).

The Government are also consulting on a draft regulatory impact assessment and a draft Code of Practice concerned with the duties on trade organisations under Part II of the Act to make reasonable adjustments for their disabled members and applicants for membership. These duties will also be implemented in October 1999.

Both consultations will end on 13 November 1998.

Some of the documents in the consultation packages bear the name of my predecessor. We have decided not to reprint these documents as this would cut into the time available for consultation and entail an additional call on public funds.

Copies of both consultation packages will be placed in the Libraries.

Educational Maintenance Allowances

Mr. Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) if he will introduce legislation to allow the pilot schemes for educational maintenance allowances to proceed; [53611]

(2) if families of children involved in the pilot schemes for educational maintenance allowances will lose their entitlement to child benefit; [53612]

(3) what will be the cost to public funds of the pilot schemes for the educational maintenance allowance; [53613]

(4) which areas he proposes to use as pilot areas for the educational maintenance allowance; [53614]

(5) when he proposes to start the pilot schemes for the educational maintenance allowance; [53615]

(6) what will be the rate of the educational maintenance allowance. [53616]

Mr. Mudie: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given on 28 July 1998, *Official Report*, column *141*. The pilots are planned to start in September 1999.

Teachers' Pay

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what estimate he has made of the cost of the number of advanced skills teachers to be appointed in the current year who will be paid at the top rate of £40,000. [53895]

Mr. Charles Clarke: It is for governing bodies to determine the five point range on the Advanced Skills Teacher pay spine on which to place any ASTs employed in their schools. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has not made any estimate of the cost of the number to be appointed in the current year who will be paid at the highest point on the pay spine.

Teacher Recruitment

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what action he is taking to ensure the recruitment of more teachers with particular reference to Greater London. [53594]

Mr. Charles Clarke: The recruitment of sufficient numbers of well-trained teachers is a key challenge facing this Government and the education service. It is the contribution of high-quality, committed and motivated teachers that will help us drive up standards of achievement in schools.

The proposals we set out last week for a major Green Paper on the future of the teaching profession and the additional funding announced under the Comprehensive Spending Review, 14 July 1998, *Official Report*, columns 187–94, will boost the status of the profession and encourage recruitment. Our reply to the report of the Select Committee for Education inquiry, published in January, set out the measures we are taking to encourage more good candidates to enter teaching. We are continuing to consider options further to increase teacher recruitment and to address the particular need for an adequate supply of teachers in London. The Teacher Training Agency continues also to raise the profile of teaching and is working with key partners in the region to address the particular needs of London.

Welsh Language Scheme

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment on what date his Department

received notification from the Welsh Language Board in relation to the need to prepare a Welsh language scheme; on what date his Department and the Board held consultations on such a scheme; when a scheme was formally submitted to the Board; and if it has been approved. [53355]

Mr. Mudie: The Welsh Language Board formally invited this Department to produce a Welsh Language Scheme on 4 December 1996. The Department offered a draft Scheme to the Board for comment in August 1997. Since then, officials and the Board have held a number of consultations on the contents of the Scheme. I hope the Board will shortly confirm that it has no further suggestions to amend the draft. This Department can then consult the public; that is necessary before formal submission to the Board.

Primary Schools (Norfolk)

Dr. George Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will estimate the additional costs incurred by Norfolk County Council in supporting an above average number of small primary schools *(a)* in total and *(b)* per pupil in the primary sector. [53718]

Ms Estelle Morris: No. It is not possible to carry out such a calculation on a satisfactory basis since it would involve making unsupported assumptions about the classification of schools as "small" and the funding distribution which might be adopted by the LEA in different circumstances. There is also no reliable way of estimating the offsetting additional costs which might be incurred on transport if the pattern of schools was different.

School Inspectors

Mr. Amess: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) how many current school inspectors were former head teachers; [53384]

(2) what are the criteria for the appointment of school inspectors in respect of previous educational experience. [53434]

Ms Estelle Morris: This is a matter for HM Chief Inspector of Schools. I have asked him to write to the hon. Member and to place a copy of his letter in the Library.

Task Forces

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will list the taskforces and advisory groups composed of independent members which have been set up by his Department since 1 May 1997 and in each case *(a)* their remit, *(b)* their membership, *(c)* how many members are (i) scientists, (ii) engineers and (iii) small business people or representatives of small businesses, *(d)* any remuneration members receive for their services and *(e)* their budget. [53148]

Mr. Mudie: I will write to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

Life Science Graduates

Dr. Iddon: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what percentage of life science graduates gain employment related to their field of study [53223]

Mr. Mudie: Life science courses are included in the 'biological sciences' category in the statistics collected by the Higher Education Statistics Agency but cannot be identified separately. The latest available information is for students who qualified in 1997 and relates to first destinations as reported by 31 December 1997. The table gives a complete list of occupants entered and other destinations of first degree graduates in biological sciences.

First degree graduates in biological sciences from HE institutions in the UK in 1997 for whom destination is known, number of graduates and percentage total

Destination/Occupation	*Number*	*Percentage*
Entered employment:		
Managers and administrators	919	7
Professional occupations	1,485	12
Associate professional and technical occupations	1,300	10
Clerical and secretarial occupations	1,363	11
Craft and related occupations	50	0
Personal and protective service occupations	698	6
Sales occupations	661	5
Plant and machine operatives	71	1
Other occupations	202	2
Unknown	94	1
Entered study or training	3,665	29
Seeking employment or training	1,128	9
Not available for employment	676	5
Overseas student returning overseas	340	3
Total for whom destination known	12,652	100

School Leaving Age

Mr. Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what representations he has received regarding the lowering of the school leaving age to 14; and if he will make a statement. [53436]

Ms Estelle Morris: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State receives a wide range of representations on educational issues. While some of these touch upon the difficulties of engaging all pupils in the 14–16 age band in learning, very few commentators advocate an end to compulsory education at 14.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Unpaid Fines

Mr. Cox: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many attachments of earning orders were issued by each magistrates' court in the Greater London area to collect unpaid fines in the last 12 months for which figures are available. [52050]

Mr. Hoon: The Lord Chancellor's Department does not collect information on the number of attachment of

earnings orders issued by magistrates courts and these figures could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Courts (Modernisation)

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what steps he is taking to modernise the court environment. [51723]

Mr. Hoon: The Court Service has an on-going programme of maintenance and repair, and minor improvements for their court buildings. Magistrates' Courts Committees have similar programmes for the courts they occupy. Guidance has been issued by both the Court Service and Lord Chancellor's Department Headquarters for magistrates courts on the type of facilities it is expected should be provided in new or refurbished court buildings including facilities for disabled people and separate waiting rooms for witnesses. The Court Service is also taking forward a project to provide a testbed for new technology in the courts. The aim is to pilot different types of technology, in a live courtroom environment. Evaluation of these pilots will inform decisions about the courtroom infrastructure needed to enable technology to be used.

Judiciary

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what are the proportions of *(a)* judges, *(b)* Queen's counsel, *(c)* other members of the Bar and *(d)* pupil barristers who are (1) women, (2) black, (3) Asian and (4) of other ethnic minority origin. [53587]

Mr. Hoon: The tables show the figures for women and those believed to be of the different ethnic origins requested for judges, Queen's Counsel and other members of the Bar. The figures for the ethnic origin of judges are believed to be correct, but as the ethnic origin of candidates for judicial office was not sought before October 1991, the data may be incomplete. There are no detailed figures available about pupil barristers. The Bar Council has estimated that 46 per cent. of pupils and "squatters" are women and 13 per cent. of pupils and "squatters" are of ethnic minority origin.

(a) The number of female judges and judges of ethnic minority origin as at 1 July 1998

	Total	Women		Black		Asian		Ethnic minority other	
		Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
Lords of Appeal in Ordinary	12	0	—	0	—	0	—	0	—
Lord Justices of Appeal	35	1	2.9	0	—	0	—	0	—
Heads of Divisions (excluding the Lord Chancellor)	4	0	—	0	—	0	—	0	—
High Court Judges	97	7	7.2	0	—	0	—	0	—
Circuit Judges	556	34	6.1	0	—	3	0.5	2	0.4
Recorders	836	65	7.8	6	0.7	3	0.4	4	0.5
Assistant Recorders	396	71	17.9	4	1	5	1.3	4	1
District Judges	358	46	12.8	0	—	1	0.3	3	0.8
Deputy District Judges	754	90	11.9	2	0.3	7	0.9	3	0.4
Stipendiary Magistrates	88	13	14.8	0	—	2	2.3	0	—
Acting Stipendiary Magistrates	114	22	19.3	2	1.8	0	—	2	1.8

(b) and (c) The number of Queen's Counsel, and other members of the Bar who are women and/or of ethnic minority origin[1]

	Total	Women		Black		Asian		Ethnic minority other		Unknown ethnicity
		Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage	
Queen's Counsel (as at 9 April 1998)	1,034	73	7	7	0.7	7	0.7	3	0.3	—
Other barristers (as at 18 July 1997	9,257	2,539	27	209	2	272	3	182	2	2,029

[1] Figures supplied by the Bar Council

Non-departmental Public Bodies

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will list the non-departmental public bodies in existence on 1 May 1997 that *(a)* have been disbanded, *(b)* will be disbanded in the next 12 months, *(c)* have had their functions transferred to (i) another non-departmental public body and (ii) a democratically elected body, *(d)* have been renamed but continue to perform a similar role and *(e)* have been unchanged; if he will indicate in *(c)*(ii) the relevant successor body; what new non-departmental public bodies have been established since 1 May 1997; and how many non-departmental public bodies his Department currently is responsible for. [53866]

Mr. Hoon: None of the Lord Chancellor's Department's non-departmental public bodies has been disbanded since 1 May 1997. The Supreme Court Rule Committee and the County Court Rule Committee will probably be disbanded in the next 12 months. Their functions will have been transferred to the Civil Procedure Rule Committee.

The Civil Procedure Rule Committee and the Civil Justice Council, which were both provided for by the previous Administration's Civil Procedure Act 1997, were set up after 1 May 1997.

Non-departmental public bodies are listed in the Cabinet Office publication 'Public Bodies'. Other than the General Commissioners of Income Tax, the tribunals listed under this Department in the edition published for 1997 are no longer classified as non-departmental public bodies. They are still in existence, but as part of the Court Service Agency.

Employees Over 60

Mr. Chope: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many *(a)* men and

(b) women employed by (1) his Department and (2) his Department's agencies have contracts of employment which permit them to retire after their 60th birthday. [53049]

Mr. Hoon: For the Lord's Chancellor's Department, including the Court Service, Public Trust Office, Public Record Office, Land Registry and the Northern Ireland Court Service, the information is set out in the table.

	Men	*Women*
Lord Chancellor's Department Headquarters	164	260
Court Service Agency	2,713	5,577
Public Trust Office	194	235
Public Record Office	7	0
Land Registry		See below
Northern Ireland Court Service	197	358

Note:

1. As at 27 July 1998, the Land Registry employs 8,895 people: *(a)* 3,148 men and *(b)* 5,747 women. The terms of employment for staff in the Land Registry (with the exception of those in the Senior Civil Service (SCS) are governed by the *"Land Registry Conditions of Service Code"*

2. The conditions of service for all staff in the Land Registry include a normal retirement age of 60, with provision for an annual review of projected operational and staffing needs to determine whether individuals may remain in service to a maximum age of 65. However, staff in administrative grades at EO equivalent and above, on reaching the age of 62 with 30 years service, are required to downgrade one grade. If any member of staff in this category wishes to remain in service beyond the 63rd birthday, they are required to downgrade to an AO equivalent grade. There are currently 3,534 staff in administrative grades at EO equivalent and above, (excluding the SCS) of whom 38 are aged 60 and over (25 men and 13 women).

Mr. Chope: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many *(a)* men and *(b)* women aged over 60 years were employed by (i) his Department and (ii) his Department's agencies on 1 January. [53072]

Mr. Hoon: For the Lord Chancellor's Department, including the Court Service, Public Trust Office, Public Record Office, Land Registry and the Northern Ireland Court Service, the information is set out in the table.

	Men	*Women*
Lord Chancellor's Department Headquarters	11	7
Court Service Agency	186	400
Public Trust Office	14	5
Public Record Office	7	nil
Land Registry	156	110
Northern Ireland Court Service	25	6

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Heritage Grants

Dr. Starkey: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if he will list the endowments which have been granted by the Government when giving land to charitable trusts for heritage purposes in the last 15 years. [49279]

Mr. Banks: This information is not held centrally and a comprehensive answer could be given only at disproportionate cost. We are aware of the following:

Chatham Historic Dockyard Trust: £11.3 million provided in 1984.

Waltham Abbey Royal Gunpowder Mills Trust: £5.5 million provided in 1996.

Portsmouth Naval Base Property Trust: £6 million provided in 1998. The property was not gifted, but leased for 99 years.

National Trust: £14.3 million provided in 1989 for Ham House and Osterley Park.

National Trust: £2.3 million provided in 1993 for Orford Ness.

Support has also been given in the form of specific grants for use in the formative years of the Trust, often to meet accumulated repair and maintenance commitments. Recent examples include:

Tadworth Court: £2.85 million provided to the Children's Trust Tadworth for freehold purchase and dilapidations.

Eltham Palace: £2.5 million provided to English Heritage (an exempt charity) in 1996 and a further £1 million in 1997, which had some endowment element.

Royal Naval College, Greenwich: £17 million to be provided to the Greenwich Foundation over the next three years to cover dilapidations plus £1.5 million a year for seven years towards ongoing maintenance.

Somerset House: A contribution of £3.1 million in 1996 towards the costs of landlord's works related to the installation of the Gilbert Collection in the South Wing and £4 million over the next four years towards start-up costs of the new Trust, Somerset House Ltd.

Central Council of Physical Recreation

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what was the size of the CCPR's legal costs arising out of the recent fraud trial; and how these costs will be funded. [52913]

Mr. Banks: Details of the expenditure and income of the Central Council of Physical Recreation (CCPR) are published in the CCPR's Annual Report and Accounts.

In the year ended 31 March 1996, the CCPR incurred exceptional legal and professional costs of £240,522 in connection with investigations prior to and following the termination of certain employment contracts in 1995. The CCPR claimed the majority of these costs as an additional contribution from the English Sports Council (ESC) under the Heads of Agreement of 17 May 1972.

£228,923 in respect of these claims was paid by the ESC to the CCPR as additional income. The ESC has subsequently stated it currently regards £164,474 of this contribution as an advance of future funding. A working party of representatives of the CCPR, ESC and Department for Culture, Media and Sport, chaired by the latter, is currently reviewing the investigation. Following this review, the ESC will determine the extent, if any, to which it may require repayment of the £164,474.

In the year ended 31 March 1997, the CCPR incurred further exceptional legal and professional costs of £113,895 in connection with these investigations. Most of this, at this stage, has not been funded by the ESC.

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what new controls have been introduced by the Central Council for Physical Recreation to prevent a repeat of major fraud incidents. [52914]

Mr. Banks: The Central Council of Physical Recreation (CCPR) set up an Organisational and Services Review Group and have agreed seventeen recommendations for changing the corporate structure and working practices of the CCPR. A second stage of the Review has now started to oversee the detailed implementation of the recommendations and manage the transitional arrangements.

Alongside this, the CCPR, English Sports Council and Department for Culture, Media and Sport, have been working together and with advisers to review and provide recommendations for detailed improvements to the CCPR's internal control systems and enhance corporate governance and accountability.

As my hon. Friend may be aware, even sound systems of internal control may not be proof against collusive fraud.

Rugby League Challenge Cup

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport in what circumstances the existing sponsorship of the Rugby League Challenge Cup will continue. [52719]

Mr. Banks: The future individual sponsorship arrangements are matters for the sports concerned although they will have to comply with the legal requirements of the European Union Tobacco Advertising Directive. The current arrangements with Gallaher Limited for the Challenge Cup extends until May 2001.

Tobacco Sponsorship

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what financial assistance his Department will offer to sports currently funded by tobacco sponsorship that are now looking for alternative moneys. [52510]

Mr. Banks *[holding answer 29 July 1998]:* Through negotiation, we have ensured that the European Union Tobacco Advertising Directive reflects a fair balance, providing reasonable time for sports to adapt while ending the totally inappropriate link between smoking and sport. This timescale, coupled with the support of the Task Force, demonstrates our commitment to delivering alternative moneys for these sports events.

Television Channels

Mr. Casale: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many UK licensed television channels there are. [52138]

Mr. Chris Smith: The Independent Television Commission's Annual Report for the year ending 31 December 1997 states that, in addition to the 16 Channel 3 regional licences, the Channel 4 licence, the Channel 5 licence and the public service teletext licence, there were also 173 Satellite Television Service licences and 90 Licensable Programme Services.

PRESIDENT OF THE COUNCIL

Information Technology

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the President of the Council how much her Department spent on IT, itemising *(a)* personal computers, *(b)* main-frame, *(c)* mini-computers and *(d)* file servers in the last year for which figures are available. [52886]

Mrs. Beckett: The Privy Council Office spent £61,714.80 on IT equipment during 1997–98. Of this sum, £57,296.04 was spent on personal computers. None of the other items specified was purchased.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Information Technology

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster how much his Department spent on IT, itemising *(a)* personal computers, *(b)* main-frame, *(c)* mini-computers and *(d)* file servers in the last year for which figure are available. [52892]

Dr. John Cunningham: Capital expenditure on IT within my Department, its Agencies and the Central Office of Information in 1997–98 was £5.6 million. IT expenditure is not broken down within my Department into the precise categories asked for in the question but has been analysed to provide the following estimates of itemised expenditure:

£

	Cabinet Office	*Agencies*
(a) Personal computers	525,000	1,030,000
(b) Mainframe	0	0
(c) Mini-computers	15,000	0
(d) File servers	250,000	435,000

Departmental Research

Mr. Fabricant: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will list the cost of all research undertaken by his Department since May 1997, excluding the cost of green papers and other public consultation documents drafted by his officials; and if he will list in each case the organisations which undertook that research. [52707]

Dr. John Cunningham *[holding answer 29 July 1998]:* The term research covers a wide range of activities from scientific and engineering research through to consultancies and public opinion surveys. The information requested is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Freedom of Information

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster for what reasons the responses and comments received from other Government departments to the White Paper on the Freedom of Information Bill "Your Right to Know" have not been made public; if he will place these responses and comments in the Library; and if he will make a statement. [53368]

Dr. John Cunningham: The White Paper "Your Right to Know" invited public consultation and comment on collectively agreed government proposals. The responses to the consultation, as well as substantial background material relating to the proposals, have been published with copies placed in the Library of the House. Discussion within government since publication has concerned the detailed translation of the proposals into draft legislation. Internal policy discussion of this sort is protected from disclosure under Exemption 2 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

European Legislation

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will make a statement on the role of business test panels in the European Community's legislative process; who will select delegates; how many will serve; how many panels will be formed; which organisations will be eligible to supply candidates; and what is the length of duration of their panel service. [53774]

Dr. John Cunningham: The test panel of European businesses is a pilot initiative of the European Commission to improve consultation on new EU legislative proposals with business, and particularly with small and medium-sized enterprises. It is an addition to the Commission's usual consultation procedures.

I am delighted that this new initiative was launched and given the backing of EU Ministers during the UK's Presidency of the EU. We are strong supporters of improved consultation in the EU legislative process and see this pilot as an important step towards achieving better European regulation. The UK intends to participate fully in the pilot phase, giving UK businesses a direct voice in the Brussels policy-making process. We are particularly keen to ensure that the needs of small firms are taken into account.

The UK's participation in the pilot will be co-ordinated by the Better Regulation Unit in the Cabinet Office. Business panels will be selected according to the proposals under review. New panels will be constituted for each proposal. Officials are currently in discussion with business organisations and other Government Departments to identify a representative panel to comment on the first area, an amendment to the Directives dealing with annual accounts—(78/660/EC) and (83/349/EC). We expect to issue short questionnaires to about 300 UK firms in the Autumn.

Non-Departmental Public Bodies

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will list the non-departmental public bodies in existence on 1 May 1997 that *(a)* have been disbanded, *(b)* will be disbanded in the next 12 months, *(c)* have had their functions transferred to (i) another non-departmental public body and (ii) a democratically elected body, *(d)* have been renamed but continue to perform a similar role and *(e)* have been unchanged; if he will indicate in (c) (ii) the relevant successor body; what new non-departmental public bodies have been established since 1 May 1997; and how many non-departmental public bodies his Department currently is responsible for. [53862]

Dr. John Cunningham: The Non-departmental Public Bodies (NDPBs) for both the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and the Prime Minister are listed under my Department in the booklet "Public Bodies" published by the Stationery Office. For the purposes of this question I am answering on behalf of my Department and the Prime Minister.

(a) Since 1 May 1997 we have abolished two NDPBs: The Citizen's Charter Panel of Advisers; and the De-regulation Task Force.

(b) There are no proposals to disband any bodies within the next 12 months.

(c) No bodies have had their function transferred to another NDPB or a democratically elected body.

(d) No bodies have been removed.

(e) Details of all other NDPBs in existence on 1 May 1997 sponsored by this department are listed in "Public Bodies".

We have established two NDPBs: The Better Regulation Task Force and, on behalf of the Prime Minister, the Security Vetting Appeals Panel. My Department is currently responsible for ten NDPBs.

The Government are committed to keeping the number of NDPBs to a minimum and to ensuring that those which remain are open, accountable and effective. Many of the new NDPBs established since 1 May will be essential in helping the Government deliver their Manifesto commitments.

People's Panel

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, pursuant to his answer of 24 July 1998, *Official Report*, column *745*, if he will publish *(a)* the budgeted figures for spending on the second wave of research and *(b)* the budgeted spending figures for 1998–99 for spending on the people's panel. [53897]

Mr. Kilfoyle: The figures are as follows.

(a) The budgeted figure for spending by the Cabinet Office on the second wave of research using the People's Panel is £60,000. Budgeted figures of other departments and public bodies are not yet known.

(b) The budgeted figure for spending by the Cabinet Office on the People's Panel in 1998–99 is about £500,000.

Overseas Visits

Mr. Wilshire: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will list those who have accompanied (i) him and (ii) his departmental Ministers on overseas visits since 1 January indicating *(a)* the venue of the visit, *(b)* the purpose of the visit, *(c)* the names of those involved, *(d)* the job of those involved, *(e)* the reasons why they were included in the visit and *(f)* the cost to public funds. [53835]

Dr. John Cunningham: I regret that it has not been possible to provide an answer before the Summer Recess. I shall therefore be writing to the hon. Member and will place a copy of the letter in the libraries of the House.

Rebuttal Officers

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster how many rebuttal officers or civil servants with similar roles are currently employed in the Civil Service. [53593]

Dr. John Cunningham: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by the Prime Minister to the hon. Member for Worthing, West (Mr. Bottomley) on 8 June 1998, *Official Report*, column *424*.

Employees Over 60

Mr. Chope: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster how many *(a)* men and *(b)* women aged over 60 years were employed by (i) his Department and (ii) his Department's agencies on 1 January. [53071]

Dr. John Cunningham: The figures for my Department at 1 January 1998, including our Agencies, and The Central Office of Information (COI) which is a separate Department reporting to me, are as follows:

	Men	*Women*
Cabinet Office	17	12
Agencies	97	7
COI	0	0

Mr. Chope: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster how many *(a)* men and *(b)* women employed by (1) his Department and (2) his Department's agencies have contracts of employment which permit them to retire after their 60th birthday. [53048]

Dr. John Cunningham: At 30 June 1998, the figures for my Department, including our Agencies, and The Central Office of Information (COI) which is a separate Department reporting to me, are as follows:

	Men	*Women*
Cabinet Office	187	252
Agencies	568	122
COI	23	34

HEALTH

Expenditure Services

Ms Atherton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list for each county the expenditure on ambulance services in *(a)* 1997–98 and *(b)* 1998–99 (i) as a percentage of total health spending and (ii) in cash terms. [52207]

Mr. Boateng: Details of health authorities' expenditure in 1997–98 on ambulance services will be placed in the Library when ready later in the year, along with details of planned expenditure in 1998–99.

Group B Streptococcus

Mrs. Organ: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what research has been carried out to determine the percentage of women who could be possible carriers of Group B streptococcus. [52041]

Ms Jowell: This is a subject that has received attention in a number of countries. A list of relevant research of which we are aware will be placed in the Library. The Department is not currently supporting any research into Group B streptococcus.

Asbestos

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidance his Department issues to those constructing buildings for which it is responsible on the use of materials containing asbestos. [52304]

Mr. Milburn: The Department, in respect of buildings in its ownership, does not issue any specific guidance to contractors on the use of materials containing asbestos. However, the Department's conditions of contract require that contractors comply with all relevant statutory legislation. This will include the Asbestos Prohibition Regulations 1992 and the Asbestos Licences Regulations 1993.

Myodil

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will establish a public inquiry into the use of Myodil in myelography and into the associated risks of adhesive arachnoiditis; and if he will make a statement. [52299]

Mr. Milburn: We have no plans to hold an inquiry. My noble Friend the then Minister of State for Health, Baroness Jay, recently held a meeting with the Myodil Action Group. Officials are currently considering the points raised at that meeting.

Consultants

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Norwich, North (Dr. Gibson) of 21 July 1998, *Official Report*, column *528*, regarding numbers of consultants, if he will list *(a)* the number of consultants for each specialty working within the Shropshire Health Authority, *(b)* the ratio of consultants in each specialty to patients within the Shropshire Health Authority and *(c)* the average national ratio of consultants in each specialty to patients. [52427]

Mr. Milburn: The number of consultants (whole time equivalents (WTEs)) in the Shropshire Health Authority area is listed in the table. Information on numbers of patients is not collected centrally.

Specialty	*Consultant WTE*
Accident and Emergency	2
Anaesthetics	22.7
Cardiovascular Disease	3.5
Chemical pathology	1
Child and adolescent psychiatry	2
Dermatology	1
Diagnostic Radiology	12.5
Endocrinology	3
Gastroenterology	3
General Surgery	7.8
Geriatrics	4.5
Haematology	3
Learning Disabilities	1
Medical microbiology	0.5
Morbid anatomy	7
Neurology	3.7

Specialty	Consultant WTE
Obstetrics and Gynaecology	4.4
Occupational Medicine	1
Ophthalmology	4
Orthopaedic Surgery	14.6
Otolaryngology	2.5
Paediatrics	8.9
Psychiatry	8
Psychiatry of old age	3
Radiotherapy	1
Renal disease	1.8
Respiratory Medicine	2
Rheumatology	2
Urology	1.7
Venereology	0.6
Total	134

Source:
DH Statistical Bulletin—figures current as at September 1996

Medicines (Children)

Mr. Love: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to implement the recommendations of the Licensing Medicines for Children report of May 1996, produced by the joint working party of the British Paediatric Association and the Association of the British Pharmaceutical Industry, on the development of medicines for children; and if he will make a statement. [43822]

Ms Jowell *[holding answer 1 June 1998]:* The report of the British Paediatric Association and the Association of British Pharmaceutical Industries joint working party on the development of medicines for children made five recommendations. Of these five, three were felt by the working party to require action by the Department, and more particularly the Medicines Control Agency (MCA).

The three recommendations and action taken on them are:

Medicines are licensed for specific age ranges.

It is the MCA practice to license products for use in the recommended specific age ranges when appropriate data are presented. Use of the age ranges has been confirmed in the revised European guideline on the investigation of medicinal products in children.

The Committee on Proprietary Medicinal Products reviews its guidelines in the light of these concerns.

This has been done. The revised guideline came into operation in September 1997.

That surveillance at various levels is introduced on the use of unlicensed medicines and the prescribing of medicines "off label".

The MCA has well-established systems for monitoring the safety of marketed medicines in normal clinical practice. This covers all patient groups using medicines, including children, and "off label" usage. Nevertheless, a more targeted approach to surveillance of medicines used by children may be warranted, and the MCA reviewed the matter in conjunction with the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health. As a first step the MCA has agreed to fund, jointly with the Trent Health Region, the first year of a study which will assess the advantages of a regional monitoring centre for drug safety in children. It is hoped that this will be up and running in September 1998.

Pharmaceutical Graduates

Mr. Amess: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to increase the number of pharmaceutical graduates in the period to 2001. [52871]

Mr. Milburn: The pharmacy workforce is forecast to grow at a steady rate, with the exception of 2000 when there will be few newly qualified pharmacists because of the recent extension of the course from 3 to 4 years. National Health Service employers are adopting a range of strategies to recruit and retain pharmacists and make better use of pharmacy support staff.

Breast Cancer Radiologists

Mr. Amess: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to secure the provision of additional breast cancer radiologists. [52870]

Mr. Milburn: The Specialty Workforce Advisory Group (SWAG) advises the National Health Service Executive and the Welsh Office on the number of higher specialist trainees needed to ensure an adequate supply of properly trained doctors in each specialty. It carries out annual reviews of each specialty's estimated need for consultants.

For 1998–99, SWAG recommended further increases in the number of higher specialist trainees, in diagnostic radiology. It has recommended that these increases be treated as a priority.

Millennium Compliance

Mr. Cotter: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what extra provision of funds will be made available to the National Health Service following the comprehensive spending review to deal with the date change problem. [53157]

Mr. Milburn: My right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer announced additional resources for the National Health Service in England, totalling £17.7 billion over the years 1990–2000 to 2001–02, on 14 July 1998, *Official Report*, column *194*. This additional funding will allow the NHS not only to meet all pressures including the date change problem, but also to deliver a better, more modern NHS.

Restrictive Patents

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to ensure that restrictive patents on beneficial medicinal techniques do not prevent the use of those techniques on patients in the United Kingdom. [52897]

Mr. Milburn: Not all inventions concerning medicinal techniques are patentable in the United Kingdom. Both the United Kingdom Patents Act (1977) and the European Patent Convention (1978), which govern the grant of patent rights having effect in the United Kingdom, expressly exclude from patentability methods of treatment by therapy, surgery and diagnosis which are practised on the human body.

Existing UK Patent Law already includes safeguards specifically to prevent the abuse of patent rights for any invention, including those associated with medicine, such as providing for compulsory licensing of rights in the event that the supply of a patented product is not being met on reasonable terms.

Tuberculosis

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many reported cases there have been of the new antibiotic resistant tuberculosis; and if he will make a statement. [52922]

Ms Jowell: Data on tuberculosis (TB) that is resistant to antibiotics are split into two categories: TB resistant to one or more of the antibiotics normally used to treat TB (drug resistant TB); and TB resistant to isoniazid and rifampicin, the two most effective drugs for treating TB (multi-drug resistant TB). United Kingdom information for the years 1994 to 1997 is given in the table.

	UK laboratory isolates	
Year	*TB resistant to one or more anti-TB drugs*	*Multi-drug resistant TB*
1994	206	43
1995	212	49
1996	241	60
1997	220	49

Includes multi-drug resistant cases

Provisional

Source:

Public Health Laboratory Service on behalf of the UK Mycobacterial Resistance Network—MYCOBNET

Drug resistance is not new. TB infections consist of a mixture of organisms, some of which are naturally resistant to some antibiotics. These can multiply if the treatment for the TB is inadequate. This has been known since antibiotic treatment for TB first became available in the 1950s.

Multidrug resistant (MDR) TB in the UK remains at low levels and we intend to keep it this way. One of the aims of national TB policy is to prevent the emergence of drug resistance. Guidance from the Interdepartmental Working Group on Tuberculosis (IDWG) called "Recommendations for the Prevention and Control of Tuberculosis at Local Level" was issued by the Department of Health and Welsh Office in 1996. This guidance contained recommendations for ensuring that patients with TB complete their treatment and about infection control to prevent the spread of TB as well as advice on drug-resistant TB. Copies are available in the Library. An Expert Working Group has been set up under the IDWG to make more detailed recommendations for the prevention of transmission of TB in immuno-compromised (eg HIV) patients and of drug resistant (including MDR) TB to supplement the published guidance. Its report is expected to be issued shortly. Advice on the management of patients with HIV and MDR-TB has been issued by the British Thoracic Society.

Dental Services

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many dentists currently treat NHS patients; and if he will make a statement. [53105]

Mr. Milburn: 16,148 principals, 608 assistants and 544 vocational trainees were practising as general dental services dentists in England and Wales on 31 March 1998. These figures exclude salaried, hospital and community dentists.

Smoking

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what research the Government have commissioned recently into health risks of smoking in public places. [52921]

Ms Jowell: In March this year the Department published a report by the scientific committee on tobacco and health. The committee scientifically reviewed and appraised a range of important issues relating to tobacco and health, including the health effects of exposure of non-smokers to environmental tobacco smoke. The Department has not recently commissioned any separate research into the associated health risks of smoking in public places.

Copies of the report are available in the Library and are also available from Her Majesty's Stationery Office.

Mr. Syms: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will publish the evidence originating *(a)* domestically and *(b)* overseas which has been considered and rejected in the course of preparing his forthcoming White Paper on Tobacco. [53387]

Ms Jowell: The Government have received a wide range of material, from numerous sources, in connection with the forthcoming White Paper on tobacco control. There are no plans to publish that material.

Information Technology

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much his Department spent on IT, itemising *(a)* personal computers, *(b)* main-frame, *(c)* mini-computers and *(d)* file servers in the last year for which figures are available. [52885]

Mr. Milburn: The total Departmental spend, including agencies, on new items for the financial year 1997–1998, including replacement equipment for an upgrade of our internal office information system, was:

personal computers: £3,286,845

main-frame: Nil

mini-computers: Nil

file servers: £1,037,210.

Maintenance costs for these items and the outsourced mainframe services totalled £897,553 in 1997–98.

NHS Doctors

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many doctors joined the NHS and how many doctors left the NHS by year, for the last four years. [53771]

Mr. Milburn: Information about doctors joining and leaving the National Health Service is not collected centrally.

Head Injuries

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what measures he will take to ensure a consistently high standard for the diagnosis of head injuries at hospital accident and emergency departments; and if he will make a statement. [53569]

Mr. Boateng: All accident and emergency departments should have written guidelines on the management of patients who attend with head injuries.

In Executive Letter (93)115, the Department drew the attention of the National Health Service to published guidance on the management of head injuries. Copies of this Executive Letter are available in the Library.

Radiotherapy

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to reduce waiting lists for radiotherapy in NHS hospitals in the London Region. [52808]

Mr. Milburn: *[holding answer 29 July 1998]:* An extra £104.6 million has already been allocated to health authorities in the two Thames regions in 1998–99 to tackle National Health Service waiting lists. It is for health authorities, in partnership with NHS trusts and local primary care teams, to make decisions on how these extra resources should be invested to reduce waiting lists.

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proposals his Department has to increase the availability of trained radiotherapists in the NHS. [53389]

Mr. Milburn: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to the right hon. Member for Maidstone and the Weald (Miss Widdecombe) on 29 July 1998.

Negligence Claims

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to reduce negligence claims on the NHS. [52865]

Mr. Milburn *[holding answer 29 July 1998]:* On 29 April my right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State wrote to a number of organisations representing professional, legal, NHS and patient interests seeking their views on what can be done to reduce the threat of litigation. Officials are in the process of studying replies in order to identify suggestions which might be taken forward in the future.

Waiting Lists

Miss Widdecombe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will estimate the number of patients joining National Health Service waiting lists in *(a)* 1998 and *(b)* 1999. [53018]

Mr. Milburn *[holding answer 29 July 1998]:* No.

Miss Widdecombe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients joined National Heath Service waiting lists in *(a)* 1996 and *(b)* 1997. [53017]

Mr. Boateng *[holding answer 29 July 1998]:* The latest figures on admissions to waiting lists suggest that in 1996–97 around 4.1 million patients joined National Health Service waiting lists.

Mr. Hammond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the number of patients in England and Wales suspended from NHS surgical waiting lists at 30 June. [53734]

Mr. Milburn: Information on the number of suspensions from surgical waiting lists in England at 30 June 1998 will be available in due course.

GP Recruitment

Miss Widdecombe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will estimate the proportion of the proposed increased GP recruitment which will be recruited from outside the United Kingdom. [53019]

Mr. Milburn *[holding answer 29 July 1998]:* I refer the right hon. Member to the reply I gave the hon. Member for North Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) on 28 July 1998, *Official Report*, column *177*.

Psychiatric Wards

Mr. Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will introduce a national computerised record of vacant beds in psychiatric wards. [53830]

Mr. Boateng: No. What is important is that available resources are used to fund direct patient care. There would be no guarantee that a national computerised record would be sufficient and sufficiently up-to-date to allow for access to vacant beds particularly in an emergency. Admissions are best handled at local level using appropriate contacts and knowledge coupled with effective liaison by professional and managerial staff.

Ashford Hospital

Mr. Wilshire: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the monthly waiting list statistics for Ashford (Middlesex) hospital from May 1997 to June 1998. [53217]

Mr. Boateng: Information is not available centrally in the form requested. For 1997–98 waiting list figures for trusts and health authorities were collected quarterly. The inpatient waiting list figures for Ashford Hospital National Health Service Trust were as follows:

Date	*Number*
30 June 1997	3,670
30 September 1997	3,776
31 December 1997	3,947
31 March 1998	4,125

Monthly waiting list figures for April to July 1998 will be available at the end of August.

Written Answers

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what has been the average length of time taken by his Department in the current session to give substantive answers to written questions tabled for answer on a named day. [53728]

Mr. Milburn: During the period 15 May 1997 to 31 March 1998, 91 per cent. of questions tabled for answer on a named day were given substantive answers on that day. Of the small minority not answered on the named day, 90 per cent. were answered within one week and 98 per cent. within four weeks.

Non-departmental Public Bodies

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the non-departmental public bodies in existence on 1 May 1997 that *(a)* have been disbanded, *(b)* will be

disbanded in the next 12 months, *(c)* have had their functions transferred to (i) another non-departmental public body and (ii) a democratically elected body, *(d)* have been renamed but continue to perform a similar role and *(e)* have been unchanged; if he will indicate in (c)(ii) the relevant successor body; what new non-departmental public bodies have been established since 1 May 1997; and how many non-departmental public bodies his Department currently is responsible for. [53856]

Mr. Milburn: Of the non-Departmental public bodies (NDPBs) in existence on 1 May 1997 one, the Advisory Committee on Design Quality in the National Health Service, has been abolished. None are currently planned for abolition within the next 12 months but the Central Council for Education and Training for Social Work (an executive NDPB) will be abolished by 31 March 2001, subject to Parliamentary approval. No NDPBs have had their functions transferred to another non-departmental public body or to a democratically elected body and none have been renamed; the rest remain unchanged.

The Royal Commission on the Long-Term Care of the Elderly has been established since 1 May, but it must be wound up by 17 December 1998. The Advisory Committee on Dangerous Pathogens, which was a Departmental committee, has been reclassified as an advisory NDPB. We are responsible for 7 executive and 38 advisory NDPBs.

We are committed to keeping the number of NDPBs to a minimum and to ensuring that those which remain are open, accountable and effective. Many of the new NDPBs established since 1 May will be essential in helping the Government to deliver their manifesto commitments.

The NDPBs for which the Department of Health is responsible are listed in *Public Bodies*, copies of which have been laid in the Libraries of both Houses.

Employees Over 60

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* men and *(b)* women aged over 60 years were employed by (i) his Department and (ii) his Department's agencies on 1 January. [53065]

Mr. Milburn: The information requested is in contained in the table.

Staff over age 60 on 1 January 1998

	Male	*Female*
Department of Health (excluding agencies)	15	8
Agencies		
Medicines Control Agency	2	11
Medical Devices Agency	0	0
NHS Estates Agency	1	1
NHS Pensions Agency	6	10
Total	24	30

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* men and *(b)* women employed by (1) his Department and (2) his Department's agencies have contracts of employment which permit them to retire after their 60th birthday. [53041]

Mr. Milburn: The information requested is contained in the table.

Staff with contracts of employment which permit them to retire after their 60th birthday

	Male	*Female*
Department of Health (excluding agencies)	259	445
Agencies		
Medicines Control Agency	0	0
Medical Devices Agency	1	0
NHS Estates Agency	90	59
NHS Pensions Agency	0	0
Total	350	504

Strokes

Mr. Hammond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he expects to make a response to the specific recommendations regarding strokes in the CSAG report published in June. [53733]

Ms Jowell: The Government have already welcomed the Clinical Services Advisory Group report which has been circulated widely to health professionals. It is envisaged that clinicians will take on board recommendations from the report and that they will be reflected in standards of patient care.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will not be making any additional response to the specific recommendations regarding strokes.

Hospital Deaths

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many deaths occurred in hospitals during the period between June and October, in each of the last 10 years. [53749]

Mr. Milburn: Information for the years 1991 to 1996 (the latest year available) is in the table. Comparable data are also available for 1989 and 1990 but are not immediately accessible. We will write to the hon. Member shortly with data for those years.

Year	*Number of deaths*
1 June-31 October 1991	84,246
1 June-31 October 1992	84,825
1 June-31 October 1993	86,097
1 June-31 October 1994	81,608
1 June-31 October 1995	81,703
1 June-31 October 1996[1]	75,005

[1] 1996–97 is derived from ungrossed HES data, and may not be directly comparable with earlier years

Note:
1992–93 to 1995–96 data are grossed for coverage

Source:
Department of Health, Hospital Episode Statistics (HES)

Asthma

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the Government's policy on *(a)* preventing and *(b)* alleviating asthma in

children; what national initiatives are targeted at children with asthma; and how much each of these initiatives costs. [53358]

Ms Jowell: The Government are working closely with the health professions, the National Asthma Campaign and all those with an interest in asthma to improve knowledge of the causes of asthma and to make life as normal as possible for children and adults who suffer from it.

Management of asthma, in children as in adults, mainly takes place in primary care. 93 per cent. of general practitioners run organised programmes of care for asthma under the Chronic Disease Management Programme. The Department of Health is currently considering funding for a project, co-ordinated by the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health, to develop new evidence-based clinical guidelines for asthma in children and adults.

The Medical Research Council spends about £2 million a year on research into prevention and treatment of asthma and related areas. The Department of Health, the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions and the MRC are jointly funding a major research initiative on the relationship between air pollution and respiratory disease, which may inform prevention strategies. The National Asthma Campaign is managing, on behalf of the National Health Service Executive, the NHS National research and development Programme on Asthma Management. Many of the research projects commissioned will be pertinent to asthma in children.

Asthma is featured in the joint Department for Education and Employment and Department of Health guidance on "Supporting pupils with medical needs in school", issued in October 1996. Asthma prevention will be encompassed in the healthy schools initiative launched by the two Departments in May, for which £2 million is committed for 1998–99. In the Green Paper "Our Healthier Nation", healthy schools are identified as a key setting, and asthma also heads the list of possible local target areas.

The National Asthma Campaign also works closely with schools. The Department of Health gave the Campaign a Section 64 project grant, totalling nearly £60,000 over the three years 1994–97, to create a childhood asthma education officer post.

Doctors' Training

Dr. Iddon: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what assessment he has made of the potential of information technology to provide the means for the ongoing training of qualified doctors; [53224]

(2) what proposals he has for the ongoing training of medical practitioners under the lifelong learning programme. [53225]

Mr. Milburn: We recognise that the availability of appropriately trained staff is one of the key determinants of the quality of patient care. The importance of lifelong learning as one of the key activities underpinning Clinical Governance is recognised in the recently published consultation document "A First Class Service—Quality in the NHS".

In this document we have set out a new approach to lifelong learning including the identification of professional and local service needs and priorities in personal development plans to be developed by individual health professionals in discussion with colleagues locally. Organisations will also be encouraged to complement these individual development plans with organisational plans.

Our aim is for all National Health Service employers to have training and development plans in place for the majority of health professional staff by April 2000. We have given a commitment to work with professional and educational bodies to explore a range of practical issues including the role of monitoring, peer review and appraisal, the role of new technology and distance learning, how the expertise of professional and statutory bodies can best support local CPD, and the educational infrastructure required to identify and meet CPD.

Later this summer we will issue an NHS human resource strategy which will include ways of developing the ability of staff to contribute to the improvement of services, and further guidance will be issued this Winter on the development of a locally based approach to lifelong learning.

The NHS Executive, as part of its information management and technology strategy, has had an active programme to develop clinical awareness of the benefits of the effective use of information through IT. The supporting infrastructure has developed considerably over the last three years. There are a number of projects within medical schools and in post-graduate education programmes to support professional development. Examples of good practice case studies are made available through intranets and over the internet.

Nerve Gas Attacks (Japan)

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the clinical data on the long-term health effects on the victims of the nerve gas attacks on the Tokyo subway and Matsumato in 1994 and 1995; and if he will make a statement. [54538]

Ms Jowell: Officials at the Department of Health have studied published material on the two nerve agent attacks by terrorist groups, to which my hon. Friend refers. Some of these papers relate to delayed effects of nerve agents.

Prescription Charges

Mr. McWalter: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will assess the *(a)* benefits and *(b)* disadvantages of requiring a single prescription charge for patients whose illness or condition requires them to be prescribed two or more medicines or treatments; and if he will make a statement; [52414]

(2) if he will estimate the costs of requiring patients to pay a single prescription charge when their medical condition requires two or more medicines or treatments; and if he will estimate the costs in terms of *(a)* revenue forgone and *(b)* administrative costs incurred. [52415]

Mr. Milburn: A single prescription charge for each occasion where a number of medicines are supplied to a patient would mean a loss of revenue to the National Health Service, or an increase in the level of the charge

to avoid this. Prepayment certificates are available to help patients who pay charges and need a number of medicines.

The revenue forgone from patients paying the current prescription charge to cover all items on the prescription form, rather than paying for each item, is estimated as being in the order of £55 million. This estimate takes no account of any revenue lost because of any switch from purchase of prepayment certificates that might result, or the cost of any additional drugs which may be prescribed if such a scheme was introduced. The administrative costs of such a change are likely to be minimal.

Vaccination Programmes

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to the Green Paper "Our Healthier Nation", if he will make a statement on the Government's policy on *(a)* the introduction of a universal adolescent hepatitis B vaccination programme and *(b)* the introduction of a universal meningitis vaccination programme. [53885]

Ms Jowell: Policy on the use of vaccines to protect against hepatitis B and meningitis is based on the recommendations of independent experts, including the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI).

The United Kingdom has one of the lowest prevalence rates of hepatitis B carriage in the world. Our policy is to target hepatitis B immunisation at groups at increased risk of infection because of their lifestyle, occupation or other factors such as close contact with a case or carrier of hepatitis B. The JCVI has recently considered our immunisation strategy. It has not recommended the introduction of universal immunisation for the present, but it wished to see the selective programme reinforced. We are considering ways of achieving this.

The introduction of haemophilus influenzae b vaccine in 1992 has led to the virtual elimination of this disease, which used to be the most common cause of bacterial meningitis in the under 5s. Most cases of bacterial meningitis are now caused by meningococcal disease. There is no vaccine available against the most common strain of meningococcal disease, Group B, whilst Group C vaccine does not protect those at most risk from the disease (that is, very young children), offers only about 80 per cent. protection and does not offer long term protection and, as such, is not suitable for routine use. Current policy is, therefore, to use Group C vaccine only whenever local circumstances indicate, such as in outbreaks of an unusually high incidence of Group C infection.

We are funding work to evaluate new meningococcal and pneumococcal vaccines in United Kingdom children. These studies are being conducted by the Public Health Laboratory Service in collaboration with the National Institute for Biological Standards and Controls, the Centre for Applied Microbiology and Research and the Institute for Child Health. The studies have shown very encouraging results already for meningococcal Group C vaccines and early indicators for Group B are encouraging. There are reasonable prospects that these vaccines will eventually be able to induce long term immunity although more research is needed before their suitability for widespread use can be considered.

Carers

Mr. O'Hara: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will estimate the number of people in the United Kingdom who are currently caring for parents and children or parents and grandchildren; and if he will provide this information by gender, age and employment status of carer. [54160]

Mr. Boateng: Such information as is readily available is included in the Office for National Statistics' Supplement A to the 1995 General Household Survey, entitled 'Informal Carers'. Copies of this information are available in the Library.

Xenotransplantation

Ms Christine Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when the Government will publish the responses to the consultation exercise held last year on Animal Tissue into Humans: report of the Advisory Group on the Ethics of Xenotransplantation. [53726]

Mr. Dobson: We are making the responses available and announcing our action on the regulation of xenotransplantation today. 51 responses were received. Two respondents asked that their responses be kept confidential. All other responses are being made publicly available through the Department of Health, Scottish Office, Welsh Office, Northern Ireland Office and the Library.

Welsh Language Scheme

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health on what date his Department received notification from the Welsh Language Board in relation to the need to prepare a Welsh language scheme; on what date his Department and the Board held consultations on such a scheme; when a scheme was formally submitted to the Board; and if it has been approved. [53357]

Ms Jowell: The Department received notification from the Welsh Language Board on 5 December 1996. Consultations took place within the Department and with the Welsh Language Board until early May 1997. On 7 May 1997 the Permanent Secretary's office wrote to the Welsh Language Board confirming the Department's position which was that it had suitably flexible arrangements in place to fulfil its responsibilities to Welsh speaking people and saw no need for a formal Welsh Language Scheme.

Correspondence

Mr. Wilshire: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he expects to reply to the letter from the hon. Member for Spelthorne dated 2 June, concerning Mrs. W. Pockett of Sunbury-on-Thames, reference POH(4)5430/17. [53798]

Mr. Boateng: I replied on 24 April. A copy of the letter was sent to the hon. Member on 29 July.

Residential Care

Mr. Grogan: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to amend legislation to allow the elderly in long-term care to use any capital they have which is

wholly disregarded by the means tests to make up the difference in cost between the care which their authority is prepared to arrange and the care they choose. [53957]

Mr. Boateng: The terms of reference of the Royal Commission on long-term care of elderly people ask them to look at how the cost of long term care should be apportioned between public funds and individuals.

NHS Pensions Agency

Laura Moffatt: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will approve and publish the annual report and accounts of the NHS Pensions Agency. [54630]

Mr. Milburn: We have approved the Report and Accounts which has been laid before both Houses of Parliament in accordance with the requirements of Section 5(2) and 5(3) of the Exchequer and Audit Departments Act 1921.

Copies have been placed in the Library.

Nannies (Registration)

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will bring forward proposals to require the registration of nannies. [53150]

Ms Estelle Morris: I have been asked to reply.

The Government are consulting on the regulation of early education and day care, including the scope of services which should be regulated. The aim is to produce a system of regulation which supports the development of a national childcare strategy but also meets the needs of children and families for safe and high quality day care. We will announce our proposals once the responses to the consultation, which ends on 31 July, have been considered.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Departmental Reviews

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the reviews his Department initiated in the years *(a)* 1974–75, *(b)* 1979–80 and *(c)* 1992–93. [48513]

Mr. Fatchett *[holding answer 6 July 1998]:* According to the *Official Report*, the FCO initiated one review in financial year 1992–93. The subject of this review was how best to conduct relations between Whitehall and the Caribbean Dependent Territories, *Official Report*, column *311*. For financial years 1974–75 and 1979–80 the *Official Report* is not held in a form that can be searched electronically. The cost of obtaining the information requested for those periods would therefore be disproportionate.

Asbestos

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what guidance his Department issues to those constructing buildings for which it is responsible on the use of materials containing asbestos. [52315]

Mr. Fatchett: For any construction projects in the UK we employ professional project managers who in turn would appoint planning supervisors under the CDM regulations. Their duty is to ensure that all guidance and legislation related to asbestos is brought to the attention of those working on the project and ensure compliance with all Health and Safety requirements.

For overseas building projects the FCO use contracts which specify performance standards which at a minimum must comply with British or EC building regulations (or local regulations where in those cases higher standards may apply).

Turkey

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to the meeting of the Council of Ministers in May, what further developments were reported in respect of the release from prison of four Turkish parliamentarians. [52781]

Ms Quin: I will write to my hon. Friend shortly. We have repeatedly made it clear to the Turkish authorities that the conviction of elected politicians for the non-violent expression of their opinions can only damage Turkey's international standing.

Information Technology

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how much his Department spent on IT, itemising *(a)* personal computers, *(b)* main-frame, *(c)* mini-computers and *(d)* file servers in the last year for which figure are available. [52877]

Mr. Fatchett: In 1997–98 this Department spent £21.1 million capital on IT equipment, including the first phase of a programme to supply industry-standard common software and hardware to all Posts overseas. Of this, £5.3 million was for purchase of personal computers; the balance was spent on set-up costs—including minor building works at Posts—software, cabling, peripheral equipment, and communications equipment. None was for purchase of main-frame, mini-computers or file servers.

Immigration

Ms Oona King: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many applications have been made at the British High Commission Visa Section in Dhaka for entry clearance by over-aged children who had previously been refused on the grounds of not being related as claimed but whose relationship has now been established by DNA testing since June 1989. [52715]

Mr. Fatchett: Figures for applications made by over-aged children under the 1989 concession at Dhaka are not readily available, and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. No fresh applications have been made in recent years under the concession at any overseas Post.

India and Pakistan

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on Her Majesty's Government's relations with India and Pakistan since the nuclear tests conducted by both countries. [52730]

Mr. Fatchett *[holding answer 28 July 1998]:* I refer the hon. Member to the answer my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary gave to the hon. Member for Rochford and Southend, East (Sir T. Taylor) on 14 July 1998, *Official Report*, column *175*. I subsequently met with Jaswant Singh on 28 July in the margins of the ASEAN post-ministerial conference in Manila.

National Non-domestic Rates

Mr. Crausby: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the names of the diplomatic missions and international organisations that have outstanding balances of over £10,000 as at 31 March in respect of national non-domestic rates. [54153]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: Most missions meet their obligations. However, at 31 March 1998 the following owed over £10,000.00 for National Non-domestic Rates:

£

Country	*Amount outstanding*[1]
Afghanistan	32,920.71
Algeria	38,344.90
Angola	27,019.13
Cameroon	28,760.56
China	250,049.83
Cote d'Ivoire	30,403.94
Cuba	72,330.14
Czech Republic	77,069.41
Egypt	54,735.90
Imo	28,208.89
Iran	101,439.09
Jordan	39,135.25
Libya	23,547.10
Morocco	20,932.01
Mozambique	30,559.79
Nigeria	332,218.53
Pakistan	25,098.33
Philippines	15,904.97

£

Country	Amount outstanding[1]
Saudi Arabia	510,377.34
Senegal	10,610.23
Sierra Leone	73,585.31
Slovak Republic	43,389.27
Spain	74,666.12
Thailand	77,226.28
Uganda	15,335.25
Yemen Republic	34,759.24
Yugoslavia	50,021.78
Zambia	21,683.65
Zimbabwe	193,842.88

[1] up to 31 March 1998

Weapons of Mass Destruction

Mr. Pickthall: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the extent to which the end-use control, relating to goods which may be used in connection with the development of weapons of mass destruction, applies to the supply of goods to destinations subject to binding UN arms embargoes. [54871]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: Council Regulation (EC) No. 3381/94 and the Dual-Use and Related Goods (Export Control) Regulations 1996 prohibit the export from the UK to any destination of dual-use or other goods which the exporter has been informed by a competent authority are or may be intended, wholly or in part, or which the exporter knows are intended, wholly or in part, to be used in connection with the development, production, handling, operation, maintenance, storage, detection, identification or dissemination of chemical, biological or nuclear weapons or the development, production, maintenance or storage of missiles capable of delivering such weapons, and also where the exporter has grounds for suspecting that the goods might so be used. These provisions are known as the end-use control.

Under UK law, all binding UN embargoes are implemented by prohibiting the export of goods and technology on the Military List which forms part III of Schedule 1 to the Export of Goods (Control) Order 1994, as amended.

In addition, the Orders in Council implementing in UK law the binding UN embargoes against Liberia, Somalia, Libya, Angola and Rwanda also prohibit the supply of persons in the UK or by UK nationals or companies overseas of goods which are or may be intended to be used in connection with the development, production, handling, operation, maintenance, storage, detection, identification or dissemination of chemical, biological or nuclear weapons or the development, production, maintenance or storage of missiles capable of delivering such weapons.

This statement supplements the information given in another place on the scope of arms embargoes observed by the UK by the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, Baroness Chalker of Wallasey, on 20 March 1997, *Official Report, House of Lords*, columns 75–77; and by the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Baroness Symons, on 28 January 1998, *Official Report, House of Lords*, columns 36–39. An updated version of the list of the Government's commitments regarding the application of strategic export controls, covering this point and other recent changes, has been laid in the Library.

Nuclear Disarmament

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is his Department's policy towards the Irish Government's recent initiative on global nuclear disarmament known as The New Agenda Coalition; and if he will make a statement. [51680]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: The "New Agenda" statement calls for a clear commitment from the Nuclear Weapon States to the speedy, final and total elimination of nuclear weapons. We have made clear our commitment to the global elimination of nuclear weapons. We have taken some important steps towards this goal in the Strategic Defence Review and elsewhere.

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is his policy on the South African Conference on Disarmament's proposal to establish an ad-hoc committee on nuclear disarmament; and if he will make a statement. [51681]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: We are actively considering how best to follow up internationally the initiatives on nuclear disarmament set out in the Strategic Defence Review.

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has to report to the participatory nation states of the Conference on Disarmament on the conclusions of the Strategic Defence Review; and if he will make a statement. [51682]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: The United Kingdom's Permanent Representative has today made a statement to the Conference on Disarmament's Plenary Session, the first such session since the announcement of the Strategic Defence Review.

Employees Over 60

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many *(a)* men and *(b)* women employed by (1) his Department and (2) his Department's agencies have contracts of employment which permit them to retire after their 60th birthday. [53054]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: Letters of appointment for staff in the FCO state that 60 is the official retirement age.

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many *(a)* men and *(b)* women aged over 60 years were employed by (i) his Department and (ii) his Department's agencies on 1 January. [53059]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: On 1 January 1998 the Foreign and Commonwealth Office employed 34 men and 16 women aged over 60.

The Wilton Park agency employed no staff over 60 years.

European Commission Documents

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has received on the European Commission document "What exactly is Europe? A Classroom Guide to the European Union", published in November 1997. [53732]

Ms Quin: We have no record of any official representations on the European Commission document referred to by the hon. Member.

Legg Report

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what funds have been allocated to implement the recommendations in the Legg report. [53870]

Mr. Robin Cook: The outcome of the Comprehensive Spending Review will allow us to devote resources to implementing management and other changes within the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. This will include changes resulting from the recommendations of the Legg report, which are in line with our intentions to modernise the FCO.

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to the Legg report, if he will list the new instructions that will be given to those compiling and approving press lines. [53874]

Mr. Robin Cook: The News Department of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, which is responsible, in co-ordination with the specialist department concerned, for drawing up press lines, has taken full note of the lessons highlighted by the Legg report.

Mr. Howard: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to paragraph 3.20 of the Legg report, what action he proposes to take in respect of the oral statement made by the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the hon. Member for Manchester, Central (Mr. Lloyd), on 12 March 1998, *Official Report*, column 841. [53884]

Mr. Robin Cook: None.

Mr. Howard: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to paragraph 9.55 of the Legg report, what action he proposes to take in respect of his oral statement of 12 May 1998, *Official Report*, column 160, that the papers seen by the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the hon. Member for Manchester, Central (Mr. Lloyd), in mid-April gave rise to no grounds for apprehension or concern on the part of the Minister of State. [53880]

Mr. Robin Cook: Paragraph 9.55 of the Legg report states that the documents that went to the Minister of State were "misleading" and "substantially incomplete".

Paragraph 10.48 of the report states that the information that the Minister of State was given in mid-April

"indicated that this was being dealt with by officials. It told him that the FCO was not aware of a shipment of arms. He saw no need to take action."

I support his judgment at that time, based on the information that was available to him, and stand by my remarks to the House on 12 May.

Mr. Wilshire: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) how many times his Ministers met Sir Thomas Legg whilst he was conducting his inquiry; and what was discussed on each occasion; [53789]

(2) how many times he met Sir Thomas Legg whilst he was conducting his inquiry; and what was discussed on each occasion. [53788]

Mr. Robin Cook: I met Sir Thomas Legg and Sir Robin Ibbs shortly after their appointment, on 26 May, to discuss the terms of reference of their investigation. They subsequently held one interview each with me and my hon. Friends the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the Member for Manchester, Central (Mr. Lloyd), and the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, to ask us questions about our involvement in the events they were investigating. These interviews took place on 1 July, 18 June and 29 June respectively.

Mr. Wilshire: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list all those *(a)* who saw and *(b)* who were given a copy of the Legg report prior to its publication. [53793]

Mr. Robin Cook: No officials or Ministers were given a copy of the Legg report before it was presented to me on Friday 24 July, although those mentioned to any significant extent in the report were sent draft extracts referring to them, to allow them to comment.

After the report had been presented to me, and prior to my statement in the House on 27 July 1998, *Official Report*, columns 19–34, it was given a very limited distribution, on a confidential basis, to Ministers and senior officials, and I also allowed the two Opposition Foreign Affairs spokesmen and the Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee to read it in the Foreign Office.

Mr. Wilshire: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if copies of the Legg report were issued to journalists under an embargo prior to its official publication. [53794]

Mr. Robin Cook: No.

Mr. Wilshire: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he first received the Legg report. [53787]

Mr. Robin Cook: The secretary to the Legg investigation presented the report to my office at 16.20 on Friday 24 July, and I saw it later that day.

International Criminal Court

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what the United Kingdom's

financial contribution will be to the running costs of the International Criminal Court. [53888]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: No budget for the Court has yet been set so it is not possible to say what financial contribution will fall to the United Kingdom.

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs who will appoint *(a)* the prosecutor and *(b)* the judges of the International Criminal Court. [53889]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: Both the Prosecutor and the Judges of the International Criminal Court will be elected by the members of the Assembly of States Parties to the Statute.

War Crime Tribunals

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the costs to date for the *(a)* Rwanda and *(b)* Yugoslavia tribunals. [53887]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: The costs to date of the International Criminal Tribunals for Rwanda and the former Yugoslavia which are funded by assessments upon member states of the United Nations are as follows:

International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda

Year	*$ million*
1995	2.2
1996	24.5
1997 (budgeted expenditure)	36.0

International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia

Year	*$ million*
1 May 1994–31 December 1995	35.8
1996	30.4
1997	36.4

The costs to date of the International Criminal Tribunals which are funded by donations from member states and other contributors to the Tribunals' Trust Funds are as follows:

International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda

Year	*$ million*
1995	0.2
1996	0.8
1997 (estimate)	1.0

International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia

Year	*$ million*
1 May 1994–31 December 1995	0.09
1996	1.7
1997	4.0

All figures are actual unless otherwise stated. The Tribunals also receive donations in-kind and the services of gratis (seconded) personnel.

Arms Sales

Mr. Letwin: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what mechanisms Her Majesty's Government uses to police the sale of arms by UK-based companies under circumstances where those arms do not touch United Kingdom soil. [53808]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: The Import, Export and Customs Powers (Defence) Act 1939 gives the Government power to control only exports from and imports to the UK. As such, it does not allow the Government to impose controls on the involvement of persons in the UK or UK persons abroad in trafficking in goods between overseas countries or in brokering such deals. However, the Government do have the power to control trafficking and brokering under the United Nations Act 1946 where this is necessary to implement a binding UN decision, such as a binding UN arms embargo. The DTI White Paper on Strategic Export Controls (Cm 3989) contains a proposal to introduce a power so that the Government can also control the involvement of persons in the UK or UK persons abroad in trafficking and brokering in controlled goods to countries which are the subject of other types of embargo, such as those resulting from decisions of the EU, OSCE or the Government; in certain types of equipment, the export of which has been banned from the UK because of evidence that goods of the same type have been used in torture; and in missiles capable of a range of at least 300 km. The White Paper's proposals relating to weapons of mass destruction also cover trafficking and brokering.

The investigation and prosecution of any alleged breaches of UK legislation implementing UN embargoes or sanctions is a matter for the Commissioners of Customs and Excise.

Foreign Enlistment Act 1870

Mr. Letwin: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if it is his policy to enforce the Foreign Enlistment Act 1870. [53799]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: The Foreign Enlistment Act 1870 remains on the Statute books. However, no successful prosecutions have ever been brought under this legislation.

Diplomatic Posts

Mr. Jim Murphy: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the combined capital value of the United Kingdom's diplomatic posts. [53290]

Mr. Fatchett: A financial summary of the Department's assets, in the UK and overseas, can be found on page 90 (Appendix C) of this year's Departmental Report, which can be found in the House of Commons Library.

UN Conventions

Sir John Stanley: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) what official representations the British Government have made to the Government of Guinea-Bissau regarding that Government's non-ratification of the International Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination; and on what dates; [53654]

(2) what official representations the British Government have made to the Government of Saint Kitts and Nevis regarding that Government's non-ratification of the International Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination; and on what dates; [53628]

(3) what official representations the British Government have made to the Government of Kenya regarding that Government's non-ratificiaton of the International Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination; and on what dates; [53641]

(4) what official representations the British Government have made to the Government of Tuvalu regarding that Government's non-ratification of the UN Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women; and on what dates; [53400]

(5) what official representations the British Government have made to the Government of San Marino regarding that Government's non-ratification of the UN Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women; and on what dates; [53409]

(6) what official representations the British Government have made to the Government of Djibouti regarding that Government's non-ratification of the UN Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women; and on what dates; [53424]

(7) what official representations the British Government have made to the Government of Andorra regarding that Government's non-ratification of the International Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination; and on what dates; [53662]

(8) what official representations the British Government have made to the Government of Georgia regarding that Government's non-ratification of the International Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination; and on what dates; [53652]

(9) what official representations the British Government have made to the Government of the Cook Islands regarding that Government's non-ratification of the UN Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women; and on what dates; [53426]

(10) what official representations the British Government have made to the Government of Monaco regarding that Government's non-ratification of the UN Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women; and on what dates; [53416]

(11) what official representations the British Government have made to the Governments of *(a)* Lebanon, *(b)* Lesotho, *(c)* Liberia, *(d)* Madagascar, *(e)* Malaysia, *(f)* the Maldives, *(g)* Mali, *(h)* the Marshall Islands, *(i)* Mauritania and *(j)* the Federated States of Micronesia regarding those Governments' non-ratification of the UN Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment and on what dates in respect of each Government; [53878]

(12) what official representations the British Government have made to the Government of Somalia regarding that Government's non-ratification of the UN Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women; and on what dates; [53405]

(13) what official representations the British Government have made to the Government of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea regarding that Government's non-ratification of the UN Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women; and on what dates; [53425]

(14) what official representations the British Government have made to the Government of Malaysia regarding that Government's non-ratification of the International Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination; and on what dates; [53637]

(15) what official representations the British Government have made to the Government of the United Arab Emirates regarding that Government's non-ratification of the UN Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women; and on what dates; [53399]

(16) what official representations the British Government have made to the Government of Samoa regarding that Government's non-ratification of the International Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination; and on what dates; [53627]

(17) what official representations the British Government have made to the Government of the Federated States of Micronesia regarding that Government's non-ratification of the UN Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women; and on what dates; [53417]

(18) what official representations the British Government have made to the Governments of *(a)* India, *(b)* Indonesia, *(c)* Iran, *(d)* the Islamic Republic of Iraq, *(e)* Ireland, *(f)* Jamaica, *(g)* Japan, *(h)* Kazakhstan, *(i)* Kiribati and *(j)* the Lao People's Democratic Republic regarding those Governments' non-ratification of the UN Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment and on what dates in respect of each Government; [53877]

(19) what official representations the British Government have made to the Government of Eritrea regarding that Government's non-ratification of the International Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination; and on what dates; [53651]

(20) what official representations the British Government have made to the Government of Bhutan regarding that Government's non-ratification of the International Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination; and on what dates; [53658]

(21) what official representations the British Government have made to the Government of Comoros regarding that Government's non-ratification of the International Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination; and on what dates; [53645]

(22) what official representations the British Government have made to the Government of Nive regarding that Government's non-ratification of the International Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination; and on what dates; [53632]

(23) what official representations the British Government have made to the Government of the Marshall Islands regarding that Government's non-ratification of the UN Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women; and on what dates; [53419]

(24) what official representations the British Government have made to the Government of Dar-es-Salaam regarding that Government's non-ratification of the International Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination; and on what dates; [53660]

(25) what official representations the British Government have made to the Governments of *(a)* Mongolia, *(b)* Mozambique, *(c)* Myanmar, *(d)* Nauru, *(e)* Nicaragua, *(f)* Niger, *(g)* Nigeria, *(h)* Nive, *(i)* Oman and *(j)* Pakistan regarding those Governments' non-ratification of the UN Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment and on what dates in respect of each Government; [53879]

(26) what official representations the British Government have made to the Government of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea regarding that Government's non-ratification of the International Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination; and on what dates; [53647]

(27) what official representations the British Government have made to the Government of Equatorial Guinea regarding that Government's non-ratification of the International Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination; and on what dates; [53650]

(28) what official representations the British Government have made to the Government of Qatar regarding that Government's non-ratification of the UN Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women; and on what dates; [53410]

(29) what official representations the British Government have made to the Government of San Marino regarding that Government's non-ratification of the International Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination; and on what dates; [53626]

(30) what official representations the British Government have made to the Government of Oman regarding that Government's non-ratification of the UN Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women; and on what dates; [53412]

(31) what official representations the British Government have made to the Government of Liechtenstein regarding that Government's non-ratification of the International Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination; and on what dates; [53639]

(32) what official representations the British Government have made to the Government of the United States of America regarding that Government's non-ratification of the UN Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women; and on what dates; [53398]

(33) what official representations the British Government have made to the Government of Palau regarding that Government's non-ratification of the International Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination; and on what dates; [53630]

(34) what official representations the British Government have made to the Government of Palau regarding that Government's non-ratification of the UN Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women; and on what dates; [53411]

(35) what official representations the British Government have made to the Governments of *(a)* Dar-es-Salaam, *(b)* Burkina Faso, *(c)* Central African Republic, *(d)* Camores, *(e)* Congo, *(f)* Cook Islands, *(g)* the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, *(h)* Djbouti, *(i)* Dominica and *(j)* the Dominican Republic regarding those Governments' non-ratification of the UN Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment and on what dates in respect of each Government; [53875]

(36) what official representations the British Government have made to the Government of Nauru regarding that Government's non-ratification of the International Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination; and on what dates; [53633]

(37) what official representations the British Government have made to the Government of Brunei regarding that Government's non-ratification of the International Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination; and on what dates; [53659]

(38) what official representations the British Government have made to the Government of Kiribati regarding that Government's non-ratification of the International Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination; and on what dates; [53640]

(39) what official representations the British Government have made to the Government of Niger regarding that Government's non-ratification of the UN Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women; and on what dates; [53414]

(40) what official representations the British Government have made to the Government of Bahrain regarding that Government's non-ratification of the UN Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women; and on what dates; [53428]

(41) what official representations the British Government have made to the Government of Thailand regarding that Government's non-ratification of the International Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination; and on what dates; [53622]

(42) what official representations the British Government have made to the Government of the Holy See regarding that Government's non-ratification of the UN Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women; and on what dates; [53423]

(43) what official representations the British Government have made to the Governments of *(a)* Andorra, *(b)* Angola, *(c)* Bahamas, *(d)* Bangladesh, *(e)* Barbados, *(f)* Belgium, *(g)* Bhutan, *(h)* Bolivia, *(i)* Botswana, and *(j)* Brunei regarding those Governments' non-ratification of the UN Convention

against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment of Punishment and on what dates in respect of each Government; [53869]

(44) what official representations the British Government have made to the Governments of *(a)* Equatorial Guinea, *(b)* Eritrea, *(c)* Fiji, *(d)* Gabon, *(e)* Gambia, *(f)* Ghana, *(g)* Grenada, *(h)* Guinea-Bissau, *(i)* Haiti and *(j)* the Holy See regarding those Governments' non-ratification of the UN Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment and on what dates in respect of each Government; [53876]

(45) what official representations the British Government have made to the Government of Indonesia regarding that Government's non-ratification of the International Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination; and on what dates; [53644]

(46) what official representations the British Government have made to the Government of Benin regarding that Government's non-ratification of the International Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination; and on what dates; [53657]

(47) what official representations the British Government have made to the Government of Oman regarding that Government's non-ratification of the International Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination; and on what dates; [53631]

(48) what official representations the British Government have made to the Government of Myanmar regarding that Government's non-ratification of the International Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination; and on what dates; [53634]

(49) what official representations the British Government have made to the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic regarding that Government's non-ratification of the UN Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women; and on what dates; [53402]

(50) what official representations the British Government have made to the Government of Nauru regarding that Government's non-ratification of the UN Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women; and on what dates; [53415]

(51) what official representations the British Government have made to the Government of Sudan regarding that Government's non-ratification of the UN Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women; and on what dates; [53404]

(52) what official representations the British Government have made to the Government of South Africa regarding that Government's non-ratification of the International Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination; and on what dates; [53623]

(53) what official representations the British Government have made to the Government of Kazakhstan regarding that Government's non-ratification of the UN Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women; and on what dates; [53421]

(54) what official representations the British Government have made to the Government of Niue regarding that Government's non-ratification of the UN Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women; and on what dates; [53413]

(55) what official representations the British Government have made to the Government of Swaziland regarding that Government's non-ratification of the UN Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women; and on what dates; [53403]

(56) what official representations the British Government have made to the Government of Grenada regarding that Government's non-ratification of the International Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination; and on what dates; [53653]

(57) what official representations the British Government have made to the Government of Sao Tome and Principe regarding that Government's non-ratification of the UN Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women; and on what dates; [53408]

(58) what official representations the British Government have made to the Government of Ireland regarding that Government's non-ratification of the International Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination; and on what dates; [53643]

(59) what official representations the British Government have made to the Government of Singapore regarding that Government's non-ratification of the International Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination; and on what dates; [53624]

(60) what official representations the British Government have made to the Government of Kiribati regarding that Government's non-ratification of the UN Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women; and on what dates; [53420]

(61) what official representations the British Government have made to the Government of Afghanistan regarding that Government's non-ratification of the UN Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women; and on what dates; [53442]

(62) what official representations the British Government have made to the Governments of *(a)* Palau, *(b)* Papua New Guinea, *(c)* Qatar, *(d)* Rwanda, *(e)* St Kitts and Nevis, *(f)* St Lucia, *(g)* St Vincent and the Grenadines, *(h)* Samoa, *(i)* San Marino and *(j)* Sao Tome and Principe regarding those Governments' non-ratification of the UN Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment and on what dates in respect of each Government; [53881]

(63) what official representations the British Government have made to the Government of Angola regarding that Government's non-ratification of the International Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination; and on what dates; [53661]

(64) what official representations the British Government have made to the Government of Djibouti regarding that Government's non-ratification of the International Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination; and on what dates; [53648]

(65) what official representations the British Government have made to the Government of Brunei regarding that Government's non-ratification of the UN Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women; and on what dates; [53427]

(66) what official representations the British Government have made to the Governments of *(a)* Trinidad and Tobago, *(b)* Turkmenistan, *(c)* Tuvalu, *(d)* the United Arab Emirates, *(e)* the United Republic of Tanzania, *(f)* Vanuatu, *(g)* Vietnam, *(h)* Zambia, *(i)* and Zimbabwe regarding those Governments' non-ratification of the UN Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment and on what dates in respect of each Government; [53883]

(67) what official representations the British Government have made to the Government of Turkey regarding that Government's non-ratification of the International Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination; and on what dates; [53621]

(68) what official representations the British Government have made to the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran regarding that Government's non-ratification of the UN Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women; and on what dates; [53422]

(69) what official representations the British Government have made to the Government of Vanuatu regarding that Government's non-ratification of the International Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination; and on what dates; [53619]

(70) what official representations the British Government have made to the Government of Dar-es-Salaam regarding that Government's non-ratification of the UN Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women; and on what dates; [53441]

(71) what official representations the British Government have made to the Government of the Federated States of Micronesia regarding that Government's non-ratification of the International Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination; and on what dates; [53635]

(72) what official representations the British Government have made to the Government of Kazakhstan regarding that Government's non-ratification of the International Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination; and on what dates; [53642]

(73) what official representations the British Government have made to the Government of Paraguay regarding that Government's non-ratification of the International Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination; and on what dates; [53629]

(74) what official representations the British Government have made to the Government of Honduras regarding that Government's non-ratification of the International Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination; and on what dates; [53655]

(75) what official representations the British Government have made to the Government of Saudi Arabia regarding that Government's non-ratification of the UN Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women; and on what dates; [53407]

(76) what official representations the British Government have made to the Government of the Cook Islands regarding that Government's non-ratification of the International Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination; and on what dates; [53646]

(77) what official representations the British Government have made to the Government of the Marshall Islands regarding that Government's non-ratification of the International Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination; and on what dates; [53636]

(77) what official representations the British Government have made to the Government of Mauritania regarding that Government's non-ratification of the UN Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women; and on what dates; [53418]

(78) what official representations the British Government have made to the Government of Dominica regarding that Government's non-ratification of the International Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination; and on what dates; [53649]

(79) what official representations the British Government have made to the Governments of *(a)* Sierra Leone, *(b)* Singapore, *(c)* the Solomon Islands, *(d)* South Africa, *(e)* Sudan, *(f)* Surinam, *(g)* Swaziland, *(h)* the Syrian Arab Republic, *(i)* Thailand and *(j)* Tonga regarding those Governments' non-ratification of the UN Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment and on what dates in respect of each Government; [53882]

(80) what official representations the British Government have made to the Government of Belize regarding that Government's non-ratification of the International Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination; and on what dates; [53656]

(81) what official representations the British Government have made to the Government of Sao Tome and Principe regarding that Government's non-ratification of the International Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination; and on what dates; [53625]

(83) what official representations the British Government have made to the Government of the Solomon Islands regarding that Government's non-ratification of the UN Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women; and on what dates; [53406]

(84) what official representations the British Government have made to the Government of Lithuania regarding that Government's non-ratification of the International Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination; and on what dates; [53638]

(85) what official representations the British Government have made to the Government of Tonga regarding that Government's non-ratification of the UN Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women; and on what dates; [53401]

(86) what official representations the British Government have made to the Government of Tuvalu regarding that Government's non-ratification of the International Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination; and on what dates. [53620]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: We take every appropriate opportunity to encourage States to sign and ratify the six core human rights texts of the United Nations including through bilateral contacts and in multilateral forums.

I regret that we would not be able to provide a more detailed response to the right hon. Member's questions without incurring disproportionate costs. I will however write to the right hon. Member inviting him to put any specific questions of concern.

Israel

Dr. Starkey: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the Israeli policy of house demolition in Jerusalem, the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. [53455]

Mr. Fatchett: House demolitions are a serious abuse of human rights wherever they occur. We and the EU carefully monitor Israeli demolitions of Palestinian homes and report these in a quarterly EU "Jerusalem Watch".

Dr. Starkey: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many Palestinian houses in the occupied Palestinian territories have been demolished since the Oslo Accords of 1993. [53456]

Mr. Fatchett: Estimates vary between 671 (discounting demolitions of temporary dwellings; figures from a local NGO) and 2,004 (including temporary dwellings; figures from the Palestinian Ministry of Local Government). These figures include demolitions in East Jerusalem.

Dr. Starkey: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations Her Majesty's Government have made to the Government of Israel on the demolition of Palestinian homes in the West Bank and Jerusalem. [53457]

Mr. Fatchett: We have made it clear to the Israeli Government on many occasions that we condemn any attempt to change the demographic balance of Jerusalem in advance of final status talks.

Security Surveillance Warrants

Mr. Wilshire: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what legal advice he receives before signing warrants authorising security surveillance; and from whom. [53825]

Mr. Robin Cook: The procedures involved in submitting warrants for approval were set out in paragraph 5 of the Interception of Communications Act Commissioner's report for 1996. This makes it clear that the Secretary of State considers applications, after scrutiny by senior officials, together with supporting documentation and the comments of advisers. This process incorporates in every case, advice from legal advisers of the appropriate agency.

Mr. Wilshire: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many warrants authorising security surveillance he has signed since 1 May 1997. [53827]

Mr. Robin Cook: It has been the practice of successive Interception of Communications Act Commissioners not to publish the numbers of interception warrants issued by the Foreign Secretary, as they have taken the view that it would be against the public interest to do so. Similarly the Intelligence Services Act Commissioner has stated that he does not consider it in the public interest to disclose the numbers of warrants issued under Section 5 of the Interception of Communications Act 1994. The Government endorse the Commissioners' views.

Embassy Buildings

Mr. Wilshire: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) if he will make it his policy not to dispose of *(a)* the whole and *(b)* part of the Paris (i) Embassy and (ii) Residence buildings; [53344]

(2) if he will make it his policy not to dispose of *(a)* the whole and *(b)* part of the Tokyo (i) Embassy and (ii) Residence buildings; [53347]

(3) if he will make it his policy not to dispose of *(a)* the whole and *(b)* part of the Bangkok (i) Embassy and (ii) Residence buildings; [53345]

(4) if he will make it his policy not to dispose of *(a)* the whole and *(b)* part of the Vienna (i) Embassy and (ii) Residence buildings. [53348]

Mr. Fatchett: Our policy is to ensure that all elements of the FCO estate provide value for money. For those which do not, disposal is one option; we shall also be considering how to make better, and more intensive, use of those properties we retain.

Diplomatic Exchanges (Publication)

Mr. Wilshire: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will publish the summaries of the telegrams provided to members of the Foreign Affairs Committee. [53795]

Mr. Robin Cook: I have no plans to publish the summaries. I believe that publication of diplomatic exchanges will do cumulative damage to the frankness of the reports our High Commissioners and Ambassadors send, and the willingness of other governments to talk to them on a confidential basis.

Desk Officers

Mr. Wilshire: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the desk officers in his Department, indicating the countries for which they are responsible. [53792]

Mr. Fatchett: For security reasons, it is not possible to provide the information requested. General information on members of the Diplomatic Service at Posts overseas and in London is contained in Her Majesty's Diplomatic Service List, a copy of which is in the Library.

Sierra Leone

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the *(a)* costs and *(b)* nature of assistance currently being given by the Government to Sierra Leone. [53872]

Mr. Foulkes: I have been asked to reply.

Assistance currently being provided to Sierra Leone by the United Kingdom Government comprises:

Contribution to the UN Trust Fund for Peace Enforcement in Sierra Leone: £2,000,000 from the FCO

Emergency Demobilisation Project providing humanitarian assistance to ex-combatants: £2,000,000 from Department for International Development

Contribution to the work of the Commonwealth Police Development Team: £800,000 from DFID

Humanitarian and Rehabilitation projects implemented through NGOs: c.£3,000,000 from DFID

Three senior advisers to Government of Sierra Leone: £250,000 from DFID

Support to the establishment of an independent radio station: £120,000 from DFID

Civil Service Support Project: Campaign for Good Governance: £101,000 from DFID

Contribution to Government of Sierra Leone's two year National Programme for Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration: £6,500,000 from DFID.

Land Mines

Mr. Howard: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the Government's policy on classifying the use of land mines as a war crime. [49673]

Mr. Doug Henderson *[holding answer 9 July 1998]:* I have been asked to reply.

Until such time as the use of Anti-Personnel mines become subject to a comprehensive prohibition under international law, it cannot be classified as a war crime. This is not a matter of policy but what is currently possible under international law.

The abhorrence with which the Government view the use of Anti-Personnel land mines should be in no doubt to anyone. This is reflected by the Government's introduction of domestic legislation to fulfill our obligations under the Ottawa Convention. We shall continue to encourage as many countries as possible to sign and ratify the Ottawa Convention.

Regulation Reform

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to the section "Reforming Regulation" in his Department's document "UK Presidency of the EU Half Way Mark", if he will place in the Library the progress report; and if he will make a statement on the proposals agreed at Cardiff. [53781]

Dr. John Cunningham: I have been asked to reply as Cabinet Minister with responsibility for better EU regulation.

The European Commission's report "Legislate less to act better: the facts" (COM(98)345) was presented to the European Council at Cardiff on 15 June 1998.

The report and an accompanying Explanatory Memorandum (9319/98) were submitted to Parliament by the Cabinet Office on Friday, 26 June 1998.

I am delighted that better regulation featured prominently in the Cardiff European Council's conclusions. This shows the degree to which the UK has successfully taken the debate forward during its Presidency. Specifically, the European Council:

highlighted the importance of better regulation and subsidiarity, calling on the EU institutions and the Member States to work together to observe these principles;

asked the Commission to co-ordinate the sharing of best regulatory practice between Member States;

invited the Commission to press ahead with its Simpler Legislation for the Internal Market (SLIM) initiative to simplify and improve Single Market rules;

welcomed the Commission's establishment of a pilot test panel of businesses to improve consultation on new regulatory proposals;

encouraged the Commission to develop its business impact assessment system (fiche d'impact); and

invited the Commission to draw up a timetable for action, in the light of the recommendations in the report of the Business Environment Simplification Task Force (BEST)—also presented to the Cardiff European Council—to assess the extent to which current EU and Member States' policies encourage entrepreneurship.

WALES

Education Advisers

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many advisers are currently employed by each local education authority in Wales. [53196]

Mr. Hain: Information on the numbers of advisers currently employed by local education authorities in Wales is not held centrally.

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was the total cost for each local education authority of employing advisers in the last year for which figures are available. [53193]

Mr. Hain: The cost of employing advisers for each local education authority is not collected separately. The information collected from local education authorities on costs attributed to inspection and advice is given in the following table.

Local authority net current expenditure on inspection and advisory services—1996–97

	£000
Blaenau Gwent	38
Bridgend	80
Caerphilly	37
Cardiff	939
Carmarthenshire	159
Ceredigion	76

Local authority net current expenditure on inspection and advisory services—1996–97

	£000
Conwy	98
Denbighshire	240
Flintshire	134
Gwynedd	267
Isle of Anglesey	174
Merthyr Tydfill	94
Monmouthshire	52
Neath Port Talbot	261
Newport	194
Pembrokeshire	173
Powys	n/a
Rhondda Cynon Taff	272
Swansea	180
Torfaen	207
The Vale of Glamorgan	166
Wrexham	356

Source:
Local authority revenue outturn returns

Departmental Research

Mr. Fabricant: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the cost of all research undertaken by his Department since May 1997, excluding the cost of green papers and other public consultation documents drafted by his officials; and if he will list in each case the organisations which undertook that research. [52710]

Mr. Ron Davies *[holding answer 29 July 1998]:* The term research covers a wide range of activities from scientific and engineering research through to consultancies and public opinion surveys. The information requested is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Welsh Development Agency

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what plans he has to make changes to the membership of the Welsh Development Agency prior to the establishment of the National Assembly. [53370]

Mr. Hain: Advertisements for the Board of the new Welsh Development Agency (WDA) have been placed and the process of selection is ongoing in line with the guidance from the Commissioner of Public Appointments. The appointments will take effect from the date of the merger of the WDA with the Development Board for Rural Wales (DBRW) and the Land Authority for Wales (LAW) this autumn.

Persistent Inquirers

Mr. Sanders: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales which of his Department's agencies have procedures to identify persistent inquirers for information. [53946]

Mr. Ron Davies: Cadw: Welsh Historic Monuments is the only solely owned executive agency of the Welsh Office. It has no procedures to identify persistent inquiries for information.

Welsh Assembly

Mr. Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what arrangements he is making to appoint the Standing Orders Commission for the National Assembly; and if he will make a statement. [54930]

Mr. Ron Davies: The Commissioners will be appointed under the provisions of the Government of Wales Bill. I hope to be able to announce the names of the Commissioners shortly.

The Commissioners' role is to prepare the draft of the first standing orders of the Assembly, which will then be made, with or without modification, by the Secretary of State.

The recruitment of the Commissioners has been by open competition, in accordance with the current principles of public appointments. The Bill provides that there will be between 5 and 9 Commissioners. We expect that members will work 4 days a month and be paid £167.32 a day. The chairman will be paid £227.54 a day.

The Bill empowers the Secretary of State to issue guidance to the Commissioners on the content and form of the standing orders. The core of the guidance I intend to give will be based on the report of the National Assembly Advisory Group, which I expect to be published during August. The Advisory Group includes members nominated by all the main political parties, as well as members representative of a wide range of interests. It has already made considerable progress, through its discussions and public consultations, in building political consensus about the way the Assembly should operate—a task which the White Paper "A Voice for Wales" envisaged would fall to the Commissioners. This will enable the Commissioners to be rather more expert and technical than was originally envisaged. I shall want a balance of talents among the Commissioners, but it will not contain members nominated by the political parties.

There will be a continuing need to seek political consensus about issues other than the standing orders which will affect the way the Assembly will operate. These could include matters such as the opening ceremony and information support for Members. For this task I intend to establish an Assembly Preparations Group. This Group will include some members nominated by the political parties, as well as some former members of the National Assembly Advisory Group. I am consulting the leaders of the main political parties in Wales about the membership of this group, and about other matters relevant to the Assembly, in order to ensure that we continue to develop the arrangements for the Assembly in an inclusive spirit, seeking consensus where we can.

Mr. Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what advice he proposes to submit to Her Majesty in Council on the use to be made of the order-making power in clause 12(1)(b) of the Government of Wales Bill. [54931]

Mr. Ron Davies: Clause 12(1)(b) enables Her Majesty in Council to designated public offices the holding of which would disqualify individuals from membership of the National Assembly for Wales. A draft of an Order in Council made under clause 12(1)(b) requires approval by each House of Parliament before it can be made. I shall shortly be publishing a consultation document inviting views about the advice I should submit to Her Majesty on the content of an Order in Council under clause 12; the paper will make detailed proposals about disqualification of members and staff of a range of executive non-departmental and health bodies, the holders of certain offices, and those who hold politically restricted posts in

local government. I will place a copy of the consultation paper in the Library. Responses to the consultation paper will be requested by 2 October 1998.

Mr. Rhodri Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the appointments procedure for senior posts in the National Assembly; if he will list the membership of the appointing panels, indicating external assessors and grades of civil servants; and if he will make a statement. [53607]

Mr. Ron Davies: The Government of Wales Bill provides that staff of the National Assembly for Wales will be members of the Home Civil Service. The appointments procedures for senior posts in the National Assembly will, therefore, generally mirror those for the rest of the unified Civil Service. The precise way in which they will apply is being considered.

Non-departmental Public Bodies

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the non-departmental public bodies in existence on 1 May 1997 that *(a)* have been disbanded, *(b)* will be disbanded in the next 12 months, *(c)* have had their functions transferred to (i) another non-departmental public body and (ii) a democratically elected body, *(d)* have been renamed but continue to perform a similar role and *(e)* have been unchanged; if he will indicate in (c) (ii) the relevant successor body; what new non-departmental public bodies have been established since 1 May 1997; and how many non-departmental public bodies his Department currently is responsible for. [53860]

Mr. Ron Davies: The information requested is as follows:

(a) Agricultural Advisory Panel for Wales; Staff Commission for Wales; and the Welsh Council for Post Graduate Medical and Dental Education;

(b) The Residuary Body for Wales; Tai Cymru—whose functions will be transferred to the Welsh Office; the Land Authority for Wales and the Development Board for Rural Wales will be merged with the Welsh Development Agency;

(c) i. None; ii. None;

(d) The Welsh Optical Committee was renamed the Welsh Optometric Committee on 14 May 1997; the Curriculum and Assessment Authority for Wales was renamed the Qualifications, Curriculum and Assessment Authority for Wales on 1 October 1997; the Welsh Committee for Post Graduate Pharmaceutical Education was renamed the Welsh Committee for Professional Development of Pharmacy on 1 April 1998;

(e) A list of the remaining follows.

There have been no new non-departmental public bodies (NDPBs) established since 1 May 1997. I am currently responsible for 24 Executive NDPBs, 22 advisory NDPBs and 8 Tribunals.

List of those NDPBs remaining

Executive NDPBs

- Agricultural Wages Committee (there are six committees)
- Arts Council of Wales
- Cardiff Bay Development Corporation
- Countryside Council for Wales
- Further Education Funding Council for Wales
- Higher Education Funding Council for Wales
- National Library of Wales
- National Museums and Galleries of Wales
- Royal Commission for Ancient and Historical Monuments of Wales
- Sports Council for Wales
- Welsh Development Agency
- Welsh Language Board
- Welsh National Board for Nursing, Midwifery and Health Visiting
- Tourist Board

Advisory NDPBs

- Agricultural Dwelling House Advisory Committee for Wales (there are six committees)
- Ancient Monuments Board for Wales
- Environment Agency Advisory Committee for Wales
- Hill Farming Advisory Sub-Committee for Wales
- Historic Building Council for Wales
- Library and Information Services Council (Wales)
- Local Government Boundary Commission for Wales
- Place Names Advisory Committee
- Welsh Advisory Committee on Drug and Alcohol Misuse
- Welsh Dental Committee
- Welsh Industrial Development Advisory Board
- Welsh Medical Committee
- Welsh Nursing and Midwifery Committee
- Welsh Pharmaceutical Committee
- Welsh Scientific Advisory Committee

Tribunals

- Agricultural Land Tribunal (Wales)
- Mental Health Review Tribunal for Wales
- Registered Inspectors Appeals Tribunal (Wales)
- Rent Assessment Panel for Wales
- Valuation Tribunals (Wales) (there are four tribunals).

Employees Over 60

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many *(a)* men and *(b)* women employed by (1) his Department and (2) his Department's agencies have contracts of employment which permit them to retire after their 60th birthday. [53045]

Mr. Ron Davies: My Department employs a total of 46 men and 23 women who can choose to stay on after age 60.

Cadw, an executive agency of the Welsh Office, employs a total of 66 men and 22 women who can choose to stay on after age 60.

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many *(a)* men and *(b)* women aged over 60 years were employed by (i) his Department and (ii) his Department's agencies on 1 January. [53068]

Mr. Ron Davies: The numbers of men and women aged over 60 years employed by my Department and Agency CADW at 1 January 1998 are given as follows:

	Welsh Office	*CADW*
Men	20	6
Women	8	6
Total	28	12

Paediatric Cardiac Surgery Units

Mr. Rhodri Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, pursuant to the letter of 30 June 1998, from the Under-Secretary, the hon. Member for Bridgend (Mr. Griffiths), if he will list the other paediatric cardiac surgery units with which the University Hospital of Wales unit will be linked pending the replacement of the current paediatric cardiac surgeon and cardiologist. [53610]

Mr. Ron Davies: The development of links with a well established and successful paediatric cardiac unit in England is a matter for the University Hospital of Wales. I understand they will make known the proposed future arrangements once discussions have reached an appropriate stage.

Cardiff Bay Development Corporation

Mr. Rhodri Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what consultations he has had with the Chairman of the Cardiff Bay Development Corporation in relation to the switching of corporation funds from developing Hamadayad Park, Cardiff to the Gwent Wetland Reserve, Newport. [53584]

Mr. Ron Davies: None.

Schools (Loan Schemes)

Mr. Alan Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if paragraph 69 of Fair Funding: Improving Delegation to Schools gives local education authorities the power to compel schools with surpluses to participate in loan schemes. [53893]

Mr. Hain: No. The terms of any loans scheme operated for schools will depend on the financial controls in the schemes that LEAs are required to prepare under section 48 of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998. These schemes are subject to the Secretary of State's approval.

Local Government Boundary Commission

Mr. Alan Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales on how many occasions since 1968 the Secretary of State for Wales has used his powers to delay the implementation of the proposals of the Local Government Boundaries Commission. [53892]

Mr. Ron Davies: I do not have any powers to delay the implementation of the proposals of the Local Government Boundary Commission.

Section 58(2) of the Local Government Act 1972 enables the Secretary of State, if he thinks fit, to give effect to the Commission's proposals following the review of an area, either as submitted or in a modified form.

Section 64(3) the 1972 Act (as substituted by section 68 of the Local Government (Wales) Act 1994) requires the secretary of State to give effect to the Commission's proposals for electoral arrangements following reviews carried out after the 1995 local elections for principal authorities, either as submitted or in a modified form.

Brewing Industry

Mr. Alan Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales on how many occasions brewers have won planning appeals in Wales since April 1996; and if he will indicate which planning authority lost each appeal and when. [53894]

Mr. Ron Davies: Brewers have won six planning appeals in Wales since April 1996.

The Vale of Glamorgan Council lost an appeal by Bass Taverns Ltd. (trading as Harvesters Restaurants) on 15 January 1997 for the display of an internally lit double-sided freestanding pole sign and the Schooner Inn, Penarth.

The former Rhymney Valley District Council (now Caerphilly County Borough Council) lost an appeal by Bass Taverns Ltd. for a petrol filling station and A3 use (food and drink) at Hengoed, Mid Glamorgan on 12 February 1997. The same Council lost an appeal by Messrs. Whitbread Pub Partnerships against its refusal to grant listed building consent for the demolition of a public house at Pontlottyn on 4 March 1997.

The City and County of Swansea Council lost appeals on 16 April 1997 against an enforcement notice and refusal of planning permission by Bass Taverns Ltd. who were allowed to continue using premises at Bryn-y-Mor Road, Swansea as a wine bar/restaurant with ancillary kitchen, staff and office facilities. The same Council lost an appeal on 19 March 1998 by Hobgoblinns Ltd. for a change of use of premises to public house at Oxford Street, Swansea.

Task Forces

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the task forces and advisory groups composed of independent members which have been set up by his Department since 1 May 1997, indicating in each case *(a)* their remit, *(b)* their membership, *(c)* how many members are (i) scientists, (ii) engineers, (iii) small business people or representatives of small businesses, *(d)* any remuneration members receive for their services and *(e)* their budget. [53283]

Mr. Ron Davies: The information requested is as follows:

Departmental Task Forces and Advisory Groups

National Assembly Advisory Group

(a) Remit

To assist the Secretary of State in the preparation of guidance to the Standing Orders Commission.

To respond to requests for advice from the Secretary of State on other matters relating to the establishment of the National Assembly (i.e. matters which do not directly affect its standing orders).

(b) Membership

John Elfed Jones: Chairman

Nick Bourne: Conservative

Ioan Bowen Rees: Former Chief Executive, Gwynedd County Council

Majorie Dykins: Voluntary Sector

Ken Hopkins: NIACE

Mari James: Academic

Helen Mary Jones: Equal Opportunities Commission

Howard Marshall: UNISON

Eluned Morgan: Member, European Parliament

Joyce Redfearn: Chief Executive, Monmouthshire County Council

Viscount St. Davids: House of Lords

Ray Singh: Commissioner for Racial Equality

Ian Spatling: Confederation of British Industry

Kirsty Williams: Liberal Democrat

(c) Representation

Scientists: 1 (retired)

Engineers: 1 (retired)

Small business people/representatives: 1

(d) Remuneration

Posts on the Advisory Group are unpaid. Members receive travel and subsistence expenses at the normal Welsh Office rates.

(e) Budget

The budget for the financial year 1998–99 is £200,000 which covers the Advisory Group and the statutory Standing Orders Commissioners.

Wales New Deal Advisory Task Force

(a) Remit

To give advice to the Secretary of State for Wales on how the New Deal can be developed and implemented to meet the needs and circumstances of Wales.

To promote the New Deal, particularly to the business, voluntary and environment sectors and to stimulate action and commitment to the New Deal in all relevant sectors.

To receive regular reports on progress in implementing the New Deal and to advise the Secretary of State on emerging issues and means of resolution.

To support the work of the UK Task Force by advising on issues of programme policy and design which are relevant to Wales.

(b) Membership

Graham Hawker (Chairman): Group Chief Executive, Hyder PLC

Graham Benfield: Director, Wales Council for Voluntary Action

Leighton Carnell: Corporate Director, Barclays Bank PLC

Spencer Davies: Managing Director, Spencer Davies Engineering Ltd.

Haydn Edwards: Principal, Coleg Menai

Margaret Evans: Director, Prince's Trust Volunteers

Jane Hutt: Director, Chwarae Teg

David Jenkins: General Secretary, Wales TUC

Roger Jones OBE: Managing Director, Penn Pharmaceuticals

Paul Loveluck: Chief Executive, Countryside Council for Wales

John Newton-Jones: Chief Executive, Farmworld

Anne Poole: Director, NIACE Cymru

Adam Price: Executive Manager, Menter a Busnes

Sue Price: Executive Director, Groundwork Merthyr and Rhondda Cynon Taf

Gill Richards: Partner, Atebion

Cherry Short: Commission for Racial Equality

Huw Vaughan Thomas: Chief Executive, Denbighshire County Council

Kevin Watson: Church Minister representing CYTUN (Churches Together in Wales)

Alison Lea Wilson: Partner, Anglesey Sea Zoo

Wendy Yates: Director of Personnel, City and County of Swansea

(c) Representation

Scientists: 2

Engineers: 1

Small business people/representatives: 5 (including the engineer)

(d) Remuneration

Members are not remunerated.

(e) The Advisory Task Force does not have a budget.

All Wales Agri-environment Scheme Working Group

(a) Remit

To advise the Secretary of State on the technical details of a new Agri-environment scheme available to farmers throughout Wales.

(b) Membership

Mr. M. Thomas: National Farmers' Union

Mr. R. Nowell-Phillips: Farmers Union of Wales

Mr. J. Salmon: Countryside Landowners Association

Mr. N. Thomas: Royal Society for the Protection of Birds

11 other members represented the Welsh Office, local authorities and non-departmental public bodies. They have not been classed as independent members.

(c) Representation

Scientists: 1

Engineers: 0

Small business people/representatives: 3

(d) Remuneration

Members receive no remuneration.

(e) Budget

The group has no budget.

Overseas Visits

Mr. Wilshire: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list those who have accompanied (i) him and (ii) his departmental Ministers on overseas visits since 1 January indicating *(a)* the venue of the visit, *(b)* the purpose of the visit, *(c)* the names of those involved, *(d)* the job of those involved, *(e)* the reasons why they were included in the visit and *(f)* the cost to public funds. [53847]

Mr. Ron Davies: I will write to the hon. Member as soon as possible and place a copy of my reply in the Library of the house.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Carpet Manufacturing Industry

Mr. Alexander: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what representations she has received on the export prospects in the United Kingdom carpet manufacturing industry. [48491]

Mr. Battle: No representations have been received about export prospects for the United Kingdom carpet manufacturing industry. DTI officials are in close contact with the British Carpet Manufacturers Association and individual companies about the development of initiatives to improve the competitiveness of the UK carpet industry.

Dounreay

Ms Roseanna Cunningham: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what action she will take to ensure that all missing highly enriched uranium on the Dounreay site is identified and retrieved or made safe; and if she will make a statement. [48930]

Mr. Battle *[holding answer 6 July 1998]:* The UKAEA's document 'The Dounreay Shaft Inventory' identified an amount of 170kg of uranium as "material unaccounted for" (MUF). As explained on 27 July 1998, *Official Report*, columns *46–47*, it is wrong to suggest that this figure must correspond to an amount of material that is physically missing. We have asked the DTI's Safeguards Office to study the nuclear material accountancy issues raised by the UKAEA document. We shall make public the conclusions of that study.

Ms Roseanna Cunningham: To ask the President of the Board of Trade on what date she was first notified of the application to dispose of radioactive material from the Brent Spar at Dounreay. [50877]

Mr. Battle *[holding answer 20 July 1998]:* I do not receive applications for disposal of radioactive material. This is a matter for the independent regulator, the Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA).

Ms Roseanna Cunningham: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if she will list all applications or agreements made since May 1997 for *(a)* disposal and *(b)* storage of radioactive material at Dounreay; and if she will indicate (i) the source and (ii) the amount of waste in each case. [50876]

Mr. Battle *[holding answer 20 July 1998]:* I do not receive applications for disposal and storage of radioactive material. These are matters, initially, for the independent regulators, the Scottish Environment Protection Agency, and the Nuclear Installations Inspectorate of the Health & Safety Executive.

Ms Roseanna Cunningham: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if she will make a statement on the facilities which are available at Dounreay for the storage of treated radioactive material from the Brent Spar; and if additional storage pits will be required for the treated material. [50879]

Mr. Battle *[holding answer 20 July 1998]:* This is an operational matter for UKAEA. I have therefore written to the Chairman of the UKAEA requesting him to prepare this information, and his reply will be placed in the Library of the House.

Ms Roseanna Cunningham: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what steps she has taken to satisfy herself that Dounreay is a suitable site for the disposal and storage of radioactive materials from the Brent Spar. [50878]

Mr. Battle *[holding answer 20 July 1998]:* Storage and disposal of radioactive material at Dounreay is subject to independent regulation by the Nuclear Installations Inspectorate (NII) and the Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA).

Eritrea (Exports)

Ann Clwyd: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many applications for licences for the export of *(a)* paramilitary, *(b)* security and *(c)* police equipment to Eritrea have been (i) granted, (ii) refused and (iii) revoked, (1) between February 1995 and May 1997 inclusive and (2) since May 1997; and what was the export licence category in each case. [50583]

Mrs. Roche: The Export Control Organisation's computer databases have been interrogated and the following results were obtained. Between 1 February 1995 and 1 May 1997, three Standard Individual Export Licences (SIELs) were issued covering the export to consignees or endusers in Eritrea of goods subject to export control by being listed in Part III of Schedule 1 to the Export of Goods (Control) Order 1994, the so-called Military List. Between 2 May 1997 and 19 June 1998, six Standard Individual Export Licences were issued covering such exports. No Open Individual Export Licences were issued in either period covering such exports; and no SIELs or OIELs covering such exports were revoked and no applications for SIELs or OIELs covering such exports were refused.

The entry in the relevant legislation under which the export of goods is controlled is known as their rating. Individual licences may cover a range of goods with various ratings. Where this is so, the licence is included in the Table in the total for all of the relevant ratings.

Standard Individual Export Licences issued between 1 February 1995 and 1 May 1997 covering the export to Eritrea of goods on the Military List

	Rating		
	ML3	*ML10*	*ML22*
Number issued between 1 February 1995 and 1 May 1997 covering goods with this rating	1	2	0
Number issued between 2 May 1997 and 19 June 1998 covering goods with this rating	0	4	2

This information does not cover any Media OIELs that may have been issued during this period. Media OIELs authorise the export to all destinations of protective clothing, mainly for the protection of aid agency workers and journalists, when working in areas of conflict.

This information should be considered in light of my answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Don Valley (Caroline Flint) on 30 October 1997, *Official Report*, columns *870–71*.

In addition, goods on the Military List may have been exported to Eritrea under certain Open General Export Licences; copies of all Open General Export Licences valid at any time during the period are in the Library of the House.

It is not possible to break down these data in the manner requested as the equipment covered by many entries in the Military List could be used by military, paramilitary or police end-users.

Motor Dealers

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1) what action she has undertaken since 1 May 1997 to improve consumer protection in respect of the sale of used cars; [51204]

(2) what plans she has to extend the powers of trading standards officers to enable them to carry out forecourt inspections of motor dealers. [51205]

Dr. Howells: In response to the Director General of Fair Trading's report on selling second-hand cars, I shall shortly issue guidance to clarify the powers which we believe Trading Standards officers already have under the General Product Safety Regulations 1994 to enable them to carry out garage forecourt inspections of motor vehicles offered for sale.

In addition, the Department is commissioning research on the current law on the use of mileage information disclaimers and how it is being interpreted, prior to consideration of further action. It has also indicated its support for consideration to be given by the Director General of Fair Trading of the extent to which indiscriminate use of mileage information disclaimers could be cited as an unfair business practice in the context of licensing action under the Consumer Credit Act 1974.

The Advertising Standards Authority has been contacted to establish whether it could act under its own powers against advertisements offering mileage correction/ alteration services. The Department is also in consultation with the Department of the Environment, Transport, and the Regions regarding those recommendations in the Director General's report which come within its responsibilities.

The Office of Fair Trading recently published a booklet on how to get the best deal when buying a used car. This includes information for consumers about what to do if things go wrong. The Department has also recently published a more general consumer information leaflet on unsatisfactory goods and consumer rights which covers issues such as sale-of-goods rights, manufacturers' guarantees and extended warranties.

Designer Goods

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if she will initiate an investigation of selective distribution in the designer goods sector. [51216]

Dr. Howells: As announced to Parliament during the passage of the Competition Bill, the Department will consult on the approach to dealing with vertical agreements, which include selective distribution, in preparation for the commencement of the new legislation.

Any specific complaints about a supplier refusing to supply a retailer because of that retailer's pricing practices, should be directed to the Director General of Fair Trading, who will investigate.

Mr. Chope: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what action she is taking to prevent foreign manufacturers from setting the prices that British consumers have to pay for designer goods. [51664]

Mr. Ian McCartney *[holding answer 21 July 1998]:* The prices paid by consumers for designer goods are set by the manufacturer, distributor, or retailer. The judgment in Silhouette concerns the extent to which, under the terms of a European Community Directive approximating the laws of Member States relating to trade marks, the holder of a registered trade mark may prevent the import into the Community of goods bearing that trade mark where the goods have already been marketed with the consent of the holder of the mark in the Community. The judgment in Silhouette confirms that the holder of a mark has no powers to prevent the import into, for example, the United Kingdom, of goods bearing the trade mark where those goods come from another Member State in the Community. The European Commission has commissioned a study into whether this principle should be extended to cover goods that have been put on the market anywhere in the world and, once the results of the study are available, the Government will consider with other Community Member States what action should be taken, including the possibility of a change in the law. In the meantime, manufacturers remain subject to European and domestic laws governing competition and the supply of goods.

Mr. Chope: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what representations she made to the European Court and to the European Commission on behalf of British consumers prior to the ECJ ruling in the Silhouette case. [51666]

Mr. Ian McCartney *[holding answer 21 July 1998]:* The previous government submitted written observations to the European Court of Justice in February 1997. These observations confirmed that, as a matter of law, the 1989 European Community Directive on trade marks gave brand owners no power to prevent the import of trade-marked goods once they had been put on the market with their consent anywhere in the Community, but did give them power to prevent the import of goods put on the market with their consent elsewhere in the world.

Mr. Chope: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what action she is going to take in response to the ruling of the European Court of Justice in the Silhouette case on the pricing and distribution of designer goods; and if she will make a statement. [51663]

Mr. Ian McCartney *[holding answer 21 July 1998]:* The Government will consider with other Member States of the European Community, in the light of this ruling and of a study being mounted by the European Commission, what changes in the law are desirable in the interests of British consumers and manufacturers.

Mr. Chope: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if she will make a statement on the options available to British retailers and consumers in response to the rules of the ECJ in the Silhouette case. [51665]

Mr. Ian McCartney *[holding answer 21 July 1998]:* The ruling of the European Court of Justice on the Silhouette case confirms the view of the Government's own legal advisers on the interpretation of the European Community Directive on trade marks which was implemented by the Trade Marks Act 1994, both of which were adopted and enacted by the previous government. The Government will consider with other Member States of the European Community in the light of this ruling, and of a study being mounted by the European Commission, what changes in the law are desirable having regard to the interests of British consumers and manufacturers.

In the meantime, British retailers should abide by the law as it stands at present.

Mr. Chope: To ask the President of the Board of Trade when she was informed that the European Court of Justice was to make the ruling which it has made in the Silhouette case. [51662]

Mr. Ian McCartney *[holding answer 21 July 1998]:* The ruling of the European Court of Justice on the Silhouette case was delivered on 16 July 1998. The Government were aware from 24 June 1998 that the judgment would be delivered on that date.

Export Credit Guarantees

Mr. Alan Simpson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if she will list the top 10 companies in receipt of export credit guarantees for the financial years 1995–96 and 1996–97 indicating the amount of cover given to each company for each year. [51414]

Mrs. Roche: ECGD have identified the following firms as the top ten main contractors under export credit guarantees which it issued in these years:

1995–96	*1996–97*
1 British Aerospace	1 British Aerospace
2 G. E. C.	2 M. W. Kellogg
3 Water Projects International	3 Rolls-Royce
4 Babcock	4 Aero International
5 BICC	5 Foster Wheeler
6 APV (UK) Ltd.	6 Joy Mining Machinery
7 Amec	7 Alvis
8 Rolls-Royce	8 Nokia Telecoms
9 Rediffusion Simulation	9 Babcock
10 Weir Group	10 Amec

For reasons of commercial confidentiality ECGD is unable to provide details of the amount of cover given to each company.

Non-fossil Fuel Obligations

Mr. Boswell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if she will list for each NFFO round the types of generation which were awarded contracts and the number of plants *(a)* awarded contracts and *(b)* currently generating in each band. [51769]

Mr. Battle *[holding answer 21 July 1998]:* The following schedule lists the numbers of contracted projects, and of these the number of operating projects, by technology band for NFFOs 1–4, as at 31 March 1998.

NFFO technology band	*Number of contracted projects*	*Number of operating projects*
NFFO 1		
Sewage Gas	7	6
Landfill Gas	25	19
Municipal and General Industrial Waste	4	4
Other	4	4
Hydro	26	21
Wind	9	7
Total	75	61
NFFO 2		
Landfill Gas	28	26
Municipal and General Industrial Waste	10	2
Other	4	1
Hydro	12	10
Wind less than 1.6 mw	19	19
Wind more than 1.6 mw	49	25
Total	122	83
NFFO 3		
Landfill Gas	42	34
Municipal and Industrial Waste	20	4
Hydro	15	5
Wind more than 1.6 MW	31	6
Wind less than 1.6 MW	24	5
Energy Crops—Gasification	3	—
Energy Crops—Residual (Other)	6	—
Total	141	54
NFFO 4		
Landfill Gas	70	4
Municipal and Industrial Waste (Fluidised Bed Combustion)	6	—
Municipal and Industrial Waste (Combined Heat and Power)	10	—
Hydro	31	1
Wind more than 0.768 mw	48	—
Wind less than 0.768 mw	17	—
Anaerobic Digestion of Agricultural Wastes	6	—
Energy Crops	7	—
Total	195	5
All NFFO	533	203

Mr. Boswell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade which projects which have secured NFFO contracts are currently receiving EU THERMIE support; and in each case for what amounts. [51770]

Mr. Battle *[holding answer 21 July 1998]:* The following THERMIE projects are also contracted to generate electricity under the NFFO:

THERMIE Project Title	*NFFO order*	*Level of support*
Multi-fuel biomass fired power station with poultry litter as the main fuel	NFFO-1	3.7 MECU
Ovenden Moor 9.2 MW windfarm	NFFO-1	1.98 MECU
2.7 MW windfarm at Blyth Harbour	NFFO-2	1.26 MECU
5.8 MW Royd Moor windfarm using 450 kw turbines	NFFO-2	1.15 MECU
Northampton Biomass Power Station (phase 1)	NFFO-2	1.18 MECU
Demonstration of the production, drying and combustion of arable coppice for electricity generation in areas of agricultural decline	NFFO-3	1.78 MECU
ARBRE—Arable Biomass Renewable Energy	NFFO-3	14.45 MECU
Upland windfarm at Mynydde Gorddy, Wales	NFFO-3	1.8 MECU
Trysglwyn 4 MW windfarm on the island of Anglesey	NFFO-3	1.25 MECU
Blyth offshore windfarm	NFFO-4	0.96 MECU

Milk Marketing

Mr. Paice: To ask the President of the Board of Trade when she expects to receive the Monopolies and Mergers Commssion's report on milk marketing. [52453]

Dr. Howells: The Monopolies and Mergers Commission is due to deliver its report, on the supply of raw milk in Great Britain, to the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry by 26 October 1998.

Optical Fibre Communications

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what steps she is taking to introduce and improve accessibility within the United Kingdom to modern broad band optical fibre communications; and if she will make a statement. [52326]

Mrs. Roche: The Government set out their strategy in this area in the policy statements 'Our Information Age' and 'Broadband Britain' which were published in April. The latter dealt specifically with the issue of lifting the broadcast restrictions from BT and other Public Telecommunications Operators. On this issue and in our Information Age strategy, more generally, we are committed to encouraging investment in both advanced communications infrastructure and new services, and ensuring widespread access to services at affordable prices. To ensure that we keep pace with these issues, we have also launched a Green Paper reviewing the regulatory framework for telecommunications and broadcasting in response to digital convergence. I also expect, later this year, to launch a consultation on the use of significant additional radio spectrum for the delivery of broadband services, which will help address those areas of the country currently with limited competitive provision. Uptake and use are just as important as provision of broadband. We promote this through our Information Society Initiative programme for Business, which now has sixty regional and local Support Centres. I have also relaunched the IT for All programme with £2.75 million of additional money, and there are now 2,700 access sites across the country.

Exporters

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what steps she has taken to assist United Kingdom exporters in respect of problems faced as a result of current levels of sterling. [52634]

Mrs. Roche: Our overseas trade services are geared towards helping firms export, independent of the strength of sterling.

Following the Export Forum's report last November, these services are being improved and extended. A National Exporters Database was launched on 1 July and a new Export Sales Leads Service will be introduced on 1 September. A new, simpler, system of Support for Exhibitions and Seminars abroad will apply to events opening after 1 April 1999. New programmes of activity in some of the target markets identified by the Export Forum have already been announced, including the Export Explorer for Western Europe. New programmes in the remaining target markets will be announced throughout the year.

Household Furniture

Mr. Fearn: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what plans she has to review the regulations covering the fire-resistance of materials used in the manufacture of household furniture. [52377]

Dr. Howells: My Department is currently considering representations in favour of some minor modifications to the Furniture & Furnishings (Fire) (Safety) Regulations 1988, but there are at present no plans for a major revision of these Regulations.

Information Technology

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how much her Department spent on IT, itemising *(a)* personal computers, *(b)* main-frame, *(c)* mini-computers and *(d)* file servers in the last year for which figures are available. [52881]

Dr. Howells: The last year for which figures are available is the 1997/98 financial year. The figures are inclusive of purchases that have been made on behalf of the Government Offices, the Insolvency Service, and the Employment Tribunal Service. However, no account is taken of purchases by other Executive Agencies, which manage their own budgets and for which no central record of purchasing is maintained.

In 1997/98 the Department spent £8,318,000 on IT Technology. Of this, £5,037,000 was spent on PCs and £414,000 was spent on file servers. There were no purchases of mainframes or mini-computers. All figures are exclusive of VAT.

Package Holidays

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if she will assess the implications for a competitive market of recent mergers among package holiday providers. [52873]

Dr. Howells: The Director General of Fair Trading advises on mergers which qualify for investigation under the Fair Trading Act 1973. Where a merger raises concerns in respect of a particular market, it can be referred to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission (MMC) for investigation.

Stagecoach

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the President of the Board of Trade, pursuant to the answer of 25 June 1998, *Official Report*, column *563*, from the Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, the hon. Member for Hampstead and Highgate (Ms Jackson), if she will make a statement on the acquisition by Stagecoach of a shareholding in Virgin Rail. [52874]

Dr. Howells: The proposed acquisition by Stagecoach of 49 per cent. of Virgin Rail Group qualifies for consideration under the Fair Trading Act 1973. In the first instance, therefore, it is for the Director General of Fair Trading (DGFT) to consider the proposed acquisition.

My right hon. Friend,the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry will decide in the light of the DGFT's advice whether or not to refer the proposed acquisition to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission for investigation and report.

Grey Cloth

Mr. Dawson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what action she is taking to oppose measures taken by the European Commission to impose duties on grey cloth imported from countries outside the European Union. [52477]

Mrs. Roche *[holding answer 27 July 1998]:* The provisional anti-dumping duties imposed by the European Commission on greycloth imported from six third countries will remain in force for six months from 10 April. We continue to be firmly opposed to these duties, which are damaging to the UK and EU textile industries and to UK and EU consumers.

We will do all we can to ensure that the Council of Ministers does not adopt any proposal by the Commission for a Council Regulation to impose definitive measures, which would last for five years.

Indonesia

Ann Clwyd: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many export licences have been issued in each year since 1996 for exports to Indonesia by Alvis plc, indicating in each case the ML or PL list number of the equipment covered. [52754]

Mrs. Roche: I will write to my hon. Friend as soon as possible and place a copy of that letter in the Library of the House.

Foresight Programme

Mr. Cotter: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is the current participation level of small medium-sized enterprises in the Foresight Programme. [52910]

Mrs. Roche: People with a small business background sit on a number of Foresight panels. SMEs are also active participants in projects giving effect to Foresight priorities, eg SMEs account for over half the companies participating in the nineteen new LINK programmes launched since 1995 in response to Foresight.

There is a need, however, to make outputs from Foresight more accessible to SMEs. A number of initiatives have been taken for this purpose, most recently the development and publication earlier this month of *Future Markets—Future Business*, a guide for business intermediaries designed to enable SMEs to benefit from Foresight, which has been widely piloted among SMEs. A number of Foresight panels are also working closely with trade associations in tailoring the results of Foresight to SMEs.

Exchange Rates

Mr. Cotter: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what representations her Department has received from small and medium sized businesses on the current level of the pound. [52902]

Mrs. Roche: I appreciate the very real concern that small and medium sized manufacturers and exporters have expressed about the level of the pound. The most important thing that Government can do to help small and medium sized firms to thrive is to deliver a stable economic environment—with sustained growth, low inflation and sound public finances. This is the best path to achieving the Government's aim of a stable and competitive pound over the medium term.

Millennium Compliance

Mr. Cotter: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what extra provision of funds will be allocated to her Department following the Comprehensive Spending Review to address the millennium computer compliance problem. [52905]

Mr. Battle: An extra £17 million of funding for Action 2000 was announced on 30 March 1998, *Official Report*, column *384*. The Comprehensive Spending Review, which set the Department's overall budgets for the years 1999–2002, did not provide any additional funding earmarked specifically to address particular programmes: this is one of the many issues which the Department will need to bear in mind in allocating its overall budget for work, including any on millennium compliance, for these future years.

Mr. Cotter: To ask the President of the Board of Trade, pursuant to her answer of 24 June 1997, *Official Report*, columns *448–49*, how many information packs on the Year 2000 problem have been circulated to small businesses to date. [53086]

Mrs. Roche: More than 70,000 copies of Action 2000's information pack were distributed up to the time of the launch on 15 July of its current media campaign. Since that date, demand for the updated information pack has been at the rate of 300 per day which is expected to increase following the national press advertising campaign by Action 2000 which started on 26 July. To date some 4,000 copies of the new information pack have been issued.

Mr. Cotter: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what research her Department has evaluated on the number of computer programmers available to combat the millennium compliance problem. [52906]

Mrs. Roche: Regular monitoring of the labour market for IT specialists is carried out by the Department for Education and Employment. However, it is not possible to say how many are available to work on millennium compliance at any one time because of competing demands for their services.

Mr. Cotter: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what role Business Links will play in respect of combating the millennium compliance problem. [52908]

Mrs. Roche: Business Links are working with Action 2000 to ensure that, nationally, messages are co-ordinated and that they have the appropriate tools and materials to help their local small and medium sized businesses.

Business Links are already working with these businesses to raise awareness and improve understanding of the Year 2000 problem. They offer advice and signposting to a range of locally or regionally co-ordinated programmes. These programmes help businesses to identify where they may have problems, what actions they need to take to address them, and how to prioritise these actions.

Single Currency

Mr. Cotter: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what steps her Department are taking to help small and medium-sized enterprises prepare for the introduction of the single currency. [53092]

Mrs. Roche: DTI Ministers have taken part in a range of events to help business prepare for the single currency.

The Euro Preparations Unit (EPU) has been set up in Her Majesty's Treasury to raise awareness of the implication of EMU for UK businesses, and to help them prepare for the strategic and practical changes that will come with the introduction of the single currency on 1 January 1999. The Unit contains secondees from the DTI and from the private sector, in addition to Treasury staff. The Unit published its first full report on preparation in the UK 'Getting Ready for the Euro' earlier this month.

DTI officials will continue to work closely with the EPU to ensure that the many business contacts that the Department has are used to best effect. For instance, twelve new regional forums, led by local business representatives with the involvement (in England) of the Government Offices for the Regions, have been set up specifically to help small and medium-sized businesses prepare for the Euro.

Business Links

Mr. Cotter: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what steps her Department is taking to help Business Links provide the comprehensive business information relating to trading conditions and economic circumstances required for exporting to EU countries. [52909]

Mrs. Roche: The Department's Business in Europe desk provides information for Business Links and companies about EU and EFTA markets, and the new Export Explorer scheme helps Business Links to introduce local firms to business opportunities in European markets.

Rigs (Decommissioning)

Mr. Boswell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what estimate she has made of the number of rigs and other major installations currently operating in the United Kingdom Continental Shelf which are likely to be retired within the next five years; what is the cost of the decommissioning; what extra cost will be entailed by a requirement that their top sides be dismantled onshore; and if she will make a statement on the United Kingdom's policy on these matters following the OSPAR meeting. [52344]

Mr. Battle *[holding answer 27 July 1998]:* The likely date for decommissioning each offshore installations on the UK Continental Shelf (UKCS) will depend on a number of considerations. However, current estimates indicate that up to fourteen fixed steel installations located on the UKCS could reach the end of their useful lives within the next five years. The cost of decommissioning these installations is likely to be up to £1 billion.

The future regime to be applied to the disposal of offshore installations at sea was agreed at the Oslo and Paris Commission (OSPAR) ministerial meeting on 23 July. Ministers agreed a ban on dumping installations at sea. The Government's part in this agreement demonstrates that we hold the environment at the core of our decision making. All the small steel structures, all topsides, and the great majority of each and every large steel installation will be brought ashore.

Derogations from the ban are possible for the leaving in place of footings of installations which weigh more than 10,000 tonnes. Decisions about the footings of such installations will be made on a case-by-case basis following the internationally agreed rules for assessment and consultation. The presumption will be for removal wherever this is safe and practicable. Heavy concrete structures may also be left in place, if after assessment and consultation, it is agreed that land disposal is neither safe nor practicable.

For some time there has been a presumption that the topsides of all UKCS offshore installations would be removed. They will be re-used, dismantled for recycling or disposed of onshore.

Correspondence

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if she will publish the Permanent Secretary's letter of apology to the hon. Member for Edinburgh, South (Mr. Griffiths). [52716]

Mr. Mandelson: As the events referred to took place before my appointment, I do not intend to comment on them.

Mr. Forth: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) if he will publish the letter from the hon. Member for Edinburgh, South (Mr. Griffiths) to the Permanent Secretary of his Department in which the hon. Member warned him about sabotaging some of his work; [52499]

(2) if he will publish the letter of apology written by his Department's Permanent Secretary to the hon. Member for Edinburgh, South (Mr. Griffiths). [52501]

Mr. Mandelson *[holding answer 28 July 1998]:* I refer the right hon. Gentleman to the reply I have given today to the hon. Member for Worthing, West (Mr. Bottomley).

Motor Industry

Mr. Prior: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment he has made of the impact of the Transport White Paper on employment in the motor industry. [53186]

Mr. Battle: The Transport White Paper sets out a framework for transport policy for the future. The aim of the White Paper is not to restrict ownership of vehicles, but to create policies which give people more choice to create better alternatives bearing in mind the social and environmental impact.

If, as a result of the White Paper, specific policies are introduced either at national or local level, we will as a matter of course consult with industry to determine the likely impact of such policies.

Mr. Prior: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many jobs in Britain are accounted for by the distribution of cars. [53183]

Mr. Battle: The Office for National Statistics estimates that in March 1998 there were 312,300 employee jobs in Great Britain accounted for by units whose principal

activity was the sale of motor vehicles, motorcycles, and parts. More detail is available from the 1996 annual Employment Survey; of the corresponding September 1996 figure of 323,000, sales of motor vehicles alone accounted for 215,600 employee jobs. Figures for distribution of cars alone are not available.

Metrication

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans he has to review the progress of metrication in the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement. [52842]

Dr. Howells *[holding answer 28 July 1998]:* I have nothing to add to the reply which the then Minister for Competition and Consumer Affairs gave to the hon. Member for Teignbridge (Mr. Nicholls) on 17 June 1998, *Official Report,* column *241.*

Furniture Manufacturers

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will review the arrangements for supporting furniture manufacturers exhibiting at overseas trade fairs; and if he will make a statement. [52841]

Mrs. Roche *[holding answer 28 July 1998]:* I refer the hon. Member to the oral reply given to the hon. Member for Meriden (Mrs. Spelman) by my right hon. Friend the then President of the Board of Trade on 14 May 1998, *Official Report,* column 496. I have no plans to review further the arrangements for supporting trade fairs and seminars abroad.

Ice-cream

Fiona Mactaggart: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) what assessment he has made of the adequacy of competition in the UK ice-cream market; and if he will make a statement; [52797]

(2) if the Monopolies and Mergers Commission has concluded its investigation into the sale of wrapped ice-cream by Birds Eye Walls Ltd.; and if she will make a statement. [52846]

Dr. Howells *[holding answer 28 July 1998]:* The Monopolies and Mergers Commission report of their investigation of the supply of wrapped ice cream to wholesalers by Birds Eye Walls Ltd. was published yesterday.

Regional Selective Assistance

Mr. Lansley: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what cost-per-job limits are set on offers of regional selective assistance in development areas. [52924]

Mrs. Roche *[holding answer 28 July 1998]:* Information on cost per job limits is confidential and cannot be disclosed.

Multinationals (OECD Guidelines)

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what is the closing date of submissions for the current review of the OECD guidelines for multinational enterprises. [53025]

Mrs. Roche *[holding answer 29 July 1998]:* The Government will be consulting representatives of business and trades' unions, as well as a number of non-governmental organisations that have expressed an interest in the review. We anticipate that a first discussion of the substantive issues will take place in November, and we will be inviting comments to meet this timetable.

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what powers his Department has to act against British multinational enterprises in violation of the OECD guidelines for multinational enterprises. [53024]

Mrs. Roche *[holding answer 29 July 1998]:* The Guidelines are a voluntary set of principles for multinational enterprise behaviour. The National Contact Point on the Guidelines, which resides in this Department, has the role of handling enquiries and carrying out discussions on all matters related to the Guidelines. Where there is concern about the application of the Guidelines by an enterprise, the National Contact Point, following an approach from an interested party, will contact the enterprise to try to resolve the issue. This provides the opportunity for the National Contact Point to draw the attention of the enterprise to the Guidelines and make clear the importance that the Government attach to them.

Departmental Computers

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what make of computer has been provided by his Department to the hon. Member for Edinburgh, South (Mr. Griffiths); and how much it cost. [52861]

Dr. Howells *[holding answer 29 July 1998]:* My hon. Friend was provided with a Compaq computer at a cost of £1,555 exclusive of VAT.

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what make of computer is normally provided by his Department to its senior civil servants; and what is the average cost of each such computer. [52860]

Dr. Howells *[holding answer 29 July 1998]:* The senior civil servants in my Department have been issued with Dell computers at an average cost of £750 (ex VAT).

Euro

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what resources his Department will be devoting to informing and educating businesses about the introduction of the euro in *(a)* 1998, *(b)* 1999 and *(c)* 2000. [53912]

Mrs. Roche: The work of the Government in informing and educating businesses about the introduction of the euro is being led by the Euro Preparations Unit (EPU) in HM Treasury. To meet this objective, the EPU has received Summer Supplementary Estimate provision of £7.5 million to help raise awareness during 1998–99. No expenditure has been authorised beyond this.

The Department of Trade and Industry supports the work of the EPU by promoting greater awareness of the introduction of the euro, particularly among small and medium-sized enterprises, through its many contacts with business. A small unit has been established to co-ordinate this work.

Diesel

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment he has made of the effect on imports of diesel fuel of the introduction of regulations on ultra-low sulphur diesel. [53562]

Mr. Battle: Some increases in the imports of ultra-low sulphur diesel fuel are expected in the short-term while UK producers are modifying plant to increase indigenous production of this fuel.

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when regulations governing the introduction of ultra-low sulphur diesel fuel will come into operation. [53560]

Mr. Battle: All diesel fuel has to meet the specifications set out in the Motor Fuels (Composition and Content) Regulations 1994. Ultra-low sulphur diesel fuel has, in addition, to meet the requirements specified in the March 1998 Budget which are included in the current Finance Bill. There are no plans to introduce further regulations.

Konver Programme

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when the Konver Programme Monitoring Committee will confirm to the Government Office for the North West what funds it can spend outside the Objective 2 areas. [53004]

Mrs. Roche *[holding answer 29 July 1998]:* The Government Office for the North West, like all other Government Offices, is already aware of the amount of funds it may spend outside Objective areas under the current allocation of the KONVER II EU programme.

Assisted Areas

Mr. Shaw: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if the Government will carry out a review of the assisted areas of Great Britain. [54880]

Mrs. Roche: Following the publication of new European Commission rules on regional aid earlier this year all Member States of the EU are required to revise their Assisted Areas maps by 1 January 2000. The guidelines will mean a reduction in the areas eligible for regional industrial assistance.

The Government intend, therefore, to carry out a review of the Assisted Areas map.

We are committed to listening to local views and careful consideration will be given to all areas in the review. We will be assessing the relative needs of different areas across the whole of Great Britain in consultation with all those who have an interest.

I am launching today a three month period of public consultation on the criteria and geographical units which should be used in drawing up the new map. I have placed copies of the consultation document for the review in the Library of the House and the Vote Office and copies are also available from my Department, the Government Offices in England, and the Scottish and Welsh Offices.

Local organisations and other bodies wishing to make representations should send these to the appropriate Government Office in England or to the Scottish and Welsh Offices before the end of October 1998.

Company Auditors

Mr. Coaker: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he has received the sixth annual reports of the recognised supervisory bodies for company auditors under Part II of the Companies Act 1989; and if he will make a statement. [54881]

Mr. Ian McCartney: I have received the sixth annual reports of all the recognised supervisory bodies for company auditors, and have placed copies in the Library. My Department will be discussing the contents of the reports with the bodies as necessary.

New Millennium Experience Company

Mr. Browne: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he will make available to the House the Annual Report and Accounts of the New Millennium Experience Company. [54879]

Mr. Mandelson: I have today placed copies of the New Millennium Experience Company Annual Report and Accounts in the Libraries of the House. Copies of the Report have also been made available to the Vote Office.

Nuclear Energy

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will place in the Library a copy of the 93 + 2 Additional Protocol Safeguards Agreement reached between the United Kingdom, Euratom and IAEA; and if he will make a statement. [51679]

Mrs. Roche: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given to my hon. Friend the Member for Blaenau Gwent (Mr. Smith), on 20 July 1997, *Official Report*, column *402*.

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will list the nuclear facilities within his Department's responsibility which are currently *(a)* under international safeguards and *(b)* not subject to international safeguards. [51678]

Mrs. Roche: All civil nuclear material held in the United Kingdom is subject to Euratom safeguards and to the terms of the United Kingdom—Euratom—IAEA safeguards agreement of 6 September 1976—IAEA INFCIRC 263.

The nuclear facilities in the United Kingdom, as defined in Article 92.I of INFCIRC 263, are:

British Nuclear Fuels plc (BNFL)

- BNFL Capenhurst
- BNFL Chapelcross
- BNFL Sellafield
- BNFL Springfields

BNFL/Magnox Generation

- Berkeley Power Station
- Berkeley Centre
- Bradwell Power Station
- Dungeness A Power Station
- Hinkley Point A Power Station

Hunterston A Power Station
Oldbury-on-Severn Power Station
Sizewell A Power Station
Trawsfynydd Power Station
Wylfa Power Station

British Energy

Nuclear Electric

Dungeness B Power Station
Hartlepool Power Station
Heysham 1 Power Station
Heysham 2 Power Station
Hinkley Point B Power Station
Sizewell B Power Station

Scottish Nuclear

Hunterston B Power Station
Torness Power Station

United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority (UKAEA)

UKAEA Dounreay
UKAEA Harwell
UKAEA Windscale
UKAEA Winfrith

Urenco Ltd.

Urenco (Capenhurst) Ltd.
Urenco (Capenhurst) Ltd. A3—Gas Centrifuge Enrichment Plant

Universities

Imperial College Reactor
Queen Mary College Reactor
Scottish Universities Research and Reactor Centre
Universities Research Reactor Risley

Other

ICI Tracerco
Dycat International.

There are no nuclear facilities within the responsibility of the Department of Trade and Industry which are not subject to international safeguards.

Task Forces

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will list the taskforces and advisory groups composed of independent members which have been set up by his Department since 1 May 1997 and in each case *(a)* their remit, *(b)* their membership, *(c)* how many members are (i) scientists, (ii) engineers and (iii) small businesspeople or representatives of small businesses; *(d)* any remuneration members receive for their services and *(e)* their budget. [53146]

Mr. Mandelson: Since 1 May 1997 the Department has set up the following task forces and advisory groups which include independent members:

The President of the Board of Trade's Advisory Group on Competitiveness, six competitiveness working parties addressing innovation, best practice, the information age, enhancing business performance through developing individuals, business investment, and maximising competitiveness in Europe; the Tech Stars Steering Group and the Low Pay Commission.

I have arranged for the information requested for each of these groups to be placed in the Library of the House as soon as is practicable.

Written Answers to Questions

Friday 31 July 1998

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Official Entertainment

Mr. Woodward: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what sums *(a)* he and *(b)* the Lord Chancellor have spent on official entertaining since 1 May 1997. [49877]

Mr. Hoon: Since 1 May 1997 I have spent £814.33 on official entertainment. The Lord Chancellor has spent £20,964. This sum includes £10,638.94 for the Lord Chancellor's Breakfast, an annual event hosted by the Lord Chancellor as head of the judiciary and attended last year by 830 people, as well as a number of other events including a dinner for foreign judges to mark the Opening of the Legal Year; and a dinner in honour of the Chief Justice of Hong Kong.

Power of Attorney

Mr. Todd: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what assessment he has made of the obligations to maintain accounts and other disclosures required of attorneys who have been granted enduring power of attorney. [53900]

Mr. Hoon: The Public Trust office acts as registration authority for Enduring Powers of Attorney (EPAs) under the Enduring Powers of Attorney Act 1985.

Arrangements for keeping accounts of an Attorney's dealings under an *unregistered* EPA would be for the Donor and the Attorney to decide, since an Attorney can act under an unregistered EPA only while the Donor maintains his mental capacity, and wishes the Attorney to act for him. When the Attorney believes that the Donor is or is becoming mentally incapable, he has a duty to apply to the Court of Protection to register the EPA. It is presumed therefore that this question refers to *registered* EPAs.

The Attorney has a duty under common law to keep accounts of his transactions involving the Donor's money. However, the Act does not require any routine checks on an Attorney's dealings with a Donor's estate. Nor does the Attorney have to prepare accounts in a special form.

The Law Commission, who first proposed the legislation in their Report of 1983 (Law Com No. 122, The Incapacitated Principal), recognised that to impose requirements to keep accounts would be not only a burden on the Attorney but also an expensive charge on the Donor's estate. The matter is thus left to the Court's discretion.

Under section 8(2) of the Act the Court may call for accounts to be submitted regularly at the time of registration, if the circumstances of the individual case require it. It may also call for accounts to be submitted after registration, if it has reason to inquire into an Attorney's dealings.

The Attorney has a duty of confidentiality to the Donor and there are no "other disclosures" required of him.

In 1995 the Law Commission produced a report called Mental Incapacity (Law Com No. 231) as part of their programme of law reform. The Report covers a wide field, including EPAs. It recommends that a new form of Power of Attorney, to be called a "Continuing Power of Attorney", should be introduced, which would enable an Attorney to deal with the Donor's personal and health care matters as well as his financial affairs. A Green Paper, "Who Decides", was issued in December 1997; the consultation period closed at the end of March 1998.

Departmental Publications

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many of his Department's publications have been made available in *(a)* Braille, *(b)* audio tape and *(c)* large print in 1997–98; and what percentage of the total number of publications this represents. [54275]

Mr. Hoon: No external publications are published by the Lord Chancellor's Department in these formats. However, a number of in-house publications such as LCD News, Talkback, Direct Brief and the staff magazine, Hearsay, are regularly produced in Braille or large print for visually impaired staff in LCD HQ and the Court Service who require it.

Within the Court Service, The Charter for Court Users has been available in Braille and audio cassette since its publication in 1995. An audio cassette which describes the work of the Court Service is due for publication later in 1998. This represents a small part of the total number of publications, an accurate figure for which is not available.

Immigration

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department on what date the IAA received from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office the papers relating to immigration appeal No. GV100/46408/AP; and if he will make a statement. [54280]

Mr. Hoon: The IAA received the papers on 14 April 1998 and are currently awaiting instruction from the appellant's solicitors on whether an oral hearing is required.

Mr. Hoon: I shall reply to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

Mr. Baker: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, pursuant to his answer of 27 March 1998, *Official Report*, column *297*, on departmental transport arrangements, what further changes he has made. [54015]

Mr. Hoon: My Department is working towards the target announced in the White Paper "A New Deal for Transport", that all headquarters and main buildings occupied by Executive Agencies should have green transport plans by March 1999 and all other key buildings by March 2000.

Since my previous reply, new arrangements for our Departmental car fleet have been finalised: the cars will be diesel powered, and the use of low sulphur diesel is being promoted to users.

Public Trust Office

Mr. Todd: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many complaints have been received by the Public Trust Office in each of the last three years. [53899]

Mr. Hoon: Complaints are received and reported to year ending 31 March. The table gives figures for complaints received year ending 31 March.

Year ending 31 March	*Number of complaints received by the Public Trust Office*	*Number of complaints received by Lord Chancellor's Department in respect of operation of the Public Trust Office*
1996	331	21
1997[1]	443	33
1998[1]	512	20

[1] In order to analyse customer satisfaction in greater depth, complaints to SEO Managers were monitored form 1 July 1996. The figures from 1997 onwards include complaints to SEO Managers

Overseas Visits

Mr. Wilshire: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will list those who have accompanied (i) him and (ii) his departmental Ministers on overseas visits since 1 January indicating *(a)* the venue of the visit, *(b)* the purpose of the visit, *(c)* the names of those involved, *(d)* the job of those involved, *(e)* the reasons why they were included in the visit and *(f)* the cost to public funds. [53837]

Mr. Hoon: Since 1 January the Lord Chancellor and I have undertaken a number of official overseas visits. The details requested about these visits are given in the table.

Minister	*Venue*	*Purpose of visit*	*Accompanied by*	*Reason for inclusion*	*Cost to public funds of those accompanying (£)*
Lord Chancellor	Trinidad and Tobago 4 January 1998–10 January 1998	Attendance at the Commonwealth Speakers Conference	Lady Irvine Jenny Rowe (Private Secretary)	It is customary for spouses to accompany minister's to these conferences and they are specifically invited by the organisers. To provide practical and policy advice	5,332.00 *(Lady Irvine's costs were met from House of Lords funds)*
Parliamentary Secretary	Brussels 2 February 1998	Address to the Legal Affairs Committee of the European Parliament, as part of the EU Presidency	Jonathan Freeman (Private Secretary) Edwin Kilby (International Branch Policy Officer)	To provide practical and policy advice	538.00
Lord Chancellor	Paris 26 February 1998–1 March 1998	Speech to the Cour de Cassation and meetings with senior judiciary and members of the government	Lady Irvine Sir Thomas Legg (Permanent Secretary) and Lady Legg Jenny Rowe	To provide practical and policy advice	478.00 *(Lady Irvine's and Lady Legg's costs were not paid out of public funds)*
Parliamentary Secretary	Brussels 24 April 1998	Speech to the CCBE (European Lawyers' organisation), as part of the EU Presidency	Jonathan Freeman (Private Secretary) Edwin Kilby (International Branch Policy Officer	To provide practical and policy advice	692.10
Lord Chancellor	Luxembourg 29 April 1998	Visit to the European Courts of Justice	Jenny Rowe (Private Secretary)	To provide practical and policy advice	435.90
Parliamentary Secretary	Lisbon and Madrid 5 May 1998–7 May 1998	Meeting with Portuguese and Spanish Ministers of Justice as part of the UK's EU Presidency	Jonathan Freeman (Private Secretary) Edwin Kilby (International Branch Policy Officer)	To provide practical and policy advice	1,502.74
Lord Chancellor	Washington D.C. 9 May 1998–12 May 1998	To deliver US Supreme Court Heritage Society Lecture, the Oxford and Cambridge Society speech and to hold meetings with senior members of the judiciary and the government	Lady Irvine Jenny Rowe (Private Secretary)	To provide practical and policy advice	2,666.00 *(Lady Irvine's costs were not paid out of public funds)*

Minister	Venue	Purpose of visit	Accompanied by	Reason for inclusion	Cost to public funds of those accompanying (£)
Parliamentary Secretary	Stockholm and Copenhagen 13 May 1998–14 May 1998	Meeting with Swedish and Danish Ministers of Justice as part of the UK's EU Presidency	Jonathan Freeman (Private Secretary) Edwin Kilby (International Branch Policy Officer)	To provide practical and policy advice	1,177.96
Parliamentary Secretary	Bonn and Vienna 24 June 1998–26 June 1998	Meeting with German and Austrian Ministers of Justice as part of the UK's EU Presidency	Jonathan Freeman (Private Secretary) Edwin Kilby (International Branch Policy Officer)	To provide practical and policy advice	1,344.15

Information Technology

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how much his Department spent on IT, itemising *(a)* personal computers, *(b)* main-frame, *(c)* mini-computers and *(d)* file servers in the last year for which figures are available. [52878]

Mr. Hoon: The IT equipment purchased by the Department and other organisations reporting to the Lord Chancellor in the financial year 1997–98 is shown in the table.

For both the Lord Chancellor's Department Headquarters and the Court Service, future IT services and equipment will be provided under Private Finance Initiative Agreements and charged on a usage basis.

£

Organisation	PC spend	Main-frame spend	Mini-computer spend	File server spend	Total spend
Lord Chancellor's Department HQ and Associated Offices	80,696	0	0	117,646	198,342
Court Service	518,380	0	0	0	518,380
Public Trust Office	166,737	0	14,253	7,737	188,727
Northern Ireland Court Service	125,000	0	0	173,000	298,000
Public Record Office	215,857	0	0	24,763	240,620
HM Land Registry	4,016,000	2,136,000	0	597,000	6,749,000
Total	4,523,593	2,136,000	14,253	802,500	7,476,347

Note:
Figures include VAT

Freemasonry

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what steps he has taken to implement the measures outlined in the Government's response to the Third report of the Home Affairs Committee, Session 1996–97, on Freemasonry in the Police and Judiciary; if he will set out his proposed timetable for the remaining measures; and if he will make a statement. [52918]

Mr. Hoon: All new appointees to the judiciary, including the magistracy, are now asked, as a condition of appointment, to state, for the purpose of a public register, whether or not they are Freemasons and, if not, to give notice if they subsequently join. Serving members of the judiciary were recently invited, by means of a copy of a letter from the Lord Chancellor to the Lord Chief Justice, to declare their Masonic status voluntarily for the purposes of the public register. Secretaries to Advisory Committees on Justices of the Peace have also recently been asked to distribute a questionnaire to serving lay magistrates, inviting them to declare their Masonic status voluntarily for the same purpose. The information is currently being collected and will be made publicly available in due course.

New Deal

Mr. Healey: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many people his Department is committed to employing during 1998 under *(a)* the subsidised job option and *(b)* the unsubsidised job option of the New Deal programme. [52579]

Mr. Hoon: 12, all under the subsidised job option of the New Deal programme.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Homosexuals

Dr. Harris: To ask the Attorney-General what is his Department's policy towards the prosecution of men aged between 16 and 18 years for engaging in consenting homosexual acts in private. [53925]

The Attorney-General: The Crown Prosecution Service, which is headed by the Director of Public Prosecutions, subject to statutory superintendence by me as a Law Officer of the Crown, reviews and prosecutes all cases in accordance with the Code for Crown Prosecutors, issued under section 10 of the Prosecution of Offences Act 1985.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Members' Transport

Mr. Baker: To ask the President of the Council (1) what was the total amount paid in hon. Members' mileage allowances in respect of *(a)* travel within the constituency and *(b)* travel between the constituency and Westminster for (i) May 1995 to April 1996, (ii) May 1996 to April 1997 and (iii) May 1997 to April 1998; and what was the total mileage recorded in each case; [54185]

(2) how many hon. Members submitted claims for more than ten car journeys between constituency and Westminster during *(a)* May 1995 to April 1996, *(b)* May 1996 to April 1997 and *(c)* May 1997 to April 1998; [54186]

(3) how many hon. Members requested rail warrants for use between constituency and Westminster in *(a)* May 1995 to April 1996, *(b)* May 1996 to April 1997 and *(c)* May 1997 to April 1998; [54188]

(4) how many hon. Members claimed for in excess of 350 miles driven within the constituency for any week within the last month for which figures are available. [54190]

Mrs. Beckett: Records are not maintained in a form that would allow this question to be answered, without a disproportionately lengthy and costly clerical exercise.

Mr. Baker: To ask the President of the Council how many hon. Members' cars were registered as being within each engine size capacity for which records are held at *(a)* May 1995, *(b)* May 1996 and *(c)* May 1997. [54187]

Mrs. Beckett: The records maintained show usage of cars and the following details reflect the position at the dates requested.

	Number
(a) May 1995	
Up to 1300cc	15
1301cc to 2300cc	176
2301cc plus	343
(b) May 1996	
Up to 1300cc	15
1301cc to 2300cc	164
2301cc plus	315
(c) May 1997	
Up to 1300cc	8
1301cc to 2300cc	80
2301cc plus	150

Mr. Baker: To ask the President of the Council how many hon. Members have claimed a bicycle allowance since its introduction. [54189]

Mrs. Beckett: The number of hon. Members who have claimed the Bicycle Allowance since its introduction is one.

SCOTLAND

Further and Higher Education

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what regulations cover the teaching of courses in further and higher education colleges by unqualified lecturers. [48348]

Mrs. Liddell *[holding answer 6 July 1998]:* I shall write to the hon. Member as soon as possible and arrange for a copy of the reply to be placed in the Library.

Information Technology

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how much his Department spent on IT, itemising *(a)* personal computers, *(b)* main-frame, *(c)* mini-computers and *(d)* file servers in the last year for which figures are available. [52883]

Mr. Dewar: The information for my Departments and agencies is detailed. The costs shown are capital purchase costs, including VAT, rounded to the nearest £100,000, for financial year 1997–98.

Total expenditure on information technology, 1997–98

Item	*£ million*
(a) Personal computers	3.5
(b) Mainframe	nil
(c) Mini-computers	nil
(d) Servers	1.4

Council and Social Housing

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how much money will be allocated to the renovation and new building of housing in the council and social housing sector over the period of the Comprehensive Spending Review; what proportion of this funding has been set aside for debt commutation; and what will be the criteria for that commutation. [52915]

Mr. Dewar: I shall write to the hon. Member as soon as possible and arrange for a copy of the reply to be placed in the Library.

Departmental Vehicles

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many of the vehicles due for replacement by *(a)* his Department and *(b)* bodies listed in the National Asset Register in (i) 1998–99, (ii) 1999–2000 and (iii) 2000–01 will be replaced by vehicles using (1) petrol, (2) diesel, (3) natural gas, (4) electric batteries and (5) other. [52619]

Mr. Dewar *[holding answer 28 July 1998]:* I shall write to the hon. Member as soon as possible and arrange for a copy of the reply to be placed in the Library.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) how much his Department expects to spend in each year from 1998–99 to 2000–01 on vehicle replacements; [54989]

(2) pursuant to his answer of 27 July 1998, *Official Report*, column *63*, concerning departmental vehicles, how many of the vehicles use *(a)* petrol, *(b)* diesel and *(c)* LPG; and how many vehicles fall into each engine cubic capacity group. [54209]

Mr. Dewar: I shall write to the hon. Member as soon as possible and arrange for a copy of the reply to be placed in the Library.

Cycling

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what parking facilities for cycles exist at each office or site for which his Department is responsible and for each agency for which he is responsible. [52684]

Mr. Dewar *[holding answer 28 July 1998]:* I shall write to the hon. Member as soon as possible and arrange for a copy of the reply to be placed in the Library.

Thomas Hamilton

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) what powers he has to lift the 100 year closure placed upon the report by Sergeant Hughes of the Central Police into Thomas Hamilton; [53244]

(2) if he will place in the Library a copy of the report by Sergeant Hughes of the Central Police, into Thomas Hamilton, listing the charges to which he recommended consideration for prosecution. [53241]

Mr. McLeish: I shall write to the hon. Member as soon as possible and arrange for a copy of the reply to be placed in the Library.

NHS Staff

Mr. Moore: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many *(a)* nurses are and *(b)* management and administrative staff were employed by the NHS (i) on 1 May 1997 and (ii) at the latest available date. [53221]

Mr. Dewar *[holding answer 29 July 1998]:* An annual census of staff in post is conducted in September. Data from September 1998 census will not be available until end 1998.

The information available is shown in the table.

Staff employed by the NHS in Scotland: selected staff groups[1]
Headcount and whole time equivalent: at 30 September 1997

	Number	*Whole time equivalent*
Nursing and Midwifery[2]	61,954	51,472.2
Qualified	41,414	35,244.6
Unqualified	20,540	16,227.6
Management and administrative staff[3,4]	21,881	18,825.1

[1] Excludes staff employed on a casual 'as and when required' basis, for example Bank/Agency nurses
[2] Excludes nurse teachers, nurses in training and students on '1992' courses
[3] The figures include some, but not all, senior managers of professional staff, for example nurses. Some managers of these professional groups remain employed under the terms and conditions of these professions and are not included
[4] Comprises staff on senior management, administrative and clerical (A&C) and protected grades, ambulance officers and control assistants
Source:
National Manpower Statistics for payroll ISD Scotland

Nursing Vacancies

Mr. Moore: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many NHS nursing vacancies there were on *(a)* 1 May 1997 and *(b)* at the latest available date. [53220]

Mr. Dewar *[holding answer 29 July 1998]:* An annual census of nursing staff vacancies is conducted in March. The census of vacancies at 31 March 1998 is currently underway but not yet complete.
The information available centrally is shown in the table.

Nursing staff vacancies[1,2] *by qualification in the NHS in Scotland*
Whole Time Equivalent: at 31 March 1997

	Vacancies
Qualified	1,223.6
Unqualified	422.5
Total	1,646.1

[1] The vacancy figures relate to vacant posts at 31 March, irrespective of when the vacancy arose
[2] Returns for the following NHS Trusts were not submitted:
Fife Healthcare NHS Trust
Yorkhill NHS Trust
Source:
ISD(M)36
ISD Scotland

Structural Funds (Reform)

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what action he is taking to ensure that the particular circumstances of Scotland's islands are taken into account in the reform of the structural funds. [53371]

Mr. Macdonald: I shall write to the hon. and learned Member as soon as possible and arrange for a copy of the reply to be placed in the Library.

Non-departmental Public Bodies

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the non-departmental public bodies in existence on 1 May 1997 that *(a)* have been disbanded, *(b)* will be disbanded in the next 12 months, *(c)* have had their functions transferred to (i) another non-departmental public body and (ii) a democratically elected body, *(d)* have been renamed but continue to perform a similar role and *(e)* have been unchanged; if he will indicate in *(c)* (ii) the relevant successor body; what new non-departmental public bodies have been established since 1 May 1997; and how many non-departmental public bodies his Department currently is responsible for. [53854]

Mr. Dewar *[holding answer 30 July 1998]:* I shall write to the hon. Member as soon as possible and arrange for a copy of the reply to be placed in the Library.

Employees Over 60

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many *(a)* men and *(b)* women aged over 60 years were employed by (i) his Department and (ii) his Department's agencies on 1 January. [53063]

Mr. Dewar *[holding answer 30 July 1998]:* The number of male and female staff aged 60 years or over in The Scottish Office and its Executive Agencies at 1 January 1998 are detailed in the table. Figures are shown separately for the policy core and Executive Agencies of The Scottish Office.

All permanent staff in the Scottish Office and its executive agencies as at 1 January 1998

	Headcount			*Full-time equivalents*		
	Male	*Female*	*Total*	*Male*	*Female*	*Total*
Scottish Office Core	14	2	16	13.5	2.0	15.5
Executive Agencies:						
—Scottish Prison Service	41	7	48	24.0	3.5	27.5
—Other	2	1	3	2.0	1.0	3.0
The Scottish Office	57	10	67	39.5	6.5	46.0

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many *(a)* men and *(b)* women employed by (1) his Department and (2) his Department's agencies have contracts of employment which permit them to retire after their 60 birthday. [53057]

Mr. Dewar *[holding answer 30 July 1998]:* I shall write to the hon. Member as soon as possible and arrange for a copy of the reply to be placed in the Library.

Scottish Tourist Board

Mr. Alasdair Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the proposed grant-in aid for the Scottish Tourist Board for each of the next five years. [53458]

Mr. Dewar *[holding answer 30 July 1998]:* I shall write to the hon. Member as soon as possible and arrange for a copy of the reply to be placed in the Library.

Persistent Inquiries

Mr. Sanders: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland which of his Department's agencies have procedures to identify persistent inquirers for information. [53942]

Mr. Dewar: I shall write to the hon. Member as soon as possible and arrange for a copy of the reply to be placed in the Library.

Overseas Visits

Mr. Wilshire: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list those who have accompanied (i) him and (ii) his departmental Ministers on overseas visits since 1 January indicating *(a)* the venue of the visit, *(b)* the purpose of the visit, *(c)* the names of those involved, *(d)* the job of those involved, *(e)* the reasons why they were included in the visit and *(f)* the cost to public funds. [53849]

Mr. Dewar *[holding answer 30 July 1998]:* I shall write to the hon. Member as soon as possible and arrange for a copy of the reply to be placed in the Library.

Green Transport

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, pursuant to his answer of 2 April 1998, *Official Report*, column *611*, on departmental transport arrangements, what further changes he has made. [53989]

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, pursuant to his answer of 27 July 1998, *Official Report*, column *63*, concerning vehicle replacement, what guidance *(a)* he and *(b)* his Green Minister have issued concerning the vehicle fleet. [54847]

Mr. Macdonald: I shall write to the hon. Members as soon as possible and arrange for a copy of the reply to be placed in the Library.

Schools (Computers)

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many networked computers are currently in use in schools in Scotland. [54094]

Mrs. Liddell: I shall write to the hon. Member as soon as possible and arrange for a copy of the reply to be placed in the Library.

Women's Aid Projects

Mr. Russell Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what proposals he has for providing additional funding for womens' aid projects across Scotland. [54956]

Mrs. Liddell: I shall write to my hon. Friend as soon as possible and arrange for a copy of the reply to be placed in the Library.

Departmental Publications

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many of his Department's publications have been made available in *(a)* Braille, *(b)* audio tape and *(c)* large print in 1997–98; and what percentage of the total number of publications this represents. [54270]

Mr. Dewar: I shall write to the hon. Member as soon as possible and arrange for a copy of the letter to be placed in the Library of the House.

Local Enterprise Companies

Mr. Gorrie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the Scottish Office policy regarding restrictions on senior officers of local enterprise companies transferring directly to work for companies who might benefit from inside knowledge gained through the person's work for the enterprise company. [54581]

Mr. Dewar: I shall write to the hon. Member as soon as possible and arrange for a copy of the reply to be placed in the Library.

Health Service External (Consultants)

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what estimates he has made of the financial savings to *(a)* the NHS and *(b)* Government health agencies as a result of hiring external consultants in each year since 1995. [53464]

Mr. Dewar: I shall write to the hon. Member as soon as possible and arrange for a copy of the reply to be placed in the Library.

Mr. Moore: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what estimates he has made of the financial savings made by the NHS and Government health agencies as a result of employing external consultants, by year, since 1995. [53755]

Mr. Dewar: Estimates of savings from employing external consultants are neither set nor collected centrally. The responsibility for ensuring that such appointments are cost effective rests with individual Trusts and Boards.

Roads

Dr. Marek: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the figures for capital expenditure on *(a)* new build and *(b)* improvements on (i) motorways and (ii) trunk roads in Scotland for each of the last three years; and what are the projected figures for the next three years. [54183]

Mr. Macdonald: I shall write to my hon. Friend as soon as possible and arrange for a copy of the reply to be placed in the Library.

Local Transport

Dr. Marek: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the figures for 1995–96 and 1996–97 of local government expenditure in Scotland on local transport under capital and current headings as set out in "Transport Statistics Great Britain 1997". [54180]

Mr. McLeish: The table lists current and capital expenditure, as reported by local authorities.

Local government expenditure on transport 1995–96 to 1996–97
Scotland

£000

Local transport	*1995–96*	*1996–97*
Capital	174	102
Roads	164	87
Car parks	[1]—	[1]—
Public transport	10	15
Current	369	428
Roads	251	247
Car Parks	-8	-13
Revenue support to public transport	82	150
Concessionary fares	44	44

[1] Data not available

Source:

Capital—Capital Monitoring Return (CPR5) as reported by Local Authorities

Current—Local Financial Return (LFR) as reported by Local Authorities

Cancelled Operations

Mr. Moore: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will place in the Library figures *(a)* by health board and *(b)* overall, on the number of operations cancelled on the day of, or the day after, admission to a hospital, and the numbers of those patients not readmitted within a month, by quarter, for the last three years. [53309]

Mr. Dewar: Information on cancellations of hospital admissions at the level of detail requested, is not held centrally. Details of cancellations of planned admissions for in-patient and day case treatment are given in the table. Information on cancellations of hospital planned admissions is published annually in the NHS in Scotland Annual Report, copies of which have been placed in the Library.

Cancellations of hospital admissions[1] for in-patient and day case treatment by health board area

	1995				*1996*				*1996*			*1998*
	June	*September*	*December*	*March*	*June*	*September*	*December*	*March*	*June*[4]	*September*[4]	*December*[4]	*March*[4]
Argyll and Clyde	43	56	78	76	89	146	168	231	231	134	108	201
Ayrshire and Arran	61	41	37	45	37	64	34	44	49	49	45	98
Borders	77	55	34	54	54	55	100	74	97	25	94	56
Dumfries and Galloway	1	4	14	24	14	24	7	13	13	22	2	62
Fife	120	131	183	220	216	216	145	303	151	238	218	270
Forth Valley	20	20	34	38	19	35	60	68	76	80	39	88
Grampian	381	391	335	257	312	305	330	488	340	301	333	458
Greater Glasgow[2]	410	460	441	612	476	389	271	[5]—	[5]—	[5]—	[5]—	[5]—
Highland	189	251	189	283	248	181	231	227	156	220	139	172
Lanarkshire	40	57	64	91	57	85	64	56	45	21	16	11
Lothian	365	461	448	758	610	589	471	837	501	474	438	465
Orkney	1	—	3	—	—	—	—	13	23	—	—	—
Shetland	9	4	—	—	8	9	3	6	1	10	3	2
Tayside	164	184	173	360	189	125	163	288	248	232	194	263
Western Isles	—	—	3	2	1	2	3	4	2	—	—	2
Scotland[2]	1,881	2,115	2,036	2,820	2,330	2,225	2,050	2,652	1,933	1,806	1,629	2,148

[1] Cancellations made by hospital of admission of patients from the waiting list

[2] Scotland figures for quarter ending September 1996 to 31 March 1998, should be treated with caution due to the incompleteness of the Greater Glasgow Health Board area figures (see note 3)

[3] Information is not available for the following hospitals in the Glasgow area; Quarters ending 31 March 1997 to 31 March 1998; Canniesburn, Glasgow Royal Infirmary, Royal Hospital for Sick Children, Southern General and Stobhill. Quarters ending 31 December 1996 to 31 March 1998; Victoria Infirmary. Quarters ending 30 September 1996 to 31 March 1998; Western Infirmary/Gartnavel General

[4] Provisional

[5] Not available

Source:

ISD Scotland

Hospital Maintenance

Mr. Moore: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list by NHS board the hospital maintenance backlog on 1 July. [53294]

Mr. Dewar: The information requested is unavailable both in total and by Health Board. However, 81 per cent. of the essential building is considered to be in physical condition A or B which is evidence of the general soundness of the NHS estate.

NHS (Salaries)

Mr. Moore: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the amount spent on salaries and wages costs for *(a)* general and senior managers, *(b)* nurses and midwives and *(c)* administrative and clerical staff by NHS board for each financial year from 1991–92 to 1997–98. [53297]

Mr. Dewar: The information available is listed in the tables. The table for administrative and clerical staff includes the salaries of general and senior managers, the costs of which are not detailed separately in the annual accounts. Figures for 1997–98 are not yet available.

Nurses and midwives

£000

Health Board	*1991–92*	*1992–93*	*1993–94*	*1994–95*	*1995–96*	*1996–97*
Argyll and Clyde	69,888	73,976	60,624	25,621	1,952	1,090
Ayrshire and Arran	50,042	41,108	1,996	1,140	862	351
Borders	16,972	18,625	18,810	19,795	535	216
Dumfries and Galloway	27,744	30,558	28,700	18,377	702	315
Fife	50,734	53,720	51,569	2,072	1,137	732
Forth Valley	50,045	53,481	34,638	13,394	1,189	457
Grampian	87,057	67,963	6,870	4,316	2,552	1,726
Greater Glasgow	207,025	216,874	160,303	16,580	4,030	1,857
Highland	38,328	39,874	22,893	1,580	1,315	703
Lanarkshire	78,836	81,404	93,957	37,506	1,533	639
Lothian	135,489	142,748	115,109	15,481	4,305	2,557
Orkney	3,562	3,902	4,151	4,290	4,318	4,390
Shetland	3,650	3,927	4,101	4,293	4,222	4,123
Tayside	85,761	91,120	65,583	4,565	2,335	1,021
Western Isles	5,192	5,849	6,445	6,650	6,661	6,604
Health Board totals	910,325	925,129	675,749	175,660	37,648	26,781

Note:
The majority of nurses and midwives transferred to NHS Trusts following their establishment. The salaries and wages of student nurses are not included in the figures for 1995–96 due to the introduction of Project 2000

Administrative and clerical (including general and senior managers)

£000

Health Board	*1991–92*	*1992–93*	*1993–94*	*1994–95*	*1995–96*	*1996–97*
Argyll and Clyde	14,178	15,743	14,377	8,945	4,566	3,559
Ayrshire and Arran	10,118	9,603	1,627	1,750	2,367	2,523
Borders	2,105	2,518	2,801	4,141	1,455	1,325
Dumfries and Galloway	4,277	5,292	5,608	4,563	1,669	1,194
Fife	9,508	10,462	11,494	2,521	2,694	2,530
Forth Valley	8,381	9,724	7,414	4,585	2,690	2,559
Grampian	17,061	14,364	4,726	5,180	4,595	5,028
Greater Glasgow	41,749	47,473	37,480	12,515	8,938	7,841
Highland	7,263	8,264	5,535	2,968	2,832	2,519
Lanarkshire	13,350	14,240	28,033	5,760	3,350	3,375
Lothian	28,451	32,352	31,685	7,388	7,075	6,408
Orkney	480	553	671	774	827	932
Shetland	770	868	1,012	1,109	1,222	1,351
Tayside	17,180	19,415	14,716	6,360	5,440	4,746
Western Isles	919	1,107	1,392	1,478	1,511	1,647
Health Board totals	175,718	191,978	168,571	70,037	51,231	47,837

Rural Housing

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) how much Scottish Homes invested in housing associations to provide rented housing in (i) rural areas of Scotland excluding the Islands areas and (ii) the Scottish Islands areas, in each year since 1992–93; and what proportion of Scottish Homes' total budget for rented housing for each of those years is represented by those figures; [54224]

(2) how much Scottish Homes has invested in housing associations to provide low-cost home ownership in (i) rural areas of Scotland excluding the Scottish Islands areas and (ii) the Scottish Islands areas in each year since 1992–93; and what proportion of Scottish Homes' total low-cost home ownership budget is represented by those figures; [54225]

(3) how many houses were completed for rent in (i) rural areas of Scotland excluding the Scottish Islands areas and (ii) the Scottish Islands areas using Housing Association

grants in each year from 1992–93 to 1997–98; and how many units were completed in each of the foregoing years by each housing association; [54226]

(4) how many houses were completed for shared ownership and improvement for sale by each housing association in (i) rural areas of Scotland excluding the Scottish Islands areas and (ii) the Scottish Islands areas in each year from 1992–93 to 1997–98; [54227]

(5) how many tenants incentive scheme grants and rural home ownership grants were administered by each housing association in (i) the rural areas of Scotland, excluding the Scottish Islands areas and (ii) the Scottish Islands areas in each year from 1992–93 to 1997–98; [54228]

(6) what definition of rural has been adopted by Scottish Homes in each year since 1992–93 for the purpose of making investment decisions. [54229]

Mr. Macdonald: The information requested is a matter for Scottish Homes. I have asked the Chairman, Mr. John Ward, to write to the hon. and learned Member with the relevant information.

Cannabis

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland in cases reported to the Procurator Fiscal or reported to the Children's Panel, where the principal drugs offence was possession of cannabis, how many persons in Scotland were (i) proceeded against at court and (ii) dealt with other than at court in *(a)* 1996 and *(b)* 1997. [54420]

Mr. McLeish: I shall write to the hon. and learned Member as soon as possible and arrange for a copy of the reply to be placed in the Library.

Unfit Homes

Mr. Welsh: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will estimate the number of homes in Scotland which will be (i) unfit for human habitation, (ii) suffer from dampness or condensation and (iii) have lead piping in (i) 1998–99, (ii) 1999–2000, (iii) 2000–01 and (iv) 2001–02 in each region of Scotland; and if he will make a statement. [54445]

Mr. Macdonald: I shall write to the hon. Member as soon as possible and arrange for a copy of the reply to be placed in the Library.

Departmental Equipment

Mr. Welsh: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many *(a)* computers, *(b)* printers, *(c)* fax machines, *(d)* photocopiers, *(e)* telephones, *(f)* telephone answering machines, *(g)* filing cases, *(h)* office chairs and *(i)* office tables were disposed of by his Department in each year since 1995–96 surplus to requirements; how and to whom these items were disposed of; and how much was obtained through sales of such items in each year. [54461]

Mr. Dewar: I shall write to the hon. Member as soon as possible and arrange for a copy of the reply to be placed in the Library.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Departmental Vehicles

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if she will list for *(a)* her Department and *(b)* bodies listed in the National Asset Register, how many vehicles are currently (i) owned and (ii) leased; if he will indicate their (A) fuel types and (B) engine cubic capacities; and how many vehicles are expected to fall due for replacement in each of the years (1) 1998–99, (2) 1999–2000 and (3) 2000–01. [49226]

Mr. Paul Murphy: I shall write to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many of the vehicles due for replacement by *(a)* her Department and *(b)* bodies listed in the National Asset Register in (i) 1998–99, (ii) 1999–2000 and (iii) 2000–01 will be replaced by vehicles using (1) petrol, (2) diesel, (3) natural gas, (4) electric batteries and (5) other. [52613]

Mr. Paul Murphy: I shall write to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, pursuant to her answer of 22 April 1998, *Official Report*, column *645*, on departmental transport arrangements, what further changes she has made. [53988]

Mr. Paul Murphy: The Department is working towards the target announced in the White Paper "A New Deal for Transport", that all headquarters buildings and main buildings occupied by Executive Agencies and Government Offices should have transport plans by March 1999 and all other key buildings by March 2000. We have put in place an action plan for meeting this target and we are in the process of identifying the buildings for which transport plans will be prepared.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how much her Department expects to spend in each year from 1998–99 to 2000–01 on vehicle replacements. [54994]

Mr. Paul Murphy: I shall write to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

Belfast Agreement

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if she will list the legislative provisions that are required to be enacted prior to the entry into force of the 10 April 1998 Agreement between the British and Irish Governments; if she will list the legislative measures required to implement provisions of the Multi-party Agreement; and what is the proposed timetable for consultation and publication of draft legislation. [48468]

Mr. Paul Murphy *[holding answer 7 July 1998]:* The House is today taking the Third Reading of the third and last of the Bills necessary for the implementation of the Belfast Agreement, the Northern Ireland Bill, on which we have had consultations both before and since introduction.

Some subordinate legislation will be necessary to complete the implementation process and to permit effect to be given to the Agreement between the British and Irish

Governments. This will include orders to implement any proposals for changes in the structure of the Northern Ireland Departments that may be agreed, and orders to provide the necessary statutory underpinning for the initial implementation bodies envisaged in the Strand Two section of the Belfast Agreement.

Community Policing

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what assessment she has made of the level of expertise in community policing held by members of the Independent Commission on Policing in Northern Ireland from *(a)* South Africa, *(b)* New York and *(c)* Toronto. [52223]

Mr. Ingram: A careful assessment was conducted of the experience and expertise of the members of the Independent Commission on Policing. I am satisfied that they bring together a range of appropriate skills. These include a very high degree of expertise in policing, from both operational and academic perspectives, including community policing.

Information Technology

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how much her Department spent on IT, itemising *(a)* personal computers, *(b)* main-frame, *(c)* mini-computers and *(d)* file servers in the last year for which figures are available. [52889]

Mr. Paul Murphy: I shall write to my right hon. Friend as soon as possible.

Terrorist Incidents

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) how many petrol bomb and arson attacks there have been over the last 12 months in the Ballymoney area; and which were assessed to be of *(a)* Loyalist and *(b)* Republican origin; [52767]

(2) if he will list the organisations her Department has assessed to be responsible for each terrorist incident in July; [52765]

(3) how many members of the security forces, including the Royal Irish Regiment, have received threats to their life since July 1997; and from what alleged source. [52766]

Mr. Ingram: I shall write to the hon. Gentleman as soon as possible.

Cycling

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what proportion of the employees of her Department and of the employees of each agency for which she is responsible cycle to work; and what measures she plans to increase that proportion. [52665]

Mr. Paul Murphy *[holding answer 28 July 1998]:* In the Northern Ireland Office and the Northern Ireland Departments it is estimated that between 1–2 per cent. of employees cycle to work. Measures to increase the proportion of employees cycling to work are being considered as part of the development of green transport plans for buildings occupied by the Department and its Agencies. The Northern Ireland Office also has provision for an interest free loan for any employee to purchase a bicycle for travel to work purposes.

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what parking facilities for cycles exist at each office or site for which her Department is responsible and for each agency for which he is responsible. [52664]

Mr. Paul Murphy *[holding answer 28 July 1998]:* I shall write to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

Departmental Research

Mr. Fabricant: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if she will list the cost of all research undertaken by her Department since May 1997, excluding the cost of green papers and other public consultation documents drafted by her officials; and if she will list in each case the organisations which undertook that research. [52708]

Mr. Paul Murphy *[holding answer 29 July 1998]:* I shall write to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

Devolved Institutions

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, pursuant to the answer of the Prime Minister on 10 July 1998, *Official Report*, column *641*, what institutions are included in the description

"devolved institutions in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales when established and, if appropriate, elsewhere in the United Kingdom";

if the description extends to regional chambers and regional assemblies. [53580]

Marjorie Mowlam: The institutions include the Northern Ireland Assembly, Scottish Parliament and Welsh Assembly. In the absence of elected regional Assemblies in England we have yet to determine the best means of reflecting the views of regional interests in England in the Council.

Non-departmental Public Bodies

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if she will list the non-departmental public bodies in existence on 1 May 1997 that *(a)* have been disbanded, *(b)* will be disbanded in the next 12 months, *(c)* have had their functions transferred to (i) another non-departmental public body and (ii) a democratically elected body, *(d)* have been renamed but continue to perform a similar role and *(e)* have been unchanged; if she will indicate in (c) (ii) the relevant successor body; what new non-departmental public bodies have been established since 1 May 1997; and how many non-departmental public bodies her Department currently is responsible for. [53859]

Mr. Paul Murphy *[holding answer 30 July 1998]:* The information requested is as follows:

(a) NDPBs disbanded since 1 May 1997:

1. NI Citizens Charter Advisory Panel
2. Ulster Folk and Transport Museum
3. Ulster Museum
4. North Down and Ards Community HSS Trust
5. Ulster, North Down and Ards Hospital HSS Trust

(b) NDPBs which will be disbanded in the next 12 months:

1. Standing Advisory Commission on Human Rights
2. Health and Safety Agency
3. Commission for Racial Equality in NI
4. Fair Employment Commission
5. Equal Opportunities Commission
6. NI Disability Council
7. Independent Commission Police Complaints

(c) NDPBs which have had their functions transferred to:

(i) another NDPB—the functions of the North Down and Ards Community HSS Trust and the Ulster, North Down and Ards Hospital HSS Trust were transferred to the Ulster Community and Hospitals HSS Trust with effect from 1 April 1998. Ulster Folk and Transport Museums, and Ulster Museum were transferred to the National Museums and Galleries of Northern Ireland with effect from 1 April 1998;

(ii) a democratically elected body (naming the relevant successor body): None.

(d) NDPBs which have been renamed but continuing to perform a similar role: Rathgeal and Whiteabbey Training Schools Management Board will become the Juvenile Justice Board with effect from 1 August 1998.

(e) Details of all other NDPBs in existence on 1 May 1997 are listed in Public Bodies 1997.

(f) New NDPBs which have been established since 1 May 1998: The Ulster Community and Hospitals HSS Trust with effect from 1 April 1998 Commission for Racial Equality in Northern Ireland with effect from 29 July 1997 National Museums and Galleries of Northern Ireland with effect from 1 April 1998.

(g) The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland is currently responsible for 131 Non Departmental Public Bodies.

Employees Over 60

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many *(a)* men and *(b)* women aged over 60 years were employed by (i) her Department and (ii) her Department's agencies on 1 January. [53043]

Mr. Paul Murphy *[holding answer 30 July 1998]:* The information for the Northern Ireland Office and Northern Ireland Departments is as follows:

(a)(i): 104

(a)(ii): 352

(b)(i): 63

(b)(ii): 98.

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many *(a)* men and *(b)* women employed by (1) her Department and (2) her Department's agencies have contracts of employment which permit them to retire after their 60th birthday. [53044]

Mr. Paul Murphy *[holding answer 30 July 1998]:* The information for (1) the Northern Ireland Office, Northern Ireland Departments and (2) their Agencies is as follows:

	(a) Men	*(b) Women*
(1) Departments	1,107	1,811
(2) Agencies	4,655	4,502
Total	5,762	6,313

Public Registers

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when she expects to respond to the question from the hon. Member for Leyton and Wanstead, to which a holding answer was given on 29 June, concerning the public registers for which her Department is responsible. [54021]

Mr. Paul Murphy: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave him on 28 July 1998, *Official Report*, columns *130–31*.

Persistent Inquirers

Mr. Sanders: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland which of her Department's agencies have procedures to identify persistent inquirers for information. [53943]

Mr. Paul Murphy: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave him on 19 May 1998, *Official Report*, column *313*.

NHS Expenditure

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what proportion of the additional funding for the NHS announced in the Comprehensive Spending Review will be made available to Northern Ireland; and on what basis it has been calculated. [54157]

Mr. Paul Murphy: The Barnett formula provided Northern Ireland with its population share (2.91 per cent.) of changes in comparable spending programmes in Great Britain, including the increases for the NHS. Allocations to individual Northern Ireland spending programmes will be announced later this year.

Overseas Visits

Mr. Wilshire: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if she will list those who have accompanied (i) her and (ii) her departmental Ministers on overseas visits since 1 January indicating *(a)* the venue of the visit, *(b)* the purpose of the visit, *(c)* the names of those involved, *(d)* the job of those involved, *(e)* the reasons why they were included in the visit and *(f)* the cost to public funds. [53848]

Mr. Paul Murphy *[holding answer 30 July 1998]:* I shall write to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

Departmental Publications

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many of her Department's publications have been made available in *(a)* Braille, *(b)* audio tape and *(c)* large print in 1997–98; and what percentage of the total number of publications this represents. [54265]

Mr. Paul Murphy: Information on the numbers of documents published in alternative formats, such as audio tapes, will normally be held by officials with responsibility for the documents in question. This information is not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Criminal Appeals

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many convictions in cases tried on indictment were referred by the Secretary of State to the Northern Ireland Court of Appeal for each year between 1990–91 and 1996–97. [54103]

Mr. Ingram: During the period 1 April 1990 and 31 March 1997, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State referred six cases back to the Court of Appeal for Northern Ireland. They were during the years 1991–92; four cases; and 1996–97; two cases.

Mr. W. J. McGarry

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) when the PBNI informed the RUC Care Unit of the release of Mr. W. J. McGarry from prison; [54133]

(2) what were the reasons for the delay in the Prison Service notifying the social services of the release of Mr. W. J. McGarry from prison; and what steps are being taken to improve the procedures. [54029]

Mr. Ingram: I shall write to my hon. Friend as soon as possible.

Housing

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many schemes from the Housing Association have received project approval from the Northern Ireland Housing Executive in the past 12 months; and how many schemes were submitted for approval in that same period. [54660]

Mr. Paul Murphy: This is a matter for the Northern Ireland Housing Executive whose Chief Executive has advised as follows:

The Northern Ireland Housing Executive issued Scheme Approval for 26 schemes in the 12 month period July 1997 to July 1998.

The Northern Ireland Housing Executive received 25 applications from Housing Associations for Scheme Approval in the same period.

WALES

Arms Park Millennium Stadium

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what steps he has taken to ensure that delays in the completion of the new Arms Park Millennium Stadium do not result in the loss of the rugby world cup final to Cardiff; what are the links between his Department and the committee overseeing this project; and if he will make a statement. [53578]

Mr. Ron Davies: I will write to the right hon. Member as soon as possible and place a copy of my reply in the Library of the House.

Lobbyists

Mr. Rogers: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) what meetings he and any of his ministers or advisers have had with principals of the lobby company, Political Context or its Cardiff-based offshoot, Welsh Context, what were the dates of those meetings; who was present at those meetings; and what were the subjects discussed at those meetings; [54532]

(2) what contracts *(a)* his Department and *(b)* other public bodies in Wales have awarded to the lobby company, Political Context, or its Cardiff-based offshoot, Welsh Context; [54530]

(3) what contracts *(a)* his Department and *(b)* other public bodies in Wales have awarded to the public relations company, Morgan Allan. [54531]

Mr. Ron Davies: I will write to my hon. Friend as soon as possible and place a copy of my reply in the Library of the House.

Local Government Modernisation

Mr. Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he will announce his proposals for modernising local government in Wales; and if he will make a statement. [55189]

Mr. Ron Davies: I have today placed in the Library of the House copies of a White Paper entitled "Local Voices: Modernising Local Government in Wales". The Paper sets out an agenda for bringing Welsh local government back to the people. It places the policy in the context of Wales and the potential for a strong partnership between local government and the National Assembly.

Departmental Vehicles

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how much his Department expects to spend in each year from 1998–99 to 2000–01 on vehicle replacements. [54995]

Mr. Ron Davies: I will reply to the hon. Member as soon as possible and place a copy of my reply in the Library of the House.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, pursuant to his answer of 28 July 1998, *Official Report*, columns *180–81*, concerning vehicle replacement, what guidance he has issued concerning the replacement policy for vehicle fleets. [54479]

Mr. Ron Davies: My Department currently operates a policy of replacing diesel driven vehicles with those which run on unleaded petrol and which are fitted with 'three way' catalytic converters. This policy is reviewed annually as part of the Department's Green Housekeeping Action Plan which takes account of developments in alternative fuels, having regard also to economic, financial and environmental factors.

Where practicable, these factors will also be applied to the replacement of the specialist diesel powered highway vehicles.

Schools (Rate Relief)

Mr. Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement about discretionary rate relief granted by local authorities to their own schools. [55190]

Mr. Ron Davies: My Department has advised local authorities that rate relief cannot be granted to Local Education Authority (County) schools under section 47 of

the Local Government Finance Act 1988. In this respect, local authority schools are treated in the same manner as other types of local authority property. The Government's funding of local authority expenditure has always taken account of the fact that full rates are payable on local authority property.

Like all other rate income, the rates paid by local authorities are pooled and redistributed. Those authorities who do not pay their full rates bills do so to the disadvantage of others. My Department intends to ensure that the outstanding rates are paid into the national pool for redistribution to all authorities.

Sea Empress

Mr. Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he expects to respond to the report on the Sea Empress Environmental Evaluation Committee. [55191]

Mr. Ron Davies: I have carefully considered the findings of the report and intend publishing the Government's response shortly. I will arrange for copies to be placed in the Library.

Departmental Reviews

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the reviews his Department initiated in the years *(a)* 1974–75, *(b)* 1979–80 and *(c)* 1992–93. [48518]

Mr. Ron Davies *[holding answer 6 July 1998]:* Present Ministers are not responsible to Parliament for events which took place under a previous Administration and do not normally have access to relevant papers. Information on those reviews which have been published is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Green Transport

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, pursuant to his answer of 27 March 1998, *Official Report*, column *354*, on departmental transport arrangements, what further changes he has made. [54005]

Mr. Ron Davies: The White Paper, "A New Deal for Transport: Better for Everyone" (Cm 3950), was published on 20 July. The Welsh Transport Policy Statement, "Transporting Wales into the Future", was published on 24 July.

My Department has given an undertaking that a Green Transport Plan, covering commuting and travel in the course of work at the Department's main offices will be in place by March 1999.

Departmental Publications

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many of his Department's publications have been made available in *(a)* Braille, *(b)* audio tape and *(c)* large print in 1997–98; and what percentage of the total number of publications this represents. [54264]

Mr. Ron Davies: I will write to the hon. Member as soon as possible and place a copy of my reply in the Library of the House.

Blackwood Bypass

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what representations he has received concerning the Blackwood Bypass (Sirhowy Enterprise Way). [54101]

Mr. Hain My right hon. Friend and I have received a number of representations from Caerphilly County Borough Council concerning this scheme.

NHS Dental Services

Ms Lawrence: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what measures are in hand to improve access to NHS dental services in Wales. [54614]

Mr. Ron Davies: The Welsh Office £3m dental initiative, first launched in September 1995, enabled Welsh Health Authorities to offer unprecedented levels of grant (up to £50,000 in certain areas) to dentists for new or expanding practices, and to NHS Trusts to expand the Community Dental Service. An additional £0.25m for the continuation of the dental initiative was announced on 17 July 1997 as part of the comprehensive primary care initiative "Delivering Care: Meeting Need".

Sixty-one grants have already been paid but there are still some areas where certain categories of patients may find it difficult to register with an NHS dentist close to home. This can be a particular problem in the more rural parts of Wales.

Stage 2 of the initiative, launched on 10 July this year, introduces more flexibility into the grant scheme, both in terms of the extent and length of commitment required. It also offers more help to dentists who want to open new part-time or branch practices in certain areas, where this would be the best way of meeting local needs.

The Government are committed to ensuring that a comprehensive, good quality, NHS dental service is available to all who wish to use it no matter where they live, and the continuation of this Welsh Office initiative demonstrates our determination to tackle any remaining inequity of access to health care.

Sterile Service Units

Ms Lawrence: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what assessment he made of the impact on sterile service units within other trusts in Wales of the contract between UHW NHS Trust and SSI. [54957]

Mr. Ron Davies: The Private Finance Initiative contract between UHW NHS Trust and SSI is justified on the basis of present activity levels. I do not anticipate any impact on sterile services units in other NHS Trusts.

Ynys Môn Council

Dr. Marek: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what discussions he has had with Ynys Môn Council on the financial arrangements relating to the resignation of the Chief Executive. [54179]

Mr. Ron Davies: None, and it would not be appropriate for my Department to do so.

Local Transport

Dr. Marek: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the figures for 1996–97 of local government

expenditure in Wales on local transport under capital and current headings as set out in Transport Statistics Great Britain, 1997. [54181]

Mr. Hain: The information is given in the table.

Local government expenditure on transport 1996–97

	£ million
Local transport	268
Capital	104
Roads	99
Car parks	5
Public transport	1
Current	165
Roads	148
Car parks	–4
Revenue support to public transport	11
Concessionary fares	9

NHS Staff Salaries

Mr. Öpik: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the amount spent on salaries and wages costs for *(a)* general and senior managers, *(b)* nurses and midwives and *(c)* administrative and clerical staff by NHS authority for each financial year from 1991–92 to 1997–98. [53298]

Mr. Ron Davies: The information is as follows:

£000

Financial year	General and senior managers	Nurses and midwives	Administrative and clerical staff
1991–92	19,432	402,501	79,134
1992–93	20,919	425,736	96,059
1993–94	30,836	421,737	110,832
1994–95	38,753	433,661	110,620
1995–96	42,605	442,604	118,049
1996–97	50,172	441,996	112,627
1997–98	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—

[1] Figures not yet available

Sources:

Financial returns of Health Authorities, NHS Trusts, Family Health Services Authorities, The Health Promotion Authority for Wales and the Welsh Health Common Services Authority

Hospital Maintenance

Mr. Öpik: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list by NHS authority the hospital maintenance backlog on 1 July. [53293]

Mr. Ron Davies: Since 31 March 1995, statistics for backlog maintenance have been collected and presented on a Trust basis. Figures for July 1998 will not be available until November this year but figures are available for July 1997.

£000

Trust name	Backlog maintenance
Bridgend and District	5,760
Cardiff Community Healthcare	21,943
Carmarthen and District	6,895
Ceredigion and Mid Wales	6,095
Clwydian Community Care	8,375
Dental Hospital, Heath	6,607
Derwen	8,711
East Glamorgan	9,955
Glan Clwyd	19,786
Glan Hafren	28,815
Glan Y Mor	22,054
Gwent Community	8,016
Gwynedd Community	4,344
Gwynedd Hospitals	5,188
Llandough	21,892
Llanelli/Dinefwr	3,280
Morriston	6,070
Nevill Hall and District	1,390
North Glamorgan	23,832
Pembrokeshire	8,097
Powys Healthcare	5,645
Rhondda Healthcare	6,968
Nevill Hall and District	1,390
North Glamorgan	23,832
Pembrokeshire	8,097
Powys Healthcare	5,645
Rhondda Healthcare	6,968
Swansea	2,154
UHW/Royal Group	56,689
Velindre	480
Wrexham Maelor	4,527
Total	303,568

NHS Staff

Mr. Öpik: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was the total number of *(a)* NHS clerical, administrative and management staff, *(b)* NHS hospital doctors and general practitioners and *(c)* NHS nurses and midwives in each year since 1995. [53292]

Mr. Ron Davies: The information is given in the table:

Thousands

Staff in post at 30 September (whole-time equivalent):	1995	1996	1997
Administration and clerical[1]	—	9.7	9.7
Hospital doctors	3.0	3.1	3.2
Nursing, midwifery and health visiting[1]	23.3	23.5	23.4
Staff in post at 1 October (Numbers):			
General Medical Practitioners[2]	1,719	1,736	1,753

[1] The system used to classify directly employed non-medical NHS staff changed during 1995, moving from groups which were based on payscales to groups which are based on new occupation codes. Data for 1996 onwards are for the new occupation groups and are from NHS personnel systems. Data prior to 1996 are based on numbers from the NHS payroll system; the allocation of these to the new occupation groups have been estimated. As the data shown for administration and clerical are a sub set of the full group, "Administration and estates staff", a reliable figure cannot be given for 1995

[2] Unrestricted principals

NHS (External Consultants)

Mr. Öpik: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what estimates he has made of the financial savings made by the NHS and Government health agencies as a result of employing external consultants, by year, since 1995. [53754]

Mr. Ron Davies: Decisions by NHS bodies to employ management consultants, either to identify opportunities for savings or for other purposes, rest with the bodies concerned and information about outcomes of consultancy assignments is not collected centrally.

Operations (Cancellations)

Mr. Öpik: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will place in the Library figures *(a)* by health authority and *(b)* overall on the number of operations cancelled on the day of, or the day after, admission to a hospital, and the numbers of those patients not readmitted within a month, by quarter, for the last three years. [53308]

Mr. Ron Davies: Information on the number of operations cancelled on the day of, or the day after, admission to a hospital is not collected centrally. Information on the numbers of patients not re-admitted within a month of a cancelled operation is available on a Trust basis only and is given in the table:

Number of patients no re-admitted within one month following a cancelled operation

	Quarter ending						
NHS Trust	*June 1995*	*September 1995*	*December 1995*	*March 1996*	*June 1996*	*September 1996*	*December 1996*
Bridgend and District	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Cardiff Community Health Care	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Carmarthen and District	—	—	7	6	20	10	13
Ceredigion and Mid Wales	4	2	3	—	1	1	—
Clwydian Community Care	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
East Glamorgan	11	—	19	12	5	2	4
Glan-Y-Mor	3	2	1	11	—	4	2
Glan Clwyd Hospital	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Glan Hafren	—	—	—	3	6	3	2
Gwent Community Health	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Gwynedd Community Health	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Gwynedd Hospitals	—	—	—	3	3	1	—
Llandough Hospital	—	—	—	—	—	—	1
Llanelli Dinefwr	—	—	1	—	5	2	6
Morriston Hospital	—	—	—	—	—	—	1
Nevill Hall and District	1	1	4	—	—	—	3
North Glamorgan	—	—	—	—	—	1	2
Pembrokeshire and Derwen	—	—	—	—	—	7	1
Powys Health Care	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Rhondda Health Care	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Swansea	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
University Dental Hospital	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
University of Wales Healthcare	46	25	12	21	3	3	12
Velindre	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Wrexham Maelor Hospital	—	—	3	20	—	—	—
Total	65	30	50	76	43	34	47

	Quarter ending				
NHS Trust	*March 1997*	*June 1997*	*September 1997*	*December 1997*	*March 1998*
Bridgend and District	8	—	1	—	—
Cardiff Community Health Care	—	—	—	—	—
Carmarthen and District	12	12	11	9	8
Ceredigion and Mid Wales	1	3	—	1	—
Clwydian Community Care	—	—	—	—	—
East Glamorgan	194	—	—	—	4
Glan-Y-Mor	10	5	—	1	—
Glan Clwyd Hospital	—	—	—	—	—
Glan Hafren	8	3	12	5	11
Gwent Community Health	—	—	—	—	—
Gwynedd Community Health	—	—	—	—	—
Gwynedd Hospitals	—	—	—	—	—
Llandough Hospital	—	—	—	—	5
Llanelli Dinefwr	—	3	—	—	8
Morriston Hospital	5	—	—	—	1
Nevill Hall and District	2	—	7	21	8
North Glamorgan	1	—	—	2	2
Pembrokeshire and Derwen	2	—	1	—	—
Powys Health Care	—	—	—	—	—
Rhondda Health Care	—	—	—	—	—
Swansea	—	—	—	—	—
University Dental Hospital	—	—	—	—	—
University of Wales Healthcare	170	44	83	51	113
Velindre	—	—	—	—	—
Wrexham	—	—	12	4	18
Total	413	70	127	94	178

Sustrans Cycle Network

Mr. Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what progress has been made on the North Wales section of the Sustrans national cycle network; and if he will make a statement. [53921]

Mr. Hain: The North Wales section of the Sustrans national cycle network runs from Bangor to Cheshire and comprises 69 miles, of which nine miles are open and available for cycling on. The remaining 60 miles will be open and available for cycling by the year 2000.

Farmers' Markets

Mr. Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what steps he has taken to introduce farmers' markets in Wales. [53920]

Mr. Ron Davies: Farmers' markets are a useful feature of the agricultural economy, particularly in rural areas. However, decisions about the provision of such markets are a matter for the industry.

Inward Investment

Mr. Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many jobs have been *(a)* created and *(b)* sustained in (i) the Vale of Clwyd constituency and (ii) Denbighshire by (1) foreign inward investment and (2) domestic inward investment in each of the last five years. [53919]

Mr. Hain: Inward investment information for the areas of the Vale of Clwyd constituency and Denbighshire Unitary Authority, much of which is non-assisted, is available for the last two financial years only. There were no inward investment projects recorded by the Welsh Development Agency for the Vale of Clwyd in those years. Information on Denbighshire is set out below. For the previous three years, it has only been possible to assemble meaningful information for the former Rhuddlan, Glyndwr and part of Colwyn.

Year	*Source*	*New jobs*	*Safeguarded jobs*
1993–94	UK	51	127
	Overseas	24	65
1994–95	UK	60	—
	Overseas	—	—
1995–96	UK	23	21
	Overseas	—	—
1996–97	UK	15	—
	Overseas	—	—
1997–98	UK	12	—
	Overseas	—	—

Target Investment Zone

Mr. Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if North Denbighshire is included in the target investment zone in Wales. [53918]

Mr. Hain: North Denbighshire is included in the North West Wales Prototype Employment Zone.

Kwik Save, Prestatyn

Mr. Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what action his Department has taken following the redundances at Kwik Save Prestatyn. [53926]

Mr. Hain: The Welsh Office and its agencies continue to offer every assistance. I understand that the majority of the 100 or so employees who have already left the company have found new jobs.

EU Structural Funds

Mr. Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will estimate the total funding available through gaining Objective 1 status for Wales; and how that money will be apportioned to the counties within the Objective 1 Area. [53924]

Mr. Hain: We cannot at present predict with any certainty what might be the implications of Structural Fund reform for individual regions within the UK, and in particular the future financial arrangements. All these issues depend on the resolution of the final Regulations for which the Cardiff European Council set a target date of March 1999. My hon. Friend can be assured, however, that I am keeping in very close touch with this issue.

ENT Treatment

Mr. Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the size of current waiting lists for ENT treatment in each health authority in Wales. [53923]

Mr. Ron Davies: The table shows the position on ear, nose and throat (ENT) waiting lists at 31 May 1998.

Ear, Nose and Throat (ENT) waiting lists, by Health Authority, at 31 May 1998

Health Authority	*Residents waiting for ENT outpatient appointments*	*Residents waiting for ENT inpatient or daycase treatment*
Gwent Health Authority	2,678	1,182
Bro Taf Health Authority	3,644	2,021
Dyfed Powys Health Authority	2,186	1,397
North Wales Health Authority	2,931	2,386
Morgannwg Health Authority	2,812	1,217
All Welsh Health Authorities	14,251	8,203

IVF Treatment

Mr. Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what are the current average waiting times for IVF treatment in each health authority in Wales; and if he will make a statement. [53922]

Mr. Ron Davies: Information on waiting times for the specialised IVF treatment is not collected centrally.

PRIME MINISTER

Dounreay

Ms Roseanna Cunningham: To ask the Prime Minister on what date the Nuclear Installations Inspectorate memorandum, "A Summary of the Dounreay FCA Inspection Findings", was brought to his attention; what assurances he *(a)* sought and *(b)* received from the HSE that Dounreay was a suitable destination for the waste from Georgia; what action he took in response to the document; and if he will make a statement. [46785]

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 23 June 1998]:* This was brought to my attention in the usual way at the time of publication.

I also refer the hon. Member to the answer given to her by my hon. Friend the Minister for Science, Energy and Industry on 23 July 1998, *Official Report*, columns *641–42*.

Lobbyists

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list the business relationships notified to him by Mr. Roger Liddle. [49655]

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 9 July 1998]:* In accordance with the Civil Service Management Code, on appointment as a Special Adviser to the No. 10 Policy Unit, Mr. Liddle notified the Cabinet Office that he was Managing Director of Prima Europe Ltd. and that he was a shareholder in the company.

Mr. Liddle has consented to the release of this information.

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Prime Minister what guidance he gives to *(a)* Cabinet Ministers and *(b)* other Ministers concerning participation at events organised or facilitated by lobbying companies; and what account this guidance takes of Chatham House rules. [50466]

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 14 July 1998]:* Ministers participating in any outside event—whether under the Chatham House rule or not—must conduct themselves in accordance with the principles set out in the Ministerial Code.

Mr. Baker: To ask the Prime Minister in respect of section 9, "Guidance For Civil Servants: Contacts with Lobbyists", whether media contacts are deemed to be lobbyists for the purpose of the guidance. [54481]

The Prime Minister: Civil servants are under a duty, set out in the Civil Service Code, not to misuse their official position or information acquired in the course of their official duties to further their private interests or those of others. The practical examples outlined in Section 9 of the guidance focus on dealings with lobbyists but these principles apply to all contacts between civil servants and people outside Government.

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Prime Minister if the guidance issued to civil servants concerning dealings with lobbyists will extend to civil servants working to the Scottish Parliament and Welsh Assembly. [54437]

The Prime Minister: The Guidance is a clarification of the existing rules set out in the Civil Service Code. Its purpose is to set out some practical guidelines to staff who come into contact with groups and people outside Government. The Guidance applies to all civil servants. Its principles will therefore apply to members of the Home Civil Service working in the Scottish Executive and to the Welsh Assembly.

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Prime Minister in drawing up the guidance to civil servants on dealings with lobbyists, to what extent he drew on practice in other member states of the European Union. [54438]

The Prime Minister: The Guidance is essentially a clarification of existing rules and principles which have long applied to civil servants in the United Kingdom. However, in drafting the Guidance which sets out practical guidelines for staff who may come into contact with groups and people outside Government, experience and practice overseas was, of course, considered.

No. 10 Policy Unit

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Prime Minister what is his policy regarding the provision of political information or advice by the No. 10 Policy Unit to people outside Parliament who have been invited to appear on television or radio programmes. [50069]

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 31 July 1998]:* Schedule 1, Part 1 of the Model Contract for Special Advisers sets out the duties and responsibilities of Special Advisers including their briefing role. In doing so, they are required not to misuse their official position or information required in the course of their duties or do anything which might breach Parliamentary privilege or offend against the conventions of Parliament.

Mr. Chope: To ask the Prime Minister how many meetings members of his policy unit have had with (i) Tesco plc, (ii) Marks and Spencer plc and (iii) Manpower since 1 February; and on what matters. [54494]

The Prime Minister: Ministers, their Special Advisers and other civil servants meet many people in the course of their work. This properly includes meetings with interest groups outside Government. This liaison is intended to help Ministers draw upon outside contributions—from academics, think-tanks, trade and industry associations, private sector organisations, trade unions and others, as well as relevant experience from other countries—during the process of policy analysis and development. But they must observe the requirements of propriety: for instance they must not provide confidential information without authorisation, or allow improper influence on policy. It is not our policy to make information on meetings or their content public.

Information Technology

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Prime Minister how much his office spent on IT, itemising *(a)* personal computers, *(b)* mainframe, *(c)* mini-computers and *(d)* file servers in the last year for which figures are available. [52899]

The Prime Minister: The information requested is being collated and I will write to my right hon. Friend in due course.

Genetically Modified Foods

Mr. Baker: To ask the Prime Minister what (i) discussions he has had with and (ii) representations he has received from the President of the United States in respect of genetically modified foods or crops; when, and what issues were discussed; and if he will make a statement. [52854]

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 28 July 1998]:* Officials are in regular contact with their United States counterparts and this issue was discussed during the recent European Union-United States summit.

Cycling

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Prime Minister what proportion of the employees of his Department and of the employees of each agency for which he is responsible cycle to work; and what measures he plans to increase that proportion. [52806]

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 28 July 1998]:* I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to him by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office on 28 July 1998, *Official Report*, column *221*.

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Prime Minister what parking facilities for cycles exist at each office or site for which his Department is responsible; and for each agency for which he has responsibility. [52805]

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 28 July 1998]:* For these purposes my Office is part of the Cabinet Office.

I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to him by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office on 28 July, *Official Report*, column *221*.

Departmental Research

Mr. Fabricant: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list the cost of all research undertaken by his Department since May 1997, excluding the cost of green papers and other public consultation documents drafted by his officials; and if he will list in each case the organisations which undertook that research. [52711]

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 29 July 1998]:* For these purposes my Office is part of the Cabinet Office. I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to him by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster on 30 July, *Official Report*, column *502*.

Lord-Lieutenants

Mr. Love: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list the Lord-Lieutenants and their deputies for Greater London indicating the dates when they were appointed, the term each will serve before re-appointment and the dates when each post will next be due for appointment or reappointment. [53682]

The Prime Minister: This week I have announced the appointment of Sir Peter Imbert QPM as the new Lord Lieutenant of London to succeed Lord Bramall later in the year.

As the appointment of Deputy Lord-Lieutenants is made by Lord Lieutenants, I have asked the Clerk to the Lieutenancy to write to my hon. Friend with the information he has requested.

Mr. Jim Murphy: To ask the Prime Minister if he will assess the factors which led to an increase in the cost of lord-lieutenants in England over the past 10 years. [53278]

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 29 July 1998]:* The majority of Lord-Lieutenants receive assistance from their local authority by the voluntary provision of accommodation and staff; and some meet all or most of their day-to-day running costs from their own resources. But contributions from these two sources have fallen over the last 10 years and the proportion of total expenditure on Lord-Lieutenants which is met from central Government funds has risen accordingly.

Life Peerages

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Prime Minister, pursuant to his answer of 23 July 1998, *Official Report*, column *626*, if he will invite the Speaker to nominate persons for life peerages. [53203]

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 29 July 1998]:* There is no obstacle to the Speaker proposing a candidate for a life peerage.

Civil Servants

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Prime Minister if he will issue guidance to Ministers about making public criticisms of their departments' civil servants. [52868]

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 29 July 1998]:* Paragraphs 56–61 of the Ministerial Code provide guidance in relation to civil servants.

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Prime Minister if he will make a statement about the public criticisms made by the hon. Member for Edinburgh, South (Mr. Griffiths) of civil servants in the Department of Trade and Industry. [52866]

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 29 July 1998]:* I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my right hon. Friend the then President of the Council on 23 July 1998, *Official Report*, column 1258.

Social Exclusion Unit

Mr. Corbett: To ask the Prime Minister what topics the Social Exclusion Unit will focus on in its next phase. [55137]

The Prime Minister: In its next phase, the Unit will follow up its reports on Truancy and School Exclusion, and Rough Sleeping, and conduct further work arising from its "worst estates" project: the framework for this will be set out in the Unit's first report on the subject, which will be published in September.

In addition, I have asked the Unit to take on two new topics:

teenage parents. The Unit should work with other departments, building particularly on the work already undertaken by the Department of Health to develop an integrated strategy to cut rates of teenage parenthood, particularly under-age parenthood, towards the European average, and propose better solutions to combat the risk of social exclusion for vulnerable teenage parents and their children. This work should report to Ministers by December.

16 to 18 year olds. The Unit should work with other departments to assess how many 16 to 18 year olds are not in education, work or training, analyse the reasons why, and produce proposals to reduce the numbers significantly. This work should report to Ministers by Easter.

Open Government

Ms Corston: To ask the Prime Minister what progress has been made in fulfilling the Government's commitment to more open government; and if he will make a statement. [55221]

The Prime Minister: Citizens have the right to more information on what their Government are doing and this is why we have published our proposals for a Freedom of Information Act. A draft Bill is being prepared for public consultation and submission to the Public Services Select Committee for pre-legislative scrutiny. In order to co-ordinate the detailed preparation and implementation of Freedom of Information alongside related legislation on data protection and human rights, the Home Office will take on the responsibility for this Bill. These arrangements will deliver our commitment to end unnecessary secrecy in government as part of our programme to modernise the constitution.

Genetic Engineering

Mr. Baker: To ask the Prime Minister, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs Dunwoody), of 28 July 1998, *Official Report*, columns *132–34*, if the Performance and Innovation Unit within the Cabinet Office will consider the delivery of policies in respect of *(a)* genetic engineering and *(b)* animal welfare; and if he will make a statement. [54483]

The Prime Minister: The first group of projects to be carried out by the Performance and Innovation Unit will be announced in the Autumn.

Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster

Mr. Baker: To ask the Prime Minister for what reasons the previous Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster was required to relinquish his Cabinet position; and if he will make a statement. [54572]

The Prime Minister: With regard to the composition of my Government, I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave in the House to my hon. Friend the Member for Newport, West (Mr. Flynn) on 29 July 1998, *Official Report*, column 367.

Media Contacts

Mr. Baker: To ask the Prime Minister what is his policy in respect of contacts between Ministers and the representatives of the media, where such contacts concern other Ministers. [54482]

The Prime Minister: Ministers are expected to operate at all times in accordance with the Ministerial Code.

Ministers (VIP Lounges)

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Prime Minister if he will estimate for each Department and for each Minister *(a)* the number of occasions on which they used VIP airport lounges and at what cost in the past year and *(b)* the miles travelled and at what cost in (i) official cars and (ii) trains in the past year. [54127]

The Prime Minister: It is not possible to provide such an estimate. Information in the form requested is not held centrally or by Departments.

Mr. Peter Penfold

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Prime Minister what factors led him to say on 11 May that Mr. Peter Penfold had done a superb job in working closely with President Kabbah. [54261]

The Prime Minister: Like my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary, I have consistently recognised the contribution made by Mr. Penfold to relations between Britain and Sierra Leone, and to Britain's standing with the people of Sierra Leone. His close relationship with President Kabbah has been an important part of that contribution.

Cabinet Meetings

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Prime Minister on what occasions the Cabinet has met since May 1997; and what was the duration of each meeting. [54904]

The Prime Minister: Since May 1997 Cabinet has usually met once a week when Parliament is in session; no record is routinely kept of the duration of each Cabinet meeting.

Government Publications

Mr. McLoughlin: To ask the Prime Minister what factors underlay the retail cost of *(a)* the "Government Annual Report" CM 3969 and *(b)* "In Touch with the People" CM 4014 ; and if he will make a statement on the reasons for the difference. [55138]

The Prime Minister: In line with established practice, the price of the Government's Annual Report 97/98 CM 3969 and the Local Government White Paper "In Touch with the People" CM 4014 were determined by The Stationery Office after discussion with the relevant Government departments and in line with the HMSO guidelines for Command Papers. The price of documents produced by The Stationery Office varies according to a range of factors including production costs, estimated sales and print run.

Sierra Leone

Mr. Keith Simpson: To ask the Prime Minister on what date he was first consulted concerning the planned involvement of UK Government personnel and military assets in support of Sandline International's involvement in restoring the Government of Sierra Leone. [41832]

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 14 May 1998]:* The Legg Report makes clear Ministerial knowledge of Sandline's activities.

Reviews and Task Forces

Mr. Corbett: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list the reviews and task forces announced by the Government since 1 May 1997 and in each case the date they reported or the date they are expected to report. [55136]

Dr. Jack Cunningham: I have been asked to reply.

A fully updated list of reviews and task forces notified to this Parliament since 1 May 1997 has been made available in the Library, with details of their report dates. To ensure comprehensive coverage, a trawl has been undertaken across all Departments and the list therefore includes for the first time a number of reviews already announced to the House in the usual way since 1 May 1997.

ENVIRONMENT, TRANSPORT AND THE REGIONS

Road Noise

Mr. Edwards: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement on the proposals for noise mitigation measures on existing trunk roads in rural areas in the White Paper, A New Deal for Transport. [52251]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The White Paper states that we are examining the scope for noise mitigation measures on trunk roads built before the current standards of road construction were created. The report on the review of trunk roads in Wales expands on this, explaining that a separate announcement will be made on revised criteria for dealing with requests for noise mitigation in such cases. The White Paper also announces a new policy of considering the use of quieter road surfaces whenever a road needs to be resurfaced.

Mr. Fallon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what resources are being made available to the Highways Agency for new measures to reduce motorway noise. [54679]

Ms Glenda Jackson: As indicated in the report A New Deal for Trunk Roads, a separate announcement will be made in due course about the budget to be made available for the Highways Agency to deal with the most serious and pressing cases and the new criteria to be used.

AWE Aldermaston

Mr. Alan Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (1) if he will make a statement on the plutonium contamination incident at AWE Aldermaston on 15 December 1997; and if he will place copies of the HSE reports on this incident in the Library; [52173]

(2) if he will place in the Library copies of all HSE reports on incidents and accidents which have occurred at AWE Aldermaston in the last 30 years. [52174]

Mr. Meacher: I will write to my hon. Friend.

Technetium-99

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, pursuant to Paragraph 7 of the United Kingdom submission to the OSPAR Convention ministerial meeting in Sintra, on 20 to 24 July, if he has asked British Nuclear Fuels plc for an explanation for the measurement of technetium-99 discovered in lobsters reported to the Government by BNFL in May 1997; [52777]

Mr. Meacher: I will write to my hon. Friend.

Compliance Cost Assessments

Mr. Lansley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what cumulative net increase in compliance costs has been estimated in compliance cost assessments published by his Department since 1 May 1997. [52937]

Mr. Meale *[holding answer 28 July 1998]:* Compliance cost assessments are not directly comparable, and do not include savings, so it is not possible to provide a simple figure for the cumulative net increase in compliance costs over the period in question. I have placed in the Library summary information of costs from the compliance cost assessments carried out since July 1997. Information before that date is not held centrally, but I will arrange for it to be placed in the Library as soon as possible.

Trunk Road Accidents

Ms Ryan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (1) what assessment he has made of recent trends in *(a)* injuries to residents and *(b)* damage to their property in respect of residences alongside (i) trunk roads and (ii) the A10 (London); [53250]

(2) what assessment he has made of recent trends in *(a)* accidents, *(b)* injuries and *(c)* deaths on the A10 due to (i) car and (ii) motorcycle accidents. [53248]

Ms Glenda Jackson: I have asked the Chief Executive of the Highways Agency, Mr. Lawrie Haynes, to write to my hon. Friend.

Letter from Laurence Haynes to Ms Joan Ryan, dated 31 July 1998:

The Transport Minister, Glenda Jackson has asked me to reply to your recent questions about the Assessment of accident trends on the A10.

The Highways Agency obtains accident records on a regular basis from the London Accident Analysis Unit which is part of the London Research Centre. The Unit performs regular statistical analysis such as ranking of sites and breakdown of accident figures by type of vehicle, severity, road and weather conditions. The Unit also carries out a rolling programme of route studies that make specific recommendations for safety improvements based on the accident record of a route.

The Agency's network managers are also able to commission specific safety studies on an ad hoc basis if accident figures of our normal oversight of the network show that there might be a safety problem at a specific location. One such study was recently commissioned on the A10 in north London. The study will include work on traffic signal installations and an examination of road geometry, speeding and environmental issues. The results of the study will be available in about three months' time.

We monitor continuously trends in complaints or claims for damage or injury to persons or properties along side trunk roads, including the A10 in London. We have not detected any significant changes in the numbers of complaints or claims for damage or injuries either nationally or on the A10 in London.

Ms Ryan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has to improve the protection for residents living alongside trunk roads. [53249]

Ms Glenda Jackson: I refer my hon. Friend to the statement made by my hon. right Friend the Minister of Transport setting out our policy on trunk roads, today *Official Report,* columns *653–560.*

Ministerial Meetings

Mr. Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions on what

occasions Ministers in his Department have had meetings with *(a)* Friends of the Earth and *(b)* CPRE in the last six months. [53695]

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (1) how many meetings Ministers in his Department have had with Marks and Spencer plc since 1 February; and on what matters; [54396]

(2) how many meetings ministers have had with Tesco plc since 1 February; and on what matters; [54429]

(3) how many meetings ministers have had with BAA since 1 February; and on what matters. [54430]

Mr. Meale: Ministers, their Special Advisers and other civil servants meet many people in the course of their work. This properly includes meetings with interest groups outside Government. This liaison is intended to help Ministers draw upon outside contributions—from academics, think-tanks, trade and industry associations, private sector organisations, trade unions and others, as well as relevant experience from other countries—during the process of policy analysis and development. But they must observe the requirements of propriety: for instance they must not provide confidential information without authorisation, or allow improper influence on policy. It is not our policy to make information on meetings or their content public.

Housing Co-operatives

Mr. Love: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what proportion of the housing corporation grant has been allocated to the housing cooperatives in each of the last five years; what plans he has to increase expenditure on housing cooperatives; and if he will make a statement. [53336]

Mr. Raynsford: The proportion of Housing Corporation grant allocated to housing co-operatives in the last five years is set out in the table.

The Housing Corporation is currently reviewing its housing co-operative policy with the intention of producing a consultation document later in the year.

Funding of co-operatives in England in the last five years

Year	*Proportion of HC rented programme for co-operatives (%)*
1993–94	2.6
1994–95	1.1
1995–96	0.7
1996–97	0.7
1997–98	0.1

Local Authority Rents

Mr. Love: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what is the projected level of average local authority rents in *(a)* England and Wales and *(b)* Greater London arising from the proposed increases of (i) one per cent. next year and (ii) two per cent. in the following two years; and what estimate he has made of the level of average local authority rents (1) as a proportion of registered social landlord rents and (2) as a proportion of average eligible rents in the private sector. [53574]

Mr. Raynsford: The provision for Housing Revenue Account Subsidy announced by the Chancellor of the Exchequer on 14 July 1998, *Official Report*, columns 187–94, allows for a real increase in local authority rents in England of one per cent. in 1999–2000 and of two per cent. in each of the following two years. Actual rent increases may differ from these guideline rent increases used in the calculation of Housing Revenue Account Subsidy.

We will be consulting individual local authorities on their guideline rent increases for 1999–2000 in the autumn. Local authorities will not have all the information they need to set their rents for 1999–2000 until the beginning of 1999.

Data on average weekly rents for local authority, registered social landlord and private sector tenants for 1996–97 are set out in the table. The figures are not directly comparable as they take no account of differences in size and quality of accommodation.

£

	England	*London*
Local authority	40.17	53.11
Registered social landlord[1]	46.74	53.12
Privately rented	77	[2]—

[1] Rents at 31 March 1997

[2] The Survey of English Housing sample size is not large enough to produce estimates for London for individual financial years. Combined data for 1995–96 and 1996–97 give an average private sector rent of £111 for London (£73 for England as a whole).

Sources:

Local authority—Housing Subsidy Claim forms; Registered social landlords—Housing Corporation HAR 10/1 return; Privately rented—Survey of English Housing (like all estimates from sample surveys, these figures are subject to sampling variability)

Regeneration

Mr. Love: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (1) if he will list the annual expenditure of the current programme of pathway networks in local authorities in Greater London; what are the objectives of the programme; and if he will make a statement; [53568]

(2) if he will list the criteria for qualification as a locally-driven initiative in future regeneration activity; and if he will make a statement on the role of pathway networks in developing comprehensive local strategies for regeneration and on the relationship between those local partnerships and the RDAs. [53905]

Mr. Caborn: The information is as follows:

New Deal for Regeneration

Under the new deal for regeneration, locally driven initiatives will be developed by inclusive local partnerships and will:

enhance the employment prospects, education and skills of local people

address social exclusion and enhance opportunities for the disadvantaged through community development

promote sustainable regeneration, improving and protecting the environment and infrastructure

improve the quality of life of local people and their capacity to participate in regeneration activities

encourage more effective integration of programmes through partnerships and the involvement of local communities and voluntary groups

support and promote growth in local economies and businesses

Further details of the arrangements for local partnership led initiatives will be included in the Bidding Guidance for the re-shaped Single Regeneration Budget due to be published in the near future.

Bids will have to show how they fit with other new area-based initiatives and strategies Regeneration partnerships will have to make clear the linkages between housing, regeneration and other initiatives and demonstrate that their local strategies complement the regional strategies that the Regional Development Agencies will develop.

Pathway Partnerships

The East London and Lea Valley Objective 2 Programme Monitoring Committee agreed that the programme should be implemented through a range of existing local and regional partnerships. As part of this process Strategic and Pathway Partnerships evolved to implement parts of the programme. There are no formal qualification criteria other than that they should be representative, accessible and that their procedures in relation to the identification of potential projects should be fully transparent. A number of area based and thematic strategic partnerships have been formed as a result of this process, including 14 community led Pathway Partnerships. The Objective 2 Monitoring Committee has recognised the value of these partnerships and has resolved to strengthen their role in future bidding rounds. However, at this stage there have been no discussions concerning the future of these partnerships in relation to the activity of the RDA.

Pathway Partnerships are based in areas of acute urban deprivation within the East London and Lea Valley Objective 2 area. £952,000 has been made available from ERDF funds and matched by local authorities; a total of £1.7 million of support has been provided to date. The Pathway Partnerships are made up of representatives from the local community, voluntary, public and the private sector. Each Pathway has drawn up a regeneration strategy for the local area and is in the process of identifying projects for support from Priority 4 of the Objective 2 fund which targets 'community economic development.

The table shows the name of the Pathway Partnerships, the Borough they are situated in and the amount of grant agreed to date.

£

Pathway Partnership	*London Borough*	*Total Grant*
Héart of Hackney	Hackney	130,500
Hackney Wick	Hackney	49,300
Hoxton and Shoreditch	Hackney	31,900
Haggerston	Hackney	78,300
Edmonton	Enfield	70,000
Bridging the Gap	Newham	100,000
Tottenham Community	Haringey	60,000
Little Ilford Development Partnership	Newham	16,800
Green Street	Newham	83,000
Canning Town West Ham	Newham	66,000
Stratford	Newham	51,450
Tower Hamlets West	Tower Hamlets	78,904
Tower Hamlets East	Tower Hamlets	55,450
Central Stepney and Locksley	Tower Hamlets	80,626
Total		952,230

Home Repairs and Improvements

Mr. Love: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will commission research into the use of equity release mechanisms to assist home owners to fund essential repairs and improvements to their dwellings; and if he will make a statement. [53907]

Mr. Raynsford: The Department currently has no plans to commission research into the use of equity release schemes. However, we have been informing ourselves about the schemes that are currently available. There is interdepartmental interest in the potential of such schemes.

Waste Incineration Plants

Mr. Love: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will list the criteria used by the Environment Agency when considering an application for an environmental licence to *(a)* build and *(b)* extend a waste to energy incineration plant; and if he will make a statement on the role of public consultation in determining such applications. [53908]

Mr. Meacher: In considering an application under Integrated Pollution Control to *(a)* build or *(b)* extend a waste to energy incineration plant, the Environment Agency are under a duty to assess the best practicable environmental option and ensure that the best available techniques not entailing excessive cost are used to prevent or minimise and render harmless potentially harmful emissions. In particular the Agency will assess the suitability of the design of the plant to meet stringent emission limits, the impact of emissions on the local environment and the ability of the company to operate the plant satisfactorily.

The IPC system was designed to encourage public involvement in the decision making process. The public are given the opportunity to comment in respect of an authorisation and variation of authorisations involving a substantial change. The Environment Agency must consider any representation it receives when determining the application.

The Agency has recognised that it should carry out more detailed consultation with respect to certain high profile licence application and is currently piloting an extended consultation process for these cases.

Owner-occupied Housing

Mr. Love: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will publish the current *(a)* number and *(b)* estimated value of owner-occupied properties and the total value of mortgages outstanding on those properties. [53909]

Mr. Raynsford: The latest available figures on a consistent timing basis for the UK relate to the end of March 1998, and are as follows:

Number of owner occupied properties: 16.7 million (provisional)

Estimated value of owner occupied property: £1,340 billion

Value of mortgages outstanding (at June 1998): £436 billion

Source:

DETR estimates and Bank of England.

Schools (Discretionary Rate Relief)

Mr. Sawford: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement about discretionary rate relief granted by local authorities to their own schools. [54625]

Ms Armstrong: As my Department has advised local authorities, rate relief cannot be granted to Local Education Authority (County) schools under section 47 of the Local Government Finance Act 1988. In this respect local authority schools are treated the same as other types of local authority property. The fact that the full rates are payable on local authority property has always been taken into account in the Government's funding of local authority expenditure.

The rates paid by local authorities, like all other rate income, are pooled and redistributed among all local authorities. Therefore if, some authorities do not pay their full rate bills, they do so to the detriment of all authorities. My Department intends to ensure that the outstanding rates are paid into the national rate pool for redistribution to all authorities.

Motorway Service Areas

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what is his policy on the spacing of motorway service areas; and if he will make a statement. [54626]

Ms Glenda Jackson: Motorway service areas (MSAs) exist to meet a road safety need by giving drivers somewhere to stop and rest. It is nevertheless important to strike a balance between the needs of motorists and the protection of the countryside from unnecessary development.

Policy on MSAs was last set out by the previous administration in Annexe A to PPG13 and Roads Circular 1/94. In summary, MSAs were to be not more than around thirty miles apart and, to increase competition and choice, could be provided as frequently as about every fifteen miles.

Some six years after its introduction, there is little evidence of new operators entering the MSA sector. I am, however, concerned that additional MSA provision has been at the expense of other considerations, particularly in areas of planning restraint. We therefore intend to return to a policy based on the provision of MSAs approximately every thirty miles in order to provide drivers with adequate opportunities to stop and rest. Services at closer intervals will not be ruled out completely but we will in future expect to approve them only where there are exceptional need and safety grounds for doing so.

I am today issuing detailed guidance on this and a number of related MSA matters. Copies have been placed in the Libraries of both Houses. This new advice will take effect immediately and we will expect developers, planners and others to take account of it when considering proposals for new MSAs. Where it differs from previous statements of policy, the new guidance should be regarded as taking precedence. It will be incorporated in a consolidated circular on MSA policy in due course.

Soap and Detergent Industry

Dr. Marek: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what is his Department's policy on the soap and detergent industry's code of good environmental practice; to what extent this code complies with the proposed standards and initiatives his Department is considering for greater eco-efficiency in the home; and if he will make a statement. [54817]

Mr. Meale: The code is a welcome initiative by the soap and detergent industry. It has the potential to make a significant contribution to the Government's Sustainable Development Strategy and is in line with the Government's market transformation approach for consumer products. In particular, the industry's proposal to provide guidance to consumers on the responsible use of laundry detergents and their packaging, and to set quantifiable targets against which progress can be audited independently, provides a positive example for other industry sectors to follow.

In order to meet the Government's wider aims for reducing energy consumption and other environmental impacts, the industry will need to demonstrate that the targets it has set for itself are being achieved. My Department is currently in discussion with the Soap and Detergent Industry Association on this point, and on how we can work together to integrate this initiative within our wider environment strategies.

Housing (Expenditure)

Mr. Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what was the gross public expenditure in 1997 prices on capital investment in housing in England and Wales for each financial year from 1968 to 1997; and what were the levels of expenditure in 1997 prices for *(a)* local authority new build and acquisitions, *(b)* renovation of local authority housing stock, *(c)* private sector renovation, *(d)* housing association new build, *(e)* housing association rehabilitation, *(f)* low cost home ownership and *(g)* other in each of these years; and what are the projections for expenditure under each of these headings for each year between 1997–98 and 2001–02. [54541]

Mr. Raynsford: I will write to my hon. Friend with the available data shortly.

Non-Departmental Public Bodies

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will list the non-departmental public bodies in existence on 1 May 1997 that *(a)* have been disbanded, *(b)* will be disbanded in the next 12 months, *(c)* have had their functions transferred to (i) another non-departmental public body and (ii) a democratically elected body, *(d)* have been renamed but continue to perform a similar role and *(e)* have been unchanged; if he will indicate in (c) (ii) the relevant successor body; what new non-departmental public bodies have been established since 1 May 1997; and how many non-departmental public bodies his Department currently is responsible for. [53864]

Mr. Meale: The information is as follows:

(a) 12 non-departmental public bodies (NDPBs) sponsored by this Department have been wound-up since 1 may 1997; 9 Urban Development Corporations—Birmingham Heartlands, Black Country, London Docklands, Merseyside, Plymouth, Sheffield, Trafford Park, Teesside and Tyne & Wear—which were executive NDPBs, and 3 advisory bodies—the Assessment Panel for Construction Research, the Advisory Committee on Plant and Machinery and the Local Government Staff Commission (England).

(b) North Hull Housing Action Trust, an executive NDPB, is due to be wound-up early in 1999.

(c) No bodies have had their functions transferred to either (i) another NDPB or (ii) a democratically elected body.

(d) None have been renamed but continue to perform a similar function.

(e) Details of other NDPBs in existence on 1 May 1997 sponsored by this Department are listed in "Public Bodies 1997".

Four advisory NDPBs have been established since 1 May 1997; the Committee on Chemicals and Materials on Construction for use in Public Water Supplies and Swimming Pools, the Expert Group on Airborne Particles, the Expert Group on Cryptosporidium in Water Supplies, and the Expert Panel on Sustainable Development Education. Docklands Light Railway was reclassified as an executive NDPB, to enable it to receive grant-in-aid from the Department, on 1 April 1998 following the wind-up of London Docklands Development Corporation.

This Department currently sponsors 50 NDPBs—28 executive and 22 advisory bodies.

The Government are committed to keeping the number of NDPBs to a minimum and to ensuring that those which remain are open, accountable and effective. Many of the new NDPBs established since 1 May 1997 will be essential in helping the Government to deliver their Manifesto commitments.

Birmingham Northern Relief Road

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 13 July 1998, *Official Report*, column *15*, what is the current projection of traffic flows on the M42 and M6 if the Birmingham Northern Relief Road is built. [53730]

Ms Glenda Jackson *[holding answer 30 July 1998]:* I have asked the Chief Executive of the Highways Agency, Mr. Lawrie Haynes, to write to my hon. Friend.

Letter from Lawrie Haynes to Mr. Brian Jenkins, dated 31 July 1998:

The Transport Minister, Glenda Jackson, has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question about the Birmingham Northern Relief Road.

The current traffic forecasts are those prepared during the BNRR Public Inquiries and a table showing these is attached. The forecasts are for the design year 2011, and they assumed that the Western Orbital Route would not be built. Traffic forecasts are currently being updated and I shall let you know details when they are available.

Birmingham Northern Relief Road

Year 2011 indicative annual average daily traffic two-way modelledflows: with the BNRR scheme, but excluding the western orbital route

	Total
M42	
J 7A-8	148,000
J 8–9	179,200
M6	
J 4–4A	100,900
J 4A-5	151,200
J 5–6	141,600
J 6–7	147,300
J 8E-8W	83,900
J 8W-9	165,300
J 9–10	155,300
J 10–10A	143,800
J 10A-11	97,900
J 11–11A	91,400
J 11A-12	142,400
J 12–13	162,900

Dr. Tony Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if the contract between MEL and the contractor for BNRR is in the possession of his Department; and if the Government would *(a)* be liable in respect of categories of damages and *(b)* be liable for penalties to the contractor if the Government had not decided to proceed with BNRR. [53075]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The Department has a copy of the construction contact let by MEL in 1992, although I understand MEL will be reviewing it in the light of decisions over the last six years. The Government have no direct liabilities to MEL's contractors.

Dr. Tony Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make public *(a)* part or *(b)* all of the concession agreement for the Birmingham Northern Relief Road under the Environmental Information Regulations 1992 in the event of the High Court ruling that he has a discretion. [53077]

Ms Glenda Jackson: I am considering the Judgment given on 29 July by the High Court.

Dr. Tony Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions for what categories of damage the Government would have been liable if they had decided not to proceed with the Birmingham Northern Relief Road; and what estimate was made of the size of the possible damages in such categories. [53078]

Ms Glenda Jackson: As Section 1(4) of the New Roads and Street Works Act 1991 requires, the Birmingham Northern Relief Road Concession Agreement makes provision in certain circumstances for compensation payments to the Concessionaire in respect of costs incurred by him. The details are, however, confidential.

Poplar II HARCA Ballot

Mr. Sanders: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will ensure the votes of the eight separate estates being balloted for the Poplar II HARCA will be counted separately. [53972]

Mr. Raynsford: No. The conduct of the count is a matter for the London Borough of Tower Hamlets.

Mr. Sanders: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if the results of the Poplar II HARCA ballot will be published estate by estate. [53971]

Mr. Raynsford: The publication of the Poplar ballot result is a matter for the London Borough of Tower Hamlets.

Mr. Sanders: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what measures he proposes to ensure that the votes of leaseholders are given equal weight to those of tenants in the Poplar II HARCA ballot. [53973]

Mr. Raynsford: When deciding whether or not to give consent to a transfer under section 32 of the Housing Act 1985 the Secretary of State has to be satisfied that the majority of secure tenants are not opposed to the proposals. There is no such requirement in relation to leaseholders, although the Secretary of State will take their views into account when making his decision.

Health and Safety

Mr. Pond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will list all UK legislation currently in force regarding the health and safety of children and young people at work. [54075]

Mr. Meale: The Health and Safety at Work, etc. Act 1974 and its relevant statutory provisions apply to persons at work and those affected by work activities in Great Britain including children and young people. In particular, the following legislation applies restrictions to protect the health and safety of children and young people at work:

The Employment of Women, Young Persons and Children Act 1920;

The Health and Safety (Young Persons) Regulations 1997;

The Explosives Act 1875 (amended by the Explosives Act 1923);

The Carriage of Explosives by Road Regulations 1996;

The Ionising Radiations Regulations 1985;

The Control of Lead at Work Regulations 1998;

The Power Presses Regulations 1965;

The Woodworking Machines Regulations 1974;

The Agriculture (Circular Saws) Regulations 1959;

The Carriage of Dangerous Goods by Road Regulations 1996;

The Agriculture (Avoidance of Accidents to Children) Regulations 1958;

The Docks Regulations 1988;

The Construction (Lifting Operations) Regulations 1961;

The Mines and Quarries Act 1954;

The Coal and Other Mines (Sidings) Regulations 1956;

The Coal and Other Mines (Locomotives) Regulations 1956;

The Quarries (General) Regulations 1956;

The Quarries (Ropeways and Vehicles) Regulations 1958;

The Quarries Vehicles Regulations 1970;

The Quarries (Explosives) Regulations 1988;

The Miscellaneous (Mines Explosives) Regulations 1959;

The Coal and Other Safety Lamp Mines (Explosives) Regulations 1993; and

The Shipbuilding and Ship-repairing Regulations 1960.

Additionally, the Children and Young Persons Act 1933 and the Children and Young Persons (Scotland) Act 1937, as amended, control conditions and hours that children can work.

Green Transport

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 27 March 1998, *Official Report*, column *293*, on departmental transport arrangements, what further changes he has made. [54016]

Ms Glenda Jackson: My Department has asked its property managers to prepare green transport plans and held a workshop to discuss what is involved. It has issued further internal guidance on green transport plan proposals for 1998–99 and drafted a site survey form for use in preparing a first plan, taking account of the experience with the earlier pilot studies. Good progress is being made. For example, DVLA has persuaded a local bus operator to improve services to its main site in Swansea.

Driving Penalties

Mrs. Brinton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what research his Department has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated on the effects of replacing the charge of reckless driving with that of dangerous driving in terms of improving the safety of vulnerable road users. [53304]

Ms Glenda Jackson: We commissioned the Transport Research Laboratory, on 1 May 1998, to study the effect of the Road Traffic Act 1991 on prosecutions for dangerous driving.

The study will examine whether there is sufficiently clear guidance on the law and its purpose, and how this affects the choice of penalty. The study will include a comparison of sentencing trends before and since the 1991 Act and will assess how the changes in the definition of "bad driving" offences have been implemented by police and courts.

We shall try to gain an understanding of what leads prosecutors and courts to select one offence or one penalty rather than another. We hope that, by examining the whole procedure from charging to sentencing, we shall be able to identify ways of improving practice, so as to deter poor driving more effectively. We expect to complete this study by October 2000.

Pedestrians

Mrs. Brinton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what research his Department has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated on trends in (1) numbers of pedestrians and (2) the number of pedestrian deaths over the last 30 years. [53306]

Ms Glenda Jackson: Data on the number of trips made by pedestrians, and the distance they travel, are collected regularly as part of the National Travel Survey. In 1994–96 the distance walked per person per year averaged 200 miles, compared to 244 miles in 1985–86 and 255 miles in 1975–76.

Trends in pedestrian deaths are available from data on accidents collected by the police and local authorities. Deaths have fallen from 2,964 in 1967 to 973 in 1997. A comprehensive list of research on pedestrian safety over the last 30 years is not available, but a wide range of relevant research has been carried out including a study of pedestrian accident causation, and research on traffic calming and safety measures in urban areas. A study of pedestrian behaviour and exposure to risk has recently been completed.

The Department is developing a Walking Strategy which will take account of a wide range of information and research findings on pedestrian safety.

Mrs. Brinton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what research his Department has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated into (1) the number or child pedestrian deaths over the last 30 years and (2) how the number of child pedestrian deaths compares with other Western European countries. [53307]

Ms Glenda Jackson: Child pedestrian deaths, aged 0–14, have reduced from 541 a year in 1967 to 133 in 1997. But this still represents an unsatisfactory rate of 1.1 child pedestrian deaths per 100,000 children, higher than the European average of 1.0.

A summary of recent research on child pedestrians is contained in the booklet my Department produced in June which covers the road safety education of children. A copy of the booklet was placed in the Library.

We have also commissioned MVA and the Institute of Transport Studies at Leeds University to undertake an international study of children's exposure to accidents, and of previous child pedestrian accidents. The study aims to identify the reasons for differences in child pedestrian accident rates between countries and hence identify ways of, and policies for, reducing the child pedestrian accident risk.

Radioactive Emissions

Mrs. Brinton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what are the limits on radioactive emissions over a quarter of a mile from *(a)* coal-fired power stations and *(b)* nuclear power stations. [53313]

Mr. Meacher: Discharges of radioactivity to the environment must be authorised by the Environment Agency under the Radioactive Substances Act 1993. The guiding principle in authorising discharges from a particular site is the need to restrict the radiation doses that might be received by the most exposed members of the public, or "critical group", since adequate protection of this group will ensure that others are also protected. Exposure may result from a number of pathways, for example, through inhalation of airborne activity, through drinking water, or through uptake by animals and transfer to foodstuffs. For the purposes of discharge authorisations, the UK has since 1986 applied a limit of 1 millisievert per year (mSv/y) to members of the public from all man-made sources of radioactivity other than medical exposure and furthermore requires that such doses are 'as low as reasonably achievable'.

Coal-fired power stations are exempt from regulation under the Radioactive Substances Act 1993 because levels of naturally occurring radioactivity in the fuel and waste products are below the levels specified in that Act.

Mrs. Brinton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement on the arrangements for the safe disposal of radioactive flyash discharged by coal-fired power stations. [53312]

Mr. Meale: Coal-fired power stations are exempt from regulation under the Radioactive Substances Act 1993 because levels of naturally occurring radioactivity in the fuel and waste products are below the levels specified in that Act and indeed can be lower than those found in natural deposits. Flyash from such power stations which is disposed of as a waste is therefore managed in the following ways:

(i) Some ash is stored on site at the power stations, pending processing such as grading. This activity is controlled by the Environment Agency under an IPC authorisation.

(ii) The majority of the flyash is landfilled, under local authority planning and Environment Agency waste management regulatory controls. The material is regarded as virtually inert. Waste management licensing requirements ensure the protection of human health and the environment.

A significant amount of ash is also used in the construction industry. It is a by-product in this context and as such falls outside waste disposal controls. The best known application is in light-weight concrete blocks used to form internal walls of houses and other buildings. It is a useful civil engineering material and an increasing range of uses are being found.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what arrangements his Department has made for public consultation concerning the proposal for a temporary increase in radioactive emissions from AWE, Aldermaston; and if he will make a statement. [54958]

Mr. Meale: I understand that in respect of the applications made by Hunting-BRAE Ltd. and AWE plc to dispose of radioactive wastes from the Atomic Weapons Establishments at Aldermaston and Burghfield the Environment Agency is preparing to consult with public bodies, local authorities and members of the public before making any decision. The Agency has placed copies of the applications on its public register at its regional office in Reading and the public register of the local authority, West Berkshire Council, in Newbury. These are available for inspection during normal office hours. The Agency has held two public meetings, one at Reading and one at Newbury, to explain the consultation process, and it will publish a consultative document later this year.

HFCs

Mrs. Brinton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what estimates he has made of likely levels of HFC emissions in 2010. [53321]

Mr. Meacher: Based on research funded by my Department, the Government estimate that UK emissions of HFCs will be just over 3 thousand tonnes in 2010.

Mrs. Brinton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (1) whether the consultation paper on ways to reach the United Kingdom targets for reducing greenhouse gas emissions will include a commitment to phase out HFCs; [53320]

(2) what proportion of the commitment to reduce greenhouse gases by 12.5 per cent. would be advised by the phasing out of HFCs. [53322]

Mr. Meacher: We intend to issue shortly a consultation paper on policy options for delivering our climate change targets. This will cover the options for reducing all greenhouse gas emissions, including HFCs. HFCs are necessary replacements for ozone depleting substances in some applications, and enable us to meet our commitments under the Montreal Protocol. Following consultation we will develop a balanced climate change programme which will focus on cost effective options for reducing emissions across all six greenhouse gases.

Road Traffic Law

Mrs. Brinton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has to review the road traffic law to protect vulnerable road users. [53305]

Ms Glenda Jackson: There are no plans to do so at present. The aim of the road traffic law is to provide protection for all road users. It contains general rules and regulation making powers which govern correct behaviour and so has safety benefits for all road users.

Greenhouse Gases

Mrs. Brinton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when he expects to conclude the consultation process on ways to reach United Kingdom targets for reducing greenhouse gas emissions agreed at Kyoto. [53326]

Mr. Meacher: We intend to issue a consultation paper shortly on policy options for delivering our climate change targets. We expect the consultation period to last for 3 months.

Housing (Disabled People)

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make it his policy to include in the guidance to local authorities on the use of moneys released by the capital receipts initiative a requirement that *(a)* all new homes will be built to be accessible for disabled people and *(b)* renovations and refurbishments where appropriate should improve access for disabled people. [54112]

Mr. Raynsford: Within the Capital Receipts Initiative in 1999–2000 it will be for each local authority to decide, within its allocation, how best to use the resources in the light of local circumstances. It will remain open to local authorities to use their allocations to improve accessibility of housing to disabled people where to do so is consistent with both the local housing strategy and the authority's own priorities. We will issue guidance shortly.

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions following the Government's decision to cut funding to the Access Committee for England, what action the Government are taking to ensure that issues of access for disabled people are addressed by *(a)* Government departments and *(b)* local authorities; and which Government department takes lead responsibility on policy for access for disabled people. [54039]

Mr. Raynsford: I will write to the hon. Member.

Departmental Vehicles

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 22 July 1998, *Official Report*, columns *535–36*, concerning the vehicle replacement programme, how many vehicles due for replacement in 1998–99 are planned to be replaced by vehicles using (i) petrol, (ii) diesel, (iii) natural gas, (iv) electric batteries and (v) other fuels. [54184]

Ms Glenda Jackson: I refer the hon. Member to my previous answer of 28 July 1998, *Official Report*, column *117*.

Concessionary Fares

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has for officials to liaise with representatives of local government on the implementation of the national minimum standard for local authority concessionary fares. [54247]

Ms Glenda Jackson: There will be consultation with local government when the legislation is being prepared.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions by what date he expects implementation of the national minimum standard for local authority concessionary fares for elderly people, as proposed in the Transport White Paper, to start. [54248]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The necessary primary legislation will be brought forward as soon as Parliamentary time permits.

Departmental Publications

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many of his Department's publications have been made available in *(a)* Braille, *(b)* audio tape and *(c)* large print in 1997–98; and what percentage of the total number of publications this represents. [54278]

Mr. Meale: Information on the numbers of documents published in alternative formats such as audio tapes will normally be considered by officials with responsibility for

the documents in question. This information is not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Unlicensed Vehicles

Mr. Caton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what assessment he has made of the effectiveness of the DVLA's recent We Are Clamping Down campaign. [54613]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The national scheme to wheelclamp and impound unlicensed vehicles was introduced in August 1997 and is being extended progressively across the country. In the 8 months to March 1998, it is estimated that some 80,000 additional vehicles were licensed as a result of the campaign, raising an extra £8.5 million. Support from the police, local authorities and the public has been enthusiastic.

Environmental Agreements

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will list each international environmental agreement *(a)* signed by the UK Government and *(b)* ratified by the UK parliament during the last 10 years. [54850]

Mr. Meale: I will place the information in the Library as soon as possible and ensure that my hon. Friend receives a copy.

Traffic Speeds

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what is the most recent assessment of the average speed of traffic in *(a)* central London, *(b)* inner London and *(c)* each of the 10 largest conurbations in England. [54851]

Ms Glenda Jackson: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given on 28 July 1998, *Official Report*, column *117*, for details of the Department's traffic speed surveys. The results from the latest surveys are as follows:

mph

	Morning peak	*Daytime off-peak*	*Evening peak*
Central London	10.0	10.0	10.2
Rest of inner London	13.4	15.0	12.8
Outer London	17.0	19.1	19.0

mph

	Morning/evening peak	*Daytime off-peak*
Bournemouth/Poole	20.2	25.3
Brighton/Hove	25.6	25.7
Bristol	18.5	22.7
Coventry	20.9	25.8
Derby	22.7	28.4
Greater Manchester	21.3	27.4
Grimsby/Cleethorpes	23.1	23.2
Hull	19.5	23.1
Leeds/Bradford	19.5	23.9
Leicester	17.6	20.6
Luton/Dunstable	18.5	23.3
Merseyside	21.1	21.5
Norwich	19.1	22.4
Nottingham	18.0	23.5
Oxford	20.0	24.2
Peterborough	34.2	33.7
Plymouth	24.1	25.9
Sheffield	17.3	21.1
Southampton	18.6	24.4
Stoke/Newcastle-under-Lyme	20.7	24.2
Swindon	24.9	29.5
Teesside	29.0	35.0
Tyneside	17.3	21.1
West Midlands	26.2	27.3

The latest traffic speed survey in central London was conducted in 1997, in the rest of inner London was conducted in 1995, in outer London in 1996–97, and in other cities in England in 1996.

More detailed results from these surveys are available from DETR statistical publications.

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what assessment he has made of the effect of reducing the maximum speed limit to 20 miles per hour in built up areas on road deaths and injuries. [54911]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The Department commissioned the Transport Research Laboratory (TRL) to study the effectiveness of 20 mph speed limit zones with traffic calming. TRL published their report, Review of Traffic Calming in 20 mph Zones, number 215, in 1996 and found that 20 mph zones with traffic calming reduced accidents by 60 per cent., and accidents involving child pedestrians and child cyclists by 67 per cent. Accidents to cyclists were reduced by 29 per cent. Only in those 20 mph speed limit zones with traffic calming was this degree of casualty reduction achieved. This corresponded to an average reduction in vehicle speed of nearly 10 mph, to less than 20 mph.

This week TRL has published the findings of its latest study for the Department on Urban Speed Management Methods, TRL report number 363. It concludes that where speeds of around 20 mph are desired in urban areas, traffic calming remains the best option to achieve this. The use of static signs only without traffic calming appears insufficiently effective to reduce speeds to 20 mph or to achieve accident reductions. Speed reductions of only 1 to 2 mph were found. Small additional speed reductions and accident savings can be achieved with associated publicity and enforcement campaigns, but speeds are still likely to remain well above the 20 mph speed limit.

Regional Development Agencies

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when he expects to announce the appointment of the chairmen and other members of the regional development agencies; and if he will make a statement. [54428]

Mr. Caborn: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given on 29 July 1998, *Official Report*, columns *244–45*, to my hon. Friend the Member for Corby (Mr. Hope),

concerning the appointment of Chairmen. A further announcement on other board appointments will be made in the Autumn.

Mr. Derek Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he plans to issue further guidance on the criteria which regional chambers must meet in order to be designated for the purposes of regional development agencies. [55195]

Mr. Caborn: I propose to write shortly to representatives of the emerging chambers and to other interested parties setting out our views.

Manchester Metrolink

Mr. Cunliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what proposals he has evaluated relating to the extension of the Manchester Metrolink tramway to Leigh. [54170]

Ms Glenda Jackson: No such proposals have been put to my Department for evaluation.

Sustainable Development

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, pursuant to the letter of 16 July MR/PSO/8216/98, what is his timetable for moving towards the electronic publishing of headline indicators. [54055]

Mr. Meacher: My Department plans to publish proposals for a core set of indicators of Sustainable Development in the Autumn. A final set of indicators, following consultation on the proposals, will be published alongside the Sustainable Development Strategy itself, around the turn of the year. Electronic publication of the core indicators will follow as soon as practicable thereafter, probably in the Spring of 1999.

Agriculture (Environmental Effects)

Mr. Etherington: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when he intends to publish the report of the study of the Environmental Effects of Agriculture commissioned by his Department. [53670]

Mr. Meale: We have published the report "Environmental Effects of Agriculture" today. Copies have been placed in the Library.

Leaded Petrol

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when he plans to announce how *(a)* the EU directive banning lead in petrol and *(b)* the derogation for the continued supply of leaded petrol will be incorporated into UK law. [53978]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The provisions in the EU directive which require a general ban on leaded petrol whilst allowing the continuance of a limited supply of leaded petrol, will be incorporated into UK law by means of an amendment to the Motor Fuel (Composition and Content) Regulations 1994. The amendment will also incorporate the directive requirements introducing improved specifications for petrol and diesel fuel commencing from 1 January 2000. The process of amendment, which includes statutory consultation and Parliamentary approval, will begin as soon as the directive has been formally adopted—which is currently expected later this year.

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (1) which oil companies have notified him that they propose to market lead replacement petrol by 1 January 2000; [53979]

(2) if he will ensure that petrol containing lead substitutes will be widely available in rural areas from 1 January 2000. [54517]

Ms Glenda Jackson: Oil companies will not commit to the marketing of lead replacement petrol until UK regulations are enacted which ban the general sale of leaded petrol. These regulations will follow the adoption of the EC Directive, expected later this year, which introduces the leaded petrol ban. However, the UK Petroleum Industry Association have stated that the commercial opportunities for such a product are sufficiently high to ensure that few, if any, UK oil companies will decline to offer lead replacement additives from 1 January 2000, either pre-mixed with high octane unleaded petrol or offered in measured doses for use at point-of-sale. Such supplies will be widely available wherever there is a demand and there is no indication that rural areas will be disadvantaged in this regard. In the light of this, the Government do not consider it necessary to require provision of these substitutes on a statutory basis.

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions which interest groups he is liaising with about the proposed ban on leaded petrol from 1 January 2000; and how often he has met them since 1 May 1997. [53991]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The following special interest groups have been approached regarding implementation of the ban on leaded petrol:

The UK Petroleum Industry Association (UKPIA)

The Association of UK Oil Independents (AUKOI)

The Petroleum Retailers Association (PRA)

The Society of Motor Manufacturers & Traders (SMMT)

The Royal Automobile Club (RAC)

The Automobile Association (AA)

The Federation of British Historic Vehicle Clubs (FBHVC).

Two meetings with UKPIA have taken place and one meeting with each of the SMMT, AUKOI, RAC and FBHVC. Department officials will be meeting with representatives from PRA and the AA next week.

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions which specialist interest groups will distribute leaded petrol after 1 January 2000. [53992]

Ms Glenda Jackson: No information is available at this stage. Department officials are continuing to discuss options with interested organisations. However, the continued supply of leaded petrol will ultimately be a commercial decision which will need to take into account such matters as the practicality, safety and security of distribution—including the necessity to comply with the regulations relating to the storage of petrol—as well as potential demand. The Department's objective is to ensure

that, within the constraints imposed by the directive, there are no obstacles, legal or otherwise, to prevent this happening.

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when he plans to publish publicity material about the proposed ban on leaded petrol; and where he plans to distribute it. [54516]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The Department is preparing information about the proposed ban on leaded petrol. We are looking into the possibilities of distribution through MOT test centres, petrol stations and at specialist car events in the Autumn. The motoring organisations are also preparing publicity.

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what proportion of and how much petrol used in Britain contained lead in each of the last 10 years for which figures are available. [54647]

Ms Glenda Jackson: Figures for petrol deliveries in the United Kingdom for the last 10 years are as follows:

Year	*Total petrol deliveries Tonnes*	*Leaded petrol deliveries Tonnes*	*Leaded petrol as proportion of total (percentage)*
1987	22,183,848	22,165,669	99.9
1988	23,238,048	22,980,953	98.9
1989	23,927,632	19,275,687	80.6
1990	24,307,594	16,051,618	66.0
1991	24,021,384	14,152,924	58.9
1992	23,906,094	12,701,808	53.1
1993	23,799,019	11,253,604	47.3
1994	22,842,969	9,681,199	42.4
1995	18,087,034	6,855,080	37.9
1996	22,408,607	7,177,229	32.0
1997	22,237,923	6,256,041	28.1

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has to discourage the use of petrol containing lead. [54645]

Ms Glenda Jackson: Sales of leaded petrol have already fallen to approximately 22 per cent. of total petrol sales as a result of measures such as the duty differential between leaded and unleaded petrol. This decline is expected to continue until 1 January 2000 when an EU ban on leaded petrol, as agreed by the European Council of Ministers and the European Parliament, will come into effect.

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has to reduce the use by his Department of petrol containing lead. [54644]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The Department does not use leaded petrol. Of the cars supplied on contract by the Government Car and Despatch Agency for Ministerial use, six use unleaded petrol and three use liquified petroleum gas.

Vehicle Emissions

Mr. Hammond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what estimate he has made of the percentage of harmful vehicle emissions attributable to vehicles over 10 years old; and what percentage of the United Kingdom vehicle fleet such vehicles represent. [54463]

Ms Glenda Jackson: Although my Department regularly estimates emissions from road transport by vehicle type and emission standard, we have no ready-to-hand estimate of the proportion of emissions from vehicles over 10 years old. I will write to the hon. Member as soon as an estimate is available, and a copy of the letter will be placed in the House of Commons Library.

26 per cent. of the United Kingdom vehicles fleet were over 10 years old at the end of 1997.

Vehicle Conversions

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if the Energy Saving Trust's Powershift programme gives grants for the conversion of cars, buses and taxi cabs to use *(a)* liquid propane gas and *(b)* natural compressed gas. [54896]

Mr. Meale: The Energy Saving Trust's Powershift programme provides grants for funding partnerships to promote the manufacture of cars, buses and taxi cabs fuelled by these fuels. So far, out of the 350 clean fuel vehicles to receive funding, 290 have been vehicles fuelled by liquefied petroleum gas or natural gas. Grants for a further 500 clean fuel vehicles have been approved.

Bus and Railway Station Facilities

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will introduce measures to require a minimum standard of facilities at bus and railway stations. [54171]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The White Paper "A New Deal for Transport" stresses the importance of better facilities at stations and other places of interchange. We expect the local transport plans developed by local authorities to include an audit of existing facilities against key attributes of good provision and to identify improvements that need to be made.

In addition, the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 will place specific requirements on operators of bus and rail stations to provide facilities that meet the needs of disabled passengers.

Canals and Waterways

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what support his Department is providing for the restoration and development of canals and waterways; and if he will make a statement. [54639]

Mr. Meale: The Government value the social, economic and environmental benefits that inland waterways can bring and are keen to maximise the full potential of the canal network.

We have provided financial help to a range of canal restoration projects through the Single Regeneration Budget Challenge Fund, Land Reclamation Programme grant and the Environmental Action Fund. Projects are also eligible for funding from the various Lottery distribution boards, from local authorities and from

Europe. The forthcoming report by the Inland Waterways Amenity Advisory Council on their prioritisation of restoration projects will help to ensure that available funding is more effectively targeted.

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what assessment he has made of the advantages of increasing the level of freight traffic on the United Kingdom's canals and waterways. [54640]

Mr. Meale: Research in 1993 indicated that there may be potential to divert about 3.5 per cent. of the UK's road freight traffic to water although the majority of this would be to ships rather than barges. The Government recognise the environmental benefits of making use of waterways for carrying freight. As stated in the White Paper on the Future of Transport, the Government will encourage greater use of inland waterways as an alternative to road transport where this is a practical and economic option.

Sunlight Reflectors

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (1) what assessment he has made of the Space Regatta Consortium's proposal to place reflectors in space to direct sunlight to the Arctic region; and if he will make a statement; [54650]

(2) if he will assess the environmental impact of the Znamya 2.5 experiment; and if he will make a statement. [54649]

Mr. Meale: The Znamya 2.5 experiment is planned by the Space Regatta Consortium to assess the feasibility of illuminating dark areas of the Earth's surface, particularly during winter. The experiment would last for a single night and is intended to be visible from a given point on the Earth for only a few minutes every 90 minutes. Even if the experiment occurs and is successful, which is by no means certain, the eventual operational deployment of an array of deflectors would be at least 10 years away. The environmental impact is such an array would need to be assessed in light of the conclusions of the small scale experiment and, if necessary, addressed in the appropriate international bodies.

Teesside Development Corporation

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what assessment he has made of the arrangements for the provision of advice during the lifetime of Teesside Development Corporation to its board by officers of the Corporation. [53443]

Mr. Caborn: I have made no such assessment. The arrangements are covered in the published reports of the Corporation's external auditors, and in reports by the Department's Internal Audit Service, which are confidential between the Department and the Corporation.

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will estimate the costs of carrying out works on structural problems of the Tees Barrage. [53460]

Mr. Caborn: These matters are now the responsibility of the Commission for the New Towns. I will write to my hon. Friend when I have made further inquiries.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 29 July 1998, *Official Report*, column *237*, if he will give equivalent figures for standard spending assessments for Milton Keynes Borough Council. [54955]

Ms Armstrong: The information requested is in the tables. They show the effects of re-calculating the standard spending assessments for 1997–98 and 1998–99 using the method of calculating the area cost adjustment proposed by the 1996 Review of the Area Cost Adjustment but keeping the indicators of need used in the current SSA formulae.

Table 1: Standard Spending Assessments for 1997–98

	Milton Keynes
1997–98 SSA £ million[1]	149.397
1997–98 SSA Using method proposed in Elliott Report[2] (£ million)	156.155
Difference (£ million)	6.758
Difference (percentage)	4.5
Difference (£/head[3])	34.28

[1] The figures for 1997–98 are indicative SSAs to allow for the effects of local authority reorganisation on 1 April 1998
[2] The figures are taken from Standard Spending Assessments Sub-Group: Report for 1998–99. They show the effect of using the method of calculating the ACA proposed by the 1996 Review of the Area Cost Adjustment using data available at August 1997 to determine the coefficients on the SSA formulae while keeping the same indicators in the formulae.
[3] The population figures are as at 30 June 1996

Table 2: Standard Spending Assessments for 1998–99

	Milton Keynes
1998–99 SSA £ million	157.475
1998–99 SSA Using method proposed in Elliott Report[1] (£ million)	163.554
Difference (£ million)	6.079
Difference (percentage)	3.9
Difference (£/head[2])	30.84

[1] The figures show the effect of using the method of calculation proposed by the 1996 Review of the Area Coast Adjustment using data available at July 1998 to determine the coefficients on the SSA formulae while keeping the same indicators in the formulae
[2] The population figures are as at 30 June 1996.

Dr. George Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (1) if he will list the amounts allocated per head of population for the cost effects of population density and sparsity in the other services sub-block of the Personal Social Services SSA for each local authority in England; [54197]

(2) if he will list for each SSA block and sub-block the proportion which is determined by regression analysis of previous expenditure; [54198]

(3) if he will list for each fire authority in England the amounts allocated per head of population for the cost effects of population density or sparsity; [54199]

(4) if he will estimate for each education authority the change in SSA if the Other Education Sub-block SSA were to include a sparsity effect equivalent in effect to the average of the factor in all other education sub-blocks; [54200]

(5) if he will estimate the changes in SSA for Norfolk if all elements of the Social Services SSA that can be expressed in unit cost terms were calculated using average unit cost SSA data for all authorities within (i) the Eastern Region (ii) all Shire counties (iii) England and Wales and (iv) London; [54231]

(6) if, for Norfolk County Council, he will estimate *(a)* the change in the SSA highways block if the SSA per kilometre of road were calculated at the average rate for England, *(b)* the change in SSA Fire Service block if calculated at the average rate per head of population for England and *(c)* the change in total SSA if calculated at the same average rate per head of population as that pertaining to (i) the Eastern Region, (ii) all shire counties, (iii) England and Wales and (iv) London; [54234]

(7) if he will estimate the changes in SSA for Norfolk if the SSA per pupil in *(a)* primary, *(b)* secondary, *(c)* post 16 and *(d)* under 5 SSA blocks were calculated using the average for local education authorities within (i) the Eastern Region, (ii) all shire counties, (iii) England and Wales and (iv) London. [54235]

Ms Armstrong: When the calculations requested have been completed, the information requested will be placed in the Library.

Dr. George Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will introduce a sparsity factor in the Other Education Sub-block of the SSA. [54201]

Ms Armstrong: We expect to announce our proposals for Standard Spending Assessments for 1999–2000 around the beginning of December. No proposal of the kind described has been developed in this year's discussions with the Local Government Association about Standard Spending Assessments.

Dr. George Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will take account in future SSA calculations of the Highways SSA block for Norfolk of (i) the maintenance costs of minor roads which have not been constructed to a high standard and (ii) the number of summer visitors. [54230]

Ms Armstrong: The formula already takes account of the length of roads, including minor roads, which each Highways Authority is responsible for maintaining. It also takes account of traffic flow, making no distinction between traffic flow arising from residents and that arising from visitors.

Planning Appeals

Mr. Ennis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when he will consult on proposed changes to the planning appeals system as part of the Government's Modernising Planning Initiative. [54978]

Mr. Caborn: I have today issued a consultation paper, and I have placed copies in the Library of the House, on our proposals for recovering the cost of holding inquiries into planning appeals as part of our drive to modernise the planning system. If implemented, this will provide the Planning Inspectorate with some additional resources to benefit the appeals system as a whole.

Costs would be recovered by means of a standard daily rate for all public local inquiries, although they would not be recovered where their imposition appears unreasonable.

Recovery of costs is already established practice for other public inquiries into development proposals covered by the Electricity Act 1989, the Harbours Act 1964 and the Transport and Works Act 1992. This change would, therefore, also bring about greater consistency in inquiry practice.

Subject to public consultation, it is proposed that this change would take effect from April 1999. It would not apply to planning applications and appeals received by the Planning Inspectorate before that date.

Roads Review

Mr. Leslie: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when he proposes to announce the results of the Roads Review. [55131]

Dr. Reid: I refer my hon. Friend to oral statement today, *Official Report,* columns *653–56.*

Trunk Roads

Mr. Leslie: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what provision he intends to make for investment in trunk roads in England. [55132]

Dr. Reid: I have today announced our new priorities for Trunk Road investment. Planned provision for the Highways Agency's programmes for the next three financial years is as follows:

	1998–99	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*	*2001–02*
Trunk road maintenance	651	740	794	780
Making Better Use of trunk road network	139	139	193	220
Existing Road schemes	445	350	259	137
New schemes in Targeted Programme of Improvements	0	0	51	234
Private Finance	114	177	238	208
Total	1,349	1,406	1,535	1,579

The Highways Agency will work up more detailed plans for delivering this programme which will be published as part of its normal planning cycle.

Car Use

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what account he will take of the impact of proposals set out in the Integrated Transport White Paper for reducing car use when considering proposals by county councils to construct new settlements in the countryside; and if he will make a statement. [54458]

Mr. Raynsford: We are in the process of drawing up draft planning guidance on housing and transport and will be considering this issue, among others, as part of that process.

The New Deal for Transport announced that, in updating the guidance on locations for major growth, we will give an increased emphasis on accessibility to jobs, leisure and services by foot, bicycle and public transport, including the promotion of major development in public transport corridors and other areas where good public transport exists or can be provided.

Rolling Stock

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (1) if he will place in the Library copies of correspondence between OPRAF and the Health and Safety Executive relating to the use of mark 1 rolling stock; [54521]

(2) if he will place in the Library copies of correspondence between his Department and the Health and Safety Executive relating to the use of mark 1 rolling stock. [54522]

Ms Glenda Jackson: I will write to my hon. Friend.

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement on the future of the Channel Tunnel night-train rolling-stock. [54114]

Ms Glenda Jackson: This rolling stock is now the responsibility of the manufacturer, Metro Cammel. In the event that the rolling stock were sold on, European Night Services will take a share of any profit, which will be subject to a Government clawback.

Airport Noise

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, pursuant to paragraph 4.217 of the White Paper on Transport, when measures will be put in place to mitigate noise pollution from airports; and who will bear the cost of these measures. [54116]

Ms Glenda Jackson: Measures are already in place to mitigate noise pollution from airports. At Heathrow, Gatwick and Stansted certain such measures are prescribed by the Secretary of State under s.78 of the Civil Aviation Act 1982; elsewhere, by airports either independently or by agreement with local authorities through the planning system. The costs of compliance are normally borne by the aviation industry, consistent with the 'polluter pays' principle. This principle will be integral to the airports policy, which we have undertaken in the White Paper to develop.

Queensway Hall, Dunstable

Sir David Madel: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will call in for determination by his Department the prospective planning application for the redevelopment of the Queensway Hall site in Dunstable; and if he will make a statement. [54052]

Mr. Caborn: No planning application for this proposal has yet been submitted. If an application is made, the Secretary of State will consider the need for call-in in the usual way.

Sir David Madel: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when he expects to make a decision on the application of South Bedfordshire District Council to his Department to disregard the highest bidder for the purchase of the Queensway Hall, Dunstable; and if he will make a statement. [54051]

Mr. Caborn: We are currently considering the Council's application, and will issue our decision as soon as possible.

Transport Statistics

Dr. Marek: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make it his policy to publish complete information on central and local government expenditure on transport in Great Britain in future editions of Transport Statistics Great Britain, 1997. [54182]

Ms Glenda Jackson: Transport Statistics Great Britain (TSGB) is a compendium of Transport Statistics, generally relying on information already in the public domain.

The publication of information on central and local government expenditure in TSGB has always included summary results drawn from the most recently published editions of *Scottish Transport Statistics, Welsh Transport Statistics*, and *DETR Annual Report: Government Expenditure Plans* (or formerly *The Transport Report: Government Expenditure Plans*). I have no plans to change this policy, but we will continue to consult with the Welsh and Scottish Offices to ensure that TSGB contains the most up-to-date publicly available information.

Building Regulations

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will list those disability organisations that have been consulted in preparing draft building regulations for life-time homes. [54041]

Mr. Raynsford: When the Department consulted on proposals to extend Part M of the Building Regulations covering access and facilities for disabled people to new housing on 12 January 1995, a list of organisations being consulted, including disability organisations, was included as an annexe to the consultation letter.

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when he expects to publish draft building regulations for life-time homes; what consultations will take place on the draft regulation; and when he expects to lay final regulations before the House. [54042]

Mr. Raynsford: The Department consulted on proposals to extend Part M of the Building Regulations covering access and facilities for disabled people to new housing on 12 January 1995. I expect to lay final regulations before the House in October this year.

M4 Service Area

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when he expects to issue a decision on the report he has received from the Planning Inspectorate on the public inquiry into three applications for a motorway service area on the M4 between junction 8/9 and 10. [54710]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The Inspector's Report was received on 28 July. I am not yet able to say when the decision will be issued.

Climate Change

Mr. Stunell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when the Government's consultation paper on climate change will be published; and if he will make a statement. [54219]

Mr. Meacher: We intend to issue a consultation paper shortly on policy options for delivering our climate change targets.

Energy-efficient Lighting

Mr. Stunell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what estimate he has made of the country's annual electricity consumption for lighting; and what plans he has to encourage energy-efficient lighting. [54220]

Mr. Meacher: Our most recent estimate is that lighting uses about 20 per cent. (58 TWh) of electricity in the UK, accounting for about 6.4 per cent. of UK CO_2 emissions and is projected to rise.

My department supports a comprehensive programme of national and European-wide measures to encourage energy efficient lighting. At a national level, provisions in the Building Regulations to set lighting efficiency requirements are currently being reviewed; and I have just agreed increased funding for the Best Practice Programme which, among other things, provides guidance on cost-effective energy efficiency lighting measures to building owners, equipment specifiers and users. The planned budget for the Energy Saving Trust's work to promote energy efficiency for the Department has also been increased, and a new project "Lightswitch" has been approved to promote energy efficient lighting to the non-domestic sector. The Market Transformation Programme will inform Government plans to continue to support Common and Co-ordinated Policy Measures at European level to provide product information, raise product standards and facilitate the procurement of energy efficient lighting products. We plan to introduce a regulation for the mandatory energy labelling of light bulbs next June.

Eurostar

Mr. Syms: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many paths are currently allocated for regional Eurostar services; how many of these train paths are non-operational; what is the cost of maintaining these paths; and what plans he has to release these train paths for other operational rail services. [54901]

Ms Glenda Jackson: Eurostar (UK) Ltd. have an access contract with Railtrack which provides for 2 paths on the East Coast Main Line and 3 paths on the West Coast Main line each way per day for Regional Eurostar services. As no passenger-carrying regional Eurostar services are operating at the present time, these paths are not being used by EUKL although other paths are being used for testing the trainsets. The cost of maintaining these paths is a matter for Railtrack and EUKL as would be their release for other operational rail services.

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (1) if the plans of the consortium selected to run Eurostar require regulatory approval; and if he will make a statement; [54206]

(2) what share British Airways will have of the consortium selected to run Eurostar; and if he will make a statement. [54208]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The consortium arrangements are a matter for the consortium members and will be notified separately by them to the European Commission and/or UK authorities, as the case may be, fully in accordance with relevant EU and UK competition rules. British Airways is proposing to take an initial shareholding of 10 per cent.

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions who is the current owner of the regional Eurostar sets. [54205]

Ms Glenda Jackson: Eurostar (UK) Ltd. has the beneficial ownership rights to the regional Eurostar sets.

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what estimate his Department has made of *(a)* Eurostar's and *(b)* British Airways' share of the London-Paris rail/air market. [54207]

Ms Glenda Jackson: My Department have made no estimate of either Eurostar's or British Airways' share of the London-Paris rail/air market.

Shipping

Mr. Todd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will publish the report of the Shipping Working Group on ways to promote British shipping. [53901]

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what measures he will put in place to attract commercial shipping companies away from flags of convenience. [54113]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The Integrated Transport White Paper set out the broad aims of a shipping policy. A shipping paper, based on the work of the Shipping Working Group, will be published shortly.

Cycling

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what steps he has taken in the last six months to protect the safety of cyclists, with particular reference to those on rural roads. [54910]

Ms Glenda Jackson: Forty per cent. fewer cyclists were killed or seriously injured on our roads in 1997 compared with the 1981–85 annual average. We are continuing to build on this improvement by encouraging local authorities to provide for safe cycling in their transport policies and programmes. £50 million funding was made available in 1998–99 for local safety schemes and traffic calming measures which have proven safety benefits for vulnerable road users, including cyclists. It is for local authorities to decide on which roads their work to improve the safety of cyclists will be most effective.

We have also continued with our road safety education, publicity and research projects concerning cyclists' safety.

Rough Sleepers

Sir Raymond Powell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many homeless people have used Admiralty Arch *(a)* in total and *(b)* in each week since the homeless unit's establishment. [54707]

Mr. Raynsford: Last winter Admiralty Arch was used by Centrepoint as one of the temporary winter shelters for rough sleepers funded by the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions as part of the Government's Winter Shelter Programme. Almost 500 additional beds for rough sleepers were provided in London as part of the Winter Shelter Programme and about 50 in Bristol and Cambridge. The Admiralty Arch shelter provided 60 beds and was open from 15 December 1997 to 31 March 1998. During that time a total of 253 admissions were made by 234 individuals. Weekly breakdown figures are not available but for each month the shelter was open the average daily occupancy figures were:

December 1997: 28.37 beds occupied

January 1998: 45.22 beds occupied

February 1998: 44.5 beds occupied

March 1998: 37 beds occupied

The figures for December and March are lower due to staggered opening and phased closing.

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, pursuant to the Green Paper Cm. 3805, New Ambitions for our Country: A New Contract for Welfare, (p84), what is the number of people sleeping rough at present, and what it was in April 1997 and March 1998. [54592]

Mr. Raynsford: Information on the number of people sleeping rough is not collected by the Department. The last systematic count was undertaken as part of the 1991 Census of Population and found 2,674 people sleeping rough on Census night in England. The recent Social Exclusion Unit report *Rough Sleeping* Cm 4008 reviewed more recent information collected through twice yearly street counts in central London and ad hoc counts in various other towns and cities undertaken by the voluntary sector, and estimated that around 2,000 people sleep rough in England each night.

Fatal Accidents (Manslaughter charges)

Dr. Stoate: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many manslaughter charges have been brought following fatal accidents at work in each of the last 10 years; how many have been brought against *(a)* employees and *(b)* managers; and how many have resulted in convictions. [54846]

Mr. Meale: The number of manslaughter charges brought following fatal accidents at work which have been investigated by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE), and the outcome, in each of the last six years is as follows:

	Manslaughter charges		
Year	*Against employees*	*Against managers*	*Convictions*
1992–93	—	—	—
1993–94	—	2	1
1994–95	1	4	1
1995–96	1	—	—
1996–97	—	2	—
1997–98	—	—	—

HSE has not collated data for previous years.

Dr. Stoate: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many manslaughter charges have been brought following fatal rail crashes in each of the last 10 years; how many have been brought against *(a)* drivers and *(b)* managers; and how many have resulted in convictions. [54845]

Mr. Meale: A train driver was charged with manslaughter and convicted following a fatal rail crash on 4 March 1989. Following a further fatal crash on 8 August 1996 charges were laid against a driver who was subsequently found not guilty. A driver has also been charged following a fatal crash on 19 September 1997. There have been no manslaughter charges brought against managers in this period.

Stockton University

Ms Dari Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he has reached a decision on grants to the University of Stockton. [54977]

Mr. Caborn: I am pleased to advise my hon. Friend that I have today given my approval to the payment of two grants to the University College Stockton; £800,000 to endow a Chair in Urban Regeneration and Change, and £500,000 towards the construction of amenity facilities for staff and students.

I firmly believe that expanding higher education facilities into areas of economic and social disadvantage makes a vital contribution towards their development and regeneration.

Coastguard

Mr. McNulty: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when he will announce his decision on the outcome of consultation on HM Coastguard's five-year strategy; and if he will make a statement in the context of the Maritime and Coastguard Agency merger. [55233]

Ms Glenda Jackson: Following extensive consultation which included staff, trades unions and members of the House, and in the light of the new Maritime and Coastguard Agency created on 1 April, I have decided that the 5-year Coastguard strategy will be taken forward as proposed, though with some changes in timing.

The 5-year strategy involves a major investment o £5 million-£10 million in new digital technology to re-equip and improve the operation of a major rescue service. The new equipment will provide an integrated communications system, replacing outdated equipment which is approaching life-expiry. Associated with the new investment is a programme to close selected Coastguard co-ordination centres which will effectively be replaced by the greater capability of the new equipment. The timing of these closures has also been revised following the consultation process. The centres at Oban and Pentland were proposed for closure by the end of 1999, and this has been revised to Autumn 2000; for Tyne Tees and Liverpool the proposed closure date by the end of 2000 has been revised to Autumn 2001; while the co-location of Portland and Lee on Solent, formerly proposed for the end of 2002, has been revised to Autumn 2003.

The new equipment will provide more effective backup to the frontline Coastguard whose local knowledge will be supported by modern technology. In view of interest in the relationship between the new technology and the station closures, we will keep the reequipment programme under close monitoring to ensure high standards of service are maintained.

I have arranged for copies of the Operational Research Unit's analysis of responses to the consultation document to be placed in the Library of each House.

I have also agreed proposals for management changes within the Maritime and Coastguard Agency which will yield further progress in the closer integration of its two predecessor agencies, to the benefit of all the new Agency's customers.

British Transport Police

Mr. Shaw: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what are the Government's proposals for the future of the British Transport Police. [55234]

Dr. Reid: The British Railways Board are currently under a duty to maintain a railway police force for the national railway, the London Underground and the Docklands Light Railway (DLR) and are in consequence the employer of the British Transport Police (BTP). In order to improve the public status and accountability of the force, the Government have decided, when a suitable legislative opportunity arises, to seek to establish an independent national police authority for the BTP on similar lines to the existing police authorities for Home Office forces, with its members appointed by the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions.

The Force's jurisdiction on railway land at present depends on contracts with the privatised rail industry. These contracts can cause problems in defining jurisdiction (eg to company premises which are not part of the railway network and are already properly policed by Home Office forces), they can overlap and there are parts of the network which are not covered. The proposed legislation would seek to put the jurisdiction of the force on all railway land (including the London Underground and the DLR) on a statutory basis.

In 1996 Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary recommended extending the BTP's jurisdiction outside the railway in three specific circumstances: when called on for assistance by a Home Office police officer, when called on for assistance by a member of the public, and in an emergency. The Home Office are undertaking a further consultation exercise with a view to assessing the acceptability of such an extension of jurisdiction.

Public Safety Zones

Maria Eagle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what decisions he has reached on public safety zone policy and administration following the public consultation. [54628]

Ms Glenda Jackson: We received about 100 responses to the consultation document which we published last December and I am grateful to all those who replied. The broad policy objective, that once a Public Safety Zone has been established, there should be no significant increase in the number of people living, working or congregating within it, remains unchanged. In general the consultation responses supported the proposed adoption of a policy based on risk contour modelling and setting limits on the degree of risk which is tolerable for people on the ground near airports.

We have therefore decided to use risk contour modelling as a basis for developing Public Safety Zone policy. This will mean the introduction of Zones which will taper from the runway end, in contrast to the current Zones which broaden out from it. In setting the areas of the Zones we shall make broad assumptions about the number and type of aircraft movements at the respective airports in fifteen years time; and we shall roll these assumptions forward every ten years. This will provide a sensible balance between imposing unduly onerous controls on the use of land around airports and failing to anticipate the effects on third party risk of the forecast increase of aircraft movements.

We consider that Public Safety Zones should correspond essentially to the areas which may be expected to experience individual risk of death of 1 in 100,000 per year or greater in fifteen years time. We shall redefine the existing Public Safety Zones accordingly. A decision on whether to have a few standard sizes of Public Safety Zone or separate sizes for each airport will be taken later.

We shall prepare and publish guidance to local planning authorities for use in considering planning applications arising within Public Safety Zones. The guidance will recommend that new housing development,

and most types of non-housing development, should not be approved within Public Safety Zones. We intend to go ahead with the proposal that existing development need be removed only where people would be subject to an individual risk of death of 1 in 10,000 per year or greater.

We have also considered with the Civil Aviation Authority the future administration of Public Safety Zone policy. At present a planning application arising within Public Safety Zones is notified to the CAA, which advises local planning authorities whether it should be approved. The CAA has carried out this function on behalf of the Department for many years but now wishes to relinquish it. We are minded that the CAA's role should be discontinued and that the residual work in administering the policy should be transferred to the Department. We shall consult those concerned about this proposal.

Our objective is to introduce these new arrangements as early as possible in 1999. Meanwhile in considering planning applications within existing Public Safety Zones the CAA will have regard to whether the site in question is likely to remain within a Public Safety Zone.

Cowboy Builders

Mr. Hope: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how he intends to take forward the proposals contained in his Department's consultation paper "Combating Cowboy Builders". [54875]

Mr. Raynsford: I am pleased to announce the formation of a working group chaired by Anthony Merricks CBE to drive forward the Government's campaign against cowboy builders.

This follows the publication of our consultation paper "Combating Cowboy Builders" to which we received over 130 responses from the construction industry, local government and consumer interests.

The tone of these responses, a summary of which I am placing in the Library, was very encouraging, with the overwhelming majority supporting the two key proposals in the consultation paper: the development of an approved list (or lists) of reputable contractors to empower consumers; and a kitemark or badge of quality which would indicate that a trader subscribed to agreed standards of quality backed by a warranty and an effective means of redress if things go wrong.

The new working group's terms of reference include a commitment to deliver a tangible outcome by this time next year. It will include key representatives from the construction industry, local government, consumer interests and the insurance industry.

Compost

Mr. Clapham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what action he proposes to take to develop the markets for compost. [54942]

Mr. Meacher: A Composting Development Group was established last year to identify the problems and obstacles of marketing compost to a range of sectors, including landscaping, horticulture, agriculture and land restoration, and to develop proposals for overcoming them. The Group, whose members were drawn from the composting industry, research organisations, agricultural and composting trade associations, and central government, has completed its discussions and submitted its report to DETR Ministers.

It contains a number of proposals for improving the markets for compost, including the need to agree national standards to cover both the product and the process, and to develop a coherent and comprehensive programme of publicity and information measures, supported by research, demonstrations and trials, to improve public perception. The report recommends that securing the participation and cooperation of professional institutes and trade associations is the key to gaining greater access to individual sectors.

It also proposes that compost producers develop a more innovative approach, for example by setting up temporary on-site composting schemes to restore land, or by local authority producers maximising the use of compost in their own parks and gardens. I am today issuing the report for consultation, and will consider its recommendations in the light of comments received. Copies are being placed in the Library of the House.

The increased composting of organic waste has an important part to play in an integrated approach to sustainable waste management, and to meeting the targets of the landfill directive. I welcome the Group's report as a positive contribution to developing the markets for compost, and am grateful to its members for the time and effort they have put into the Group's work.

British Railways (Surplus Land)

Helen Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how the BR board are to conduct their review of surplus land. [54943]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The Government announced in the White Paper "A New Deal For Transport: Better for Everyone" that the British Railways Board was suspending land sales while it conducted an audit of the remaining sites. These amount to some 1,200, with a book value of about £137 million.

The Board will immediately enter into discussions with key players in the rail industry on the latter's plans for the future. It will report to the Government, as the review progresses, on sites which in the light of these discussions appear to the Board to have a realistic prospect of use for transport purposes in the foreseeable future, so that they may in due course be offered for sale to Railtrack, the rail businesses, other transport operators and relevant local authorities at open market value.

Sites which appear to the Board to have no realistic use for transport purposes in the foreseeable future will be put on sale, but local authorities and the rail industry will be given at least two months notice of the intention to sell any site in the category so that they will still have full opportunity to bid for it. The Board will consider sympathetically any request to delay the sale of such a site where it can be shown that a transport use is already under active consideration.

Fastship Project

Mr. Viggers: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what assessment he has made of the impact of the Fastship project. [53964]

Mr. Spellar: I have been asked to reply.

I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

PRESIDENT OF THE COUNCIL

Public Appointments

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the President of the Council if he will make a statement on his policy in respect of the organisations which are requested to suggest names for public appointment. [53383]

Dr. Jack Cunningham: I have been asked to reply.

I regret that it has not been possible to provide an answer before the Summer Recess. I shall therefore write to my hon. Friend and will place a copy of the letter in the Library of the House.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Annual Report

Mr. Burgon: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster when the Government intend to publish their annual report. [54127]

Dr. Jack Cunningham: My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has today published the Government's Annual Report 97/98 (CM 3969). Copies of the document are available from the Vote Office and the Libraries of both Houses.

Asbestos

Mr. Cox: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what guidance his Department issues to those constructing buildings for which it is responsible on the use of materials containing asbestos. [52307]

Mr. Kilfoyle: I regret that it has not been possible to provide an answer before the Summer Recess. I shall therefore write to my hon. Friend and will place a copy of the letter in the Library.

Departmental Publications

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster how many of his Department's publications have been made available in *(a)* Braille, *(b)* audio tape and *(c)* large print in 1997 98; and what percentage of the total number of publications this represents. [54262]

Dr. Jack Cunningham: I regret that it has not been possible to provide an answer before the Summer Recess. I shall therefore write to the hon. Member and will place a copy of the letter in the Library.

Electronic Red Box

Mr. Chope: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, pursuant to the answer to the hon. Member for Lichfield (Mr. Fabricant) of 8 July 1998, *Official Report*, column *567*, on the electronic red box, if the new prototype is now in use in his office, and if he will make a statement. [54577]

Dr. Jack Cunningham: I am aware of the innovative work done by my predecessor my right hon. Friend the Member for South Shields (Dr. Clark). The prototype is not currently in use in my office.

Millennium Compliance

Mr. Chope: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, pursuant to the answer to the hon. Member for Bournemouth, East (Mr. Atkinson) of 8 July 1998, *Official Report*, column *565*, on millennium compliance, if he will write to all hon. Members during the summer to report the results of the next quarterly report. [54515]

Dr. Jack Cunningham: I regret that it has not been possible to provide an answer before the Summer Recess. I shall therefore write to the hon. Member and will place a copy of the letter in the Library.

Green Transport

Mr. Baker: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, pursuant to his answer of 30 March 1998, *Official Report*, column *379*, on departmental transport arrangements, what further changes he has made. [54020]

Dr. Jack Cunningham: I regret that it has not been possible to provide an answer before the Summer Recess. I shall therefore write to the hon. Member and will place a copy of the letter in the Library.

Cabinet Office

Sir Raymond Powell: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster (1) what is the estimated cost of relocating part of the Cabinet Office including the new Performance and Innovation Unit and the Centre for Management and Policy Studies in Admiralty Arch; [54705]

(2) what is the estimated cost of setting up the new Centre for Management and Policy Studies in the Cabinet Office; and how many additional civil servants will be employed; [54703]

(3) what will be the effect of the proposed Cabinet Office move to Admiralty Arch on the homeless unit currently there; how many homeless persons are currently in Admiralty Arch; and what efforts have been made to rehouse them. [54706]

Dr. Jack Cunningham: I regret that it has not been possible to provide an answer before the Summer Recess. I shall therefore write to my hon. Friend and will place a copy of the letter in the Library.

Departmental Vehicles

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster how much his Department expects to spend in each year from 1998 99 to 2000 01 on vehicle replacements. [54907]

Dr. Jack Cunningham: I regret that it has not been possible to provide an answer before the Summer Recess. I shall therefore write to the hon. Member and will place a copy of the letter in the Library.

Correspondence

Mr. McNulty: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster when he will publish the latest figures on his Department's handling of correspondence from hon. Members; and if he will make a statement. [55134]

Dr. Jack Cunningham: Figures showing the volume of correspondence received by Ministers and Agency Chief Executives from hon. Members in 1997, the targets set for reply and the percentage of replies sent within target are set out in the table. The table also includes comparative figures for 1996—first published on 17 June 1997, *Official Report*, columns *107–12*.

The Government attach great importance to the effective handling by departments of correspondence from hon. Members, and individual Ministers have already taken action to improve response times where their department's performance has not been satisfactory. However, the nature of correspondence and caseload varies greatly between departments and between agencies. In some departments and agencies, for example, a high proportion of correspondence requires reference to individual casework before a reply can be sent. Targets are set to reflect the particular circumstances of departments and agencies and performance against target is not therefore directly comparable. My Department will be producing shortly central guidance for all departments and agencies reminding them of the correct procedures to be followed when handling Ministerial correspondence.

Correspondence from Members of Parliament to Ministers and agency Chief Executives

	1996			*1997*		
Department or Agency	*Target set for reply (working days)*	*Number of letters received*	*Percentage of replies within target*	*Target set for reply (working days)*	*Number of letters received*	*Percentage of replies within target*
Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food	15	10,645	62	15	7,423	76
Intervention Board[1]	—	—	—	10	27	85
Cabinet Office	15	[2]1,067	63	15	341	96
Minister Without Portfolio's Office	—	—	—	15	[2]47	87
Crown Prosecution Service	15	92	91	15	39	85
Department for Culture, Media and Sport[4]	18	5,476	81	18	2,939	78
Royal Parks Agency	10	29	86	18	18	100
HM Customs and Excise	18	4,303	63	18	[4]4,291	20
Ministry of Defence	15	5,897	66	15	[4]4,719	65
Army Personnel Centre	—	—	—	15	119	64
Defence Evaluation and Research Agency	10	377	74	12	27	93
Department for International Development	15	3,508	94	15	[2]2,994	89
Department for Education and Employment	20	16,774	88	15	22,460	71
Employment Service	15	1,044	98	15	1,837	93
Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions[5]	15	[3]30,324	59	15	[3]31,798	58
DVLA	7	373	100	7	299	96
Driving Standards Agency	15	273	91	15	194	78
Highways Agency	15	662	98	12	468	71
Marine and Coastguard Agency				15	25	100
Planning Inspectorate	8	481	84	8	296	94
Vehicle Inspectorate	15	37	97	15	24	96
Foreign and Commonwealth Office	10	9,756	95	7	8,735	95
Department of Health	20	11,376	87	20	14,547	76
NHS Pensions Agency	15	46	70	15	78	76
Home Office	15	12,072	32	15	[3]16,831	20
	25	10,371	57	20	1,175	22
HM Prison Service	15	2,911	89	15	2,702	61
UK Passport Agency	10	245	87	10	101	97
Inland Revenue	18	3,914	41	18	3,323	40
	23	682	85	23	[3]375	79
Valuation Office	23	256	46	23	74	31
Legal Secretariat to the Law Officers	15	515	76	15	301	88
Lord Chancellor's Department	20	2,876	68	20	2,458	76
Court Service	20	1,217	93	20	1,391	99
HM Land Registry	20	53	98	20	37	100
Public Trust Office	15	113	100	15	65	98
Northern Ireland Office (including Northern Ireland Departments)	10	4,195	52	10	2,163	59
Child Support Agency	10	69	86	10	144	67
Northern Ireland Prison Service	10	127	99	10	48	92

Correspondence from Members of Parliament to Ministers and agency Chief Executives

Department or Agency	1996 Target set for reply (working days)	1996 Number of letters received	1996 Percentage of replies within target	1997 Target set for reply (working days)	1997 Number of letters received	1997 Percentage of replies within target
Planning Service	15	163	99	15	78	77
Rate Collection Agency	5	19	100	5	12	92
Rivers Agency	—	—	—	15	13	85
Road Service	15	91	100	15	23	87
Social Security Agency	10	75	87	10	94	78
Training and Employment Agency	—	—	—	5	11	100
Water Service	15	52	92	15	37	92
Office for National Statistics	10	199	54	10	[2]269	92
President of the Council's Office	—	—	—	15	[3]102	91
Scottish Office						
Historic Scotland	17	5,226	61	17	4,722	65
Scottish Courts Service	17	59	93	17	23	91
Scottish Office	—	—	—	17	11	82
Pensions Agency	17	31	97	17	38	97
Scottish Prison Service	17	112	99	17	145	97
Student Awards Agency for Scotland	17	120	97	17	240	70
Department of Social Security	20	18,091	74	20	17,585	51
Benefits Agency	20	2,175	98	20	3,314	89
Child Support Agency	20	9,110	62	20	8,182	99
Contributions Agency	20	395	61	20	338	89
War Pensions Agency	20	1,283	99	20	693	99
Department of Trade and Industry	10	15,483	74	10	[4]19,459	61
Companies House	10	48	100	10	41	100
Insolvency Service	10	42	98	10	27	100
Patent Office	10	26	100	10	12	100
Radiocommunications Agency	10	23	100	10	27	96
HM Treasury	15	4,331	57	15	4,553	54
Treasury Solicitor's Department	—	—	—	15	[5]39	100
Welsh Office	12	2,989	80	15	2,998	75
CADW (Welsh Historic Monuments)	10	35	97	12	65	83

Notes on 1997 Figures

[1] The Intervention Board is not a MAFF Agency but a separate Government Department reporting to MAFF Ministers

[2] Includes correspondence from MPs to the then Deputy Prime Minister

[3] Figures from 1 May 1997 to 31 December 1997

[4] The Department of National Heritage was renamed the Department for Culture, Media and Sport on 14 July 1997

[5] Includes all Ministerial replies, not only replies to Members of Parliament

[6] Excludes 447 letters where Agency Chief Executives replied on Ministers' behalf

[7] The Overseas Development Administration became the Department for International Development on 1 May 1997

[8] Since 1 May 1997, DFID no longer handles correspondence on political matters in Africa. 1996 and 1997 figures are therefore not directly comparable

[9] The former DOE and DOT merged on 1 May 1997 to form the DETR. 1996 correspondence figures for the former DOE and DOT have been added together for ease of reference

[10] 74 per cent. of letters were replied to within 20 working days

[11] In addition, the FCO's migration and visa department received 9,818 letters direct from MPs in 1997, of which 42 per cent. were replied to within 15 working days

[12] HM Prison Service DG cases

[13] UK Passport Agency DG cases

[14] Includes letters from January 1997 where the target time was reduced for IND and UKPA cases from 25 to 15 working days. Excludes letters where Agency Chief Executives have replied on Ministers' behalf

[15] Includes letters from February 1997 where the target time was reduced for HMP cases from 25 to 20 working days. Excludes letters where Agency Chief Executives have replied on Ministers' behalf

[16] The Home Office is reviewing its procedures and has appointed a team to improve the timeliness of Ministerial replies and to establish that its statistics are prepared on the same basis as other departments

[17] Head Office figures

[18] 'Local Office and 'delegated' figures (where local officials reply direct to MPs)

[19] This figure excludes letters which were subsequently replied to by the Director of Public Prosecutions

[20] Part estimated

[21] Includes letters where the Chief Executive has replied on Ministers' behalf

[22] Excludes DOE (NI) which received 368 letters from MPs in 1997 (77 per cent. of which were replied to within 8-15 working days). The figures given in the table, however, include an element of all letters which received a Ministerial reply, where figures for MPs' letters only were not held separately

[23] Includes 208 letters where the Chief Executive replied on Ministers' behalf

[24] Includes 11 letters where the Chief Executive replied on Ministers behalf

[25] The 1996 figures are taken from the *Official Report*, 17 June 1997, columns *107-112*. Please also refer to notes given with that reply. Departments and Agencies which received a total of between 1 and 10 letters from MPs during 1997 are not shown in this table

Service Standards

Mr. McNulty: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will make a statement on the performance of the main departments and agencies against the six service standards for central Government. [55135]

Dr. Jack Cunningham: The six standards came into effect on 1 April 1997. An analysis of the main departments' performance over the 12 months to 31 March 1998 showed that they generally had both telephone inquiry points and complaints procedures in place, were consulting their users, and were trying to make their services more accessible, for example, through greater use of new technology and the publication of information in minority languages. On appointments, the results showed that people were generally seen within 10 minutes of a pre-arranged appointment.

The performance of the main departments and agencies in responding to letters from the public is set out in the table.

Department	*Target (working days)*	*Total volume*	*Percentage of responses within target*	*Target 1998–99*	*Agencies included*
Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food[1]	15	65,410	89	15	yes
Cabinet Office (OPS)	15	6,226	95.6	15	yes
Department for Culture, Media and Sport[2]	18	21,162	68	18	no
Customs and Excise[3]	10	572,430	89	10	n/a
Ministry of Defence[4]	20	5,922	96	20	yes
Department for Education and Employment	15	116,417	88	15	no
Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions[5]	15	672,980	96	15	yes
Department of Health[6]	20	46,675	66	20	yes
Home Office	20	[7]173,285	81	20	[8]—
Inland Revenue	20	85m	[9]73.7	20	n/a
Lord Chancellor's Department	20	10,200	77	20	no
Northern Ireland Office (including Northern Ireland Departments)	15	198,160	94	15	[8]—
Department of Social Security	20	[10]32,618	77	20	no
Scottish Office	20	200,000	71	20	yes
Department of Trade and Industry	15	133,200	95	15	no
Welsh Office	15	65,087	86	15	yes
Benefits Agency	20	25,816	92	20	n/a
Child Support Agency	10	[11]—	67	10	n/a
Child Support Agency (Northern Ireland)	10	2,981	89	10	n/a
Contributions Agency	20	259,302	92	20	n/a
Court Service	10	4,534,387	99.5	10	n/a
Employment Service	10	[12]-	91	10	n/a
Social Security Agency (Northern Ireland)	15	41,609	96.5	15	n/a

[1] Correspondence received between 1 November 1997 and 31 March 1998.
[2] Figures relate to correspondence addressed to Ministers.
[3] Correspondence addressed to Ministers, e-mailed to the MOD web site, and mail on defence issues received by other departments between 1 August 1997 and 31 March 1998.
[4] As a result of the large increase in correspondence after the General Election it was often impossible for letters to be passed to the answering division within 15 days. Consequently many parts of the Department have interpreted the target as being a response within 15 days of receipt in the responding division, rather than from when the letter was actually received in the Department.
[5] The number of letters received by the Central Correspondence Unit from members of the public, and the percentage of letters meeting the target, was taken from a statistically monitored sample.
[6] Includes all Home Office agencies except the Prison Service.
[7] This is the number of items of post received by the Department's network of offices.
[8] Holding replies are not counted in order to maximise the incentive to issue full replies quickly.
[9] Includes all Northern Ireland departments' agencies except the Prison Service, and the CSA(NI) and SSA(NI) whose performance is shown separately.
[10] In addition 17,151 letters were received from DSS HQ but were passed on to the Department's executive agencies for reply and are therefore included in the agencies' return.
[11] Total volumes are not recorded. Performance is calculated through a sample, which in 1997–98 was just under 25,000 letters.
[12] Total volume not known. The performance against target was calculated by evaluating 4,000 letters sent out by a research company. In the same period some 780 letters were received addressed to Ministers - 80.6 per cent. of these were cleared within 15 days.

I will be placing a more detailed summary of performance by the main departments and agencies against the six standards in the Libraries of the House. I believe the Whitehall Standards are an important tool for improving the quality of Central Government services. This is the first time such information has been made available. It shows our commitment to open government and to reporting transparently on our performance. We plan to retain the standards in their present form until 31 March 1999, when they will be reviewed and if necessary revised.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Nicaragua

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assessment she has made of the long term effectiveness of the 1998 IMF agreement with Nicaragua. [54818]

Ms Hewitt: I have been asked to reply.

I regret that it has not been possible to provide a substantive answer before the summer recess. I shall write to my hon. Friend shortly and place a copy of the letter in the Library.

TREASURY

Foreign Earnings Deduction

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 11 June 1998, *Official Report*, column *652*, on foreign earnings deduction (1) if he will define the phrase, "very high incomes", used in paragraph 22 of the Inland Revenue Explanatory Notes to Clause 63 of the Finance (No. 2) Bill; [46401]

(2) if he will define the phrase, "very high earning individuals" used in paragraph 2 of the Inland Revenue Press Release 33 of 17 March. [46402]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 18 June 1998]:* As I explained in my answer of 11 June, there is no standard definition of what constitutes very high earnings.

Economic and Fiscal Strategy Report

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the current net annual cost to the Exchequer of the operation of *(a)* the National Air Traffic Services, *(b)* student loans, *(c)* residual debt in British Energy plc., *(d)* Radio Spectrum, *(e)* Belfast Port, *(f)* the Commonwealth Development Corporation, *(g)* the Royal Mint and *(h)* the Tote. [47037]

Mr. Byers: I regret that it has not been possible to provide a substantive answer before the summer recess. I shall write to my hon. Friend shortly and place a copy of the letter in the Library.

North Sea Fiscal Regime

Sir Robert Smith: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he will publish his consultation paper on the North Sea fiscal regime; and if he will make a statement. [49369]

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to adjust the tax regime on oil companies. [47769]

Mr. Fallon: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he expects to publish the consultation document on the taxation of North Sea oil. [54118]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 9 July 1998]:* I regret that it has not been possible to provide a substantive answer before the Summer recess. I shall write to the hon. Gentlemen shortly and place a copy of the letter in the Library.

Working Families Tax Credit

Mr. Webb: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received from the Inland Revenue on the feasibility of delivering the working families tax credit via the PAYE system; and if he will place a copy of any such representations in the Library. [50252]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 13 July 1998]:* The advice of officials to Ministers is confidential, but I can refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Hove (Mr. Caplin) on 9 July 1998, *Official Report*, column *576*, on the question of how the WFTC will be delivered to employees.

Mr. Duncan Smith: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what date he has set for achieving the target of an £180 per week income for all working families with a full-time worker under the working families tax credit scheme. [53115]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 28 July 1998]:* The WFTC will guarantee an income of £180 for families with a full time worker from when it is introduced in October 1999.

Mr. Rendel: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimates he has made of the number of people expected to be entitled to, and to claim, the working families tax credit in Scotland. [53172]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 28 July 1998]:* It is estimated that in 2000–01, the first full year of WFTC, around 130,000 families in Scotland will be in receipt of WFTC and we intend to ensure that as many families as are entitled receive the tax credit.

Mr. Rendel: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer which computer system will be used to collect *(a)* tax and national insurance information and *(b)* information required under the working families tax credit; and which company/consortium has been awarded the contract to oversee the computer system. [52747]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 28 July 1998]:* The current, separate, IT systems for collecting tax and NIC will continue to be used and the Working Family Tax Credit will build on existing Family Credit IT systems. The current IT support for Family Credit will transfer to the Inland Revenue to enable them to successfully deliver the Working Family Tax Credit. There has been no new award of contracts resulting from Working Family Tax Credits or the proposed merger of The Contributions Agency.

Mr. Rendel: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what systems have been set up to allow for direct payments from the Inland Revenue of the working families tax credit where the credit is not made through the pay packet. [52803]

Dawn Primarolo: I regret that it has not been possible to provide a substantive answer before the summer recess. I shall write to the hon. Member shortly and place a copy of the letter in the Library.

Mr. Rendel: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many people are expected to be eligible for, and to claim, the child care credit within the working families tax credit; and if his Department has estimated the costs involved in Scotland. [53173]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 28 July 1998]:* I regret that it has not been possible to provide a substantive answer before the summer recess. I shall write to the hon. Member shortly and place a copy of the letter in the Library.

Mr. MacShane: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 16 June 1998, *Official Report*, column *133–34*, if he will give the corresponding figures for a single earner married couple with one child aged four years. [53692]

Dawn Primarolo: The table shows the net income (after income tax, including WFTC, NICs and child benefit), and equivalised net income, of a single earner married couple with 1 child aged 4, at different levels of gross income, with an additional £48.80 of basic WFTC.

£ per week

Single earner married couple (1 child aged 4)						
Gross Income	150	200	250	300	350	400
Net Income (after taxes and benefits)	245.73	260.99	276.07	291.14	306.22	321.29
Equivalised Net Income	208.25	221.18	233.96	246.73	259.51	272.28

The figures include the effect of Budget measures taking effect in 1999–2000 (abolishing the employee NICs entry fee, MCA at 10 per cent. and £2.50 additional child benefit for the first child, although at 1998–99 levels of tax and benefits.

The data assume that the earner in the household is working over 30 hours a week for Working Family Tax Credit purposes; that earnings are from employment; and that there are no other sources of income.

The Standard McClements scales have been used to determine equivalised income. This is the same process that is used in the DSS's Households Below Average Income publication.At some levels of earnings this family may also be entitled to housing benefit and council tax benefit. However, as this will depend upon the composition of the housing costs (between mortgage payments, council tax, and rent), housing benefit and council tax benefit have been left out of these figures.

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the basis for his assumption that 20 per cent. of the working families tax credit is to be accounted for as tax forgone. [53720]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 30 July 1998]:* The assumption that 20 per cent. of the Working Families Tax Credit will be accounted for as tax forgone is based on an estimate of the proportion of WFTC payments which are paid up to an individual's gross income tax liability. WFTC payments paid over an individual's gross income tax liability will be accounted for as expenditure in the national accounts, under current conventions.

Mr. Fallon: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if the Treasury has reached agreement with the Office for National Statistics on the treatment of the working families tax credit for the purposes of the national accounts. [54121]

Mr. Byers: Decisions on classification for the national accounts are for Office for National Statistics alone following international standards.

International Debt

Mr. Reed: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) if he will list by country the value of the outstanding debts on *(a)* United Kingdom aid loans and *(b)* loans guaranteed by the British Government through the ECGD for (i) each developing country which reports under the Debtor reporting System of the World Bank, (ii) Afghanistan, (iii) Antigua and Barbuda, (iv) Bahrain, (v) Cuba, (vi) Gibraltar, (vii) Iraq, (viii) Kiribati, (ix) the Democratic Republic of Korea, (x) Libya, (xi) Namibia, (xii) Saudi Arabia and (xiii) Surinam; [51422]

(2) if he will list by country the amounts of *(a)* interest and *(b)* principal received by (i) the ECGD and (ii) the Department for International Development, in each year since 1979, from (1) each developing country which reports under the Debtor reporting System of the World Bank, (2) Afghanistan, (3) Antigua and Barbuda, (4) Bahrain, (5) Cuba, (6) Gibraltar, (7) Iraq, (8) Kiribati, (9) the Democratic Republic of Korea, (10) Libya, (11) Namibia, (12) Saudi Arabia and (13) Surinam. [51424]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 20 July 1998]:* I regret that it has not been possible to provide a substantive answer before the summer recess. I shall write to my hon. Friend shortly and place a copy of the letter in the Library.

Domestic Fuel (VAT)

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) if he will estimate the cost of reducing VAT on domestic fuel for, and estimate the benefit to, *(a)* non-pensioners, *(b)* pensioners on income support and *(c)* pensioners not on income support; [52035]

(2) if he will estimate the average annual benefit for households that include *(a)* a person on income support, *(b)* a person paying higher rate tax and *(c)* no person on income support and no person paying higher rate tax, of reducing VAT on domestic fuel. [52036]

Dawn Primarolo: I regret that it has not been possible to provide a substantive answer before the summer recess. I shall write to the hon. Member shortly and place a copy of the letter in the Library.

New Deal

Mr. Healey: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many people his Department is committed to

employing during 1998 under *(a)* the subsidised job option and *(b)* the unsubsidised job option of the New Deal programme. [52591]

Ms Hewitt: As a major UK employer, Government departments are being actively encouraged to consider the important supply of potential new recruits that New Deal can offer. So far as the Chancellor's main departments are concerned, the Inland Revenue will have a programme in place this autumn under which it hopes to employ over 100 people in subsidised jobs in the first full year, more if there are people who fit the department's needs. About 30 people will be in post by the end of December. Customs and Excise expect to recruit up to 6 people into unsubsidised jobs over the next year. HM Treasury, though not undertaking much recruitment at the moment, will recruit at least one person from the New Deal Gateway into an unsubsidised job, before the end of the year. Of the Chancellor's smaller departments, the Office for National Statistics (ONS) hopes to recruit up to 11 staff in subsidised jobs.

Charities' Taxation

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many representations he has received from charities about the abolition of the repayment of dividend tax credits; and if he will list the individual organisations, indicating how many *(a)* supported and *(b)* opposed the policy. [52552]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 27 July 1998]:* About 250 charities, many in response to the Charities Taxation Review, have written asking for changes to the current treatment of dividend tax credits. We have made generous transitional arrangements to help charities adjust to the withdrawal of payable tax credits.

Correspondence

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he plans to answer Mr. Eason's letter of 19 May regarding the McKinsey report. [52722]

Ms Hewitt: The Treasury has no record of having received Mr. Eason's letter. I will be happy to respond promptly when I do receive it.

Mr. Wilshire: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he expects to reply to the letter from the hon. Member for Spelthorne of 20 January, concerning Mr. F. R. Cannings of Ashford, Middlesex, reference 1/03342/1998. [53797]

Ms Hewitt: *[holding answer 30 July 1998]:* I regret the long delay in replying to this letter. The correspondence was unfortunately mislaid due to a problem with the computer system used to handle Ministerial correspondence between the Inland Revenue and the Treasury. In view of its subject matter, the correspondence has now been passed to my right hon. Friend the President of the Council and Leader of the House and I understand the hon. Member can expect to receive a reply in the near future.

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when the hon. Member for Walsall, North will receive a reply to his letter dated 22 June regarding a constituent (ref: O603/19). [54100]

Dawn Primarolo: I replied to my hon. Friend's letter on 28 July.

Sport (VAT)

Mr. Maude: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he received in the period 9 April to 24 July regarding the VAT (Sports, Sports Competitions and Physical Education) Order 1998. [53333]

Dawn Primarolo: I have received a number of representations which have been taken into account by Customs and Excise.

Mr. Maude: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the total revenue forgone from 1 April to 30 June as a result of the withdrawal of the VAT (Sport, Sports Competitions and Physical Education) Order 1998. [53331]

Dawn Primarolo: Customs and Excise estimate the avoidance of VAT during that period to have been £2 million.

Mr. Maude: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he expects the redrafting of the VAT (Sport, Sports Competitions and Physical Education) Order 1998 to be completed; and if he will make a statement. [53335]

Dawn Primarolo: Customs and Excise will consult on any proposals before a further announcement is made.

Mr. Maude: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received regarding VAT treatment for sporting facilities provided by *(a)* local authorities and *(b)* private individuals and organisations. [53332]

Dawn Primarolo: I have received a number of representations concerning the VAT treatment of sporting facilities and the VAT (Sport, Sports Competitions and Physical Education) Order 1998.

Mr. Maude: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to Her Majesty's Customs and Excise News Release 06/98, when the consultation exercise regarding VAT exemption on sporting services commenced; and when it will be completed. [53334]

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when the revised draft order on the VAT treatment of sports clubs will be published for consultation. [52856]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 29 July 1998]:* The arrangements for the consultation exercise will be announced by means of a Customs and Excise News Release.

Disability Living Allowance

Mr. Burns: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate his Department has made of revenue which would accrue from the taxation of disability living allowance. [53035]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 28 July 1998]:* I regret that it has not been possible to provide a substantive answer before the summer recess. I shall write

to the hon. Member shortly and a place a copy of the letter in the Library.

Small Businesses

Mr. Gale: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what proposals he has to stimulate investment in and expansion of small business; what consideration he has given to allowing the retention of profits for the purpose of investment in and the expansion of small businesses; and if he will make a statement. [53124]

Mr. Byers *[holding answer 28 July 1998]:* The Government announced in the Comprehensive Spending Review that they will refocus business support programmes to promote innovation and enterprise, with a particular emphasis on small and medium-sized enterprises that have the potential for high growth.

The Government said in the last Budget that they will continue to examine how best to create an environment which encourages investment by small and medium-sized businesses. This includes reviewing the case for continuing with enhanced capital allowances.

Mr. Gill: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what measures he will take to ensure that the tax take on small businesses is redistributed to provide incentives for the retention of earnings for investment. [54941]

Dawn Primarolo: I cannot anticipate my right hon. Friend's Budget Statement.

Mr. Gill: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the extent of tax barriers to long-term investment in small companies. [54940]

Dawn Primarolo: The Capital Gains Tax regime encourages long-term investment in all companies, irrespective of their size.

Compliance Cost Assessments

Mr. Lansley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what cumulative net increase in compliance costs has been estimated in compliance cost assessments published by his Department since 1 May 1997. [52963]

Ms Hewitt: *[holding answer 28 July 1998]:* The estimated net cumulative increase in compliance costs assessments published by the Chancellor's departments during the period 1 May 1997 to 30 June 1998 is as follows:

Recurring: £7 million

Non-recurring: In the range of £44 million-£94 million.

Of the non-recurring costs, some £25 million to £75 million is accounted for by the Modernisation of the Transfer Pricing Legislation arising out of the Finance (No.2) Bill 1998. This estimate is based on the minimum and maximum cost figures arising from consultation with parties who would be affected by the legislation and represents best and worst case assumptions.

Inland Revenue Office, Evesham

Mr. Luff: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the future of the Evesham Inland Revenue Office. [52735]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 28 July 1998]:* I regret that it has not been possible to provide a substantive answer before the summer recess. I shall write to the hon. Member shortly and place a copy of the letter in the Library.

Least Cost Procurement

Mr. Keith Simpson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if the Secretary of State for Defence has agreed his Department's proposals for least cost procurement. [52799]

Mr. Byers *[holding answer 28 July 1998]:* I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer given to him by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence on 20 July 1998, *Official Report*, column *430*.

Government Receipts

Mr. Rooney: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what were the receipts from *(a)* tobacco duty, *(b)* alcohol duty and *(c)* other duties expressed (i) in cash terms, (ii) at June 1998 prices and (iii) as a percentage of total Government receipts for each year since 1982–83. [53208]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 29 July 1998]:* The figures for *(a)* tobacco are as follows:

£ million

Year	*Cash terms*	*June 1998 prices*	*Percentage of total general Government receipts*
1982–83	3,446	6,853	2.8
1983–84	3,806	7,231	2.9
1984–85	4,140	7,488	2.9
1985–86	4,459	7,614	2.9
1986–87	4,755	7,868	3.0
1987–88	4,767	7,585	2.7
1988–89	4,990	7,491	2.6
1989–90	5,035	7,012	2.4
1990–91	5,636	7,155	2.6
1991–92	6,290	7,623	2.8
1992–93	6,041	7,098	2.7
1993–94	6,518	7,530	2.8
1994–95	7,388	8,308	2.9
1995–96	7,291	7,940	2.7
1996–97	8,039	8,547	2.8
1997–98	8,356	8,600	2.7

The figures for *(b)* alcohol duty are as follows:

£ million

Year	*Cash terms*	*June 1998 prices*	*Percentage of total general Government receipts*
1982–83	3,021	6,008	2.5
1983–84	4,035	7,667	3.1
1984–85	3,761	6,802	2.7
1985–86	4,197	7,167	2.8
1986–87	4,184	6,923	2.6
1987–88	4,343	6,911	2.5
1988–89	4,518	6,783	2.4
1989–90	4,438	6,180	2.1
1990–91	4,856	6,165	2.2
1991–92	5,065	6,140	2.3

£ million

Year	Cash terms	June 1998 prices	Percentage of total general Government receipts
1992–93	5,108	6,002	2.3
1993–94	5,172	5,975	2.3
1994–95	5,560	6,252	2.2
1995–96	5,617	6,118	2.1
1996–97	5,631	5,987	2.0
1997–98	5,742	5,909	1.8

The figures for *(c)* other duties are as follows:

£ million

Year	Cash terms	June 1998 prices	Percentage of total general Government receipts
1982–83	8,714	17,329	7.1
1983–84	9,427	17,911	7.2
1984–85	10,422	18,851	7.4
1985–86	10,846	18,519	7.1
1986–87	12,161	20,124	7.6
1987–88	12,824	20,406	7.3
1988–89	14,096	21,162	7.4
1989–90	14,455	20,129	7.0
1990–91	15,307	19,434	7.0
1991–92	16,748	20,300	7.5
1992–93	17,476	20,534	7.8
1993–94	19,609	22,653	8.5
1994–95	21,368	24,028	8.5
1995–96	24,119	26,268	8.9
1996–97	25,487	27,099	8.0
1997–98	28,313	29,140	9.0

Note:
Other duties include vehicle excise duty, hydrocarbon oils duty, betting and gaming duties, matches and mechanical lighters (until 1993), air passenger duty and customs duties.

Mr. Rooney: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what were the receipts from VAT expressed (i) in cash terms, (ii) at June 1998 prices and (iii) as a percentage of total Government receipts for each year since 1982–83. [53207]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 29 July 1998]:* The figures are as follows:

£ million

Year	Cash terms	June 1998 prices	Percentage of total general Government receipts
1982–83	13,816	27,474	11.3
1983–84	15,218	28,916	11.7
1984–85	18,535	33,525	13.1
1985–86	19,331	33,008	12.7
1986–87	21,365	35,354	13.4
1987–88	24,067	38,297	13.7
1988–89	27,328	41,026	14.3
1989–90	29,482	41,055	14.2
1990–91	31,006	39,364	14.2
1991–92	35,626	43,181	16.0
1992–93	37,246	43,763	16.7
1993–94	38,959	45,008	17.0
1994–95	41,817	47,024	16.7
1995–96	43,069	46,907	15.9
1996–97	46,657	49,608	16.3
1997–98	50,865	52,351	16.2

Mr. Rooney: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what were the receipts from *(a)* inheritance tax and *(b)* corporation tax expressed (i) in cash terms, (ii) at June 1998 prices and (iii) as a percentage of total Government receipts for each year since 1982–83; [53206]

(2) what were the receipts from *(a)* income tax and *(b)* capital gains tax expressed (i) in cash terms, (ii) at June 1998 prices and (iii) as a percentage of total Government receipts for each year since 1982–83. [53205]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 29 July 1998]:* The information requested is in the following table:

£ million

	Income tax			Capital gains tax[1]		
Year	In cash terms	At 1998 Q1 prices[2]	As a % of general government receipts	In cash terms	At 1998 Q1 prices	As a % of general government receipts
1982–83	30,361	86,050	24.8	632	1,791	0.5
1983–84	31,108	81,293	23.8	671	1,753	0.5
1984–85	32,507	79,286	23.0	730	1,781	0.5
1985–86	33,353	78,484	23.3	908	2,016	0.6
1986–87	39,499	79,403	24.1	1,064	2,194	0.7
1987–88	41,402	77,135	23.6	1,379	2,569	0.8
1988–89	43,433	72,680	22.7	2,323	3,887	1.2
1989–90	48,801	75,170	23.5	1,854	2,856	0.9
1990–91	55,287	80,447	25.3	1,852	2,695	0.8
1991–92	57,493	80,115	25.9	1,140	1,589	0.5
1992–93	56,797	75,822	25.5	982	1,311	0.4
1993–94	58,442	73,948	25.4	710	898	0.3
1994–95	63,100	75,337	25.2	926	1,105	0.4
1995–96	68,049	77,263	25.1	796	904	0.3
1996–97	69,071	74,385	24.1	1,131	1,218	0.4
1997–98	76,700	77,981	24.4	1,450	1,474	0.5

£ million

Year	Inheritance tax: In cash terms	Inheritance tax: At 1998 Q1 prices[2]	Inheritance tax: As a % of general government receipts	Corporation tax[1]: In cash terms	Corporation tax[1]: At 1998 Q1 prices	Corporation tax[1]: As a % of general government receipts
1982–83	499	1,414	0.4	5,677	16,090	4.6
1983–84	599	1,565	0.5	6,184	16,160	4.7
1984–85	658	1,605	0.5	8,341	20,344	5.8
1985–86	881	1,956	0.6	10,708	23,772	7.1
1986–87	988	2,038	0.6	13,495	27,833	8.4
1987–88	1,078	2,008	0.6	15,734	29,314	9.0
1988–89	1,071	1,792	0.6	18,537	31,019	9.7
1989–90	1,232	1,898	0.6	21,495	33,110	10.4
1990–91	1,262	1,836	0.6	21,495	31,277	9.8
1991–92	1,299	1,810	0.6	18,263	25,449	8.2
1992–93	1,211	1,617	0.5	15,783	21,070	7.1
1993–94	1,333	1,687	0.6	14,887	18,837	6.5
1994–95	1,411	1,685	0.6	19,390	23,150	7.7
1995–96	1,518	1,724	0.6	23,570	26,762	8.7
1996–97	1,558	1,678	0.5	27,788	29,926	9.7
1997–98[3]	1,700	1,728	0.5	30,500	31,009	9.7

[1] Tax on capital gains realised by companies is included in corporation tax
[2] Using the GDP deflator at market prices adjusted for the abolition of domestic rates
[3] Provisional

Aircraft and Ship Sales

Mr. Goggins: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if the implementation of the opinion of the European Commission on the successor regime for duty and tax-paid sales on aircraft and ships after the end of June 1999 will require a change in *(a)* EU and *(b)* United Kingdom law. [52536]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 29 July 1998]:* The Commission's view is that there is no requirement for a change in EU legislation in order to enact their suggestion for the successor regime and it has said that, to the extent necessary, certain legal provisions may be disregarded by mutual agreement. The UK has reserved its position on this to examine all options.

Dividend Tax Credits

Dr. Cable: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when the Government will issue a statement on the ability of non-taxpayers to claim tax credits on dividend income. [53969]

Dawn Primarolo: I refer the hon. Member to the answers given by my hon. Friend the Paymaster General to the hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam (Mr. Burstow) on 23 July 1998, *Official Report*, column *652*, and 28 July 1998, *Official Report*, column *217*.

Children's Fund

Mrs. May: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer which Department will have prime responsibility for administering the children's fund. [53890]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 30 July 1998]:* The Children's Fund will be set up to fund Sure Start, a new programme for 0–3 year olds and their families in areas of need. It will be located on the budget of the Department for Education and Employment and administered by new inter-departmental arrangements.

VAT Group Treatment

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the estimated annual lost revenue resulting from VAT avoidance from schemes using the VAT grouping concessions. [53721]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 30 July 1998]:* There is no reliable estimate of the VAT loss arising from exploitation of the grouping facility for tax avoidance purposes. The revenue cost of the normal operation of the facility has been estimated at £400 million.

Mr. Whittingdale: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what estimate his Department has made of the additional revenue which will be raised from *(a)* the education sector, *(b)* the health sector, *(c)* the property industry, *(d)* the banking sector, *(e)* the financial services industry, *(f)* the insurance industry and *(g)* charities as a result of the restriction of VAT group treatment to fully-taxable corporate bodies; [54693]

(2) what amount of additional revenue will be raised by the Government's proposals to restrict VAT group treatment to fully-taxable corporate bodies; [54840]

(3) what estimate his Department has made of the effect on customer charges for financial services products of the restriction of VAT group treatment to fully-taxable corporate bodies; [54701]

(4) what basis the estimated revenue cost of £400 million of current VAT grouping structures is calculated; [54819]

(5) what research the Treasury has carried out since 1 May 1997 on the revenue cost of current VAT grouping structures; [54837]

(6) what estimate his Department has made of the *(a)* compliance costs and *(b)* restructuring costs resulting from the restriction of VAT group treatment to fully taxable corporate bodies. [54832]

Dawn Primarolo: No reliable or up-to-date estimates exist of the costs associated with the VAT grouping facility, either for business or the Exchequer. It is one of the main purposes of the consultation process that the extent of such costs, and the associated revenue implications, should be established. As part of this process Customs and Excise will be meeting representatives from a number of key business sectors in the autumn to discuss, in detail, these and other aspects of the proposal to restrict the VAT grouping facility.

Mr. Whittingdale: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what are the rules relating to VAT group treatment in each other member state of the European Union. [54694]

Dawn Primarolo: VAT grouping facilities exist in eight of the fifteen member States of the EU: Austria, Denmark, Finland, Germany, the Netherlands, the Republic of Ireland, Sweden and the United Kingdom. Germany and the Netherlands operate systems which are obligatory and which encompass the entire corporate group. In Sweden and Finland grouping is restricted to the financial sector. The Danish facility is broadly similar to the current system operated in the UK. VAT grouping in the Republic of Ireland is granted at the absolute discretion of the Revenue Commissioners.

Mr. Whittingdale: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what discussions have taken place with other European Ministers about the harmonisation of VAT rates; and if he will make a statement. [54633]

Dawn Primarolo: There have been no recent discussions in ECOFIN about the harmonisation of VAT rates. However, the European Commission's suggestion for an optional reduced rate of VAT for some local, labour-intensive services was discussed at February's ECOFIN.

Any change to the EC VAT system requires the unanimous agreement of member states. The Government, while supportive of efforts to simplify and modernise the current European Community VAT system, are opposed to further harmonisation at the Community level.

Mr. Whittingdale: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what estimate his Department has made of the level of abuse of the current rules on VAT grouping in order to avoid tax; and how much tax he estimates to have been lost as a result of this abuse; [54831]

(2) how much of the revenue raised by the Government's proposals to restrict VAT group treatment to fully-taxable corporate bodies will come from closing down tax avoidance schemes. [54839]

Dawn Primarolo: There is no reliable estimate of the VAT loss arising from exploitation of the grouping facility for tax avoidance purposes. The revenue cost of the normal operation of the facility has been estimated at £400 million.

Mr. Whittingdale: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what discussions he has had with other European Finance Ministers about the proposed changes to the VAT grouping rules. [54695]

Dawn Primarolo: No such discussions have been held.

Mr. Whittingdale: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what estimate his Department has made of the number of companies which because of regulatory requirements cannot restructure their organisation to avoid being affected by the proposed restriction of VAT group treatment to fully-taxable corporate bodies; [54696]

(2) what estimate his Department has made of the number of companies which will be able to restructure their organisation to avoid being affected by the proposed restriction of VAT group treatment to fully-taxable corporate bodies; [54697]

(3) how many companies, broken down by sector, will be affected by the Government's proposals to restrict VAT group treatment to fully taxable corporate bodies. [54838]

Dawn Primarolo: There are no detailed estimates as to the number of companies which would be affected by the proposal to restrict VAT grouping. The main purposes of the consultation process are to give businesses the opportunity to comment in detail on the potential implications that such a proposal would have for them and to obtain better information about the numbers and types of companies affected.

Taxation (Guernsey)

Mr. Letwin: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will enter into negotiations with the Government of Guernsey to alter the United Kingdom's tax treaty with Guernsey so that the treatment of dividends from Guernsey companies is put on an equal footing with tax dividends from other EU countries. [53809]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 30 July 1998]:* I am not clear what the hon. Member has in mind. The tax treatment of a dividend paid by a Guernsey company and received in the UK is no different from the tax treatment of a dividend payable by a company resident in an EU country. In both cases, where the recipient of the dividend is a UK resident company which controls at least 10 per cent. of the voting power in the company paying the dividend, tax credit relief is allowed for the amount of tax actually paid on the profits out of which the dividend is paid; a UK resident individual is not entitled to such relief.

Persistent Inquirers

Mr. Sanders: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer which of his agencies have procedures to identify persistent inquirers for information. [53955]

Ms Hewitt: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the Chief Executives of the Royal Mint, the Valuation Office, the Debt Management Office, National Savings and the Office for National Statistics. I have asked each of them to reply directly.

Letter from Allan E. Pearce to Mr. Adrian Sanders, dated 31 July 1998:

Thank you for your recent question to the Chancellor of the Exchequer regarding procedures to identify persistent inquirers. I am replying on behalf of the Chief Executive of the Royal Mint.

Whilst we do on occasion receive calls from persistent inquirers, the Mint does not monitor these independently of general enquiries.

I hope you will find this reply helpful.

Letter from Michael A. Johns to Mr. Adrian Sanders, dated 31 July 1998:

I have been asked to reply to your Parliamentary Question to the Chancellor (ref 53955) where you ask which of his agencies have procedures to identify persistent inquiries for information.

The Valuation Office Agency monitors correspondence which requires a substantive reply, but we do not log incoming telephone calls.

We do not have specific procedures in place to identify persistent inquiries as we have not experienced any problems with this to date.

I trust that this answers your query, but if I can help further please let me know.

Letter from Mike Williams to Mr. Adrian Sanders, dated 31 July 1998:

The Chancellor of the Exchequer has asked me to reply direct to the Parliamentary Question you asked about procedures for identifying persistent inquiries for information, insofar as it relates to the UK Debt Management Office ("DMO").

The DMO does not maintain a formal record of persistent telephone inquirers although, by the nature of our business, we have a large number of regular telephone inquirers and monitor informally the sources of all telephone inquiries made. The great majority of inquiries from the general public are seeking factual information on gilt-edged stock.

We do maintain a formal record of all written inquiries to the DMO and have a published target deadline within which to respond to these. A written acknowledgement will be sent to inquirers within two weeks of the receipt of the correspondence and, for at least 95 per cent. of inquirers, a substantive reply will be sent within four weeks.

Letter from Peter Bareau to Mr. Adrian Sanders, dated 31 July 1998:

I have been asked to reply to your Parliamentary Question 53955 about whether National Savings has procedures to identify persistent inquiries for information.

National Savings receives thousands of calls for information each day from savers. We keep records of many of the calls, but do not monitor specifically for calls from persistent inquirers.

National Savings does, however, keep a record of the main subjects of inquiry and ensures that the staff who handle inquiries are equipped to deal with them.

Letter from Tim Holt to Mr. Adrian Sanders, dated 31 July 1998:

As Director of the Office for National Statistics (ONS), I have been asked to reply to your recent question on Treasury agencies having procedures to identify persistent inquiries for information.

The ONS Public Enquiry Line staff record the total number of calls they have answered. However, whilst they do receive calls from persistent inquirers, these are not monitored independently.

Overseas Visits

Mr. Wilshire: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list those who have accompanied (i) him and (ii) his departmental Ministers on overseas visits since 1 January indicating *(a)* the venue of the visit, *(b)* the purpose of the visit, *(c)* the names of those involved, *(d)* the job of those involved, *(e)* the reasons why they were included in the visit and *(f)* the cost to public funds. [53838]

Mr. Gordon Brown *[holding answer 30 July 1998]:* All overseas visits by Treasury Ministers are conducted in accordance with the principles set out in the Ministerial code.

Non-departmental Public Bodies

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the non-departmental public bodies in existence on 1 May 1997 that *(a)* have been disbanded, *(b)* will be disbanded in the next 12 months, *(c)* have had their functions transferred to (i) another non-departmental public body and (ii) a democratically elected body, *(d)* have been renamed but continue to perform a similar role and *(e)* have been unchanged; if he will indicate in *(c)* (ii) the relevant successor body; what new non-departmental public bodies have been established since 1 May 1997; and how many non-departmental public bodies his Department currently is responsible for. [53868]

Ms Hewitt: *[holding answer 30 July 1998]:* The Government are committed to keeping the number of NDPBs to a minimum, and to ensuring that those which remain are open, accountable and effective. Details of all Non-departmental Public Bodies in existence since 1 May 1997 are listed in "Public Bodies 1997". Since publication, the Policyholder's Protection Board has transferred from the DTI to the Treasury.

ICL Pathway Project

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Christchurch (Mr. Chope), of 23 July 1998, *Official Report*, columns *652–53*, on the ICL Pathway Project, what is the extent of the Government's commitment to the completion of the project. [53454]

Mr. Byers *[holding answer 30 July 1998]:* The Government are committed to providing a secure and cost effective method of paying benefits over post office counters. ICL pathway have contracted with the Benefits Agency (on behalf of DSS) and Post Office Counters Ltd. to deliver this using the benefit payment card.

Economic and Monetary Union

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) if he will list the main activities of the Euro Preparations Unit since December 1997; [53741]

(2) if he will make a statement on the programme of the Standing Committee on Preparations for EMU in 1998–99; [53737]

(3) if he will publish a breakdown of the Euro Preparations Unit's programme of co-ordination with external organisations. [53740]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 30 July 1998]:* The Treasury published on 28 July "Getting Ready for the Euro, first report July 1998". Copies were placed in the Library of the House. The report includes a description of the activities undertaken by the Treasury's Euro Preparations Unit, including its extensive contacts with business. The report also sets out the programme of

activities relating to practical preparations for the euro over the next six months, including the next meeting of the Standing Committee on preparations for EMU. The Standing Committee is expected to consider preparations for the launch of the euro on 1 January 1999, communications with business, and progress on the outline national changeover plan, which will set out the steps which would need to be followed if the United Kingdom were to decide to join the single currency.

Task Forces

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the task forces and advisory groups composed of independent members which have been set up by his Department since 1 May 1997, indicating in each case *(a)* their remit, *(b)* their membership, *(c)* how many members are (i) scientists, (ii) engineers, (iii) small business people or representatives of small businesses, *(d)* any remuneration members receive for their services and *(e)* their budget. [53282]

Ms Hewitt [holding answer 30 July 1998]: The task forces and advisory groups composed of independent members, which have been set up by the Treasury since 1 May 1997 are as follows:

1. Private Finance Taskforce

(a) remit:

to advance the private finance initiative and private/public partnerships across government;

(b) membership: twenty two;

(c) composition:

(i) scientists: none;

(ii) engineers: two;

(iii) small business: two

(d) remuneration:

thirteen members of the Taskforce are full time employees of Treasury Taskforce Limited and receive salaries and benefits under contracts of employment with that company: 6 are civil servants employed under normal civil service terms and conditions and three are secondees from the private sector whose terms and conditions are determined by their employers;

(e) budget: £2,317,000 per year;

2. Task force on Banks' Assistance to Credit Unions

(a) remit:

to explore ways in which banks and building societies can work more closely with credit unions to increase their effectiveness; to look at ways to widen the range of services provided to credit union customers; and to encourage the continued expansion of the movement;

(b) membership:

yet to be announced;

(c) composition:

yet to be announced;

(d) remuneration: none;

(e) budget:

out of pocket expenses only;

3. Working Group on the Financing of High Technology Companies

(a) remit:

to identify financing barriers experienced by UK high technology companies and to bring forward proposals to help overcome those barriers;

(b) membership: 15;

(c) composition:

(i) scientists: none;

(ii) engineers: none;

(iii) small business: one;

(d) remuneration: none;

(e) budget: none;

4. Standing Committee on preparations for EMU

(a) remit:

to oversee preparations for EMU;

(b) membership:

14, including seven ministers;

(c) composition:

(i) scientists: none;

(ii) engineers: none;

(iii) small business: the President of the CBI and the President of the British Chambers of Commerce are members;

(d) remuneration: none;

(e) budget: none;

5. Business Advisory Group on EMU

(a) remit:

to provide advice on the practical and strategic implications of EMU;

(b) membership: 22;

(c) composition:

(i) scientists: none;

(ii) engineers: the Engineering Employers' Federation is represented;

(iii) small business: many of the associations represented on the Business Advisory Group have members which are small businesses, and two of the associations have memberships entirely composed of small businesses;

(d) remuneration: none;

(e) budget: none.

In addition, a number of temporary working parties and other committees have been organised to consider detailed aspects of preparations for the euro. Their membership is drawn largely from the associations represented on the Business Advisory Group, including small business representatives, and from the Government departments and other public authorities. None offers remuneration or has a budget. Details are available in "Getting Ready for the Euro, first report July 1998", published by the Treasury on 28 April. Copies of this report are available in the Library of the House.

Local Telephone Calls (VAT)

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much was collected in value added tax from local telephone calls in each of the last five years. [54642]

Dawn Primarolo: The VAT collected from businesses classified to telecommunications as a whole is as follows:

1993: £1,500 million

1994: £1,400 million

1995: £1,450 million

1996: £1,550 million

1997: £1,400 million.

Prior to 1996, telecommunications were included in the trade classification for post and telecommunications. HM Customs and Excise have therefore estimated the

amount that related to telecommunications based on the yield in subsequent years. Unfortunately they are unable to estimate the amount of this relating specifically to local telephone calls.

Environmental Taxation

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what progress has been made by the working party on environmental taxation. [54692]

Dawn Primarolo: There is no single Government working party that is looking at environmental taxation.

In the last Budget my right hon. Friend the Chancellor appointed Lord Marshall, assisted by a Government Task Force to examine the potential for the use of economic instruments—such as an industrial energy tax and/or other market mechanisms—to improve business energy use and reduce greenhouse gas emissions from this sector. Lord Marshall has been asked to report back to the Chancellor by the start of November. A consultation document was released by the Task Force on 5 June. Responses have been requested by 31 July.

Aggregates

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he expects the working group on the taxation of the extraction of aggregates to report. [54691]

Dawn Primarolo: There are two aspects to this. First, the Customs and Excise consultation on how such a tax could operate asked for replies by the end of August. Second key results from the further work on the environment costs and benefits of the supply of aggregates are due in January. Both will be feeding into further consideration of the case for a tax or other measures.

Landfill Tax

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much of the 20 per cent. of the landfill tax available through the Environmental Trust was *(a)* used for environmental purposes and *(b)* not used and retained by Customs and Excise. [54689]

Dawn Primarolo: Credits claimed at 22 July amounted to £78.4 million. In the same period (1 October 1996 to 22 July 1998) total landfill tax revenue declared was £650 million, giving rise to a maximum credit that could have been claimed of £130 million. The majority of credits are claimed at the end of landfill site operators contribution years which mainly fall between October and December.

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much revenue was generated by the landfill tax in its first year of operation. [54690]

Dawn Primarolo: As I told my hon. Friend on 21 July 1998, *Official Report*, column *503*, the most accurate figures I now have for revenue received in the first year of the landfill tax are £420 million gross and £396 million net of tax credits claimed.

Savings Income

Mr. Whittingdale: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the Government's policy on the proposed withholding tax on savings income of residents of other EU member states. [54698]

Dawn Primarolo: The Government are in principle in favour of effective international action to tackle tax evasion. But the Government would need to be satisfied that any proposals would not do serious damage to financial markets.

Mr. Whittingdale: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what discussions he has had with other European Finance Ministers about the proposed imposition of a withholding tax on savings income of residents of other EU member states. [54699]

Dawn Primarolo: Last December's meeting of Finance Ministers at ECOFIN invited the Commission to produce a draft directive on this subject. The draft has now been published and is being considered and discussed.

Mr. Whittingdale: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the impact on the UK financial services industry of the imposition of a withholding tax on the savings income of residents of other EU member states. [54700]

Dawn Primarolo: The Draft Directive would involve some compliance costs for payers who would have to withhold tax and/or provide information. The Government are concerned about its possible impact on the financial markets. It is holding discussions with interested parties and will publish a fuller assessment in the light of these.

Zero-rated VAT

Mr. Whittingdale: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list those goods and services which are zero-rated for VAT in each member state of the European Union. [54631]

Dawn Primarolo: The goods and services which are zero-rated for VAT in other Member States are shown on the list below.

Coverage of zero rates in EC member states

Belgium

Supplies of newspapers and magazines, subject to certain conditions

Supplies of certain recovered materials and by-products

Supplies of genuine pearls and precious stones to persons who are exclusively traders in such goods

Denmark

Sales of newspapers normally published more frequently than one issue per month

Finland

Newspapers and periodicals provided that they are sold on subscription for a period of at least one month

Printing services for membership publications of non-profit making organisations

Ireland

Books and pamphlets (excluding newspapers, periodicals, catalogues, diaries etc.)

Food and drink for human consumption (excluding alcohol, manufactured beverages, ice-cream and confectionery)

Seeds, plants, trees etc. used for food production

Fertiliser in units of not less than 10kg

Animal feed (excluding pet food)

Oral medicines for human and animal (excluding pet) consumption

Sanitary towels and tampons

Medical equipment and aids for the handicapped

Children's clothing and footwear

Wax candles

Certain services provided by the Commissioners of Irish Lights

Life-saving services provided by the Royal National Lifeboat Institution

Italy

Unwrought gold (ingots etc.)

Land not capable of being used as building land

Ferrous and non-ferrous scrap metal

Sweden

Printing of certain membership publications

Medicines on prescription

Supply or hire of vessels for rescue at sea to the Swedish Society for Rescue at sea

Fuel for aircraft

United Kingdom

Books, newspapers and periodicals

Food for human consumption (excluding alcohol, manufactured beverages, confectionery)

Animal feeding stuffs (excluding pet foods)

Seeds and plants for food production

Live animals used for food production

Water and sewerage services for domestic use

Pharmaceuticals, medicines and aids for the handicapped

Young children's clothing and footwear

Construction of domestic buildings

Alterations to listed buildings

Goods donated to charities

Talking books and radios for the blind

Public passenger transport

Large caravans and houseboats

Protective boots and helmets.

Excise Duties

Mr. Whittingdale: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what discussions have taken place with other European Ministers about the harmonisation of excise duties; and if he will make a statement. [54632]

Dawn Primarolo: Excise duty rates on alcohol, tobacco and oils within the EU were discussed in ECOFIN on 23 October 1995.

In relation to oils, a proposal for a directive restructuring the Community framework for the taxation of energy products was introduced at the 17 March 1997 ECOFIN. The Presidency created a High Level Working Group at official level to discuss the proposal, and produced a brief progress report to ECOFIN on 12 May 1997. ECOFIN called on the Commission to do further work on the single market case for the proposal, its environmental and economic justification, and the impact on competitiveness. A number of discussions took place at official working group level under the Dutch, Luxembourg and UK Presidencies to examine technical aspects of the proposal. The last Ministerial level discussion took place in the Tax Policy Group, under the chairmanship of Commissioner Monti, on 3 July this year at which I represented the UK.

For tobacco products, the Commission published its report on its biennial review of the minimum rates in June. The first discussion, at official working group level, is scheduled to take place in September. Discussion in ECOFIN is expected to follow.

The Commission's report on alcohol minimum rates, due by 31 December 1996, is awaited.

Direct Taxes

Mr. Whittingdale: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what discussions have taken place with other European Ministers about the harmonisation of direct taxes; and if he will make a statement. [54634]

Dawn Primarolo: The Government's view is that direct taxation is a matter for national Governments. Decisions on European tax issues are subject to unanimity.

Departmental Publications

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many of his Department's publications have been made available in *(a)* Braille, *(b)* audio tape and *(c)* large print in 1997–98; and what percentage of the total number of publications this represents. [54277]

Ms Hewitt: If requested Treasury publications would be made available in Braille using Braille transcription services. Similarly, if requested, the Treasury would make arrangements to have publications produced on audio tape. However to date these services have not been requested.

All public Treasury documents are produced in the optimum typeface sizes for legibility. These are also available on the Internet, where they can be heard by visually handicapped people who have access to a 'talking computer', or can be displayed and printed out as text of any size.

Ministerial Meetings

Mr. Chope: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) how many meetings Ministers have had with BSkyB since 1 February; and on what matters; [54491]

(2) how many meetings Ministers have had with BAA plc since 1 February; and on what matters; [54493]

(3) how many meetings Ministers have had with Manpower since 1 February; and on what matters; [54489]

(4) how many meetings Ministers have had with Tesco plc since 1 February; and on what matters; [54490]

(5) how many meetings Ministers have had with Marks and Spencer plc since 1 February; and on what matters. [54488]

Ms Hewitt: Ministers, their Special Advisers and other civil servants meet many people in the course of their work. This properly includes meetings with interest groups outside Government. This liaison is intended to help Ministers draw upon outside contributions—from academics, think-tanks, trade and industry associations,

private sector organisations, trade unions and others, as well as relevant experience from other countries—during the process of policy analysis and development. But they must observe the requirements of propriety: for instance they must not provide confidential information without authorisation, or allow improper influence on policy. It is not our policy to make information on meetings or their content public.

Welfare Reform

Mr. Webb: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, (1) pursuant to the Green Paper, Cm 3805, "New Ambitions for our Country: A New Contract for Welfare", page 82, what is the proportion of working age people living in workless households at present; and what it was in April 1997 and March 1998; [54606]

(2) pursuant to the Green Paper, Cm 3805, "New Ambitions for Our Country: A New Contract for Welfare", page 84, what is the proportion of children living in workless households at present; and what it was in April 1997 and March 1998. [54596]

Ms Hewitt: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the Director of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Tim Holt to Mr. Steven Webb, dated 31 July 1998:

As Director of the Office for National Statistics (ONS), I have been asked to reply to your parliamentary questions about proportions of people living in workless households.

The ONS defines workless households as those where there is no one in employment and normally applies this where there is at least one person of working age.

Estimates from the quarterly Labour Force Survey (LFS) giving the proportion of working age people and dependent children living in workless households are shown in the table.

ONS will shortly be releasing LFS Household Datasets, designed specifically for analysis at household level, which will enable improved estimates of these measures to be produced. The figures given should therefore be regarded as provisional, and I will send you estimates based on the LFS Household Datasets when they are available. An article describing these new datasets will be published in *Labour Market Trends* on 6 August and will be available in the House of Commons Library.

The LFS is a household survey and therefore the institutional population is largely excluded apart from students in halls of residence who are sampled via their parental home and staff in NHS accommodation who are sampled separately.

Proportions of people living in workless households

	Spring 1997	*Spring 1996*
Percentage of people of working age living in workless households[1]	13.6	13.4
Percentage of dependent children living in working age households who live in workless households[2]	18.2	18.5

[1] Households where there is at least one person of working age (men aged 16–56, women aged 16–59) and there is no one in employment

[2] All aged 0–15 and 16–18 year olds in full-time education

Source:

ONS, Labour Force Survey

Mr. Webb: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to the Green Paper, Cm 3805, "New Ambitions for Our Country: A New Contract for Welfare", page 83, what is the non-Governmental proportion of personal savings and insurance at present; and what it was in April 1997 and March 1998. [54609]

Ms Hewitt: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the Director of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Tim Holt to Mr. Steven Webb, dated 31 July 1998:

As Director of the Office for National Statistics (ONS), I have been asked to reply to your recent parliamentary question on personal savings and insurance.

63 per cent. of contributions for social insurance were paid to non-governmental schemes in 1996 (the latest period for which information is available).

The figures underlying these calculations are:

	£ billion
Contributions to life assurance and pension funds	36.8
Individual premiums for life policies	42.9
Social Security contributions	46.3
Total contributions	126.0

Government Expenditure

Mr. Tyrie: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the contingency reserve for each year since 1970–71 until and including those years forecast in the latest Government expenditure forecasts *(a)* in cash, *(b)* as a percentage of GGE and *(c)* as a percentage of GDP; where figures for the reserve were published for more than one year, if he will calculate *(a)* to (c) for each published figure; and for those years for which cash figures are not available if he will publish the equivalent figures based on survey prices. [52816]

Mr. Byers: Before 1981, public expenditure was planned in volume terms. Figures for the planned reserves on a comparable basis are available starting from the 1981 Public Expenditure Survey, the first year of public expenditure cash planning. These may be found in the annual Financial Statement and Budget Reports (FSBRs), with the exception of plans for Departmental Expenditure Limits for the period 1999–2000 to 2001–02 which were set out in the July 1998 Comprehensive Spending Review White Paper (Cm 4011).

The scope of expenditure covered by the main control aggregate has varied since 1981, especially at the point of regime changes (i.e. from planning total to Control Total, and from Control Total to Departmental Expenditure Limits). In particular, the coverage of Departmental Expenditure Limits is substantially narrower than that of the Control Total. This needs to be taken into account if making comparisons over time.

Figures for the percentage of GGE may be calculated using the figures for GCE contained in Table A6 of Cm 4011. Figures for the percentage of GDP can be

calculated using the table, which gives figures for GDP since 1982–83 and projections of GDP consistent with Cm 4011.

£ billion

Year	GDP
1982–83	280.7
1983–84	304.4
1984–85	326.2
1985–86	358.4
1986–87	385.7
1987–88	427.0
1988–89	475.4
1989–90	517.1
1990–91	556.7
1991–92	581.3
1992–93	606.8
1993–94	640.2
1994–95	678.5
1995–96	713.4
1996–97	752.2
1997–98	796.7
1998–99	833.6
1999–00	872.3
2000–01	914.3
2001–02	958.3

Figures up to 1997–98 are outturn GDP figures, adjusted to remove the distortion caused by the abolition of domestic rates; figures for the period 1998–99 to 2001–02 are calculated using projections of GDP consistent with those used in Cm 4011

Mr. Tyrie: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to Annex A, Table A6 of the Comprehensive Spending Review, what factors underlie the differences between the figures for General Government Expenditure and Total Managed Expenditure; and what Government documents set out the distinction between the two aggregates. [52817]

Mr. Byers: For an explanation of the differences between Total Managed Expenditure (TME) and General Government Expenditure (GGE) I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer the former Chief Secretary gave to the right hon. Member for Horsham (Mr. Maude) on 25 June 1998, *Official Report*, column *616*.

TME was described in the *Comprehensive Spending Review* (Cm 4011), Paragraph B1. GGE was described in *Public Expenditure Statistical Analyses 1998–99* (Cm 3901) paragraph 1.8.

Government Spending

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the amounts of non-BSE related Government spending on agriculture in real terms for *(a)* each of the last 10 years and *(b)* the next three years. [54947]

Mr. Byers: Historical expenditure series for government expenditure on agriculture, fisheries, food and forestry are given in tables 3.2 and 3.3 of the "Public Expenditure Statistical Analyses" publication. The table excludes BSE expenditure. Provision for UK agriculture over the next three years has not yet been finalised, pending consultations in Wales and Northern Ireland on the allocation of their settlements.

£ billion

Year	Expenditure
1988–89	3.3
1989–90	3.0
1990–91	3.7
1991–92	3.7
1992–93	3.6
1993–94	4.5
1994–95	4.0
1995–96	4.4
1996–97	4.6
1997–98	4.0
1998–99	3.7

At 1997–98 prices

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) if he will calculate the real increase or decrease in Government expenditure *(a)* for each Department and *(b)* in total, relative to his Department's forecasts for growth in the economy in each of the next three years; and what assumptions underlie these projections; [54962]

(2) what is the forecast growth for Government capital and current spending combined, relative to the predicted growth of the economy in each of the next three years. [54961]

Mr. Byers: I regret that it has not been possible to provide a substantive answer before the summer recess. I shall write to the hon. Member shortly and place a copy of the letter in the Library.

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what contingency planning his Department has undertaken in respect of funding his expenditure plans if real growth is less than 1.75 per cent. rising to 2.25 per cent. in two years' time. [54963]

Mr. Byers: The Government have adopted a prudent approach so that it meets its fiscal rules over the economic cycle. We are planning for surpluses on current budget, including a margin within Annually Managed Expenditure and are basing our fiscal projections on cautious assumptions, audited by the National Audit Office. This prudent approach and the significant reduction in public borrowing since 1996–97 leave the public finances well placed to cope with the effects of any changes to the short-term economic outlook.

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the size of the fiscal surplus or deficit resulting from combined Government spending on *(a)* capital and *(b)* current account over the next three years. [54948]

Mr. Byers: Forecasts for public sector net borrowing and the surplus on current budget consistent with the Government's spending plans were set out in tables 4.4 and 4.5 of the *Economic and Fiscal Strategy Report 1998* (Cm 3978).

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what percentage of the national income will be spent on capital investment by the Government in the current year; and what was the average percentage in each of the last 10 years. [54952]

Mr. Byers: Public sector net investment as a share of GDP for the current year and for the previous 10 years is set out in table 4A.1 in the Economic and Fiscal Strategy Report, June 1998.

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what are the expected capital savings on PFI contracts over the next three years; and what will be the resultant additional current spending. [54946]

Mr. Byers: Departments enter into PFI contracts when they are satisfied that the PFI route offers the best means of securing improved public services and value for money for the taxpayer over the lifetime of the contract.

Table B15 of the March 1998 Financial Statement and Budget Report provides a breakdown of anticipated investment by the private sector on PFI projects, with Table B16 providing a breakdown of the service payments the Government is committed to in respect of contracts that have been signed. These tables will be updated, and published, in September this year.

Funding (Wales and Scotland)

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will change the funding formula for *(a)* Scotland and *(b)* Wales for the next three years. [54954]

Mr. Byers: The White Papers "Scotland's Parliament" (Cm 3658) and "A Voice for Wales" (Cm 3718) explained that the funding formula will be updated from time to time to take account of population and other technical changes.

Matching Funds

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will review the policy of encouraging matching funds from the private sector in those areas which lack access to significant private funds; and if he will make a statement. [54907]

Mr. Byers: Attracting matching funds from the private sector forms an important part of public private partnerships in a number of areas of government and brings important benefits to the taxpayer.

Registration Records

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what timescale he has set for the Registrar General to present to Ministers an options paper on access to registration records. [54960]

Ms Hewitt: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the Director of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Tim Holt to Mr. David Lidington, dated 31 July 1998:

As Director of the Office for National Statistics (ONS), I have been asked to reply to your recent parliamentary question on a timescale for an options paper on access to registration records.

No timetable has been set for the production of the options paper.

The options paper will consider the use of information technology to improve the service to customers and to provide better data management. It will also consider the possibility of working with a wide variety of organisations outside the public sector.

Educational Qualifications

Mr. Webb: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to the Green Paper, "New Ambitions for Our Country: A New Contract for Welfare", Cm. 3805, page 83, what is the proportion of the adult population with educational qualifications at present; and what it was in April 1997 and March 1998. [54603]

Ms Hewitt: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the Director of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Tim Holt to Mr. Steven Webb, dated 31 July 1998:

As Director of the Office for National Statistics (ONS), I have been asked to reply to your parliamentary question about the percentage of adults with qualifications.

Estimates from the quarterly Labour Force Survey (LFS) are shown in the table below. Figures have been given both for all those of working age (16-state retirement age) and also those aged 18 to state retirement age (ie adults of working age). The LFS does not ask respondents above working age about their qualifications unless they are in employment.

The LFS is a household survey and therefore the institutional population is largely excluded apart from students in halls of residence who are sampled via their parental home and staff in NHS accommodation who are sampled separately.

Percentage of people with educational qualifications (United Kingdom, not seasonally adjusted)

Percentage

	All working age[1]	*At least 18 and working age*[1]
Spring 1997	81.3	82.0
Spring 1998	81.9	82.6

[1] Working age is 16–64 for men and 16–59 for women

Source:
ONS, UK Labour Force Survey

Conception Statistics

Mr. Webb: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to the Green Paper Cm. 3805, "New Ambitions for our Country: A New Contract for Welfare", (p84), what is the rate of conceptions among girls aged under 16 years in the areas where the rate is highest, at present; and what it was in April 1997 and March 1998. [54594]

Ms Hewitt: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the Director of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Tim Holt to Mr. Steven Webb, dated 31 July 1998:

As Director of the Office for National Statistics (ONS), I have been asked to reply to your parliamentary question on the rate of conceptions among girls aged under 16.

The conception rates in 1996 for the three Health Authority Areas with the highest rates are shown in the table. Figures for 1997 and 1998 are not yet available.

Conception rates for girls aged under 16 in 1996

Health authority	*Rate per 1,000 girls aged 13–15*
Sunderland	19.5
Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham	19.5
South Humber	18.3

Conception rates for the remaining Health Authority areas are published in the ONS Monitor Ref FM1 98/1 which is available in the House of Commons Library.

Foreign Earnings

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the impact of the changes to the foreign earnings deduction arrangements on the overseas earnings and competitive position outside the United Kingdom of *(a)* the consultancy sector, *(b)* consulting engineers, *(c)* contractor and *(d)* industries in the UK which supply goods and services for British consultants and contractors operating overseas. [53665]

Mr. Geoffrey Robinson: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave him on 29 July 1998, *Official Report*, columns *292–93*.

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what estimate he has made of the impact of the changes to the foreign earnings deduction arrangements on the gross and tax revenues accruing to the Exchequer; [53667]

(2) what estimate he has made of the impact of the changes to the foreign earnings deduction arrangements on the overseas operating costs of British charities. [53666]

Dawn Primarolo: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to him on 29 July 1998, *Official Report*, column *292*.

Green Transport

Mr. Baker: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 2 April 1998, *Official Report*, column *619*, on departmental transport arrangements, what further changes he has made. [53987]

Dawn Primarolo: Her Majesty's Treasury is working towards the target announced in the White Paper "A New Deal for Transport". The Treasury should have green transport plans in place by March 1999.

Lear's Macaws

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what response he is sending to the Brazilian authorities about their representations over the handling by HM Customs of three Lear's Macaws. [53461]

Dawn Primarolo: Customs inquiries concerning the three Lear's Macaws are still in progress. Until these are completed the birds will remain in this country. Officials are, however, already in contact with the Brazilian authorities who have been offered the opportunity to view the birds to alleviate any concerns about their current welfare. The final re-homing of the birds will take full account of their welfare and the need to maximise the breeding potential of such an endangered species.

Public Service Agreement

Mr. Fallon: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he expects to publish the terms of the public service agreement negotiated between the Treasury and the spending departments. [54119]

Mr. Byers: We will make available a collected set of Public Service Agreements in due course.

Republic of Ireland

Mr. Swinney: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what advice he has given to banks, building societies, insurance and assurance firms with registered headquarters in Northern Ireland on conducting business in the Republic of Ireland. [54565]

Ms Hewitt: None.

Mr. Swinney: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) if he will list the banks, building societies, insurance and assurance firms with registered headquarters in Northern Ireland which own or partly own banks, building societies, insurance and assurance firms in the Republic of Ireland; [54562]

(2) if he will list the banks, building societies, insurance and assurance firms with registered headquarters in England which own or partly own banks, building societies, insurance and assurance firms in the Republic of Ireland; [54563]

(3) if he will list the banks, building societies, insurance and assurance firms with registered headquarters in Scotland which own or partly own banks, building societies, insurance and assurance firms in the Republic of Ireland; [54564]

(4) if he will list the banks, building societies, insurance and assurance firms with registered headquarters in Wales which own or partly own banks, building societies, insurance and assurance firms in the Republic of Ireland. [54561]

Ms Hewitt: The information could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

EU Budget

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the net EU Budget contributions for each member state *(a)* in 1996 and *(b)* estimated for 1997, indicating the sources of the figures. [54202]

Ms Hewitt: Indicative net contributions for all Member States for the budgetary year 1996 are set out in the table. The Community does not publish forward estimates of the net contributions for Member States. Information on the 1997 outturn for Member States, after account is taken of the United Kingdom's abatement, will be available later this year when the European Court of Auditors publishes its report on the 1997 European Community Budget.

Net contributions to the EC Budget in 1996

Member State	*million ecu*
Belgium	746.2
Denmark	−193.4
Germany	10,894.9
Greece	−3,932.7
Spain	−5,972.2
France	459.8
Ireland	−2,260.3
Italy	1,402.3
Luxembourg	79.3
Netherlands	2,446.8
Austria	272.2
Portugal	−2,774.3

Net contributions to the EC Budget in 1996

Member State	*million ecu*
Finland	−27.1
Sweden	752.5
UK	2,276.0

Notes:

1. The Court of Auditors uses European Currency Unit figures, the unit of account for the EC Budget

2. The Court of Auditors does not allocate all Community spending to the Member States. Consequently the figures in the table are likely only to be indicative of the amount of Member States' net positions. For example, if all administrative expenditure were allocated to the country in which it is paid, the net position of Belgium and Luxembourg would be substantially improved

Source:

Figures derived from information on Member States' contributions and receipts published in the European Court of Auditors report on the 1996 Budget

Single Currency

Mr. Derek Twigg: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the arrangements for paying tax in euros after the single currency is introduced on 1 January 1999. [54980]

Ms Hewitt: The Chancellor of the Exchequer announced in his speech to the CBI on 10 November 1997 that businesses, if they wished, would be able to pay their taxes in euro from 1 January 1999. The Inland Revenue and Customs and Excise are today publishing a joint press release setting out further details of the arrangements and inviting comments from interested parties on any aspects of the proposals.

Environmental Trust

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to ensure that sufficient of the funds allocated by the Environmental Trust flows into research and development projects. [53391]

Dawn Primarolo: Research and Development work on sustainable waste management is one of the approved objects under the landfill tax credit scheme, which gives tax credits to site operators who make contributions to environmental bodies. Neither the Government nor the private sector regulator of the scheme, Entrust Ltd., may direct to which of the approved objects site operators choose to make their contributions. However, Customs and Excise are currently examining, together with other interested departments, whether and how the scheme could be altered to encourage recycling.

Equity Release Mechanisms

Mr. Love: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will commission research into the use of equity release mechanisms to assist elderly home owners to unlock additional income in retirement; and if he will make a statement. [53906]

Dawn Primarolo: We have no plans to commission any such research. However, the issue of equity release is currently being considered on a cross-departmental basis.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Green Transport

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 30 March 1998, *Official Report*, column *356*, on departmental transport arrangements, what further changes he has made. [54017]

Mr. Fatchett: I shall write to the hon. Member shortly and place copies of the letter in the Library.

Fiji

Mr. Öpik: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the level of British Government assistance to Fiji; and what plans he has to increase the level of support. [52057]

Mr. Foulkes: I have been asked to reply.

I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave yesterday, 30 July 1998, *Official Report*, column *460*.

Public Registers

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the public registers for which his Department has responsibility. [47354]

Mr. Tony Lloyd *[holding answer 29 June 1998]:* I shall write to my hon. Friend shortly and place copies of the letter in the Library.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he expects to respond to the question from the hon. Member for Leyton and Wanstead, to which a holding answer was given on 29 June, concerning the public registers for which his Department is responsible. [54023]

Mr. Robin Cook: I shall write to my hon. Friend shortly and place copies of the letter in the Library.

Data Protection

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if his Department holds copies of all the certificates, signed by Cabinet Ministers since 1984, under section 27 of the Data Protection Act 1984. [47387]

Mr. Tony Lloyd *[holding answer 29 June 1998]:* I shall write to my hon. Friend shortly and place copies of the letter in the Library.

Diplomatic Service

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs on how many occasions since 1968 a United Kingdom ambassador or high commissioner has followed a deposed democratic leader or Government into exile. [51861]

Mr. Robin Cook *[holding answer 23 July 1998]:* Since April 1980, HMG has recognised states, not governments (whether in exile or otherwise).

The original decision that the High Commissioner in Freetown should leave for Conakry, was taken out of concern for his safety, and that of his staff, as a result of the fighting in Freetown. His presence in Conakry, from where he monitored the situation in Sierra Leone, also allowed him to remain in contact with President Kabbah, who was based in Conakry between May 1997 and March 1998. There are no direct parallels with this case.

Two indirect parallels, however, are:

HMG continued to deal with the Kuwaiti government in Saudi Arabia as the legitimate government of Kuwait after the Iraqi invasion of August 1990. HMA Kuwait was unable to leave Kuwait City after the Iraqi invasion;

following the coup in Haiti in September 1991, HMG along with the EU, the OAS and the UN continued to regard President Aristide as Haiti's democratically elected Head of State. In exile he met FCO officials, including the UK's non-resident Ambassador to Haiti based in Jamaica.

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many staff in posts overseas are working full-time to win inward investments projects for the United Kingdom, and in which countries they are serving. [54554]

Mr. Fatchett: I shall write to the hon. Member shortly and place copies of the letter in the Libraries of the House.

Biological Warfare

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) what assessment his Department has made since 1990 of the implications of information being exchanged between Libya and the biological warfare programme organised by South Africa's former apartheid regime; what were the conclusions of this assessment; when this assessment was started and finished; what action has been taken in the light of this assessment; and if he will make a statement; [53103]

(2) what assessment his Department has made of the implications of the extent and nature of the biological warfare programme organised by South Africa's former apartheid regime; what were the conclusions of this assessment; when this assessment was started and finished; what action has been taken in the light of this assessment; and if he will make a statement. [53102]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given by the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence, my hon Friend the Member for Warley (Mr. Spellar) today, *Official Report*, column *711*.

Mrs. Farrukh Sheikh

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he proposes to make to French Customs officials over the case of Mrs. Farrukh Sheikh of Leicester. [52753]

Mr. Fatchett: I shall write to my hon. Friend shortly and copies will be placed in the Library.

Denis Halliday

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the resignation of Mr. Denis Halliday, UN Humanitarian Co-ordinator for Iraq. [53459]

Mr. Fatchett: Mr. Halliday's resignation is matter for the UN.

Sally Becker

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what action his Department has taken in respect of the imprisonment of Sally Becker in Lipjan prison; what representations he has made to the Serbian authorities on this matter; and if he will make a statement. [52729]

Mr. Fatchett *[holding answer 28 July 1998]:* Our staff have visited Ms Becker almost daily since they were informed of her arrest on 18 July. She has appointed a local lawyer who lodged an appeal against her sentence. The appeal hearing has been postponed to 3 August. Ms Becker started a hunger strike on 23 July. Our Embassy asked the prison Governor to monitor her condition carefully and to ensure she was regularly examined by the prison doctor. Our Ambassador spoke to an official at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on 24 July to request that Ms Becker's hunger strike be handled sensitively with her health as the priority. When our Ambassador visited her on 29 July she had abandoned her hunger strike. Our continuing concern about Ms Becker's situation is being raised with the local authorities.

Compliance Cost Assessments

Mr. Lansley: To ask the Secretary of State for (1) Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the compliance cost assessments published by his Department since 1 May 1997; [52966]

(2) if he will list those compliance cost assessments since 1 May 1997 in which there is a net reduction in compliance costs resulting from a legislative proposal; [52964]

(3) what cumulative net increase in compliance costs has been estimated in compliance cost assessments published by his Department since 1 May 1997. [52965]

Mr. Fatchett *[holding answer 28 July]:* There have been no compliance cost assessments published by this Department during this period.

National Employment Plans

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to the section "Jobs" in the document, "UK Presidency of the EU Half Way Mark", if he will make a statement on the purpose of national employment plans; how many jobs they will create; and if such plans existed prior to the United Kingdom presidency. [53783]

Ms Quin: National employment action plans describe the measures taken by each Member State to meet the collectively agreed Employment Guidelines. It is the measures in these action plans which should encourage job creation. No national employment action plans were submitted by Member States and subject to peer review before the UK Presidency.

Millennium Compliance

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to the document,

"UK Presidency of the EU Half Way Mark", if he will list the agreements reached on millennium compliance by the close of the UK presidency. [53782]

Mr. Fatchett: Our aim to raise awareness of this issue across Europe and work together on responses to it was a high priority during the UK Presidency. We contributed to the preparation of a European Commission information paper on the Millennium Bug, which was presented at various Councils to encourage early and vigorous action by Member States. We hosted a workshop in May, involving senior representatives from each Member State to promote Millennium compliance throughout the EU. We secured an important statement in the Conclusions of the Cardiff European Council, highlighting the urgency of action by all Members. This helped to promote a sense of common purpose within the EU on the Millennium problem. We expect there to be further discussions in the Council of Ministers and in other EU contexts under the Austrian Presidency.

Belarus

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions his Department is having with the Belarus Government regarding the policy of the Belarus Government towards embassies of foreign countries based in Belarus. [53700]

Ms Quin: We, our EU partners and other countries affected by the Belarusian decision to exclude Ambassadors from their residencies at Drozdy are in regular contact with the Belarusian authorities. The Troika of EU chargés d'affaires met Deputy Foreign Minister Gerasimovich on 20 July. They underlined the need for the Belarusian authorities to comply with international law on the inviolability of diplomatic premises, and called on the Belarusian authorities to put forward concrete proposals to resolve the problem.

Departmental Research

Mr. Fabricant: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the cost of all research undertaken by his Department since May 1997, excluding the cost of green papers and other public consultation documents drafted by his officials; and if he will list in each case the organisations which undertook that research. [52695]

Mr. Fatchett *[holding answer 30 July 1998]:* The FCO maintains a specialised cadre of Research Analysts, who provide research support to the Office as a whole. The approximate annual cost of this research facility is £3 million. Specialised and ad hoc research is done by other departments including Economic Advisers, Legal Advisers and the Library and Records Department. This is only part of their duties and expenditure on such research is not managed centrally.

Sri Lanka

Mr. Love: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has to visit Sri Lanka; what discussions he has had regarding the political situation in Sri Lanka; and if he will make a statement. [53556]

Mr. Fatchett: My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary currently has no plans to visit Sri Lanka. I hope to reinstate my postponed visit from April as soon as possible. In a range of discussions on Sri Lanka, we have made clear our view that a lasting solution to the conflict there can only be reached through a political settlement. We have said publicly that we stand ready to help in the resolution of the conflict if the parties involved ask us to play a role.

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what Government initiatives *(a)* have been taken since 1 January and *(b)* are currently being planned to bring about a peaceful end to the conflict in Sri Lanka. [54097]

Mr. Fatchett: A lasting solution to the conflict in Sri Lanka requires a political settlement between the parties. We have made clear that we stand ready to help if both sides ask us to play a role.

Sudan

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 21 July 1998, *Official Report*, column *491*, what reports his Department received on what dates from the British Embassy in Khartoum of impending famine in Southern Sudan. [53553]

Mr. Fatchett: I shall write to the hon. Member shortly and place copies of the letter in the Library.

EU Staff (Security Vetting)

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the security vetting procedures for the selection of United Kingdom candidates for the European Community's senior staff; what level of staff are involved; and what political opinions on the European Union are held to invalidate candidature. [53772]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: The Commission of the European Communities and the European Atomic Energy Community (EURATOM) are the only EC offices that impose personnel security obligations on member nations. Security vetting is a requirement for all UK nationals directly recruited for work at the Commission and is the responsibility of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. Staff are cleared to SECRET level following a request from the Commission on the basis of personal particulars provided by the candidate on a completed security questionnaire. The procedure is broadly similar to the process for SC clearance in respect of UK Civil Servants as set out in the then Prime Minister's Statement on Security Vetting dated 14 December 1994. For the EC, it involves a check against the National Collection of Criminal records and a check against Security Service records.

No account is taken of a candidate's political opinions.

Departmental Publications

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many of his Department's publications have been made available in

(a) Braille, *(b)* audio tape and *(c)* large print in 1997–98; and what percentage of the total number of publications this represents. [54276]

Mr. Fatchett: The FCO leaflet on British Consular Services Abroad is available in large print. The FCO also provides an automated telephone answering service offering recorded travel advice on destinations which give rise to the most inquiries. Advice on other destinations is available from the FCO's Travel Advice Unit whose members can read out the advice or provide hard copies in large print. Other FCO publications aimed at overseas audiences are not available in Braille, audio tape or large print.

Task Forces

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the taskforces and advisory groups composed of independent members which have been set up by his Department since 1 May 1997 and in each case *(a)* their remit, *(b)* their membership, *(c)* how many members are (i) scientists, (ii) engineers and (iii) small businesspeople or representatives of small businesses, *(d)* any remuneration members receive for their services and *(e)* their budget. [53149]

Mr. Fatchett *[holding answer 30 July 1998]:* Since 1 May 1997 the Foreign and Commonwealth Office has established one advisory group which includes independent members—Panel 2000 set up on 1 April 1998—but no task forces.

Panel 2000's remit is:

to produce a strategy to improve the way Britain is seen overseas;

to look at the methods and tools available to do this;

to make sure that the public and private sectors are working together to do this; and

to modernise the way the Foreign and Commonwealth Office communicates with the public.

Membership of the Panel, drawn from both the public and private sectors, is as follows:

Waheed Alli, Zeinab Badawi, Martin Bell MP, Baroness Chalker, Dr. Frances D'Souza, David John, Mark Leonard, Lord Levy, Ruth Mackenzie, Sir Colin Marshall, Lord Paul, Shahwar Sadeque, Judy Simpson, Martin Sorrell, John Sorrell, Harriet Ware-Austin, Baroness Blackstone, Lord Clinton-Davies, Dr. David Drewry, Mark Fisher MP, Andrew Fisher, Tom Harris, Roger Liddle, Peter Mandelson MP, David Quarmby, Baroness Symons, Sir John Kerr, Sir Michael Jay, Claire Fulton, Priya Guha and Vivien Life.

Of these, one member is a scientist, four are from small and medium sized businesses. There are no engineers on the panel. The members are unpaid, but can claim travel expenses. No budget has been allocated to the Panel.

International Exhibitions

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list *(a)* the value of financial support provided to United Kingdom companies attending, *(b)* those Ministers and other Government officials who attended and the cost of their attendance and *(c)* any other costs incurred by (i) his Department and (ii) Defence Export Services Organisation in connection with (1) IMDEX Asia 97, (2) the Paris Air Show 1997, (3) IDEF 97, (4) IMDEX 97, (5) the Underwater Defence Technology Conference and Exhibition, (6) the International Defence and Security Technology Fair, Brno, Czech Republic, May 1997, (7) the 3rd International Civil and Military Aerospace Exhibition, Prague and (8) the 3rd Central European Defence Equipment and Aviation Exhibition and Conference, Budapest. [54168]

Mr. Fatchett: I shall write to my hon. Friend shortly and place copies of the letter in the Library.

Cyprus

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussion he has had with the Turkish Government on the overflying of the Republic of Cyprus by Turkish military aircraft; and if he will make a statement. [54412]

Ms Quin: We have repeatedly made clear to all concerned, including the Turkish Government, our concerns about military activity in Cyprus. In line with the relevant UN resolutions, we have urged all parties to refrain from any action, particularly in the vicinity of the buffer zone, which would exacerbate tension.

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) what discussions he has had and with whom in Northern Cyprus on the offer of President Clerides of Cyprus for Northern Cyprus to take part in the Cypriot team discussing that country's application for membership of the European Union; [54416]

(2) what discussions has he had with Turkish representatives on the offer made by President Clerides of the Republic of Cyprus to include Turkish Cypriots within the Cypriot delegation to discuss the application of Cyprus for membership of the European Union; and if he will make a statement; [54413]

(3) what discussions has he had with the Government of the Republic of Cyprus on their offer to Turkish Cypriot representatives in northern Cyprus to participate in the negotiating team representing Cyprus in their application for membership of the European Union. [54414]

Ms Quin: We welcome President Clerides's offer to the Turkish Cypriot community to participate in the team negotiating Cyprus's EU accession. My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary made this clear when he met President Clerides on 12 March. We continue to urge both sides to work actively to promote such participation. Sir David Hannay, acting in his capacity as UK Special Representative for Cyprus and as the Austrian EU Presidency Representative for Cyprus, visited the island on 20–22 July and discussed with President Clerides the importance of continued efforts to encourage Turkish Cypriot acceptance of his offer. The then Minister of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, my hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle-upon-Tyne, North (Mr. Henderson) conveyed the same message to Cyprus's Chief EU Negotiator, George Vassiliou, when the latter visited the UK on 2 July.

We are in regular contact with the Turkish Cypriot community in northern Cyprus, including Mr. Denktash, through our High Commission in Nicosia. We have made clear on several occasions that we consider President Clerides's offer to the Turkish Cypriots to participate in

Cyprus's EU accession negotiations to be reasonable. We continue to urge them to agree with the Greek Cypriot side an arrangement acceptable to both parties allowing their participation in those negotiations. Sir David Hannay reiterated this message to representatives of the Turkish Cypriot community during his recent visit to Cyprus.

We remain in regular contact on this issue with the Turkish Government through our Embassy in Ankara. We continue to stress to them the importance of Turkey's constructive cooperation on Cyprus.

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with the Austrian Government as holders of the presidency of the European Union on the application by the Republic of Cyprus for membership of the European Union; and if he will make a statement. [54415]

Ms Quin: I shall write to my hon. Friend shortly and place copies of the letter in the Library.

Sierra Leone

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when Mr. Peter Penfold's position as High Commissioner to Sierra Leone will end. [53871]

Mr. Robin Cook: Mr. Penfold became High Commissioner to Sierra Leone in March 1997. Staff in the High Commission normally serve two tours of duty of 12 months each, with an option of a third. This tour length reflects the classification of Freetown as a "difficult post".

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list those private military companies on which explicit guidance will be given to officials on handling their contacts with such companies. [53873]

Mr. Tony Lloyd *[holding answer 30 July 1998]:* There is no such list. We are in the process of preparing more detailed guidance, in consultation with other Whitehall departments.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if his Department informed the Prime Minister before 11 May that Mr. Penfold had displayed a lack of caution in his dealings with Colonel Spicer. [54256]

Mr. Robin Cook: No. That Mr. Penfold displayed a lack of caution in his dealings with Mr. Spicer is a finding of the Report of the Sierra Leone Arms Investigation. I have stated previously that it would have been improper to draw conclusions on the actions of individuals in advance of the full, independent findings of Sir Thomas Legg's investigation.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) if he will place in the Library the Permanent Under Secretary's letter to Mr. Peter Penfold; [54257]

(2) if he will make a statement on the Permanent Under Secretary's interview with Mr. Peter Penfold. [54255]

Mr. Robin Cook: No. Such matters are in confidence between the FCO and its employees.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his oral statement of 27 July 19998, *Official Report*, column 19, what advice has been received from Sierra Leone authorities on the role of Mr. Peter Penfold in the restoration of civilian Government. [54254]

Mr. Robin Cook: President Kabbah wrote to the Prime Minister in May 1998 to thank him for HMG's support. He stated that Mr. Penfold had encouraged his Government to remain committed to the ideals of democracy and not to lose hope. The letter said that Mr. Penfold had been a source of moral strength.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what advice was given to Mr. Peter Penfold at CHOGM in Edinburgh, on his relations with President Kabbah. [54260]

Mr. Robin Cook: None.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to section 10 of the report of the Sierra Leone Arms Investigation for what reasons Mr. Penfold was not informed that in banning the supply of arms to Sierra Leone, the resulting embargo covered all parties. [54259]

Mr. Robin Cook: The Report notes that Mr. Penfold was sent the full text of Security Council Resolution 1132 on 8 October.

We have accepted the finding of the Report that FCO officials were not as alert to the importance of sanctions enforcement as they should have been. We have set up a new Sanctions Enforcement Unit, which has responsibility for ensuring that the relevant terms of any Security Council Resolution, and the details of the Order in Council giving effect to the Resolution in UK law, are drawn to the attention of all officials in London and to all diplomatic missions.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his oral answer of 27 July 1998, *Official Report*, column 31, what factors underlie his description of Britain's record in Sierra Leone as positive. [54258]

Mr. Robin Cook: Britain has a consistent record of supporting democracy in Sierra Leone. The UK provided funding for the elections in 1996. After the military coup in 1997 we led international efforts to support peaceful restoration of the democratic government. DfID gave assistance to President Kabbah while in Conakry to enable him to plan for the resumption of his government. We provided assistance to refugees through the ICRC.

Britain was first on the scene with humanitarian aid after the restoration of President Kabbah. We have sponsored the UN resolution providing for military observers to help the process of demilitarisation, and we are providing four Military Officers to serve as UN Military Observers. We are providing aid to fund the process of strengthening democracy, civil reconstruction and military demobilisation. We are the first donor to the UN Trust Fund for Sierra Leone.

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will place in the Library a copy of the Sandline paper itemised as document 49 dated 2 February in Annex D of the Legg report; if this

document is identical the Sandline planning paper dated 28 January noted in Annex B; and if both documents were viewed by the Legg investigation. [54543]

Mr. Robin Cook: The two references refer to the same document. It was seen by the Legg investigation. The paper in question is not an FCO document and was not given to us on the basis that it would be published. I do not therefore intend to place it in the Library of the House, but I have told the Foreign Affairs Committee that I would be willing to consider any specific request to have access to documents listed in the Annex to the Legg report.

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if the reference to a helicopter in FCO telegram 37 to Abuja relates to aviation operated by Sandline in a military context; and if he will make a statement. [54474]

Mr. Robin Cook: The telegram refers to reports of several helicopter flights carrying Kamajors from Lungi airport and says that the helicopter is assumed to be an MI17. No further information is given about the helicopter or its operators.

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to the Legg report, if he will make a statement on the nature of the work undertaken by Ann Grant of AD(E) in Brussels on 4 to 6 February; when the work was planned; and who organised the work. [54553]

Mr. Robin Cook: Ms Grant was attending, as representative of the UK Presidency of the European Union, a monthly meeting of the Africa Working Group of the Council of the European Union.

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what were the reasons Sir Thomas Legg QC advertised for witnesses for his investigation in national newspapers; what response he gave to Sir Thomas Legg on being informed that such a move was intended; and what was the response achieved from them. [54548]

Mr. Robin Cook: The investigation advertised in order that people outside the public service could contribute any relevant evidence. 35 responses were received. The investigation was entirely independent and I gave no comment to Sir Thomas Legg on its working practices.

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the nature of the random checks undertaken by the Legg Inquiry to verify that all relevant material had successfully been collated. [54475]

Mr. Robin Cook: The random check of the relevant files in the FCO referred to in paragraph 2.12 of the Legg report was conducted by a member of the Secretariat at an early stage in the investigation. This involved a thorough trawl of the records and files held in the relevant registry in Africa Command.

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when Mr. Penfold communicated with staff of Sandline during his visit to Canada and North America at the turn of 1998; and what reports were dispatched to Whitehall in consequence. [54544]

Mr. Robin Cook: Mr. Penfold spent three days in New York with Mr. Flynn, the Foreign Secretary's Special Representative on Sierra Leone, between 14–16 January. While Mr. Penfold was in New York, he telephoned Mr. Spicer to ask whether he had any up-to-date information on the security situation in Sierra Leone. Mr. Penfold sent no reports to London while he was in the USA or Canada.

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the ministers who saw press releases pertaining to SCR1132 *(a)* before and *(b)* after release of such internal FCO documents assessing the effect of the arms embargo on forces opposed to the Sierra Leone coup; and on what dates. [54547]

Mr. Robin Cook: The press line announcing the adoption of UNSCR 1132 was seen at the time by the Minister of State, my hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Central (Mr. Lloyd).

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list those documents requested by the Legg inquiry which (i) had been destroyed, (ii) had been mislaid and (iii) of which no trace in the records existed. [54550]

Mr. Robin Cook: No documents requested by Sir Thomas Legg were unavailable to him for any of the reasons cited.

Mr. David Heath: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to the recommendations of the Legg Inquiry what proposals he has to improve communications between Ministers in his Department. [53976]

Mr. Robin Cook: The Report of the Sierra Leone Arms Investigation contains no findings to suggest that communications between Ministers were unsatisfactory. Nevertheless, guidance issued in the light of the Report covers the processing of papers to and between Ministers.

Immigration

Fiona Mactaggart: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how long applicants *(a)* who are being interviewed in July 1998 and *(b)* who applied in July 1998 have waited, or may expect to wait, for interview in the settlement queues in (i) Islamabad, (ii) Karachi, (iii) New Delhi, (iv) Bombay, (v) Madras, (vi) Colombo, (vii) Lagos, (viii) Abuja, (ix) Moscow and (x) Bogota. [53962]

Mr. Fatchett: Statistics for July from Entry Clearance Posts are not yet available. We have asked the Posts to which my hon. Friend refers to provide the information required as soon as possible. Once the figures are available they will be sent to my hon. Friend in writing.

Persistent Inquirers

Mr. Sanders: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs which of his Department's agencies have procedures to identify persistent inquirers for information. [53947]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: I shall write to the hon. Member shortly and place copies of the letter in the Library.

Lockerbie

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) what recent contacts there have been with *(a)* officials and *(b)* ministers of the Libyan Government on the arrangements for a trial of suspects in the Lockerbie case in The Hague; and if it is his intention that discussions on this issue should continue; [54066]

(2) if he will make a statement on the arrangements which would be acceptable to Her Majesty's Government for a trial of suspects of the Lockerbie bombing to take place in The Hague. [54067]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: I refer the hon. Member to the statement made by my noble Friend the Lord Advocate in another place on 30 July 1998, *Official Report, House of Lords*, column 1618.

UN Budget Deficit

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what options are currently under review to address the UN budget deficit. [54025]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: The best option currently under consideration to address the UN's financial difficulties is the package of financial reform proposals developed by the UK and France and tabled by the EU in New York in January 1996. These comprise full payment of all member states' arrears; revision of the UN Regular Budget and peacekeeping scales of assessment to reflect more closely member states' capacity to pay; and penalties and incentives to encourage prompt payment in future.

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement in respect of the USA's current membership of the UN General Assembly; what dues are currently owed by the United States of America to the UN; and what percentage of total arrears this constitutes. [54024]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: All UN member states, including the US, have the right to be represented on the UN General Assembly's six Main Committees. Those states whose arrears exceed two years' contributions (of which the US is not one) may not vote in the General Assembly. At 30 June the US owed $569 million to the UN Regular Budget and $966 million to UN peacekeeping budgets in respect of prior year arrears and unpaid 1998 dues. This represents 62 per cent. of total unpaid dues to the Regular Budget and 63 per cent. of total unpaid dues to peacekeeping budgets.

Ethiopia and Eritrea (Arms)

Ms Ward: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement in light of the recent press reports on the shipment of arms to Ethiopia and Eritrea. [55186]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: We are aware of reports of shipments of arms from China to Ethiopia, and from Bulgaria to Eritrea on a Ukranian aircraft. We are seeking to establish whether these arms were ordered before or after the border dispute between Ethiopia and Eritrea had broken out.

There are no arms embargoes against either Ethiopia or Eritrea. But we are nevertheless extremely concerned that both countries, two of the poorest in the world, should apparently be seeking to rearm themselves at a time when the OAU, supported by the United Nations and the EU, are engaged in mediation efforts to settle their dispute by peaceful means.

We remind all countries who might be considering supplying arms to either Ethiopia or Eritrea of their responsibility to exercise responsibility in the transfer of conventional arms in line with their international commitments.

Westminster Foundation for Democracy

Ms Ward: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when the Annual report of the Westminster Foundation for Democracy will be available. [55187]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: Copies of the Foundation's Annual Report for 1997/98 have been placed in the libraries of both Houses.

The Foundation received £2,713,650 from the FCO, along with £139,099 from other sources, for its activities in 1997/98. With these funds it supported 256 new projects in 47 countries. It directed most of its funds to supporting democratic institutions in Central and Eastern Europe, the former Soviet Union and Anglophone Africa, and also supported worthwhile projects in other parts of the world. It makes a valuable contribution to the promotion of democracy overseas. Projects have included work with political parties, parliaments, the independent media, trades unions, human rights groups, women's groups and other non-governmental organisations involved in political development.

Landmines

Ms Ward: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when the United Kingdom will ratify the Ottawa Convention banning anti-personnel landmines. [55188]

Mr. Robin Cook: Our instrument of ratification will be deposited with the UN Secretary General in New York today, thus fulfilling our pledge to be among the first forty ratifications and helping to bring the Convention into force.

We have placed in the Library the note accompanying the instrument of ratification, which sets out our understanding that the mere participation in the planning or execution of operations, exercises or other military activity by the United Kingdom's Armed Forces, or individual United Kingdom nationals, conducted in combination with armed forces of States not party to the Ottawa Convention, is not, by itself, assistance, encouragement or inducement for the purposes of Article 1, paragraph 1(c) of the Convention.

Know-How Fund

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) if he will list the UK based recipients of Know-How Fund support for 1997-98 indicating in each case what the funding is provided for; [54820]

(2) what procedures are in place to ensure that Know-How Funding is used effectively. [54821]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for International Development will write to the hon. Member shortly. Copies of the letter will be placed in the Library.

Burma

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what contingency plans the Government have made in the event of a deterioration in the human rights situation in Burma. [53663]

Mr. Fatchett: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave my hon. Friend the Member for Bolton, North East (Mr. Crausby) on 29 July 1998, *Official Report*, column *303*. We have been deeply concerned by the regime's recent interference with Aung San Suu Kyi's freedom of movement and association. I have made clear to the Burmese Foreign Minister on 28 July that such harassment is unacceptable and I called on the Burmese authorities to enter into immediate dialogue with the NLD and other opposition groups. We will continue to monitor the situation closely.

New Agenda Coalition

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on his Department's policy on the recent Irish initiative known as the New Agenda Coalition. [54964]

Mr. Robin Cook: I shall write to my hon. Friend shortly and place copies of the letter in the Library.

Nuclear Export Controls

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his letter of 27 June, what discussions he has had with the Chinese on nuclear export controls with particular reference to Pakistan. [54054]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: FCO officials have raised with China the issue of their nuclear export controls, with particular reference to Pakistan, on numerous occasions, and with some success. In October 1997 China introduced export controls on nuclear items using the same control lists as the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG). The one point on which Chinese controls fall short of NSG standards is that they do not require all nuclear facilities in a country to be subject to International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) safeguards in order to export. They do, however, require the importing facility to be subject to safeguards. This means that they export to Pakistan's safeguarded civil nuclear facilities only, and not to facilities linked to the weapons programme.

In May this year China introduced export controls on dual-use items usable in a nuclear programme. We will continue to work to persuade China to strengthen its conditions of supply on nuclear exports, so that it fully meets the international norm, requiring all facilities in an importing country to be safeguarded.

Comprehensive Spending Review

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) pursuant to paragraph 15.7 of the Comprehensive Spending Review, if he will list those British missions that are being considered for upgrading of their premises; [54568]

(2) if he will list the residential accommodation that is being reviewed under paragraph 15.9 of the Comprehensive Spending Review; [54570]

(3) if he will list those assets that are to be recycled and the value attributable to such assets that gave rise to the £90 million figure in the Comprehensive Spending Review. [54424]

Mr. Fatchett: I refer the hon. Member to the answers I gave to the hon. Member for Spelthorne (Mr. Wilshire) on 21 July 1998, *Official Report*, columns *491–92*.

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will set out, pursuant to chapter 15 of the Comprehensive Spending Review, the method of calculating the number of British jobs secured through foreign direct investment; how many such jobs have been created since 1 May 1997; and how many such jobs have been lost through the withdrawal of foreign direct investment since 1 May 1997. [54571]

Mr. Fatchett: I shall write to the hon. Member shortly and place copies of the letter in the Libraries of the House.

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to paragraph 15.5 of the Comprehensive Spending Review, if he will list the posts that *(a)* are being considered for closure and *(b)* will be strengthened. [54567]

Mr. Fatchett: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given in another place by the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State at the FCO, Baroness Symons, on 29 July 1998, *Official Report, House of Lords*, column 1499.

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to paragraph 15.8 of the Comprehensive Spending Review, if he will list the services and the changes being proposed for firms benefiting commercially from his Department's services. [54569]

Mr. Fatchett: A wide range of overseas trade services are available to companies—some are free of charge, others are chargeable.

Posts abroad and country and sectoral help desks in London deal with initial and some other inquiries free of charge. Published and pre-prepared information is available from DTI free of charge.

Commercial Officers at overseas posts produce tailor-made reports for UK companies on request. Reports can include basic market information, identification and assessment of potential agents/distributors, customised local contact lists, market assessments for a companies product or service, advice on market approach, information about potential local business contacts and general information on overseas investment opportunities. Some posts can arrange a programme of visits to potential business contacts and offer support during the visit.

Charges for these services are based on the number of hours research required for the inquiry and currently stand as follows:

	£
Information held by Commercial Sections	50
Up to 4 hours research	100
4–8 hours research	200
8–12 hours research	300
12–24 hours research	600
24–48 hours research	1,200
Each additional 24 hours research	600

Services are also available to help publicise new products and services abroad. A professionally written article can be targeted at trade journals and other media in chosen markets by overseas posts. The cost is £100 for an article in one chosen market and £50 for additional markets.

Besides these services, grant support is available from the DTI for trade missions, trade fairs and seminars abroad. Export Development Counsellors located in most Business Link offices in the UK can help companies develop an export strategy. Their services are free or chargeable depending on the level of help required.

Embassies

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) what are the total costs of the new Embassy in Berlin and the date of completion; [54558]

(2) what is the cost of the refurbishment of the Embassy in Cairo and the date of completion; [54551]

(3) what are the total costs of the new Embassy in Moscow and the date of completion. [54559]

Mr. Fatchett: I shall write to the hon. Member shortly and place copies of the letter in the Libraries of the House.

Staff Secondments

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list his Department's staff on secondment to other Government departments and the periods they are spending on secondment. [54556]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: As of 1 July 1998, 97 employees at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office are on secondment to other government departments. These include:

Department of Trade and Industry
Cabinet Office
Ministry of Defence
Prime Minister's Office
Buckingham Palace
DFID (includes Aid posts in London and overseas)
St. James' Palace
HM Treasury
House of Lords
Northern Ireland Office
Department of Health

The periods of secondment vary between 1 and 4 years.

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many people working for his Department have been seconded from other organisations; for what periods they will be seconded; and what areas they are working in. [54421]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: As of 1 July 1998, there are 270 people from other organisations working in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) servicing in London and at Diplomatic Posts overseas. The periods of secondment vary from 2 to 4½ years, depending on where they are serving.

Officers seconded to the FCO work in the wide range of jobs. Overseas, these include jobs in Immigration, economic, agriculture and science and technology.

Departmental Estate

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list all properties *(a)* owned and *(b)* rented or leased by his Department outside the United Kingdom, the purposes for which they are designated and the annual running costs for each property. [54443]

Mr. Fatchett: I shall write to the hon. Member shortly and place copies of the letter in the Libraries of the House.

France (Death of Britons)

Mr. Fallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps are being taken to press the French authorities to bring to justice those responsible for the deaths of British subjects in France. [54680]

Mr. Fatchett: I shall write to the hon. Member shortly and place copies of the letter in the Libraries of the House.

Uganda

Mr. Fitzpatrick: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the position of the Acholi people in Uganda. [54653]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: I shall write to my hon. Friend shortly and place copies of the letter in the Libraries of the House.

Non-Governmental Organisations

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many of his Department's officials are currently seconded to non-Governmental organisations; and for what periods. [54422]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: As of 1 July 1998, there are 12 private sector secondments. In addition, two officers are currently working for Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs). The periods of secondment vary between 6 months and 2 years.

Vehicle Services (PFI)

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list those

contracts for vehicle services provision that have been let under the PFI initiative and the companies providing the service. [54557]

Mr. Fatchett: The Foreign and Commonwealth Office have the following contracts for the provision and management of the overseas transport fleets, which have been let under the PFI initiative:

Rolls-Royce Motor Cars Ltd.

Rover Group Ltd. and ABN AMRO Lease Holding N.V.

The services under the terms of these contracts are provided by Rolls-Royce Motor Cards Ltd, the Rover Group and Lease Plan International, a Division of ABN AMRO Lease Holding.

Women Employers

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many women there were in senior grades in his Department on *(a)* 1 November 1997 and *(b)* 1 May 1998; and how many there are currently. [54555]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: There are currently 34 women in the Senior Management Structure of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. The figure for 1 November 1997 and for 1 May 1998 was 32.

These figures include three officers who have not yet taken up their appointments and three on Special Unpaid Leave who retain the right to return to the department.

Bill Payment

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what percentage of bills were paid by his Department within 30 days between October 1997 and June 1998. [54552]

Mr. Fatchett: Between October 1997 and end-June 1998 the Foreign and Commonwealth Office paid 97.26 per cent. of bills on time. During the same period the FCO's sole executive agency, Wilton Park, paid 95 per cent. of bills on time.

Consultancies

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the external consultancy contracts that have been awarded by his Department since 1 May 1997, and the companies to which they have been awarded and the scope of the projects. [54423]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: External Consultancy contracts awarded by the FCO since 1 May 1997 are set out below.

A Management Framework Agreement has recently been signed with five management consultancy firms: BDO Stoy Hayward, Pricewaterhouse Coopers, Ernst & Young, PA Consulting Group and Pannell Kerr Forster. This will enable simpler and quicker tendering procedures saving time and money.

Ministerial Meetings

Mr. David Heath: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs with what frequency and regularity meetings are held between Ministers within his Department. [53977]

Mr. Robin Cook: Ministers meet whenever necessary to address specific issues of policy, and hold collective discussion of strategic issues from time to time.

Royal Family

Mr. David Heath: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the cost to public funds for each official visit made by a member of the Royal Family outside the immediate Royal Family in each of the last three years; and what criteria determine which such visits are official visits. [54894]

Mr. Robin Cook: I shall write to the hon. Member shortly and place copies of the letter in the Libraries of the House.

East Timor

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on Indonesia's withdrawal of troops from East Timor. [54616]

Mr. Fatchett: I shall write to the my hon. Friend shortly and place copies of the letter in the Libraries of the House.

Asia (Financial Crisis)

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the impact of the financial crisis in Asia on the military modernisation plans of *(a)* Malaysia, *(b)* Thailand and *(c)* Indonesia. [54651]

Mr. Fatchett: I shall write to the hon. Member shortly and place copies of the letter in the Libraries of the House.

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the consequences for the UK arms industry of the financial crisis in Asia. [54652]

Mr. Fatchett: I shall write to the hon. Member shortly and place copies of the letter in the Libraries of the House.

Drug Gangs (Latin America)

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what data his Department has collated on the purchase of advanced military hardware by drug gangs in Latin America; and what steps the Government are taking to prevent UK-manufactured arms from reaching these gangs. [54648]

Mr. Fatchett: I shall write to the hon. Member shortly and place copies of the letter in the Libraries of the House.

Visas

Fiona Mactaggart: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what was the waiting period between interviews and application for settlement

in each category in the most recent period for which figures are available in *(a)* Islamabad, *(b)* Karachi, *(c)* New Dehli, *(d)* Mumbai, *(e)* Calcutta, *(f)* Madras, *(g)* Dhaka, *(h)* Colombo, *(i)* Lagos and *(j)* Moscow; what was the average delay at each post between application and decision on visas which have been granted in each category leading to settlement in the last month for which figures are available; and what estimates he has made of the waiting time in each post for a decision. [54944]

Mr. Fatchett: I shall write to my hon. Friend shortly and place copies of the letter in the Libraries of the House.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Overseas Visits

Mr. Wilshire: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if he will list those who have accompanied (i) him and (ii) his departmental Ministers on overseas visits since 1 January indicating *(a)* the venue of the visit, *(b)* the purpose of the visit, *(c)* the names of those involved, *(d)* the job of those involved, *(e)* the reasons why they were included in the visit and *(f)* the cost to public funds. [53834]

Mr. Chris Smith *[holding answer 30 July 1998]:* The details requested are laid out in the accompanying table.

Date	*Minister*	*Venue*	*Purpose*	*Officials*	*Total cost including Ministers £*
January 1998	Mr. M. Fisher	Stockholm	Opening city of culture	1 official	1,315.32
January 1998	Mr. C. Smith	Cannes	Midem music festival	none	1,077.26
January 1998	Mr. M. Fisher	Brussels	European committee on culture, youth, education and the media	1 official	689.07
January 1998	Mr. T. Clarke	Los Angeles	Sundance film festival and promotion of British film	1 official 1 special adviser	17,859.11
January 1998	Mr. M. Fisher	Copenhagen	Launch of EU presidency/bacon exhibition	1 official	1,233.20
January 1998	Mr. T. Banks	Brussels	Attend intergroup meeting	2 officials	1,004.55
January 1998	Mr. M. Fisher	Brussels	EU conference	1 official	586.77
February 1998	Mr. T. Banks	Tokyo/Seoul/Bangkok	Winter olympics/campaign for 2006	1 official	11,156.94
March 1998	Mr. T. Clarke	Berlin	Ministerial conference on tourism	1 official	1,682.10
March 1998	Mr. T. Banks	Paraguay/Argentina	World cup campaign for 2006 with FA	1 official	8,662.90
March 1998	Mr. M. Fisher	Stockholm	Global economic affairs conference	1 official	2,065.14
April 1998	Mr. T. Banks	Quatar	World cup campaign for 2006 with FA	1 official	9,150.58
April 1998	Mr. M. Fisher	Brussels	Launch euro theatre festival 1998	1 official	636.90
May 1998	Mr. T. Clarke	Cannes	File festival and promotion of British film	2 officials	3,142.44
May 1998	Mr. C. Smith	Cannes	Film festival and promotion of British film	2 officials 1 special adviser	'3,414.41
May 1998	Mr. M. Fisher	Brussels	European union cultural council	none	618.72
June 1998	Mr. T. Banks	Paris	European sports ministers meeting	1 official	467.00
June 1998	Mr. C. Smith	Lens	World cup—England v Colombia	none	292.50
June 1998	Mr. M. Fisher	Portugal	Expo 98 with HRH Prince Charles	1 official	1,952.03
June 1998	Mr. T. Clarke	Hong Kong	Representative at opening of new airport	1 official	10,391.45
June 1998	Mr. M. Fisher	Ottawa	Canada: Round table on international cooperation on cultural property	1 official	2,788.31
July 1998	Mr. T. Banks	Paris	Reception at French embassy by FIFA	1 official	777.94
Total	—	—	—	—	80,991.64

' Denotes full figures not yet available

Departmental Staff

Mr. Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how staff numbers in his Department have varied between 1 May 1997 and 31 March 1998. [48880]

Mr. Chris Smith: Staff numbers in the Department for Culture, Media and Sport have increased from 360 on 1 May 1997 to 373 on 31 March 1998.

BBC

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (1) what was the cost of advertising for recent appointments to the Board of Governors of the BBC; [53271]

(2) what account was taken of the political affiliations of persons recently appointed to the Board of Governors of the BBC; [53263]

(3) what representations he received from the Chairman of the BBC about the recent appointments of *(a)* the Deputy Chairman and *(b)* other governors of the BBC; [53264]

(4) what political affiliations were disclosed by the successful candidates during the recent selection process for appointments to the Board of Governors of the BBC; [53262]

(5) what criteria were used in determining recent appointments to the Board of Governors of the BBC; [53265]

(6) what discussions he held with the Union of Communications Workers about recent appointments to the Board of Governors of the BBC. [53260]

Mr. Chris Smith *[holding answer 29 July 1998]:* The process for appointing the BBC Vice-Chairman and two Governors was based on the principles set down by the independent Commissioner for Public Appointments.

Candidates had to have, or be able to acquire quickly, the ability to represent the interests of BBC viewers and listeners and of the public at large; an appreciation of the requirements of operating as a board and the management of a large and complex public service and commercial undertaking; sensitivity to and the ability to keep in touch with public opinion on broadcasting issues; and the ability to work in an effective and collegiate manner with other Governors and the senior management of the BBC. Candidates for the position of Vice-Chairman were, in addition, expected to have the qualifications and experience to deputise for the Chairman and possess sufficient influence, experience and weight to act as an effective bridge between the BBC and Parliament. Candidates for the position of the Governor who chairs the English National Forum were expected to have knowledge of the English Regions and be willing to travel extensively within England. These were the primary criteria for selection. Considerations such as the political balance of the Board of Governors and the overall gender/ethnic minority representation were also taken into account, but were not determining factors.

The cost of advertising for recent BBC Governor appointments was £40,486.98.

All candidates for appointment to major public bodies are asked to provide information on significant political activity in the past five years. This reflects the guidance set down by the Commissioner for Public Appointments and is used for overall monitoring purposes only. The information is confidential.

Role specifications for the Vice-Chairmanship and the two Governor positions were agreed with the BBC. The BBC Chairman was invited to suggest names for consideration alongside respondents to the advertisement, and to comment on the shortlist for each position. The Chairman was a member of the selection panel that interviewed candidates for the Vice-Chairmanship, and also interviewed the final shortlist of candidates for the two Governor positions. The final decision on all three appointments was taken by Her Majesty the Queen in Council, on the advice of the Prime Minister.

I held no discussions with the Union of Communication Workers about the appointments.

Departmental Assets

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what plans he has to dispose of assets held by his Department. [46451]

Mr. Chris Smith *[holding answer 18 June 1998]:* Apart from the usual disposal of obsolete furniture and IT equipment, my Department has no plans to dispose of any assets at present, although I am considering options for the future of the land to the north of the British Library at St. Pancras and of 6 Burlington Gardens, formerly the Museum of Mankind.

Dance and Drama Students

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what representations he has received about the training of dance and drama students; and if he will make a statement. [52652]

Mr. Chris Smith *[holding answer 27 July 1998]:* During the last few months my Department has received a number of letters on this subject, largely focusing on the issue of funding. I am concerned that talented students should have access to the best possible training and my Department is presently working in conjunction with DfEE to establish a long term solution, to be in place when the Arts Council of England's Interim Funding Scheme expires.

Millennium Youth Games

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what plans the Minister has for the creation of a national millennium youth games in the UK. [52720]

Mr. Chris Smith: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave to his question about Millennium Sport Competitions on 28 July 1998, *Official Report*, column *162*.

Millennium (Christianity)

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what arrangement he is making for commemorating the Christian element of the millennium. [53722]

Mr. Chris Smith *[holding answer 30 July 1998]:* The Christian Churches in the UK have a well-advanced programme of events to mark the Millennium, including a special programme of celebrations at Pentecost 2000. My Department is working closely with the Christian Churches and other faiths, through the Lambeth Consultation Group, to ensure that the importance of the year 2000 as a Christian anniversary is reflected more generally in the celebrations. The Group has produced guidelines for events organisers on how Millennium activities can be made relevant and accessible to Christians and other members of faiths. Members of the Group are also working with my Department to draw up plans for special Millennium Church Services on the first Sunday of the year 2000. With the assistance of the Lambeth Group, the New Millennium Experience Company is working to ensure that the Christian significance of the year 2000 is reflected in the Dome at Greenwich and its associated national programme of activities.

Film Industry (Ethnic Minorities)

Mr. Corbett: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what steps he is taking to ensure that talented people from ethnic minorities participate in the British film industry. [54050]

Mr. Chris Smith: The Action Committee taking forward the recommendations of the Film Policy Review Group includes ethnic minority representation and will be considering a paper later in the year on the question of improving opportunities for ethnic minority film makers. The British Film Institute is committed to improving access for all to moving image culture and has recently run a number of schemes aimed at new black writers and has also established a new post dedicated to black and minority film cultures. It is encouraging to note that to date more than £10 million of National Lottery money has

been awarded by the Arts Council of England to films with black or Asian involvement, representing almost 19 per cent. of the total funds allocated.

Persistent Inquirers

Mr. Sanders: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport which of his Department's agencies have procedures to identify persistent inquirers for information. [53952]

Mr. Chris Smith: The Royal Parks Agency is the only Agency of my Department. The Agency does not have procedures for identifying persistent inquirers for information.

Correspondence

Mr. Sanders: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what is his Department's average response time to correspondence from members of the public; and how such response times are monitored. [48643]

Mr. Chris Smith: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary, Office of Public Service on 14 July 1998, *Official Report*, column *159*.

Sky Television

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many meetings Ministers in his Department have had with BSkyB since 1 February; and on what matters. [54394]

Mr. Chris Smith: Since 1 February DCMS Ministers have met BSkyB on four occasions, covering a range of broadcasting and related issues. In addition, representatives of BSkyB along with other industry players attended the European Audiovisual Conference in Birmingham on 6 April which I attended.

Departmental Publications

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many of his Department's publications have been made available in *(a)* Braille, *(b)* audio tape and *(c)* large print in 1997–98; and what percentage of the total number of publications this represents. [54267]

Mr. Chris Smith: In 1997–98 the Departmental produced the White Paper 'The People's Lottery' in both Braille and large print.

This represented 3 per cent. of the total number of publications produced.

Green Transport

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, pursuant to his answer of 1 April 1998, *Official Report*, column *524*, on departmental transport arrangements, what progress he has made on the development of green transport plans. [54107]

Mr. Chris Smith: My Department is working towards the target announced in the White Paper "A New Deal for Transport", that all headquarters buildings and main buildings occupied by Executive Agencies and Government Offices for the Regions should have green transport plans by March 1999 and all other key buildings by March 2000. The Department provides bicycle storage, and has only very limited car parking spaces. We are reviewing the position on business travel and business deliveries.

Cycling

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what proportion of the employees of his Department and of the employees of each agency for which he is responsible cycle to work; and what measures he plans to increase that proportion. [52677]

Mr. Chris Smith *[holding answer 28 July 1998]:* Between 1 per cent. and 2 per cent. of the Department's staff currently cycle to work. The equivalent figure for the Royal Parks Agency is 5.6 per cent.

To encourage cycling to work, parking space is provided and this could be increased if necessary. There are showers and changing rooms at the Department's main building, 2–4 Cockspur Street, and the same is planned for a second building, Grove House. Staff who wish to buy bicycles can apply for an advance of salary of up to £300 towards the cost of purchase.

Further measures to increase the proportion of employees cycling to work are being considered as part of the development of green transport plans for buildings occupied by the Department and the Royal Parks Agency.

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what parking facilities for cycles exist at each office or site for which his Department is responsible and for each agency for which he is responsible. [52676]

Mr. Chris Smith *[holding answer 28 July 1998]:* Secure parking for bicycles is provided at Grove House, for the benefit of the Department's staff at its offices at 2–4 Cockspur Street, Grove House, and Haymarket House. Parking space is also available at the Government Art Collection and at the properties occupied by the Royal Parks Agency.

Tobacco Sponsorship

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if he will include within the remit of the Tobacco Sponsorship Task Force assistance to the arts. [52516]

Mr. Banks *[holding answer 29 July 1998]:* I have no plans to do so. I have set up the Task Force to address the impact of the European Union Tobacco Advertising Directive on sport.

Regional Theatres

Mr. Rendel: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (1) if he will list box office income, as a percentage of operating costs, among all regional producing theatres in England and Wales; [50606]

(2) if he will list box office income, as a percentage of operating costs, among the producing theatres in the region covered by Southern Arts. [50605]

Mr. Chris Smith *[holding answer 14 July 1998]:* Figures for 'box office income' are not available. The following figures for core earned income as a percentage

of operating costs are taken from the data received as part of the Arts Council of England's Annual Survey of Regularly Funded Organisations for 1996–97.

(a) 76 per cent. for all regional producing theatres in England

(b) 94 per cent. for all producing theatres in the region covered by Southern Arts.

Notes:

1. The Survey uses 'core earned income' which includes box office, but also all other forms of *earned* income.

2. Operating costs are 'staff costs' plus 'overheads'.

Special Advisers

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many special advisers, political advisers and other political appointees are working in his Department; at what annual cost to the public purse including recruitment costs, salaries, pensions and National Insurance contributions; and what was the position in the last full year of the last Government. [43320]

Mr. Chris Smith: For details of the numbers of Special Advisers and the annual cost of employing them, I refer the hon. Member to the answer my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister gave to the hon. Member for Woodspring (Dr. Fox) on 11 June 1998, *Official Report*, column *664*.

National Insurance contributions are excluded from this figure but are paid under the same rules and at the same rates as for other civil servants. Information on the paybill costs for the two Special Advisers within DCMS and other individual Departments is not provided in order to protect the privacy of the individuals concerned.

Information on the costs of employing Special Advisers in previous years was given by my right hon. Friend, the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster to the hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce) on 25 November 1997, *Official Report*, columns *472–73*.

Cricket

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (1) what new initiatives he has taken to promote cricket in schools at a junior level; [52631]

(2) what assessment he has made of the advantages of locating the national cricket centre of excellence in the North West; [54661]

(3) how many women's cricket leagues there are in England. [54702]

Mr. Banks: I regret that it has not been possible to provide an answer before the summer recess. I shall therefore write to my hon. Friend and place a copy of my reply in the Libraries of the House.

Millennium Celebrations

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what national sporting tournaments he has planned in order to celebrate the millennium. [52606]

Mr. Banks: I regret that it has not been possible to provide an answer before the summer recess. I shall therefore write to my hon. Friend and place a copy of my reply in the Libraries of the House.

Television Channels

Mr. Casale: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what steps his Department is taking to improve compliance with the Television without Frontiers quota requirements. [52141]

Mr. Chris Smith *[holding answer 30 July 1998]:* I regret that it has not been possible to provide an answer before the summer recess. I shall therefore write to my hon. Friend and place a copy of my reply in the Libraries of the House.

Mr. Casale: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (1) how many UK licensed television channels met the quota *(a)* for European works in Article 4 and *(b)* for independent productions in Article 5 of the Television Without Frontiers directive; [52139]

(2) which UK licensed television channels had a lower proportion of *(a)* European originating programmes and *(b)* independent productions in 1996 than 1995. [52140]

Mr. Chris Smith *[holding answer 30 July 1998]:* In April 1998, the European Commission published its third monitoring report of Member States' compliance with the quota provisions under Articles 4 and 5 of the EC Broadcasting Directive. The report covers the period 1995–96. An Explanatory Memorandum was submitted to Parliament on 5 May, and copies of the Commission's report have been placed in the Library of the House.

The report showed an upward progression in the proportion of European and independently produced programming transmitted by UK broadcasters. In 1996, the latest year for which data are publicly available, 40 of the 80 UK-licensed channels subject to the quota provisions met the requirements for European works and 49 met the requirement for independent productions. The following tables, derived from the European Commission's third monitoring report, list those channels that had a lower proportion of European works and independent productions in 1996 than 1995.

Channels which had a lower proportion of European works in 1996 than 1995

Percentage

Channel	*1995*	*1996*
Asianet	10	7
BBC1	68	67
Bravo	54	47
Carlton Select	91	80
EBN	90	80
ITV	71	70
Kindernet CV	90	77
MED TV	99	78
Movie Channel	18	17
Muslim Television Ahmadiyya	94	81
Nickelodeon	27	25
Parliamentary Channel	100	95
Sky Movies	25	13
Sky Movies Gold	27	20
TLC	67	50
TV 1000 Sverige AB	36	32

Channels which had a lower proportion of European works in 1996 than 1995 [1]

Percentage

Channel	*1995*	*1996*
UK Gold	54	51
UK Living	66	54
VT4	32	27

[1] Article 4 of the EC Broadcasting Directive requires Member States to ensure, where practicable and by appropriate means, that broadcasters reserve a majority of their transmission time for European works, excluding the time appointed to news, sports events, games, advertising and teletext services

Channels which had a lower proportion of independent productions in 1996 than 1995 [1]

Percentage

Channel	*1995*	*1996*
Asianet	9	1
BBC Prime	9	4
BBC World	11	7
BBC2	21	20
Disney Channel UK	6	5
ITV	26	24
Kindernet CV	78	63
Landmark Travel Channel	42	41
MED TV	74	47
Movie Channel	11	7
MTV Central	62	60
MTV North	62	60
MTV South	62	60
Paramount Comedy Channel	7	3
Parliamentary Channel	75	25
S4C	76	74
Sky Movies	10	5
Sky Movies Gold	16	12
Sky One	10	4
Sky Travel Channel	17	13
TLC	45	35
TV3 Norway	18	12
TV3 Sweden	26	22
UK Living	66	54
V11–1	98	88
VT4	26	18
Zee TV	2	0

[1] Article 5 of the EC Broadcasting Directive requires Member States to ensure, where practicable and by appropriate means, that broadcasters reserve at least 10 per cent. of their transmission time, excluding the time appointed to news, sports events, games, advertising and teletext services, for independent European works, or alternatively, at the discretion of the Member State, at least 10 per cent. of their programming budget

Departmental Research

Mr. Fabricant: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if he will list the cost of all research undertaken by his Department since May 1997, excluding the cost of green papers and other public consultation documents drafted by his officials; and if he will list in each case the organisations which undertook that research. [52705]

Mr. Chris Smith *[holding answer 29 July 1998]:* I regret that is has not been possible to provide an answer before the summer recess. I shall therefore write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my reply in the Libraries of the House.

Public Appointment

Ms Ward: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if he will list the public appointments for which he is responsible indicating the dates of *(a)* appointment and *(b)* retirement for those currently in post; and what proposals he has to widen the range of individuals who will be considered for such appointments in future. [54892]

Mr. Chris Smith: I regret that it has not been possible to provide an answer before the summer recess. I shall therefore write to my hon. Friend and place a copy of my reply in the Libraries of the House.

BBC Governors

Sir Raymond Powell: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (1) who were the members of the advisory panel for public appointments which considered the short-listed candidates for the two BBC governor positions; and who were the independent members; [54889]

(2) if the Chairman of the BBC Governors is normally a member of a selection panel interviewing for the post of vice-chairman of the governors; [54888]

(3) what changes were made to the final short list of candidates to the two governor positions after it had been seen by Sir Christopher Bland and the head of the Department's Broadcasting and Media Group; [54891]

(4) if the Chairman of the BBC Governors informed the existing governors that he was to be involved in the interviewing of new governors; [54887]

(5) for what reasons Sir Christopher Bland and the head of the Department's Broadcasting and Media group were shown a final short list of candidates for the two governor positions. [54890]

Mr. Chris Smith: I regret that it has not been possible to provide an answer before the summer recess. I shall therefore write to my hon. Friend and place a copy of my reply in the Libraries of the House.

Departmental Vehicles

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how much his Department expects to spend in each year from 1998–99 to 2000–01 on vehicle replacements. [54992]

Mr. Chris Smith: I regret that it has not been possible to provide an answer before the summer recess. I shall therefore write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my reply in the Libraries of the House.

D'Oyly Carte

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what steps he has taken to secure the future of the D'Oyly Carte Opera Company. [53748]

Mr. Chris Smith *[holding answer 30 July 1998]:* D'Oyly Carte is an independent company, responsible to its Board and backers for the operational decisions it takes. Public funding for the arts is channelled through the Arts Council of England who take decisions on the funding of individual arts organisations without the

involvement of Ministers. Ministers have, however, drawn to the attention of the Arts Council the representations made in Parliament on this issue.

Sports Hooligans

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what discussions he has had with sports governing bodies on measures for dealing with sports supporters who bring their sport, teams or country into disrepute. [53596]

Mr. Banks *[holding answer 30 July 1998]:* The Government deplore all acts of hooliganism at sporting events. I know from my regular dealings with sports governing bodies that they share this sentiment. The actions of thugs and hooligans who constitute a tiny minority detract from the good behaviour of the vast majority who are sport's true supporters. Of course, the full weight of the criminal law can be used to deal with incidents of serious disorder at sports grounds but increasingly sports organisers are tightening their own rules in response to bad behaviour.

Employees Over 60

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many *(a)* men and *(b)* women aged over 60 years were employed by (i) his Department and (ii) his Department's agencies on 1 January. [53066]

Mr. Chris Smith *[holding answer 30 July 1998]:* On 1 January my Department employed four women, aged over 60. No staff over 60 were employed by the Royal Parks Agency on that date.

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many *(a)* men and *(b)* women employed by (1) his Department and (2) his Department's agencies have contracts of employment which permit them to retire after their 60th birthday. [53042]

Mr. Chris Smith *[holding answer 30 July 1998]:* No staff in my Department have terms and conditions of employment which permit them to retire after their 60th birthday. However, staff may be retained beyond age 60 if there is an exceptional need for their services. In the Royal Parks Agency one man and two women have contracts which specifically allow them to work beyond 60 subject to the needs of the Agency, continued good health and efficient performance. These are reviewed annually.

Non-departmental Public Bodies

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if he will list the non-departmental public bodies in existence on 1 May 1997 that *(a)* have been disbanded, *(b)* will be disbanded in the next 12 months, *(c)* have had their functions transferred to (i) another non-departmental public body and (ii) a democratically elected body, *(d)* have been renamed but continue to perform a similar role and *(e)* have been unchanged; if he will indicate in (c) (ii) the relevant successor body; what new non-departmental public bodies have been established since 1 May 1997; and how many non-departmental public bodies his Department currently is responsible for. [53857]

Mr. Chris Smith *[holding answer 30 July 1998]:* The answer is as follows:

(a) None

(b) None

(c) (i) None, (ii) None

(d) Treasure Valuation Committee (formerly the Treasure Trove Reviewing Committee)[1]

New Millennium Experience Company (formerly Millennium Central Ltd.)[2]

(e) Details of all other NDPBs in existence on 1 May 1997 sponsored by this department are listed in "Public Bodies 1997".

The following NDPBs have been established since 1 May 1997:

(i) National Endowment for Science, Technology and the Arts

(ii) New Opportunities Fund

(iii) Football Taskforce

(iv) Historic Royal Palaces (formerly the Historic Royal Palaces Agency).

[1] The Treasure Trove Reviewing Committee was reconstituted as the Treasure Valuation Committee in September as a result of the Treasure Act 1996.

[2] Millennium Central Ltd. was reconstituted as the New Millennium Experience Company following the review of the Millennium Dome Project by the Government during May and June 1997.

My Department is responsible for 54 public bodies which include executive and advisory NDPBs and public corporations.

Ancient Monuments Laboratory

Mr. Garnier: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, pursuant to his answer of 29 June 1998, *Official Report*, column 59, (1) if he will request the Chief Executive of English Heritage to answer questions 47396, 43400 and 47397 tabled by the hon. Member for the City of York (Mr. Bayley) on 24 June; [53719]

(2) what discussions he has held with the Chief Executive of English Heritage about the proposed relocation of its Ancient Monuments Laboratory to Fort Cumberland, Portsmouth, with reference to *(a)* potential job losses, *(b)* the accuracy of the figures in the Chief Executive's letter dated 21 July to the hon. Member for the City of York (Mr. Bayley) and *(c)* the need to consult widely before relocating. [53608]

Mr. Banks: I regret that it has not been possible to provide an answer before the summer recess. I shall therefore write to the hon. and learned Member and place a copy of my reply in the Libraries of the House.

DEFENCE

Overseas Travel

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his estimate of the cost of Ministerial overseas travel in his Department in *(a)* 1995–96, *(b)* 1996–97 and *(c)* 1997–98 to date. [26638]

Mr. Spellar *[holding answer 5 February 1998]:* I regret that it has not been possible to provide the full details requested in the hon. Member's question before

now. I will write to the hon. Member in due course and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Correspondence

Mr. Ian Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans his Department has to correspond electronically with *(a)* hon. Members and *(b)* members of the public. [49848]

Mr. Spellar: I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Biological Warfare

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what assessment his Department has made since 1990 of the implications of information being exchanged between Libya and the biological warfare programme organised by South Africa's former apartheid regime; what were the conclusions of this assessment; when this assessment was started and finished; what action has been taken in the light of this assessment; and if he will make a statement; [53088]

(2) what assessment his Department has made of the implications of the extent and nature of the biological warfare programme organised by South Africa's former apartheid regime, what were the conclusions of this assessment; when this assessment was started and finished; what action has been taken in the light of this assessment; and if he will make a statement. [53087]

Mr. Spellar: A thorough assessment of South Africa's biological warfare programme was made as part of the continuous process by which the UK Government monitor the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. I am withholding further details under Exemption 1 of the Code of Practice for Access to Government Information, relating to Defence, Security and International relations.

Gulf War

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what percentage of British service personnel deployed to the Gulf in 1998 refused to take anti-anthrax injections; for what reasons such injections are currently voluntary; and if he plans to make such injections compulsory. [50001]

Mr. George Robertson: On 3 March this year, the Ministry of Defence announced that UK Service personnel and MOD civilians posted to the Gulf region were being offered immunisation against anthrax. As of 13 July, our records showed that 4,482 UK Service and MOD personnel have been offered immunisation and 1,469 are recorded as having commenced a course of anthrax immunisation. Hence an estimated 67 per cent. of personnel offered anthrax immunisation have declined to accept it. The level of uptake appears to be related to where an individual is serving and may be based on his or her personnel judgment as to the threat they personally face or faced. For example, 66 per cent. of personnel who were offered their first vaccination whilst serving in Kuwait have chosen to be vaccinated, but of personnel who were offered their first vaccination whilst serving on RN ships in the Gulf only 18 per cent. have chosen to accept.

We consider Immunisation to be vitally important for the protection of UK Service personnel against disease, in the context of public health threats as well as defence against biological warfare agents. At present, MOD policy is that immunisation for both purposes is voluntary, on the basis of informed consent. However, the means of protecting our personnel against such threats are continually reviewed and updated in the light of changing circumstances.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 29 June 1998, *Official Report*, column *7*, what estimate he has made of the numbers, breeds and species of animals required at Porton Down for the experiments relating to Gulf War Syndrome; how many experiments involving animals will be required; and what representations he has received concerning the experiments. [50625]

Mr. Doug Henderson: I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

DERA

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the qualifications held by senior civil servants which are relevant to their duties in the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency. [52047]

Mr. Spellar: This is a matter for the Chief Executive of the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency. I have asked the Chief Executive to write to my hon. Friend.

Letter from John Chisholm to Dr. Ian Gibson, dated 31 July 1998:

I have been asked to reply to your question about qualifications held by senior civil servants relevant to their duties in the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency (DERA).

Senior civil servants employed in DERA are assessed and appointed against the criteria applied across Government, which embrace experience, competence and, on initial recruitment, appropriate academic and professional qualifications.

In addition, DERA's specialist staff generally have one or more of a wide spectrum of scientific, engineering and other degrees, about half at PhD level. The majority are also either members or fellows of prestigious learned and professional institutions. A number also hold visiting Professorships.

I hope this is helpful.

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what redundancies have *(a)* taken place and *(b)* are pending in the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency. [52045]

Mr. Spellar: Since DERA was formed in 1995, there have been 878 redundancies, of which 65 were compulsory. At present there are 13 members of staff in a surplus position who might be made redundant if suitable alternative employment cannot be found.

As a result of the outcome of the review of the DERA's land ranges, announced today, a further reduction of 291 jobs is planned. The implementation of the reduction is dependent on the outcome of the detailed consultation with staff and Trades Unions but will certainly involve some redundancies.

Mr. McWilliam: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement about the future of DERA's land ranges at Eskmeals, Shoeburyness and Pendine. [55200]

Mr. Spellar: The initial period of consultation on the second stage of the review to address the long term future of DERA's land ranges is now complete. In order to maintain the necessary facilities, and to keep the affordable within projected income, we have decided to concentrate as much of the test and evaluation work as possible at Eskmeals and to use the ranges at Shoeburyness and Pendine only as required. The proposals put forward in January have been modified slightly in the light of the consultation process, with the retention of 6 additional jobs at the range at Shoeburyness and 10 at Pendine, and the loss of 20 jobs at Eskmeals. Plans for the Environmental Test Centre and demilitarisation facilities at Shoeburyness are unchanged. The planned figures are shown in the following table:

	Staff levels		
Site	*Current*	*Future*	*Difference*
Shoeburyness			
Range	182	31	−151
Environmental Test Centre	69	34	−35
Demilitarisations	72	72	—
Pendine	115	30	−85
Eskmeals	140	120	−20
Total	578	287	−291

The implementation of these measures will be phased to ensure that customer requirements are still met during the process. It is anticipated that most of the changes will have taken place by April 1999, though the exact timing is dependent on the work programme and on the completion of the next stage of detailed consultation with staff and Trades Unions.

Submarines

Mr. Alan Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence on how many occasions permission has been *(a)* granted, *(b)* deferred and *(c)* refused to lift submarines on the shiplift at Faslane; and if he will make a statement. [52167]

Mr. Spellar: The Clyde Naval Base Shiplift has been used to lift submarines on 15 occasions. Of these, 13 have been on VANGUARD Class SSBNs and 2 on SSNs. No planned or unplanned lifts have been refused permission. The shiplift returned to operational use in June 1998 having been withdrawn from service from October 1997 to March 1998 to allow modification to the platform rails. Two dockings planned in this period were deferred. Docking dates frequently change from a variety of reasons, not directly linked to the Shiplift. The docking programme is optimised for submarine operational commitments, for which SSBNs have the priority, the tasking of submarine maintenance and repair staff on other priority tasks, and the maintenance requirements of the shiplift.

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the estimated cost of each of the Astute class submarines currently on order. [53760]

Mr. George Robertson: The total cost of procuring the first three Astute Class submarines is expected to be around £2 billion. This includes design, build and some in-service support as a package.

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) if he will make a statement on his Department's future plans for the storage of spent submarine reactor cores at BNFL Sellafield; [54080]

(2) what was the average running cost of transporting used submarine reactor cores in *(a)* 1986, *(b)* 1991 and *(c)* 1996. [54084]

Mr. Doug Henderson: I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the locations of each used submarine reactor core. [54096]

Mr. Spellar: I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) how much his Department has spent to date on the new fuel transport flasks for the transport of submarine reactor cores; and what he estimates the total cost of this project will be; [54082]

(2) if he will make a statement on progress being made towards introducing the new fuel transport flasks for the transport of submarine reactor cores. [54083]

Mr. Spellar: Good progress is being made towards introducing the new used core transport package flasks for the transport of spent submarine reactor cores at the end of 1998. Manufacture of the flasks is nearing completion and they will soon be tested before delivery. I am withholding the cost of the contract under Exemption 13 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information relating to Third Party's commercial confidences.

Transport Aircraft

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what options he is assessing for replacing RAF transport aircraft. [51066]

Mr. Doug Henderson: I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Guardsmen Fisher and Wright

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) on how many occasions and on what dates the Army Board has considered the question of discharge of Guardsmen Fisher and Wright; and what plans it has to consider this matter further; [48364]

(2) from which public relations companies he has received representations concerning the interests of Guardsmen Fisher and Wright; and if he will estimate the cost to public funds of replying to these representations. [54028]

Mr. Doug Henderson: I will write to my hon. Friend and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

RAF Aircraft (Gulf)

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make statement about the RAF aircraft deployed in the Gulf. [52542]

Mr. George Robertson: At present 6 RAF Tornado aircraft and 243 personnel are based in Saudi Arabia, 2 VC-10 tankers and 36 personnel are based in Bahrain and 12 RAF Tornados and 380 personnel are based in Kuwait. These forces remain in the Gulf to demonstrate our determination that Iraq should comply with all relevant United Nations Security Council Resolutions.

In addition, HMS Grafton maintains a Royal Naval presence in the Gulf and will shortly be joined by HMS York. The Armilla patrol has displayed the UK's commitment to the region since 1980 and plays an important part in enforcing United Nations sanctions.

Chemical Weapons

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence on what date he agreed with the US Defence Secretary to increase co-operation to combat chemical and biological weapons; for what reasons he has agreed to increase such co-operation; what are the objectives of the increased co-operation; and if he will list the areas of chemical and biological warfare which are covered by this agreement. [49494]

Mr. George Robertson: I agreed with Secretary Cohen on 3 June, during my recent visit to the United States, that our two countries would enhance our co-operation efforts to combat chemical and biological weapons.

There is a clear and growing international consensus that the possession of chemical and biological weapons is unacceptable. Recent events in Iraq have demonstrated why co-operation between the US and UK in this area is absolutely vital. The US and UK already work closely together in this area, and technical and research co-operation in areas such as vaccines is well established. The June agreement will provide more precise high level policy and strategic direction. A full range of activities will be addressed. This will ensure both nations benefit fully from military and technical expertise and understanding in responding to all chemical and biological warfare risks.

The detailed programme of co-operation has not yet been established.

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what progress has been made in appointing an independent scientist to review the trial reports of the germ warfare trials in the south of England which took place between 1964 and 1977; and if he will make a statement; [54534]

(2) what is the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment's evaluation of whether short-term exposure to mustard gas causes *(a)* psychological disorders and *(b)* sexual dysfunction in the long term. [54533]

Mr. Doug Henderson: I will write to my hon. Friend and a copy of my letter will be placed in the library of the House.

Information Technology

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much his Department spent on IT itemising *(a)* personal computers, *(b)* main-frame, *(c)* mini-computers and *(d)* file servers in the last year for which figures are available. [52884]

Mr. Spellar: This information is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Defence Attachés

Mr. Ben Chapman: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how he plans to develop the role of defence attachés in providing training for armed forces from *(a)* Central and Eastern Europe and *(b)* the rest of the world with regard to the importance of democratic accountability and the use of civilians in defence management roles. [53243]

Mr. Doug Henderson: I will write to my hon. Friend and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Reservists' Pensions

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) how many people have been awarded attributable benefits for reservist pensions in each of the last 18 years; [53190]

(2) how many applications from reservists and Territorial Army personnel for attributable benefits for reservists' pensions have been rejected by the War Pensions Agency in each of the last 18 years. [53189]

Mr. Doug Henderson: I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Merchant Navy Personnel (Arctic Medal)

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will review the eligibility of the merchant navymen who served and died while on convoy to Russia for the Arctic Medal; and if he will make a statement. [53187]

Mr. Doug Henderson: I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Land Quality Assessments

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many land quality assessments of Ministry of Defence sites have been completed since April 1996; if the reports of the assessments and of land quality statements are available to the public; and if he will place a list of their titles in the Library specifying the dates on which they were produced and the locations concerned. [53377]

Mr. Spellar: This information is not readily available in the form requested and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many Ministry of Defence sites have been sold, or disposed of, by his Department since April 1996; how many of these sites have been the subject of land quality assessments and land quality statements; and if he will place a list of the titles of the assessments and statements in the Library specifying the dates on which they were produced and the locations concerned. [53379]

Mr. Spellar: The information is not readily available in the form requested and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. I will write to the hon. Member.

AWE Aldermaston

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when the Mathematical Physics Division at the Atomic Weapons Establishment, Aldermaston was set up; what is the purpose of this division; how many series of technical papers or reports are currently being produced by this division; and what are the names of each series. [53929]

Mr. Spellar: The Mathematical Physics Division at AWE Aldermaston has been in existence since the setting up of the then Atomic Weapons Research Establishment in the 1950s. Its purpose is to provide theoretical and computer models of nuclear weapons. The division produces two series of reports, which are:

Theoretical physics notes

Senior Superintendent Physics Division/USA.

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 20 July 1998, *Official Report*, column *429*, regarding AWE Aldermaston, if he will list the departments and divisions within the *(a)* assurance, *(b)* physics research, *(c)* programmes and *(d)* technology directorates. [53930]

Mr. Spellar: The departments and divisions within the *(a)* assurance, *(b)* physics research, *(c)* programmes and *(d)* technology directorates are respectively:

(a) Safety, Environment, Health, Quality, Security, Operations and Assurance Services.

(b) Hydrodynamics, Radiation Physics and Design Mathematics and Seismology.

(c) Research Co-ordination, Corporate Systems, Strategy Development and Strategy Co-ordination.

(d) The Technology Directorate has the following Business areas—Explosives, Chemistry, Nuclear Materials, Plutonium and Highly Enriched Uranium, Waste Management, Engineering Workshops and Metallic Materials, Burghfield Group Facility and Quality Control.

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the progress being made towards completing the A91 liquid waste treatment plant at AWE Aldermaston. [54088]

Mr. Spellar: The A91 facility is currently in the final stages of inactive commissioning. The building is currently expected to become operational by the end of 1999.

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the progress being made towards decontaminating the north ponds area of AWE Aldermaston. [54087]

Mr. Spellar: One of the North Ponds has been decontaminated and decommissioned. An extensive new water management system, which will allow the decontamination of the other ponds to be carried out, is currently being built on the site. The new water management system is now nearing completion and is expected to be in use in early 1999.

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if the stated running costs of the atomic weapons establishments of £302 million in 1997–98 includes all staff costs and management fees to Hunting-BRAE Ltd. [53762]

Mr. Spellar: Yes.

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the amounts paid to Hunting-BRAE in each of the last five years for administering and managing the atomic weapons establishments. [53763]

Mr. George Robertson: Payments to Hunting-BRAE are commercially confidential and I am, therefore, withholding this information under Exemption 13 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information relating to Third Party commercial confidences. My hon. Friend will, however, find a general breakdown of costs for the nuclear warhead programme for financial year 1997–98 in the Strategic Defence Review White Paper Supporting Essay Five, Figure 5, which shows that the total running costs of AWE in 1997–98 were £302 million.

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what reduction in radioactive emissions from AWE Aldermaston would follow from an end to production. [54448]

Mr. Spellar: Activities such as decommissioning and maintaining safety standards within facilities make up by far the largest proportion of discharges from AWE Aldermaston. Were production of nuclear warheads to cease, there would, therefore, be a minimal effect on emissions from the site.

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what environmental assessment of toxic and radioactive contamination levels present in the soil at AWE *(a)* Aldermaston, *(b)* Burghfield, *(c)* Cardiff and *(d)* Foulness has been conducted; and if he will place a copy of each such assessment in the Library; [54086]

(2) what estimate he has made of the number of additional nuclear waste stores, and of what cubic capacity required at AWE Aldermaston up to 2020 *(a)* to meet future arisings and *(b)* to replace those stores which do not meet regulatory requirements; [54091]

(3) if he will list the amount spent meeting all the requirements of the Nuclear Installations Inspectorate at the Atomic Weapons Establishments at *(a)* Aldermaston and *(b)* Burghfield in each of the last five years; and how much he expects to spend at each in total; [54092]

(4) if he will place in the Library a copy of the Atomic Weapons Establishment's Waste Management and Decommissioning Strategy; and if he will make a statement; [54090]

(5) how many buildings are currently in use for storing radioactive waste at AWE Aldermaston. [54085]

Mr. Spellar: I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Exercise Dimming Sun

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 29 June 1998, *Official Report*, column *14*, regarding the Dimming Sun nuclear weapon exercise, how many people are expected to take part in this exercise; what will be its scenario; which other Government departments are expected to take part in it; and on which Government properties in Norfolk it will take place. [53931]

Mr. Doug Henderson: I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Air Force Board

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 7 May 1998, *Official Report*, column *437*, if he will place in the Library a list of the items discussed at the meetings of the Air Force Board on *(a)* 17 June 1998 and *(b)* 17 July 1997. [53375]

Mr. George Robertson: I regret that in the answer of 7 May the date of the annual meeting of the Air Force Board in 1997 was wrong. The meeting took place on 16, not 17, July.

On that occasion, and again at this year's meeting on 17 June, the only item on the Board's agenda was the RAF's End of Year Performance Report 1996–97 and 1997–98 respectively.

Indonesian Army Officers

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 1 June 1998, *Official Report*, columns *102–03*, on Indonesian army officers, if any Indonesian army officers being taught at non-military educational institutions in the UK as part of programmes provided on a private and commercial basis are being funded by United Kingdom defence companies. [54417]

Mr. Doug Henderson: I will write to my hon. Friend and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Defence Exports

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 8 June 1998, *Official Report*, column *422* on defence exports, if he will list the fixed percentage rates referred to in his reply and the factors governing their application. [54404]

Mr. Spellar: The rates for Commercial Exploitation Levy will vary according to the type of equipment involved and whether the use of Government-funded jigs and tools is intended. Details of the individual rates, and the circumstances in which they might apply, are withheld under Exemption 13 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information relating to Third Party's commercial confidences. Higher values sales would normally employ profit sharing schemes rather than the application of rates of levy. The circumstances of individual sales may also permit some variation to the levy arrangements which are negotiated case by case.

Promotional Events

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many companies were involved in defence industry promotional events on board Her Majesty's ships engaged in Ocean Wave; what was the cost to his Department of defence industry promotional events staged during Ocean Wave; and what contributions towards these costs were provided by the defence companies involved. [54405]

Mr. Spellar: A total of 47 companies, including divisions of companies, took part in promotional events on board a variety of ships and submarines. The majority of this activity was in the form of eight single day "Defence Industry Days", where the costs of the event were met by a flat rate contribution of £588, including VAT, per company per event. An average of twelve companies attended each of the eight days generating a total of £57,624. In addition some companies made use of other ship visits on an individual basis; there were no additional costs to the MOD as a result of these activities.

Tornado Lease (Italy)

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the value of the countertrade and offset commitments entered into as part of the deal to lease Tornado aircraft to Italy; and what percentage of the value of the contract those commitments represent. [54169]

Mr. Spellar: The arrangements with Italy for the lease of Tornado aircraft provide for 100 per cent. offset of the lease value of £100 million.

Overseas Sales Demonstrations

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much has been charged to defence companies for the cost of overseas sales demonstrations by MoD teams in each of the last two years; and what percentage of the total cost of such demonstrations this represents. [54167]

Mr. Spellar: I will write to my hon. Friend and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Infantry Export Support Team

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when the Infantry Export Support Team was created; what was its annual cost in each of the last two years; how much of this was funded by *(a)* DESO and *(b)* industry; and what other export support teams have been created. [54418]

Mr. Spellar: I will write to my hon. Friend and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Persistent Inquirers

Mr. Sanders: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence which of his Department's agencies have procedures to identify persistent inquirers for information. [53948]

Mr. Spellar: I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Commercially Confidential Information

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what guidelines exist in his Department governing the publication of commercially confidential information; and what is his Department's definition of commercially confidential information. [54164]

Mr. Spellar: I will write to my hon. Friend and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Non-operational Warheads (Storage)

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to store non-operational warheads. [54450]

Mr. George Robertson: Operationally available warheads are either deployed on Trident submarines or stored in secure facilities ashore. Warheads in the processing margin or required for technical surveillance purposes are also held at secure locations ashore. In addition, obsolete Chevaline warheads and a few WE177 weapons remain in storage awaiting dismantlement. Where Trident warheads are replaced rather than refurbished during their service life, those withdrawn will also be stored for periods pending dismantling. We plan to dismantle all surplus warheads as quickly as possible.

Sierra Leone

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the events which led to Sandline personnel being invited onto HMS Cornwall on 20 March. [54546]

Mr. George Robertson: HMS Cornwall sailed from Freetown on 20 March. No Sandline personnel were invited aboard on that day.

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will place in the Library the logs of HMS Monmouth for the period of its deployment off Sierra Leone in 1998; when that vessel departed from the United Kingdom for that deployment; if he will publish the orders that were issued to the captain on the issue of involvement in that country's civil war; and if he will make a statement on the bearing of restricted FCO Telegram 44 to Abuja in this context. [54545]

Mr. George Robertson: I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the (i) position and (ii) orders of *(a)* HMS Cornwall, *(b)* HMS Monmouth and *(c)* RFA Orangeleaf at the time of ECOMOG initial military action against the Sierra Leone junta; and what was the date of issuing of those orders. [54473]

Mr. George Robertson: At the time of ECOMOG initial military action in February 1998, HMS Cornwall was alongside in Devonport, England, HMS Monmouth was alongside in Cape Verde Islands and RFA Orangeleaf was alongside in Gibraltar. These ships were under no specific orders at that time.

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the nature of the land contact enjoyed by RFA 'Orangeleaf' during its stationing off Sierra Leone with HMS 'Monmouth' and HMS 'Cornwall'; what contact took place between that vessel and (i) ECOMOG and (ii) Sandline; and if any of its supplies were transferred to shore. [54549]

Mr. George Robertson: FRA Orangeleaf had no direct land contact during the period she was stationed off Sierra Leone. She did not go alongside. No supplies were transferreed ashore. There was no contact between Orangeleaf and ECOMAG or Sandline.

Trident

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects the production of the first Trident warheads to cease; and when replacement production will begin. [54451]

Mr. George Robertson: A programme of refurbishment or replacement of Trident warheads will continue throughout the service life of the Trident system, in order to maintain its safety and reliability. Those warheads which are replaced rather than refurbished will be dismantled.

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the cost of *(a)* constructing and *(b)* equipping each of the four Trident nuclear submarines. [53759]

Mr. George Robertson: The latest estimate of the cost of constructing each of the four Vanguard Class Trident submarines, at 1997–87 prices, is:

	£ million
HMS Vanguard	[1]1,644
HMS Victorious	879
HMS Vigilant	891
HMS Vengeance	863

[1] Includes First of Class Costs

The estimated cost of their associated integrated strategic weapon system and tactical weapon system equipments is:

	£ million
HMS Vanguard	218
HMS Victorious	182
HMS Vigilant	151
HMS Vengeance	166

Armed Service Personnel

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what are the five most common destinations as careers for armed services personnel following their departure from the services. [54932]

Mr. Doug Henderson: I will write to my hon. Friend and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Departmental Publications

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many of his Department's publications have been made available in *(a)* Braille, *(b)* audio tape and *(c)* large print in 1997–98; and what percentage of the total number of publications this represents. [54269]

Mr. Spellar: I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

HMS Vanguard

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the incident on board HMS Vanguard in June. [53758]

Mr. Doug Henderson: I will write to my hon. Friend and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Chevaline Warhead Assembly

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects the Chevaline warhead assembly programme to be completed. [54446]

Mr. George Robertson: I assume that my hon. Friend is referring to the disassembly programme for Chevaline warheads, in which case I refer him to the answer given to the hon. Member for Truro and St. Austell (Mr. Taylor) on 7 May 1998, *Official Report*, columns *436–37*, by my hon. Friend the then Minister for the Armed Forces.

Royal Hospital, Haslar

Mr. Viggers: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the future of the Royal Hospital, Haslar. [54662]

Mr. Doug Henderson: I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Territorial Army

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects to publish his Department's Spending Defence Review on the Territorial Army; and if he will make a statement. [54897]

Mr. Doug Henderson: I will write to my hon. Friend and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

NIREX

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the amounts paid to NIREX by *(a)* his Department, *(b)* the Atomic Weapons Establishment, *(c)* Devonport Dockyard, and *(d)* Rosyth Dockyard in each of the last five years. [54093]

Mr. Spellar: Payments by the MOD to Nirex in respect of the development of a Deep Waste depository are made centrally. They began in financial year 1994–95 and the sums paid so far are:

FY 94–95: £5.9m

FY 95–96: £5.3m

FY 96–97: £4.1m

FY 97–98: £2.7m.

I will write further to the hon. Member with information on other payments which may have been made to Nirex in respect of advice given on the packaging of waste material.

Departmental Property

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list all properties *(a)* owned and *(b)* leased or rented by his Department outside the United Kingdom, the purposes for which they are designated and the annual running costs for each property. [54444]

Mr. Spellar: The information regarding properties owned, leased or rented is not readily available in the form requested and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

The annual running costs for each property are not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Ion Exchange Resin

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on progress being made to construct building D151 to store ion exchange resin. [54089]

Mr. Spellar: The construction of the upgraded Nuclear Utilities Building at Devonport Royal Dockyard (Project D151) is complete.

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many modified Magnox flasks and resin catch tanks are in use at Rosyth and Devonport to store ion exchange resin. [54081]

Mr. Spellar: There are 35 resin catch tanks currently in use at Rosyth Royal Dockyard, and 29 resin catch tanks and 9 modified magnox flasks currently in use at Devonport Royal Dockyard.

Sellafield

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to replace the spent nuclear submarine fuel ponds at BNFL Sellafield; and if he will make a statement. [53757]

Mr. Spellar: The current 'B27' store at BNFL Sellafield has a finite life. MOD has contracted BNFL to provide a replacement used fuel storage service for spent submarine reactor fuel for a period of forty years from 1 December 2001. Using their own funds, BNFL are currently designing and constructing the new facility and will transfer all submarine reactor fuel from the existing B27 store by 2011. The sums invested by BNFL will be recovered within the agreed charge for the storage service.

Nuclear Weapons

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence under what budget headings costs directly related to nuclear weapons appear. [53761]

Mr. George Robertson: Costs of the nuclear warhead programme are contained in Vote 3 Subhead A which covers the Chief of Defence Procurement's Top Level Budget. Other costs associated with the acquisition, operation and support of the Trident deterrent are contained in Vote 3 Subhead D (Director General Submarines/Chief Strategic Systems Executive), Vote 1 Subhead A (Commander in Chief Fleet) and Vote 2 Subhead A (Chief of Fleet Support).

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if all WE177 warheads have been dismantled; and if the highly enriched uranium has been recycled. [54513]

Mr. George Robertson: 97 per cent. of WE177 warheads have now been dismantled and the dismantling programme will be complete by end of August 1998. Nuclear material will be retained for Defence purposes.

Green Transport

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 27 March 1998, *Official Report*, column *313*, on departmental transport arrangements, what further changes he has made. [54013]

Mr. Spellar: To inform this process, arrangements are being made for travel surveys to be conducted amongst civilian and Service staff at several representative MOD sites.

Chemical Technology Division

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer on 29 January 1998, *Official Report*, column *345*, of which directorate the Chemical Technology Division is now a part; what former AWE chemical plant it operates; and what is its purpose. [54195]

Mr. Spellar: The Chemical Technology Division has now been absorbed into the chemistry Business Area, which is in the Technology Directorate. Chemical plant continues to be operated for the treatment of radioactive effluents and the recovery of valuable materials from residues and wastes. Such plant is also available to provide adequately pure gases for use in work box atmospheres, where hazardous materials are handled. The purpose of the current chemical technology area includes research and development into a range of materials such as polymers, ceramics and component fabrication using these materials. The work supports research and development and stockpile stewardship of the UK nuclear deterrent.

MOD Police

Mrs. Gilroy: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 29 June 1998, *Official Report*, columns *8–9*, on MOD police, what estimate he has made of the cost of disciplinary cases whose procedures took *(a)* six to 12 months to conclusion and *(b)* 12 or more months to conclusion in each of the years. [54566]

Mr. Doug Henderson: I will write to my hon. Friend and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Nuclear Transport

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will issue guidance on the containment of contaminated run-off water produced by the cooling jets which LAESI Guidelines require to be fixed in position and kept in operation in the event of a serious nuclear transport accident. [54447]

Mr. Doug Henderson: I will write to my hon. Friend and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

RAF Manston

Dr. Ladyman: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on his plans for the disposal of RAF Manston. [54967]

Mr. Doug Henderson: I am pleased to be able to announce that following a marketing campaign and open competition conducted by my Department, the Wiggins Group plc has been selected as the preferred bidder for the airfield site at RAF Manston and exchange of contracts is expected shortly. The Wiggins Group's plans for the airfield include expanding civil aviation operations and substantial site development which will encompass airport related and general commercial uses together with hotel and leisure development. The company also intends to retain Manston's Spitfire and Hurricane Memorial Museum as a permanent reminder of the historic role of RAF Manston. The Wiggins Group's plans for the airfield are in line with the aspirations of local authorities' own planning objectives for the area. In this respect, maintaining a viable commercial airfield at Manston is considered key to the economic regeneration of Thanet. The Wiggins Group's proposals are good news for the people and business community of East Kent. The proposed development of Manston has the potential to generate increased employment opportunities and to bring long term benefits to the local economy as a whole.

My Department will continue to offer whatever practical support it can to the Wiggins Group to enable a smooth and uninterrupted transfer from military to civilian airfield operations to meet the RAF's planned withdrawal from Manston on 31 March 1999.

Mr. Gale: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will announce his preferred plans for the disposal of RAF Manston to the private sector as a civilian airfield; and if he will make a statement. [53002]

Mr. Doug Henderson *[holding answer 28 July 1998]:* I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave today to my hon. Friend the Member for Thanet, South (Dr. Ladyman).

Catering and Mess Services

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if a decision on the outcome of the catering and mess services market test covering the provision of catering and mess services to the British Army in Germany has been reached. [54979]

Mr. Spellar: Following a rigorous competition it has been decided to award a contract for the provision of catering and mess services for the British Army in Germany, to NAAFI, with support from its sub-contractor EUREST. The award of the contract is expected to generate savings in the region of £18 million over the next five years, whilst continuing to deliver the required level of service.

BNFL Magnox Facility (Gloucestershire)

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what work for his Department will be undertaken at the BNFL Magnox facility at Berkeley Centre in Gloucestershire; and if he will make a statement. [55133]

Mr. Spellar: A programme of work will be carried out at the Berkeley Centre on a small quantity of nuclear material owned by the Ministry of Defence and held

outside international safeguards. The Berkeley centre has previously only worked with safeguarded material, as it has not been involved in military nuclear programmes, which are unsafeguarded. The work is essential to meet a clear requirement to provide assurance of the continued safe operation of submarine nuclear reactors, and it is not connected with the nuclear weapons programme. The facilities to be used are unique to the Berkeley centre. The work, which is a short study, will take about seven months to complete. Upon completion of the study and the removal of the unsafeguarded material the Berkeley Centre will return to its fully safeguarded status.

RAF St. Athan

Mr. John Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the future of RAF St. Athan. [54976]

Mr. Spellar: I indicated earlier this year in the context of the Strategic Defence Review that RAF St. Athan will become a part of the new Defence Aviation Repair Agency. This will form in April 1999 and move as soon as practicable thereafter to a Trading Fund. In the light of these recent decisions, I have now considered the outcome of the competition inaugurated in 1994 under the Competing for Quality programme for the management of the off-aircraft engineering and on-site support activities at RAF St. Athan. I have also taken into account that the competition did not meet all our financial objectives. I have therefore decided that the best value for money for Defence is most likely to be achieved by not proceeding any further with the competition. Challenging efficiency targets will be given to RAF St. Athan, and these will be carried forward within the context of the Defence Aviation Repair Agency. These decisions mean that RAF St. Athan can look forward to a clear future which builds upon its important contribution to our defence effort.

Helicopters

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence on what date the Lynx of HMS "Cornwall" was replaced by a Sea King; where that helicopter is normally based; and what instructions were issued to the crew on embarkation concerning planned humanitarian or other activities. [54472]

Mr. George Robertson: HMS "Cornwall" has operated with a Sea King helicopter since at least February 1996. The Sea King on board HMS "Cornwall" during her deployment to West Africa was previously based at RNAS Culdrose. The Flight Commander attended a brief which covered a wide range of operational issues. The flight did not, however, receive specific instructions on humanitarian activities prior to their embarkation.

Hunting-BRAE

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how the savings achieved by Hunting-BRAE plc from meeting incentive targets of his Department are allocated. [54449]

Mr. George Robertson: I will write to my hon. Friend and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Ottawa Convention

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what action he is taking to implement the Government's obligations under the Ottawa Convention. [54970]

Mr. George Robertson: As of today, the moratorium we have had in place on the use of anti-personnel landmines, has become a total ban, without exception. Instructions to this effect have been issued to all Command Headquarters and training establishments. We intend this to be an international example to others. Other actions the Ministry of Defence is taking to implement the Convention, such as the destruction of stockpiles and assistance to humanitarian demining, are well known to hon. Members.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Hunt Kennels

Mr. Michael J. Foster: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, if he will list those hunt kennels which have been reported to his Department as having unsatisfactory SRM surveillance audits during *(a)* 1997 and *(b)* 1998; and if he will make a statement on the resultant health risk to animals. [44795]

Mr. Rooker *[pursuant to the reply, 15 June 1998, c. 20–26]:* In the list of hunt kennels given for 1997 the following should also have been included:

Teifiside Hunt
Cefn Lodge Kennels
Cilgerran
Cardigan
Dyfed.

The following was included in error and should be deleted:

1998

Enfield Chase Hunt
Birch Farm
White Stubbs Lane
Broxbourne
Hertfordshire.

My officials are writing to the Master of Foxhounds at the Hunt to apologise for the incorrect inclusion of it on the list.

Live Animal Exports

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will publish the number of live horses exported for slaughter within the EU by country of destination in each of the last three years. [51378]

Mr. Morley: I am in a position to answer only in relation to exports from Great Britain. None of the live equines exported from Great Britain in the years concerned was declared as being moved for the purpose of immediate slaughter.

Offal and Greaves

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will take measures to prevent the export of fresh offal and greaves. [53571]

Mr. Rooker: The export from the UK of meat meal, bone meal and meat and bone meal of mammalian origin is prohibited by virtue of Commission Decision 98/256 concerning measures to protect against BSE. This Decision also prohibits the export of offals derived from bovine animals slaughtered in the UK, except for uses other than in food, animal feed, cosmetics, medical or pharmaceutical products. In addition, certain offals from cattle, sheep and goats are covered by national controls on specified risk material which require their destruction. Provided the conditions laid down in national or Community rules, or by the authorities in the countries to which they are dispatched, are respected, exports of other types of greaves or offal are permitted.

Eggs

Mr. Baker: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will ensure eggs originating from a battery system are clearly labelled as such; and if he will make a statement. [53784]

Mr. Morley: The Commission's Communication of 11 March 1998 on the protection of laying hens kept in various systems of rearing envisages the possibility of mandatory labelling of table eggs and packs by type of production. This would require a formal Commission proposal adopted via the Management Committee procedure. I strongly support the principle of mandatory labelling of egg packs and look forward to the eventual adoption of Commission proposals on this matter in the context of wider proposals on improved welfare for laying hens.

Under 10 Metre Licences

Mr. Michael Jabez Foster: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) if he will make under-10m licences area specific; [53602]

(2) if he will adjust the allocation of the quota between under-10m and over-10m vessels to take account of former over-10m registered vessels that have been re-registered as under-10m vessels without reducing their catching potential; [53604]

(3) what estimate he has made of the number of under-10m licence holders now fishing in Area 7D which have no historic connection with the area; [53601]

(4) what estimate he has made of the extent of the practice of selling former over-10m licences together with the track records the vessels being temporarily shortened, and then re-registered as under-10m vessels; and how many prosecutions there have been in respect of this practice. [53603]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 30 July 1998]:* A restrictive licensing scheme has operated for vessels of 10m and under since May 1993. Any one who wishes to bring a vessel into the under-10m fleet, including a vessel which has been reduced in length from over-10m, must acquire a licence from an existing under-10m vessel. Moreover the tonnage, engine power and vessel capacity units (VCUs) of the incoming vessel must not be greater than that of the vessel that is being replaced. The aggregation of licences is permitted up to a maximum of 100 VCUs per transaction.

Within the UK there are currently some 5,200 under-10m fishing vessels licensed by the Fisheries Departments including 978 vessels licensed by the Ministry's fisheries office at Hastings and its sub office at Poole covering the coastline from Dartford in Kent to Lyme Regis in Dorset. There has not been an overall increase in the number of vessels licensed by the Hastings fisheries office since the introduction of restrictive licensing.

Examination of licensing transactions in 1996 and 1997 has indicated that some 50 vessels over-10m in overall length were shortened, re-registered and re-licensed as vessels under-10m in overall length. Twelve of the vessels were based within the area administered by the Hastings fisheries office. There have been no prosecutions against such vessels.

The quota allocations made to the under-10m fleet are based on the proportion of fish caught in the reference period 1994 to 1996. Most allocations are underpinned so that the proportion of fish allocated to the under-10m fleet is not less than the average proportion made available in the period 1991 to 1993. In 1998 nine out of twelve of the whitefish allocations made to the under-10m fleet in the English Channel have benefited from underpinning.

These arrangements, and the need for changes to them, are kept under review.

Port of Hastings

Mr. Michael Jabez Foster: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what has been the total catch at the port of Hastings in each quarter in the past four years. [53605]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 30 July 1998]:* The information on the total catch landed at Hastings is set out in the table.

Total landings into Hastings by all vessels by quarter

	Liveweight (tonnes)				*Value (£)*			
Year	*January–March*	*April–June*	*July–September*	*October–December*	*January–March*	*April–June*	*July–September*	*October–December*
1994	78	110	89	86	146,800	203,900	212,500	163,000
1995	72	116	75	127	155,700	226,300	225,300	180,900
1996	66	173	74	122	116,000	320,000	143,500	256,000
1997	81	227	70	128	241,000	397,900	163,000	248,800
1998	101	156	—	—	161,600	293,000	—	—

— No data

Source: MAFF Fisheries Activity Database

Brown Shrimp Catch (The Wash)

Dr. George Turner: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what offers of compensation have been made to *(a)* Wash fishermen and *(b)* those directly involved in processing brown shrimp, for loss of earnings as a result of his decision not to postpone the dredging and beach replenishment programme at Mablethorpe in 1997. [53747]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 30 July 1998]:* This is entirely a matter for the Environment Agency, but I understand an offer of £21,783 has been made to fishermen by the Agency in respect of disturbance in the area where beach replenishment took place in 1997.

Dr. George Turner: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what evidence he has assessed on the stock level of brown shrimp in the North Sea in *(a)* 1997 and *(b)* the period 1993 to 1996; and if he will place such evidence in the Library. [53743]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 30 July 1998]:* An international study group is collecting data on brown shrimp but has not yet made an assessment of the stock in the North Sea as a whole.

So far as the Wash and adjacent areas are concerned, an index of abundance has been prepared using landings of brown shrimp per unit effort. The data are as follows.

Landings, effort and index of abundance (landings per unit effort) for brown shrimps from The Wash and adjacent areas 1986 to 1997

Year	Landings in tonnes	Effort in 1000s hours fished	LPUE in kg/hour
1986	497	15	32.7
1987	1,404	26	54.4
1988	561	19	29.8
1989	653	25	25.8
1990	399	27	14.9
1991	344	19	18.1
1992	401	11	35.0
1993	923	23	40.0
1994	967	33	29.6
1995	869	38	22.8
1996	548	19	29.3
1997	495	19	26.5

Dr. George Turner: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) what by weight was *(a)* the actual catch of brown shrimp by Wash fishermen, in The Wash or off the Lincolnshire coast during the months August to December 1997 and *(b)* his estimate of the catch which would have been possible in the absence of the dredging and beach replenishment programme at Mablethorpe; [53745]

(2) what estimate was made of the shortfall in income to *(a)* Wash fishermen and *(b)* those directly involved in processing the catch, which resulted from the difference in catch of brown shrimp in September to December 1997 and the average catch made in the years 1993 to 1996 when the difference is valued using relevant prices for (i) grade A and (ii) grade B brown shrimp; [53746]

(3) if he will tabulate the catch of brown shrimp by (i) weight and (ii) monetary value made by Wash fishermen in the Wash or off the Lincolnshire coast, during the months August to December for each of the years 1993 to 1996 and the corresponding average data for these years. [53744]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 30 July 1998]:* The following table shows total landings of brown shrimp into the Wash ports by volume and value.

	1993		1994		1995		1996		1997	
	tonnes liveweight	£	tonnes liveweight	£	tonnes liveweight	£s	tonnes liveweight	£	tonnes liveweight	£
August	88.943	92,288	67.938	80,124	62.217	88,068	25.658	42,862	30.892	26,511
September	179.967	196,964	146.055	128,260	132.955	199,733	53.290	61,973	56.985	47,169
October	183.707	234,011	94.297	79,189	115.949	177,163	107.770	135,359	62.298	54,525
November	172.332	221,715	109.425	146,059	76.909	119,324	56.762	70,700	42.407	36,127
December	79.923	104,688	109.138	157,323	29.817	52,748	35.174	44,432	18.138	15,502
Total August-December	704.872	849,666	526,853	590,955	417.847	637,036	278.654	355,326	210.720	179,834
Monthly average August-December	140.974	169,933	105.371	118,191	83.569	127,407	55.731	71,065	42.144	35,967
Annual total	871.432	1,136,913	925.141	1,210,682	786.007	1,206,595	347.876	531,672	347.144	324,185
Monthly average	72.619	94,743	77.095	100,890	65.501	100,550	28.990	44,306	28.929	27,015

I have made no estimate of the catch which would have been possible in the absence of dredging in 1997. Variations in catch from year to year reflect a number of factors including stock levels, fishing effort, type of gear employed and market price.

I have made no estimate of the effect on the incomes of fishermen or processors of variations in catch.

Ministerial Visit (Cambridgeshire)

Sir Brian Mawhinney: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food on what date and by what means the Parliamentary Secretary, the hon. Member for Scunthorpe (Mr. Morley),informed the right hon. Member for North West Cambridgeshire (Sir B. Mawhinney) that he would be in the North-West Cambridgeshire constituency on ministerial business. [53452]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 30 July 1998]:* I was in the North West Cambridgeshire constituency on ministerial business on 22 July when I visited the East of England Agricultural Show.

It is usual practice for my Office to inform hon. Members in writing when their constituencies are included in itineraries for my visits. My office did so on this occasion also, but regrettably, were incorrectly advised that the East of England show ground was located in the adjacent constituency of Peterborough. The letter was therefore incorrectly addressed.

Steps have been taken to ensure that such errors do not recur.

Healthy Eating

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what are his Department's priorities in respect of the promotion of healthy eating. [53589]

Mr. Rooker *[holding answer 30 July 1998]:* The Government's role is to provide accurate, unbiased, up-to-date and understandable information on the basis of which people can make their own informed choices about what they eat. This Department will continue to provide such information, and in doing so will emphasise the importance of a varied and balanced diet.

Meat Imports

Mr. Walter: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what the volume of poultry meat imports from Italy has been in the last three years; and if all imports were processed at establishments approved by the Italian authorities under EC Directive 92/116. [53712]

Mr. Rooker *[holding answer 30 July 1998]:* Official Trade Statistics record that poultry meat imports into the UK from Italy amounted to 7,210 tonnes, 7,352 tonnes and 5,929 tonnes in 1995, 1996 and 1997 respectively. These figures remain provisional and subject to amendment. We have no reason to believe that any of the poultry meat imported from Italy in the last 3 years was produced in premises not operating in accordance with the conditions laid down in Directive 92/116.

Mr. Walter: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food in which EU member states it is permitted to feed pigs meat and bone meal. [53715]

Mr. Rooker *[holding answer 30 July 1998]:* As far as we are aware, the feeding of mammalian meat and bone meal (MBM) to pigs is permitted in all European Union countries except the United Kingdom.

UK controls prohibit the feeding of mammalian MBM to all farmed livestock, including pigs. This extension of the EU-wide ban was introduced on the specific advice of the Spongiform Encephalopathy Advisory Committee (SEAC), to prevent cross contamination between ruminant and non ruminant feed. Our controls go further in this way than other Member States because we have had to cope with a much higher background level of infectivity.

Whaling

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what measures the United Kingdom will table at the next meeting of the International Whaling Commission in respect of the preservation of whale species. [53617]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 30 July 1998]:* At the meeting of the Consultative Forum on Whaling on 15 July, which I chaired, possible issues that the United Kingdom might raise at the next annual meeting of the IWC in June 1999, were discussed. The Forum agreed to give further consideration to the matter at its next meeting in December, and I look forward to receiving its advice.

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the *(a)* promotion and *(b)* the implementation to date of a whale sanctuary in the South Atlantic. [53618]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 30 July 1998]:* At the annual meeting of the International Whaling Commission, which took place in Oman from 16 to 21 June, Brazil indicated that it was considering proposing a whale sanctuary in the South Atlantic. The United Kingdom made clear its support in principle for this idea. However, Brazil did not put forward a formal proposal for such a sanctuary; I understand that the Brazilian delegation felt that more discussion with the range states was needed.

Non-Departmental Public Bodies

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the non-departmental public bodies in existence on 1 May 1997 that *(a)* have been disbanded, *(b)* will be disbanded in the next 12 months, *(c)* have had their functions transferred to (i) another non-departmental public body and (ii) a democratically elected body, *(d)* have been renamed but continue to perform a similar role and *(e)* have been unchanged; if he will indicate in (c) (ii) the relevant successor body; what new non-departmental public bodies have been established since 1 May 1997; and how many non-departmental public bodies his Department currently is responsible for. [53853]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 30 July 1998]: (a)* In a News Release on 28 May 1997 my right hon. Friend, the previous Minister, announced the disbanding of the Ministry's nine advisory Regional Panels;

(b) None.

(c) None of the MAFF non-departmental public bodies have had their functions transferred to:

(i) another non-departmental public body;

(ii) a democratically elected body.

(d) None of the MAFF non-departmental public bodies have been renamed but continue to perform a similar role.

(e) Details of all other non-departmental public bodies in existence on 1 May 1997 sponsored by this department are listed in "Public Bodies 1997".

The Potato Industry Development Council (known as the British Potato Council) was established on 1 July 1997. The council is funded by a levy on the industry.

My right hon. Friend is currently responsible for 33, including multiple bodies.

The Government are committed to keeping the number of non-departmental public bodies to a minimum and to ensuring that those which remain are open, accountable and effective. Many of the new non-departmental public bodies established since 1 May 1997 will be essential in helping the Government deliver their Manifesto commitments.

Employees Over 60

Mr. Chope: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many *(a)* men and *(b)* women aged over 60 years were employed by (i) his Department and (ii) his Department's agencies on 1 January. [53073]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 31 July 1998]:* In the core Department, there were 89 men and 72 women aged over

60 years employed on 1 January. Chief Executives of the Department's Agencies will be replying direct to the hon. Member with information on their staff.

Mr. Chope: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many *(a)* men and *(b)* women employed by (1) his Department and (2) his Department's agencies have contracts of employment which permit them to retire after their 60 birthday. [53050]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 30 July 1998]:* In the core Department, the normal retirement age for staff is 60 years. However, staff in non-mobile grades (i.e. administrative assistant, administrative officer level), secretarial and office support grades, industrial grades and farm workers are permitted to remain in service until the age of 65. Staff in mobile grades (i.e. executive officer level and above) with less than 20 years pensionable service may also remain in service beyond the age of 60. Service beyond the age of 60 has to be authorised and is subject to efficiency, fitness and the Ministry's needs.

In the core Department, there are currently 1,485 men and 2,216 women in non-mobile grades where retirement after 60 years of age is permissible.

Chief Executives of the Department's Agencies will be replying direct to the hon. Member with information on their staff.

Letter from Sarah Nason to Mr. Christopher Chope, dated 31 July 1998:

Mr. Nick Brown has asked me to reply, in respect of the Farming and Rural Conservation Agency (FRCA), to your question about how many men and women, aged over 60 years, were employed on 1 January.

In FRCA there were 3 men and 1 woman employed on 1 January.

Letter from Sarah Nason. to Mr. Christopher Chope, dated 31 July 1998:

Mr. Nick Brown has asked me to reply, in respect of the Farming and Rural Conservation Agency (FRCA), to your question about how many men and women employed have contracts of employment which permit them to retire after their 60th birthday.

In FRCA, which has the same retirement arrangements as core MAFF, there are currently 40 men and 99 women in grades where retirement after 60 years of age is permissible.

Letter from G. K. Bruce to Mr. Christopher Chope, dated 31 July 1998:

The Parliamentary Secretary of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, has asked me to reply to your question concerning the number of men and women employed by the Pesticides Safety Directorate (PSD) who have contracts of employment which permit them to retire after their 60th birthday.

The rules which apply in PSD are the same as those applied in the parent Department. The normal retirement age for staff is 60 years. However, staff in non-mobile grades, ie Administrative Assistants, Administrative Officers and their scientific equivalents and secretarial grades are permitted to remain in service until the age of 65. Staff in more senior grades, ie Executive Officers and above and their scientific equivalents, with less than 20 years pensionable service may also remain in service beyond the age of 60. Service beyond the age of 60 has to be authorised and is subject to efficiency, fitness and the needs of the Agency.

In the Pesticides Safety Directorate, there are currently 16 men and 34 women in grades where retirement after 60 years of age is permissible.

Letter from G. K. Bruce to Mr. Christopher Chope, dated 31 July 1998:

The Parliamentary Secretary of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food has asked me to reply to your question concerning the number of men and women employed by the Pesticides Safety Directorate aged 60 years and over on 1 January.

In the Pesticides Safety Directorate, there were no men or women aged over 60 years employed on 1 January.

Letter from J. M. Rutter to Mr. Christopher Chope, dated 31 July 1998:

The Minister has asked me to reply to your question about the number of a) men and b) women in the Veterinary Medicines Directorate (VMD) with contracts of employment which allow them to retire after their 60th birthday, as this is an operational matter for which I have responsibility.

The normal retirement age for staff in the VMD is 60 years. However, staff in administrative, secretarial and office support grades are permitted to remain in service until the age of 65. Staff in more senior grades with less than 20 years pensionable service may also remain in service beyond the age of 60. Service beyond the age of 60 for all staff has to be authorised and is subject to efficiency, fitness and the VMD's needs.

In VMD there are currently 7 men and 32 women in grades where retirement after 60 years of age is permissible.

Letter from J. M. Rutter to Mr. Christopher Chope, dated 31 July 1998:

The Minister has asked me to reply to your question about the number of a) men and b) women aged over 60 employed in the Veterinary Medicines Directorate on 1 January, as this is an operational matter for which I am responsible.

On 1 January 1998 there were 3 men and no women aged over 60 employed in the Veterinary Medicines Directorate.

Letter from P. I. Stanley to Mr. Christopher Chope, dated 31 July 1998:

The Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food has asked me to reply, in respect of the Central Science Laboratory (CSL), to your questions concerning the number of staff aged over 60 years and those who have contracts that permit them to retire after their 60th birthday.

On 1 January 1998, CSL employed 5 staff who were over the age of 60. All of these were men.

The normal retirement age for the majority of staff employed by CSL is 60. However, there are 71 staff working in administrative, secretarial and support posts who, by virtue of their grade, are permitted to continue in post beyond the age of 60. 14 of these are men and 57 are women.

In addition, staff in more senior grades with less than 20 years pensionable service may also remain in post beyond the age of 60, subject to work, efficiency and fitness requirements.

Letter from P. W. Greig-Smith to Mr. Christopher Chope, dated 31 July 1998:

As Agency Chief Executive, I am responding to your questions to the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries & Food about employment beyond the age of 60, in relation to the Centre for Environment, Fisheries & Aquaculture Science.

In the CEFAS Agency, there were 10 men and 3 women aged over 60 years employed on 1 January 1998.

The normal retirement age for staff employed by CEFAS is 60 years. However, staff in administrative, secretarial, office support and industrial grades and Assistant Scientific Officers are permitted to remain in service until the age of 65. Staff in more senior grades with less than 20 years service may also remain in service beyond the age of 60. Service beyond the age of 60 is subject to efficiency, fitness and the Ministry's needs.

At CEFAS, there are currently 101 men and 101 women in grades where retirement after 60 years of age is permissible.

Letter from T. W. A. Little to Mr. Christopher Chope, dated 31 July 1998:

The Minister has asked me to reply to your question on how many men/women aged over 60 years were employed by his Department's Agencies on 1 January.

In the Veterinary Laboratories Agency there were 19 men and 19 women aged over 60 years employed on 1 January 1998.

Letter from T. W. A. Little to Mr. Christopher Chope, dated 31 July 1998:

The Minister has asked me to reply to your question on how many men/women employed by his Department's Agencies have contracts of employment which permit them to retire after their 60th birthday.

In the Veterinary Laboratories Agency (VLA) the normal retirement age for staff is 60 years. However, staff in VLA Pay Bands F, F(1) and G, including administrative, secretarial and scientific support staff and animal technicians are permitted to remain in service until the age of 65. Staff in higher Pay Bands with less than 20 years pensionable service may also remain in service beyond the age of 60. Service beyond the age of 60 has to be authorised and is subject to efficiency, fitness and Agency's needs. In the VLA there are currently 210 men and 453 women in Pay Bands F, F(1) and G where retirement after 60 years of age is permissible.

Letter from Johnston McNeil to Mr. Christopher Chope, dated 31 July 1998:

As Chief Executive of the Meat Hygiene Service, your question to the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food regarding the number of men and women employed who have contracts of employment which permit them to retire after their 60th birthday has been passed to me to respond on behalf of this Executive Agency.

The Meat Hygiene Service was established on 1 April 1995 as an Executive Agency of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (MAFF). It took over from local authorities the responsibility for enforcing meat hygiene, inspection and animal welfare at slaughter legislation in licensed fresh meat premises in Great Britain. The majority of MHS staff transferred from local authorities with their existing contractual benefits under the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Act 1981. As a consequence the majority of MHS employees are members of the Local Government Pension Scheme which has a retirement age of 65.

In the MHS, 1308 men and 164 women have contracts of employment with a retirement age of 65.

Letter from Johnston McNeil to Mr. Christopher Chope, dated 31 July 1998:

As Chief Executive of the Meat Hygiene Service (MHS), your question to the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (MAFF) regarding the number of men and women employed who are aged over 60 has been passed to me to reply on behalf of this Executive Agency.

The MHS employs 84 men and 1 woman who are aged over 60.

Animal Welfare Survey

Mr. Drew: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he plans to publish the Animal Welfare Survey report of the Meat Hygiene Service. [55192]

Mr. Morley: I am pleased to announce that the Animal Welfare Survey Report was published by the Meat Hygiene Service today. Copies are available in the Library of the House.

Veterinary Laboratories Agency

Mr. Drew: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he will publish the 1997–98 Annual report and Accounts for the Veterinary Laboratories Agency. [55193]

Mr. Rooker: I am pleased to announce that the 1997–98 Annual Report and Accounts for the Veterinary Laboratories Agency were laid before Parliament on 30 July. Copies are available in the Library of the House.

I should like to congratulate all staff at VLA on their achievements during the year.

Fisheries

Mr. Gill: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many staff and what financial resources were devoted to fisheries protection and monitoring in Scotland and Northern Ireland in each of the past five years; and if he will estimate the financial resources in each year as a proportion of the value of fish landed. [54459]

Mr. Morley: Responsibility for providing detailed information on the staff and financial resources devoted to fisheries enforcement and protection in Scotland and Northern Ireland rests respectively with my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Scotland and for Northern Ireland.

Mr. Gill: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment he has made of the proposal by the National Federation of Fishermen's Organisations and the Scottish Fishermen's Federation for coastal zone management; and what definition of coastal fisheries limits he has used in assessing the proposal. [54579]

Mr. Morley: I have welcomed the joint position paper of the National Federation of Fishermen's Organisations and Scottish Fishermen's Federation as a good basis for discussion. Their paper contains a number of ideas including the concept of coastal state management whereby coastal states would be responsible for determining conservation rules within their 200 mile fisheries limits, subject to criteria established in zonal management committees whose proposals would be ratified by the Council of Ministers.

Rendering Industry

Mr. Evans: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what estimate he has made of the saving from the phasing out of the support to the rendering industry introduced in March 1996. [54079]

Mr. Rooker: Since the previous Government made no financial provision for the support of the rendering industry after March 1998, the present Government made no savings by discontinuing that support when it did.

Set-aside Land (Staffordshire)

Dr. Tony Wright: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list *(a)* the hectarage of set-aside land in Staffordshire, *(b)* the location of the land and *(c)* the set-aside payments made in respect of the land. [53074]

Mr. Rooker: For the 1997 Arable Area Payments Scheme, the latest year for which statistics are available, the information requested is:

(a) the area of land set-aside in Staffordshire was 3,251 hectares;

(b) the land would mostly have been situated in Staffordshire although if a holding is located on the border then some may have been allocated to a neighbouring county;

(c) the amount paid in respect of land set-aside where the main holding is situated in Staffordshire was £1,023,728. The payment rate per hectare were £325.83 for normal set-aside and £228.65 for additional voluntary set-aside.

Green Transport

Mr. Baker: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, pursuant to his answer of 31 March 1998, *Official Report*, column *503*, on departmental transport arrangements, what further changes he has made. [53993]

Mr. Morley: The Department is working towards the target announced in the White Paper "A New Deal for Transport", that all headquarters buildings and main buildings occupied by Executive Agencies should have green transport plans by March 1999 and all other key buildings by March 2000.

A new, small unit is being set up specifically to deal with the co-ordination of the Department's greening operations, which will include the preparation of a Green Transport Plan. Work has already started on the plan for the Department's London offices.

Bovine TB

Mrs. Dean: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what progress has been made in considering the issue of Bovine TB. [55185]

Mr. Nick Brown: I am concerned about the rising incidence of tuberculosis in cattle. We cannot stand by while the disease spreads. I intend to consult my colleagues and hope that we will soon be able to make an announcement with details of our plans.

We need to have a co-ordinated strategy. It must put public health first.

The Krebs report published last December recommended that in the long term we should look for a cattle vaccine. This is now built into my department's research requirements and we want to draw on the best expertise in the country. Some of the necessary preliminary work has already been undertaken.

The traditional way of dealing with tuberculosis in cattle has been through testing, removal of reactors and movement controls. We will maintain this policy, which is in any event required under EU legislation. I have asked officials to tell me whether these controls need to be strengthened.

The Krebs report found that there was indirect but compelling evidence that badgers were a significant source of infection in cattle. It made recommendations that we should have a culling trial. We have now also received detailed recommendations on the design of such a trial from Professor Bourne's Expert Group. I have asked my Department to prepare their report for publication, while we consider the best way forward. Any measures taken will take full account of the Government's established commitment to animal welfare.

Genetically Modified Organisms

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what proposals he has for the arrangements for the forthcoming consultation exercise on genetically modified organisms; and when it will take place. [53385]

Mr. Battle: I have been asked to reply.

A consultation exercise will explore public views on the wider, including ethical, issues raised by recent developments in the biosciences. The exercise will be managed by the Office of Science and Technology, drawing on expertise from other Government Departments and interested parties. A small advisory group of practitioners in the fields of consultation and science communication has been established to advise on appropriate techniques and the development of a detailed workplan. I expect that the exercise will start in the autumn.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Pensioners

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the estimated number of *(a)* single pensioners and *(b)* pensioner couples receiving income support in each year for which estimates are available from 1999–2000 assuming that income support is uprated in line with (i) prices and (ii) earnings, respectively. [50862]

Mr. Denham: The increases to Income Support for pensioners from April 1999, announced as part of the Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR), are more generous than if current rates were to be uprated in line with either estimated prices or earnings.

The table therefore estimates for 2000–01 and 2001–02 the numbers of pensioner benefit units on Income Support (IS) if the higher rates announced for 1999–2000 in the CSR were uprated under (i) prices and (ii) average earnings uprating.

IS pensioner benefit units	*2000–01*	*2001–02*
(i) Uprating by prices		
(a) singles	1,385,000	1,475,000
(b) couples	305,000	330,000
(ii) Uprating by average earnings		
(a) singles	1,435,000	1,595,000
(b) couples	325,000	385,000

Notes:

1. All estimates exclude cases in residential care and nursing homes as insufficient information is available on these cases to be able to model the additional cases who may float-on under (ii)
2. Estimates have been based upon latest Income Support forecasts, following the changes announced as part of the Comprehensive Spending Review, and information from the 1995–96 Family Resources Survey
3. Average earnings assumptions are consistent with the latest data on GB earnings growth
4. Under Income Support rules, only one partner in a couple need be aged over 60 years to be classed as a couple pensioner benefit unit
5. Estimates have been rounded to the nearest 5,000 cases

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to his answer of 27 July 1998, *Official Report*, column *70*, for what reason the poverty rate for single female pensioners aged 80 years or above is significantly lower than that for pensioners aged 75 to 79 years when income is measured after housing costs. [54221]

Mr. Denham: On the after-housing costs measure, 38 per cent. of single female pensioners aged 75 to 79, and 28 per cent. of single female pensioners aged 80 or over, have incomes below half the national average

Roughly one third of the difference in the proportion of people with below half average income between the two age groups can be explained by differences in receipt of Attendance Allowance. Attendance Allowance is intended to help to meet the additional costs of disability, the risk of which increases with age. The higher income of recipients does not necessarily imply that they have higher relative living standards than comparable non-recipients as they may have additional disability related costs. If Attendance Allowance is excluded from the definition of income, 38 per cent. of single female pensioners aged 75 to 79 and 31 per cent. of single female pensioners aged 80 or over have incomes below half the national average after housing costs. Other factors may also be important but it has not been possible to isolate them.

A substantial proportion of pensioners have incomes which are close to half average income. Therefore, small variations in income between different groups of low income pensioners can lead to large differences in the proportion designated as having low incomes. For example, if 60 per cent. of average income is used rather than half average income, 56 per cent. of single female pensioners aged 75 to 79, and 52 per cent. of single female pensioners aged 80 or over, have incomes below the threshold on the after housing costs measure.

All figures come from the Department's Households Below Average Income (HBAI) dataset based on the Family Resources Survey (FRS) for the financial year 1995–6.

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) if he will list the categories of pensioners who will not have a guaranteed income after the introduction of his proposed pensioner income guarantee; and if he will identify the number of pensioners in each category; [54098]

(2) how many pensioners have more than £8,000 in savings and also a lower income than the income support rates applicable from April *(a)* 1999 and *(b)* 1998; [54173]

(3) how many pensioners have savings of between £3,000 and £8,000 and a lower income, excluding income from savings, than the income support rates applicable from April *(a)* 1999 and *(b)* 1998. [54174]

Mr. Denham: I will write to the hon. Member.

Income Support

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans he has to increase the capital limits for income support. [54176]

Mr. Denham: We have no current plans to do so.

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will estimate how many pensioners will become entitled to *(a)* council tax benefit and *(b)* housing benefit as a result of the increases in the income support rates applicable from April 1999. [54177]

Mr. Denham: The information is in the table:

Thousand

Year	*Housing Benefit*	*Council Tax Benefit*
1999–00	5	10
2000–01	5	10
2001–02	5	10

Notes:

1. All estimates exclude cases in residential care and nursing homes as insufficient information is available on these cases to be able to accurately model the additional cases who may float-on under the increases

2. Estimates have been based upon latest benefit forecasts, following the changes announced as part of the Comprehensive Spending Review, and information form the 1995–96 Family Resources Survey

3. Cases may gain in more than one benefit, so an overall total cannot be summed across benefits

4. Estimates have been rounded to the nearest 5,000 cases

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will estimate how many pensioners will become entitled to income support as a result of the increases in the income support rates applicable from April 1999. [54175]

Mr. Denham: It is estimated that 65,000 pensioners will become entitled to Income Support in each of the three years covered by the Comprehensive Spending Review as a result of the increases in the rates from April 1999.

Notes:

1. The estimates exclude cases in residential care and nursing homes as insufficient information is available on these cases to be able to accurately model the additional cases who may "float on" as a result of the increases.

2. Estimates have been based on latest Income Support forecasts, following the changes announced as part of the Comprehensive Spending Review, and information from the 1995–96 Family Resources Survey.

3. Estimates have been rounded to the nearest 5,000 cases.

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what was the amount of unclaimed income support by pensioners in the latest year for which figures are available; what would be the amount unclaimed if the expenditure-based take-up rate was applied to the current financial year; and what is his estimate of the additional cost of his proposed income guarantee for pensioners in each of the next three financial years. [54099]

Mr. Denham: The amount of unclaimed Income Support by pensioners in 1995–96 (the latest year for which figures are available) was estimated at between £670 million and £890 million. If the current expenditure-based take up rate (of between 72 per cent. and 78 per cent.) was applied to forecast expenditure for the current financial year, the estimated amount unclaimed would be between

£720 million and £990 million. The additional estimated cost of the benefit measures announced on 17 July is in the table:

			£ million
CSR total expenditure	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*	*2001–02*
Income Support expenditure	325	475	610
Total for Income-Related Benefits	495	670	840

Notes:

1. All estimates exclude cases in residential care and nursing homes as insufficient information is available on these cases to be able to accurately model the additional cases who may float-on under the increases
2. Estimates have been based upon latest benefit forecasts, following the changes announced as part of the Comprehensive Spending Review, and information from the 1995–6 Family Resources Survey and the publication Income-related benefits—Estimates of take-up in 1995–96
3. Estimates have been rounded to the nearest £5 million

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will set targets for the rate of take-up of income support by pensioners to reach *(a)* 70 per cent., *(b)* 80 per cent., *(c)* 90 per cent. and *(d)* 100 per cent. [54172]

Mr. Denham: The Government are committed to tackling the problem of pensioners living below Income Support levels. This is why we will begin a national programme from next April to identify these pensioners and encourage them to claim.

Attendance Allowance

Dr. George Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will publish by local social services authority the number of recipients of attendance allowance aged (i) 65 years and over and (ii) 75 years and over for the most recent available date, *(a)* in total and *(b)* as a proportion of the resident population aged respectively 65 and 75 years and over. [54204]

Mr. Denham: The figures are set out in the table entitled "Recipients of Attendance Allowance at 31 May 1998, by local authority and population" a copy of which has been placed in the library.

Elderly People (Extra Payments)

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans he has to increase the extra payment to those aged 80 years or over. [54059]

Mr. Denham: We believe that all pensioners should share fairly in rising national prosperity and are committed to examine the means of delivering more help to the poorest pensioners—many of whom are over 80. The Pensions Review is considering all aspects of basic State pension and its value, including the 25p age addition.

We have already taken action to help the poorest of those pensioners who are aged 80 or over. From April 1999, these older pensioners who are on Income Support and receive the Higher Pensioner Premium will be entitled to £82.25 a week (up from £77.55) if they are single and £125.30 (up from £117.90) for a couple.

Departmental Publications

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many of his Department's publications have been made available in *(a)* Braille, *(b)* audio tape and *(c)* large print in 1997–98; and what percentage of the total number of publications this represents. [54266]

Mr. Denham: I refer the hon. Member to the Written Answer given to him on 2 July 1997, *Official Report*, column 209. Publications available in *(a)* Braille, *(b)* audio tape and *(c)* large print in 1997–98 and the percentage of the total number of publications this represents is given in the table.

	Total number of publications	*Percentage of total publications*
	272	
Available in Braille	43	15.80
Available in audio	11	4.04
Available in large print	22	8.08

Welfare Reform

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, (1) pursuant to the Green Paper page 83, Cm 3805, New Ambitions for Our Country: A New Contract for Welfare, what assessment he has made of the quality of housing and housing management at present, and as at April 1997 and March 1998; [54602]

(2) pursuant to the Green Paper, page 84, Cm 3805, New Ambitions for our Country: A New Contract for Welfare, what is his definition of transparency about entitlements and costs; and what assessment he has made of the extent of such transparency at present and as at April 1997 and March 1998; [54582]

(3) pursuant to the Green Paper, Cm 3805, New Ambitions for Our Country: A New Contract for Welfare, page 83, what is the extent of high-quality second-tier pension provision at present; and what it was in April 1997 and March 1998; [54610]

(4) pursuant to the Green Paper Cm 3805, New Ambitions for our Country: A New Contract for Welfare, (p85) what estimate he has made of the proportion of customers who regard the benefit system as personalised and tailored to their individual needs, at present and as at April 1997 and March 1998; [54586]

(5) pursuant to the Green Paper page 83, Cm 3805, New Ambitions for Our Country: A New Contract for Welfare, what assessments he has made of the *(a)* simplicity, *(b)* clarity and *(c)* fairness of the system for determining entitlement to disability benefits at present, and as at April 1997 and March 1998; [54598]

(6) pursuant to the Green Paper Cm 3805, New Ambitions for our Country: A New Contract for Welfare, (p84) what assessment he has made of the clarity to claimants of the gateways for eligibility for benefits at present and as at April 1997 and March 1998; [54590]

(7) pursuant to the Green Paper, page 85, Cm 3805, New Ambitions for our Country: A New Contract for Welfare, what assessment he has made of the extent of duplication between agencies, and the extent to which the

best use is being made of new technology to deliver services at present and as at April 1997 and March 1998; [54584]

(8) pursuant to the Green Paper page 83, Cm 3805, New Ambitions for Our Country: A New Contract for Welfare, how many disabled people are able to work at present, and how many were able to do so in April 1997 and March 1998; [54600]

(9) pursuant to the Green Paper, Cm 3805, New Ambitions for Our Country: A New Contract for Welfare, page 83, what is the Government's definition of a decent income in retirement; how many people receive such an income in retirement at present, and how many did so in April 1997 and March 1998; [54608]

(10) pursuant to the Green Paper, Cm 3805, New Ambitions for our Country: A New Contract for Welfare, page 82, what is the proportion of *(a)* lone parents, *(b)* people with a long-term illness and *(c)* disabled people of working age in touch with the labour market; what were the proportions in April 1997 and March 1998; and what is his definition of being in touch with the labour market; [54607]

(11) pursuant to the Green Paper, page 84, Cm 3805, New Ambitions for our Country: A New Contract for Welfare, what assessment he has made of the level of collaboration between the Employment Service and the Benefits Agency to promote jobs rather than benefit dependency at present and as at April 1997 and March 1998; [54583]

(12) pursuant to the Green Paper, Cm 3805, New Ambitions for Our Country: A New Contract for Welfare, page 83, what assessment he has made of public confidence in the quality and regulation of financial services including pensions, at present and as at April 1997 and March 1998; [54611]

(13) pursuant to the Green Paper Cm 3805, New Ambitions for our Country: A New Contract for Welfare, (p85) what assessment he has made of the level of customer satisfaction with the delivery of benefits at present and as at April 1997 and March 1998; [54587]

(14) pursuant to the Green Paper Cm 3805, New Ambitions for our Country: A New Contract for Welfare, (p84) to what extent he has developed a model for tackling the problems of the most deprived areas; and what the model involves; [54591]

(15) pursuant to the Green Paper page 83, Cm 3805, New Ambitions for Our Country: A New Contract for Welfare, what are the level of spending on incapacity benefit, the number of claimants and the expenditure on severely disabled people with greatest needs at present; and what they were in April 1997 and March 1998; [54599]

(16) pursuant to the Green Paper page 84, Cm 3805, New Ambitions for Our Country: A New Contract for Welfare, what is the level of support from the tax and benefit systems going to families with children at present; and what it was in April 1997 and March 1998; [54597]

(17) pursuant to the Green Paper, page 84, Cm 3805, New Ambitions for our Country: A New Contract for Welfare, what assessment he has made of the public service ethos and level of job satisfaction and achievement among those working in welfare services at present and as at April 1997 and March 1998; [54585]

(18) pursuant to the Green Paper page 83, Cm 3805, New Ambitions for Our Country: A New Contract for Welfare, what assessment he has made of the extent of discrimination against disabled people at present, and as at April 1997 and March 1998; [54601]

(19) pursuant to the Green Paper Cm 3805, New Ambitions for our Country: A New Contract for Welfare, (p84) what is the level of truancy and school exclusion at present; and what it was in April 1997 and March 1998; [54593]

(20) pursuant to the Green Paper Cm. 3805, New Ambitions for our Country: A New Contract for Welfare, what definition of people of working age out of work for more than two years underlies his target; and on that definition, what are his estimates for *(a)* the present, *(b)* April 1997 and *(c)* March 1998; [54635]

(21) pursuant to the Green Paper Cm. 3805, New Ambitions for our Country: A New Contract for Welfare, what definition of working age people in work underlies his target; and on this definition, what are the numbers of such people at present; and what they were in April 1997 and March 1998. [54636]

Mr. Denham: The success measures which are the subject of these questions were proposed in the Green Paper on welfare reform, "New Ambitions for our Country: A New Contract for Welfare". They form part of the consultation exercise on the Green Paper which does not end until 31 July. We will make further announcements in due course.

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to the Green Paper Cm 3805, New Ambitions for our Country: A New Contract for Welfare, (p84) what is the number of incorrect benefit payments, at present; and what it was in April 1997 and March 1998. [54588]

Mr. Denham: Information is not available in the format requested. Accurate payment of benefit is of key importance to the Department. Such information as is available, which relates to the accuracy achievements/ targets is in the table.

Benefit accuracy achievements and targets

Percentages

Benefit	*1 April 1997–30 April 1997*		*1 April 1997–31 March 1998*		*1 April 1998–30 June 1998*	
	Achievement	*Target*	*Achievement*	*Target*	*Achievement*	*Target*
Jobseeker's Allowance	87.1	87	85.11	87	91.0	87
Income Support	80.81	87	81.65	87	83.57	87
Disability Living Allowance	97.81	96	97.10	96	97.66	96
Attendance Allowance	98.25	96	98.41	96	97.44	96
Child Benefit	99	98	98.2	98	98.3	98
Guardian's Allowance	99	98	98.2	98	99.7	98

Benefit accuracy achievements and targets

Percentages

Benefit	[1] *1 April 1997–30 April 1997 Achievement*	*Target*	*1 April 1997–31 March 1998 Achievement*	*Target*	*1 April 1998–30 June 1998 Achievement*	*Target*
Family Credit	94.7	91	92.6	91	94.9	91
Disability Working Allowance	95	95	92.3	95	91.6	94
Invalid Care Allowance	94	95	96	95	97.36	95
Incapacity benefit, Severe Disablement Allowance and Maternity Allowance	90.41	94	91.66	94	94.76	94
Retirement Pension and Widows Benefits	93.28	98	94.68	98	95.5	96
War Pensions	98.11	95	96.16	95	89.91	[2] 90

[1] Figures for Jobseeker's Allowance, Child Benefit and Guardian's Allowance represents achievement to 1 April 1996–31 March 1997
[2] The checking criteria for 1998–99 were widened to include lay and medical adjudication as well as action taken to implement payments
Notes:
1. The Department does not collate information relating to the accuracy of Housing Benefit or Council Tax Benefit
2. Accuracy levels of Income Support, Jobseeker's Allowance, Incapacity benefit, Severe Disablement Allowance, Maternity Allowance, Retirement Pensions and Widows Benefits are based on a statistically valid sample selected at random and changes of circumstance in a relevant period. This methodology has been approved by the National Audit Office. The samples are sufficiently large for the results at a national level to be within a margin of error of less than 0.25 per cent.

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to the Green Paper page 84, Cm 3805, New Ambitions for Our Country: A New Contract for Welfare, what is the proportion of parents meeting their financial obligations to their children after separation at present; and what it was in April 1997 and March 1998. [54595]

Mr. Denham: The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is set out in the table.

Percentage of non-resident parents with a full maintenance assessment and paying through the Child Support Agency collection service

Percentage

	Fully compliant	*Partially compliant*
May 1997	31.3	36.1
February 1998	41	28.7

Note:
1. These figures do not include non-resident parents with interim maintenance assessments or those who have been assessed to pay nothing
2. In addition, 19 per cent. of non-resident parents with full maintenance assessments at May 1997, and 17 per cent at February 1998, were paying maintenance directly to the parent with care.
Source:
Child Support Agency Quarterly Summary of Statistics

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to the Green Paper Cm 3805, New Ambitions for our Country: A New Contract for Welfare, (p84) what is the amount of money lost in fraudulent payments at present, and what it was in April 1997 and March 1998. [54589]

Mr. Denham: The information is not available. Since fraud involves deception, it is not possible to state with great precision the amount lost through benefit fraud or to provide meaningful estimates for losses at particular points in time.

In the Green Paper "Beating Fraud is Everyone's Business: Securing the Future", we have said that, on a conservative estimate, fraud costs some £2 billion a year but that, if all suspected fraud is included in the estimate, losses could be up to around £7 billion. This is based on the results of a number of studies in which samples of cases were investigated. A key element of our new anti-fraud strategy is the development of better measures of the amount of losses from fraud, and the savings which flow from particular preventive and detective activities. This will, over time, allow us to refine our estimates of losses and savings as well as to direct anti-fraud resources to where they are most effective.

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to the Green Paper, Cm 3805, New Ambitions for our Country: A New Contract for Welfare, page 83, what are *(a)* the level of literacy and numeracy skills among 11 year olds, and *(b)* the number of school leavers with no recognised qualifications at present; and what each was in April 1997 and March 1998. [54604]

Ms Estelle Morris: I will write to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

National Minimum Wage

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will estimate the savings on the welfare budget from the introduction of the minimum wage. [54058]

Mr. Denham: I refer the hon. Member to the reply the then Under-Secretary, my hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Withington (Mr. Bradley), gave the right hon. Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood) on 25 June 1998, *Official Report*, column *620*.

Child Support

Mr. Rendel: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how *(a)* current over and under-payments and *(b)* outstanding arrears are planned to be dealt with under the proposals outlined in the Green Paper on the Child Support Agency. [54117]

Mr. Denham: Non-resident parents have a responsibility to support their children, including paying for their upkeep.

We are not proposing any reassessment of arrears due under the current formula on the introduction of a new child support scheme, as outlined in the Green Paper "Children First: a new approach to child support" (Cm 3992). Non-resident parents will be expected to pay

the amounts calculated under the present arrangements and appropriate collection and enforcement action will be taken if there are outstanding underpayments or arrears.

Where child support has been overpaid, we propose to continue the existing arrangements. Non-resident parents will receive full reimbursement for any child support paid over and above their actual liability either through a reduction in the amount of their child support payments or as a lump sum repayment.

Disability Living Allowance

Dr. George Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will publish by local social services authority, the total numbers of recipients of disability living allowance for the most recent available date *(a)* in total and *(b)* as a proportion of the population of the authority and, *(c)* the numbers of pensionable age who retain their eligibility for the care component beyond pensionable age. [54196]

Mr. Denham: The figures are set out in the table entitled "Recipients of Disability Living Allowance at 31 May 1998, by local authority and population" a copy of which has been placed in the Library.

Mr. Rendel: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many claimants of disability living allowance in Scotland have had their benefit reduced or stopped under the Benefit Integrity Project; and how much money was saved as a result. [53729]

Mr. Denham: The administration of Disability Living Allowance and the Benefits Integrity Project is a matter for Peter Mathison, the Chief Executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Peter Mathison to Mr. David Rendel, dated 30 July 1998

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question asking how many claimants of Disability Living Allowance (DLA) in Scotland have had their benefit reduced or stopped as a result of a decision taken as part of the Benefits Integrity Project (BIP) and how much money was saved as a result.

Information on the BIP is not available in the format requested. To provide geographical information routinely would incur high costs and disrupt the processing of ongoing casework.

As at 31 May 1998, a total of 217,839 cases, including 34,164 renewal cases, have been selected routinely would incur high costs and disrupt the processing of ongoing casework.

At the same date a total of 94,634 cases have been examined. Of the total cases dealt with 2,191 have resulted in an increase in benefit. 73,035 have remained unchanged, 12,101 have resulted in a reduction in benefit and 7,307 have resulted in benefit being stopped.

The total includes 20,054 renewal cases, of which 623 have resulted in an increase in benefit, 10,121 have remained unchanged, 5,539 have resulted in a reduction in benefit and 3,771 have resulted in benefit being stopped.

The BIP is looking again at some awards of Disability Living Allowance (DLA) to collect up to date information about the care and mobility needs of some disabled people and to make sure that the correct amount of benefit is being paid. It is expected that the Project will realise benefit savings of £8 million in the first year, £36 million in the second year and £40 million in the third.

A monthly statistical report can be found in the House of Commons Library.

I hope that this is helpful.

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what proportion of those decisions on the payment of disability living allowance which have been reviewed by the Benefit Integrity Project have been incurred on the basis of calculations *(a)* including exempt categories, *(b)* excluding renewals and *(c)* including exempt categories and excluding renewals. [54906]

Mr. Denham: The administration of Disability Living Allowance is a matter for Peter Mathison, the Chief Executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Peter Mathison to Mrs. Theresa May, dated 31 July 1998:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question asking what proportion of those decisions on the payment of Disability Living Allowance (DLA) which have been reviewed by the Benefits Integrity Project (BIP) have been incurred on the following basis of calculations (a) including exempt categories, (b) excluding renewals and (c) including exempt categories and excluding renewals.

The information is not available in the format requested.

Customers who are in the categories to be looked at by the BIP are those in receipt of Mobility component at the higher rate with either the middle or highest rate of the Care component.

The customers included in the BIP are selected by means of computer scans. The names of customers who are in the exemption categories for action by the BIP will not appear on the scans and therefore cannot be identified.

Some cases input onto the system during the conversion from Mobility Allowance to the Mobility component of DLA in 1992 may appear on the scans but are identified under a separate code. This does not show which disability the customer is suffering from and as a result the customer's papers are checked individually by the BIP Operational Teams. Any customers found to be exempt from the BIP are then removed from the work. New disability codes are then entered onto the system and the remaining cases appropriate to be included are actioned by the BIP Teams.

The total payload of customers in receipt of Disability Living Allowance is 2,018,619 at 31 May 1998. Of these, 561,100 were in receipt of DLA in the categories for inclusion in the BIP.

As at the 31 May 1998, a total of 217,839 cases, including 34,164 renewal cases were selected for action under the BIP nationally. This does not include 13,725 cases which were found to be exempt and therefore excluded from selection.

A monthly statistical report can be found in the House of Commons Library.

I hope you find this helpful.

Green Transport

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to his answer of 27 March 1998, *Official Report*, column *317*, on departmental transport arrangements, what further changes he has made. [54010]

Mr. Denham: This Department is working towards the target announced in the White Paper, 'A New Deal for Transport', that all headquarters buildings and main buildings occupied by Executive Agencies and Government Offices for the Regions should have green transport plans by March 1999 and all other key buildings by March 2000.

Green Transport Plans and Commuting Action Plans are currently being drafted for 20 DSS sites, including headquarter buildings and the major sites in the northwest of the country. These will be in place by 1 April 1999.

For official journeys revised guidance on the usage of motor vehicles will be published in the new version of the Departments 'Green Guide'.

Official vehicles that have reached the end of their life with the department will be replaced, where necessary, with dual fuelled vehicles, particularly in environmental 'hot spots' such as inner cities.

Asylum Seekers

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what was the total cost to the Social Security budget of claims by asylum seekers in the years *(a)* 1995–96, *(b)* 1996–97 and *(c)* 1997–98. [53585]

Mr. Denham: *[holding answer 30 July 1998]:* The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is set out in the table.

Asylum seekers—estimated income support, housing benefit and council tax benefit annual expenditure

£ million

Year	*Total estimated annual expenditure*
1995–96	300
1996–97	310
1997–98	340

Notes:
1. Estimated annual expenditure figures are rounded to the nearest five million pounds
2. Estimates for February 1997 onwards will include a number of non-asylum seekers which receive Urgent Case Payments for other reasons
3. Annual expenditure figures for Income Support have been based on an average of four quarters for the relevant financial year, using number of cases and average weekly amounts. Income Support figures are not available for the years 1997–98, data are therefore provided for May 1997 for the year 1997–98
4. Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit estimates have been calculated using the Housing Benefit Management 1 per cent. sample and Departmental Reports, and exclude asylum seekers receiving Housing Benefit who are not receiving Income Support
5. Information on the other non-contributory benefits is not available

Source:
1. Income Support Statistics Quarterly Inquiries, May 1995 to May 1997
2. Housing Benefit Management Information System, annual 1 per cent. sample of claimants in receipt of Income Support, at the end of May in each year given
3. Departmental Report

Women's Issues

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security following the changed responsibilities of Ministers in his Department in relation to women's issues, what will happen to the Women's Unit; and to which Department it will be attached. [54194]

Mr. Denham: As announced on 28 July, the Women's Unit will continue its work and will be part of the Cabinet Office.

Industrial Injuries Benefits

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a statement on his plans to reform *(a)* industrial injuries benefits and *(b)* widow's benefits. [54900]

Mr. Denham: Modernising the Social Security system is a key priority for the Government. We are, therefore, reviewing major components of the Social Security system, in line with the principles set out in the Welfare Reform Green Paper. We will make announcements in due course.

Hepple Case

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a statement on the current position with regard to the Hepple case. [54034]

Mr. Denham: The Hepple case is currently being litigated before the Social Security Commissioner and concerns whether the Reduced Earnings Allowance provisions comply with European Community law on grounds of gender. The Commissioner has referred the case to the European Court of Justice for a ruling. We maintain that the Reduced Earnings Allowance provisions are in accordance with our obligations under Community law.

Child Support Agency (Telephone Helplines)

Mr. Levitt: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if the CSA telephone helplines are accessible by hearing-impaired and speech-impaired people through the BT Typetalk relay service. [54061]

Mr. Denham: We expect the Child Support Agency to provide an efficient and effective service to all its clients throughout the child support assessment process.

The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the Chief Executive, Mrs. Faith Boardman. She will write to my hon. Friend.

Letter from Faith Boardman to Mr. Tom Levitt, dated 31 July 1998:

I am replying to your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security about the Child Support Agency telephone helplines.

BT Typetalk is a service which allows members of the public using text phones to make contact with organisations who do not have similar equipment.

The Agency's telephone helplines are equipped with text phones, therefore we do not require the BT service. If a customer contacts a complete action service team direct, arrangements are made to call them back using aline with text phone.

The equipment we have enables the hearing-impaired and speech-impaired to make access direct to the Agency and avoid the necessity of having to disclose personal information to a third party.

Additionally customers are able to take advantage of the Agency's use of local call rate numbers.

I hope this is helpful.

Child Support Agency

Miss Geraldine Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what action the Government are taking to ensure that self-employed persons are fairly assessed under the CSA and that their ex-partners receive full payments owing to them; and if he will make a statement. [54060]

Mr. Denham: The Government are consulting on their proposals for reforming the Child Support scheme set out in the Green Paper "Children First: a new approach to child support" (Cm 3992). We are considering assessing

the income of self-employed parents on the basis of the most recent year's taxable profit in line with the approach used by the Inland Revenue. We will also be looking into the possibility of using information supplied for tax purposes so as to reduce the delay in collecting maintenance.

The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the Chief Executive, Mrs. Faith Boardman. She will write to my hon. Friend.

Letter from Faith Boardman to Miss Geraldine Smith, dated 31 July 1998:

I am replying to your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security about how the Child Support Agency deals with the self employed.

The Agency acknowledges that cases where the non-resident parent is self employed can be more difficult to progress, especially where the non-resident parent does not wish to comply. However, once all the required evidence has been collected, the income of a self employed person is assessed in line with the regulations to ensure that the maintenance assessment accurately reflects that income.

The key to securing early compliance is by personal contact with our customers. By contacting customers by phone at the initial stages of their assessment we aim to build a better relationship with them, address their concerns promptly and provide an improved level of service.

We have recently completed a pilot study in the South Western Business Unit, looking at how best to process self employed cases. Trials using dedicated staff dealing exclusively with the self employed have shown a marked reduction in processing time and an increase in the collection of maintenance. We intend to have specific sections, supported by accountants where necessary, in each Business Unit to deal exclusively with self employed customers.

Additionally, to assist us to trace the whereabouts of self employed non-resident parents, we are exploring the possibility of sharing information with other Agencies and Government Departments. We have also revised staff training and raised staff awareness of the Agency's self employed powers, working practices and related issues.

If all voluntary methods to secure maintenance from a self employed non-resident parent fail, a liability order is applied for. It is hoped that the threat of such action will be enough to ensure compliance. The majority do agree to make an arrangement and only in a very small minority of cases is legal action actually taken.

We will use any and all enforcement methods legally available but we experience the same difficulties as other litigants in enforcing a civil debt. During 1997/98 we have been successful in registering debt by County Court Judgment in 522 cases. Where all other action has failed, the Agency has pursued cases for prosecution; between October 1997 and March 1998 a total of 15 suspended custodial sentences were imposed. A self employed non-resident parent was recently committed to prison, as a result of non payment of maintenance.

I hope this is helpful.

Mr. Woolas: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what was the total wastage rate of staff in the Child Support Agency for the period 1 January to 30 June; and if he intends to take measures to reduce this rate. [54035]

Mr. Denham: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the Chief Executive, Mrs. Faith Boardman. She will write to my hon. Friend.

Letter from Faith Boardman to Mr. Phil Woolas, dated 31 July 1998

I am replying to your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security about the total wastage rate of staff in the Child Support Agency.

When calculating a wastage rate we take into account all leavers from the Agency, including retirements (including voluntary early retirments), and staff transferring to other parts of DSS or to other Government Departments as well as those leaving the Civil Service. The calculation also includes a proportion of short term appointed staff whose contracts have expired, some of whom have rejoined as permanent staff.

The total wastage rate of staff in the Agency from 1 January 1998 to 30 June 1998 was 15.5 per cent. This includes permanent, fixed term appointed and casual staff.

We are examining the trends and recurring reasons for resignations, we are also looking at geographical influences and how job rotation may be introduced to develop and retain staff. We are currently undertaking a review of our recruitment policy which will look at all areas from human resources planning to retention strategies.

I hope this is helpful.

Mr. Healey: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) how many compensation payments from the Child Support Agency have been awarded in each of the last four years of *(a)* under £250, *(b)* £251 to £500, *(c)* £501 to £1,000, *(d)* £1,001 to £2,000, *(e)* £2,001 to £3,000 and *(f)* £3,001 to £5,000; [51140]

(2) what was the number of compensation payments from the Child Support Agency for each of the last four years; and what were the total amounts paid. [51139]

Mr. Denham: All children have a right to the emotional and financial support of both their parents wherever they live. We have set out proposals for radical reform in our Green Paper "Children First: a new approach to child support" (Cm 3992).

The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the Chief Executive, Mrs. Faith Boardman. She will write to my hon. Friend.

Letter from Mrs. Faith Boardman to Mr. John Healey, dated 30 July 1998:

I am replying to your Parliamentary Questions to the Secretary of State for Social Security about the Child Support Agency compensation payments.

Compensation payments are normally referred to as special payments. A special payment is considered where a clear and unambiguous error by the Agency has resulted in distress or in actual financial loss to the customer which is not recoverable through other means.

A detailed breakdown of payments made for each of the last four years is shown in the attached table.

The numbers of payments have risen as a result of our actions over the past year to increase the number of cleared backlog maintenance applications (which had accumulated in the Agency during its first 2–3 years). Where the Agency has taken-on cases, the length of time taken to complete a maintenance assessment is measured, and cases which exceed 52 weeks are considered to be a backlog; this backlog currently stands at approximately 110,000 down from 225,000 at 31 March 1997. In 1997/98 the Agency cleared 595,000 maintenance applications compared with 357,000 in 1996/97.

Additionally, we have increased our customers' awareness of special payments by advising them, where appropriate, how to apply. This will also have an impact on the number of special payments made.

I am conscious that there are still far too many complaints about the standards of basic customer contact and the service we provide, and we recognise that doing things right first time is the key to preventing complaints. We are aware that as we further tackle our backlog of cases from the Agency's first 2–3 years, there is potential for the volume of complaints to rise in the short term.

During 1997/98 we developed a series of measures to improve our customer service over the next four years. Our plans are to improve performance standards; improve significantly, computer generated letters; deal with more of our business by telephone forms review; focus on courtesy and helpfulness; cut down delays and improve the way we handle complaints.

We expect customers to see some real improvements by the end of 1998/99.

I hope this is helpful.

The number of special payments made and the total amounts paid out by the Child Support Agency since April 1995

Year	Number of payments	Amount paid (£)
1995–96	186	114,979
1996–97	983	655,821
1997–98	2,136	1,101,313
1998–99[1]	858	888,670
Total	4,163	2,760,783

[1] Up to 30 June 1998

Breakdown in bands of the number of special payments made

	1995–96	1996–97	1997–98	[1]1998–99
Under £250	63	455	1,341	42
£250-£499.99	42	136	311	122
£500-£999.99	37	180	205	99
£1,000-£1,999.99	32	144	151	74
£2,000-£2,999.99	7	38	56	51
£3,000-£4,999.99	2	21	59	51
£5,000+	3	9	13	36
Total	186	983	2,136	858

[1] Up to 30 June 1998

Widow's Pensions

Sir Brian Mawhinney: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) what plans he has to pay interest to widows who have not received their full pension entitlement on time as a result of computer problems; [53450]

(2) for how long the computer which regulates the payment of widow's pensions has been operating at less than 100 per cent. efficiency; and if he will estimate for how long this is likely to continue; [53447]

(3) how many widows have not received their full pension entitlement *(a)* at all and *(b)* on time as a result of computer problems; and if he will estimate in each case how many more are likely to be resolved. [53449]

Mr. Denham: The administration of Widow's Benefit is a matter for Peter Mathison, the Chief Executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the right hon. Member.

Letter from Peter Mathison to Sir Brian Mawhinney, dated 30 July 1998:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Questions concerning computer problems and the payment of Widow's Pensions (WP).

As a result of the modernisation of the Contributions Agency (CA)'s National Insurance Recording System (NIRS) it was necessary to switch off the existing system to enable the transfer of information to the new one to take place. Payable rates of Widows Benefits (WB) are calculated by the NIRS.

The special payments scheme includes provision for compensation where the payment of benefit is exceptionally delayed due to official error. Compensation is considered where the amount owed to the widow exceeds £100; payment of WB is delayed by more than 4 months and the potential compensation is £10 or more (compensation is calculated using the Average Shares rate supplied by the Building Societies Commission). Compensation is automatically considered where these criteria are satisfied therefore the widow does not need to apply for it.

The computer migration began on 19 June 1998 and it is planned that NIRS will resume providing WB calculations from 1 September 1998. All claims will be looked at retrospectively once calculations are available. The correct rate of WB will be put into payment and any arrears which are due will be paid.

The exact number of widows who have not received their full entitlement to WB as a result of not being able to obtain the payable rates from the NIRS computer is not known. Approximately 48,000 women a year qualify for WB and of these it is estimated about 38,000 (730 a week) qualify for WP or Widowed Mother's Allowance (WMA) in addition to the widows payment.

Between 6 April 1998 and 19 June 1998, NIRS was not able to supply the full payable rates in respect of all the estimated 300 new claims a week entitled to WP or WMA. Payment on these claims is being made on the 'safe' information provided by NIRS. Where appropriate clerical calculations of the widow's entitlement can be made and to date 208 calculations have been performed.

Since 20 June 1998 NIRS has not provided any payable rates. For women widowed after this date arrangements are in force to make emergency payments at a basic rate plus increases for children. There will be very few, if indeed any, women who are entitled to WB but who do not receive emergency payments. This includes the £1,000 lump sum widows payment.

The CA and the Benefits Agency are committed to minimising the impact on customers.

I hope you find this reply helpful.

Child Benefit Payments

Mr. Rendel: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what delays were involved in *(a)* administering and *(b)* issuing child benefit payment books; how many child benefit payments due were not received as a result of the delays; and if these payments have now been made. [53708]

Mr. Denham: The administration of Child Benefit is a matter for Peter Mathison, Chief Executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Peter Mathison to Mr. David Rendel, dated 30 July 1998:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question asking what delays were involved in (a) administering and (b) issuing Child Benefit (ChB) payment books; how many ChB payments due were not received as a result of the delays; and if these payments have now been made.

The information is not available in the format requested. The ChB Centre (CBC) in Washington has, in general encountered no delays in the administering and the issuing of ChB order books.

I am aware that there were two minor problems in the administration of ChB recently; the first followed changes to the criteria for ChB (Lone Parent) rate and the second followed the transfer of computer records to a different system. The incidents had an impact on only a very small number of customers as a result of corrective action taken by the CBC.

I hope this information is useful.

Winter Fuel Payments

Mr. Rendel: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many pensioner households in Scotland *(a)* were entitled to receive the winter fuel payment, *(b)* received their winter fuel payment by (i) January,

(ii) February and (iii) March 1998, *(c)* received incorrect winter fuel payments and *(d)* received duplicate winter fuel payments. [53709]

Mr. Denham: Winter fuel payments are one of a number of initiatives the Government has taken to help vulnerable people, especially the elderly, keep warm this winter. Originally a total of £400 million was committed for two years (97–98 and 98–99), to help pensioners with fuel bills to pay.

As announced during the statement to the House on 17 July 1998, *Official Report*, columns 703–15, a further £0.5 billion has been allocated to extend the scheme beyond next winter. This will provide each eligible pensioner household with an annual £20 winter fuel payment.

The administration of Winter Fuel Payments is a matter for Peter Mathison, Chief Executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Peter Mathison to Mr. David Rendel dated 30 July 1998:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question asking how many pensioner households in Scotland (a) were entitled to receive the winter fuel payment, (b) received their winter fuel payment by (i) January, (ii) February and (iii) March 1998, (c) received incorrect winter fuel payments and (d) received duplicate winter fuel payments.

The information is not available in the format requested and can be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

The making of Winter Fuel Payments to almost ten million eligible pensioners, in over seven million households, before the end of March 1998 was a challenging task for the Benefits Agency. This was achieved whilst maintaining normal business.

We issued 1,441,614 £50 payments to the poorest pensioners, those receiving Income Support (IS) or income-based Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA), by 31 January. Other eligible pensioners were entitled to a payment of £20 or £10. Where they lived alone, were the only eligible pensioner in a household, or were of no fixed abode, they were entitled to £20; otherwise, they were entitled to £10.

In order to establish other eligible pensioners, correctly identify pensioner households, and determine the amount each should receive, it was necessary to correlate data. This involved around fifteen million computer records, fifteen qualifying benefits, across nine computer systems. Where only one eligible person was identified as living at an address a payment of £20 was made and if more than one eligible person was identified as living at an address a payment of £10 was made. By the end of March we issued a further 8,326,715 payments to these eligible customers.

Where official Departmental records were not correct or incomplete, it was possible that the amount of some payments may not have corresponded with the actual circumstances. For example, there were cases where two eligible pensioners lived at the same address and in the same household, but the address details held on the relevant benefit computer records were incorrect or incomplete for either or both of them. In such cases, the data correlation exercise may not have identified more than one eligible person at an address and in accordance with the provisions of the legislation each were entitled to a payment of £20. There is no overprovision in such instances, but any voluntary offer to repay any amount would be accepted.

Of payments made to IS and income-based JSA pensioners in January we are aware that some payments were incorrectly made or duplicated. We know that 9,357 payments were made where information held within official records indicated payment was inappropriate. A further 211 duplicate payments were made to those pensioners who transferred from IS to income-based JSA during the qualifying week of 5 January 1998. Of the relevant payments this represents a 0.68 per cent. error rate. In financial terms the total cost of these errors amounts to £488,400, and against this represents 0.68 per cent. of the total sum issued of £72,080,700.

In addition we also know that due to a computer operator error, 40,801 IS payments were sent out with an incorrect issue date on them. All these girocheques were replaced automatically within 72 hours. To date we are aware that in 438 cases both the original and replacement payments have been cashed.

I hope you find this information helpful.

Benefit Fraud

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) how many of confirmed cases of benefit fraud among residents of care homes there were in 1997–98; [53818]

(2) to what extent care homes are targeted in his Department's measures to combat benefit fraud; [53820]

(3) what measures his Department is taking to combat benefit fraud among residents of care homes. [53819]

Mr. Denham: Tackling fraud and abuse is a top priority for the Government. Operational issues are the responsibility of Peter Mathison, the Chief Executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Peter Mathison to Mr. Mark Oaten, dated 30 July 1998:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Questions concerning benefit fraud among residents of care homes.

The information is not available in the format requested. In 1997/98 Benefits Agency Security Investigation Service (BASIS) who concentrate on serious attacks on the benefit system by organised criminals carried out 1,742 successful investigations. In the same period Benefit Fraud Investigation Service (BFIS) who deal with locally based fraud investigations carried out 547,000 successful investigations. Figures are not broken down to collate by type of benefit claimant such as by resident of care home.

The BFIS investigates fraud within the benefit system. Investigation takes place when a suspicion of fraud exists, for example following receipt information that a benefit claimant has not disclosed employment or where a benefit recipient's circumstances change (for example going into care) and the BA is not informed. Enquiries are also made of employers including those of care homes where there is suspicion that employees may be committing benefit fraud. Care homes are not specifically targeted in these types of enquiries.

The BA is undertaking a range of projects and initiatives all of which are designed to achieve a sustained reduction in the level of fraud across the benefit system. Suspicion of fraud by residents of care homes would be investigated by the BA professionally and sensitively. The Government's recent Green Paper "Beating Fraud is Everyone's Business: Securing the Future" sets out a comprehensive strategy for tackling fraud in the wider context of welfare reform.

I hope you find this reply helpful.

Departmental Vehicles

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how much his Department expects to spend in each year from 1998–99 to 2000–01 on vehicle replacements. [54993]

Mr. Denham: I will write to the hon. Member.

Incapacity Benefit

Mr. Best: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) how many claimants of incapacity benefit who have been required to undertake the all work test; [53961]

(2) how many claimants of incapacity benefit have not satisfied the requirements of the all work test in the opinion of the Benefits Agency Medical Services Medical Officer; [53966]

(3) how many claimants of incapacity benefit who have appealed against decisions of the Benefits Agency Medical Services Medical Officer that they did not satisfy the requirements of the all work test have had their appeals upheld after *(a)* an oral and *(b)* a paper hearing. [53967]

Mr. Denham: The information is not available in the form requested. The information which is available is as follows.

Decisions on entitlement to Incapacity Benefit are made by independent Adjudication Officers in the light of all the evidence, including medical advice from the claimant's GP, other medical practitioners where relevant, and the Benefits Agency Medical Services Medical Officer.

The All Work Test is a functional assessment of a person's ability to carry out a range of work-related activities: in some but not all cases a medical examination by the Benefits Agency Medical Services is required.

From 13 April 1995 to 30 June 1998, a total of 2,920,202[1] All Work Test decisions were made and a total of 565,583[2] claims were disallowed.

Details of appeals outcomes split between oral and paper hearings are only available from July 1997. From July 1997 to April 1998 the Independent Tribunal Service heard 26,778 appeals on Incapacity Benefit (All Work Test). Of these 19,691 were oral hearings with 9,803 being found in favour of the appellant. The remaining 7,087 were paper hearings with 853 found in the appellant's favour.

Appellants are asked if they want to attend the hearing of their appeal. The Department's appeals leaflet makes it clear that appellants who attend or are represented at hearings have a higher success rate and encourages people to attend the hearing.

Notes:

[1] Includes Incapacity Benefit recipients and credits only cases, and Severe Disablement Allowance cases allowed following BAMS referral

[2] Includes claimants disallowed for failure to return the IB50 questionnaire or to attend a medical examination, without good cause

Source:

1. All Work Test decisions and disallowances—100 per cent. count of the computer system, excludes a small number of cases not on the system

2. Appeals--provisional data supplied by Analytical Services Division (ASD) from the Independent Tribunal Service Generic Appeals Processing System

Benefits (Savings)

Mr. Rendel: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what estimate his Department has made of the average savings in benefit expenditure for each unemployed claimant of benefits who gains full-time employment. [53959]

Mr. Denham: The cost of unemployment-related benefits per unemployed person per year, is estimated at 1998–99 benefit levels at £3,850[1]. The extent of any savings arising from individuals moving from benefits into work would depend on their entitlement to in-work benefits such as Family Credit, Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit.

Note:

[1] For the purposes of calculating this figure, unemployment related benefits are defined as Jobseeker's Allowance, and Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit payments to people in receipt of Jobseeker's Allowance.

Chief Adjudication Officer

Ms Buck: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when he will publish the 14th annual report of the Chief Adjudication Officer; and if he will make a statement. [54885]

Angela Eagle: The report is being published today. The Chief Adjudication Officer's findings record a continuing improvement in the majority of decisions made by both the Benefits Agency and the Employment Service.

It is encouraging to read about the numerous initiatives that have been introduced to tackle weaknesses and improve overall performance. The initiatives are already helping to improve decision making. This is particularly good news as we approach 1999 when the provisions of the Social Security Act 1998 come into force. These provisions will build on current improvements and ensure that the way decisions are made and appealed is straightforward for both customers and decision-makers alike. The changes are a further step in the transformation of the Social Security system into an Active Modern Service. The Act also introduces important changes to the monitoring of decisions. Responsibility for monitoring the standards of decision-making within the Agencies will transfer to the relevant Chief Executives.

War Pensions

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) how many veterans who have been awarded war pensions for illnesses arising out of their service in the 1991 Gulf War are suffering from *(a)* post-traumatic stress disorder, *(b)* irritable bowel syndrome, *(c)* chronic fatigue syndrome, *(d)* irritable bladder, *(e)* asthma, *(f)* respiratory disorders and *(g)* signs and symptoms of ill-defined conditions; and how many of these have been awarded pensions for suffering two or more of these conditions; [54536]

(2) how many veterans to date have been awarded war pensions for illnesses arising out of their service in the 1991 Gulf War; [54535]

(3) how many veterans diagnosed with Gulf War syndrome have been refused war pensions. [54537]

Mr. Denham: One of our key aims is that delivery of service should be simpler and more efficient. The administration of the War Pensions Agency is a matter for its Chief Executive, Mr. Gordon Hextall. I have asked him to write to my hon. Friend.

Letter from Gordon Hextall to Mr. Ken Livingstone, dated 30 July 1998:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Questions about the number of War Pensions awarded for medical conditions relating to the Gulf Conflict.

I regret that the information is not available in the format requested. The War Pensions Agency does record statistics on claims from Gulf War veterans. However, such claims may relate to injuries etc received at any time whilst serving, not just during service in the Gulf Conflict. A War Pension may be awarded for any disablement which can be causally linked to service. At the end of June 1998, a total of 2315 claims had been identified for medical conditions relating to ex-servicemen whose service included the Gulf Conflict. 1610 awards of War Pension have been made.

Of the 2315 claims, 537 have been received where a Gulf Veteran had made reference to a "Gulf War related illness". Of these, 283 have been awarded a pension, 44 have been rejected and 22 claims were withdrawn or lapsed. However, I am advised that medical research carried out to date has not identified a specific "Gulf Related illness". Consequently, no claims have been awarded or rejected for "Gulf War Syndrome".

Information on the number of Gulf Veterans receiving pension payments for the conditions Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, Irritable Bowel Syndrome, Chronic Fatigue Syndrome, Irritable Bladder, Asthma, Respiratory Disorders and Signs and Symptoms of Ill Defined Conditions is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

I hope you find my reply helpful.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Gas Exploration Industry

Mr. Blizzard: To ask the President of the Board of Trade when she expects to meet representatives of the gas exploration industry to discuss proposals set out in the Review of Energy Sources for Power Generation consultation document. [49635]

Mr. Mandelson *[holding answer 9 July 1998]:* The Minister for Science, Energy and Industry met representatives of the UK Offshore Operators Association on 16 July, and of Shell on 27 July to discuss the Review.

Motor Dealers

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what assessment she has made of the introduction of the licensing of motor dealers in some Scottish regions; and what plans she has to extend the scheme to other regions. [51206]

Dr. Howells: No assessment has been made of the introduction of licensing of second-hand motor dealers which is at the discretion of individual local authorities in Scotland under powers in the Civic Government (Scotland) Act 1982 which enables them to license all second-hand dealers for the purposes of preserving public order and safety and the prevention of crime. There are no plans to extend the scheme to other regions beyond Scotland.

Export Credits (Sri Lanka)

Mr. Gerrard: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what amount of export credits were available for Sri Lanka for each of the years 1994 to 1997; and in each year what amount was cover for military exports. [51797]

Mr. Mandelson: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given to the hon. Member for Moray (Mrs. Ewing) on 9 June 1998, *Official Report*, columns *504–05*, which will provide the full details requested.

My hon. Friend will see from this that during these years ECGD issued guarantees for export credits to Sri Lanka totalling £257 million. None of these related to defence business.

Renewable Energy

Mr. Stunell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1) what plans she has to increase the target percentage of electricity to be generated from renewable sources of energy by 2010; [52444]

(2) if she will increase in real terms Government spending on direct research and development of renewable sources of energy; and if she will make a statement; [52433]

(3) how much money she plans to allocate to research into renewable energy technologies in each of the years covered by the Comprehensive Spending Review; [52439]

(4) what is the current level of Government funding of research into *(a)* offshore wind farms, *(b)* onshore wind farms, *(c)* tidal wave power schemes and *(d)* photovoltaic panels; and what was the value of departmental spending for each in real terms for each of the last four years. [52452]

Mr. Battle: The Government are committed to a new and strong drive to develop renewable energy sources in line with our manifesto commitment. To this end, I am reviewing policy towards new and renewable sources of energy, including consideration of what would be necessary and practicable to achieve 10 per cent. of UK electricity needs from renewables by the year 2010 and how renewables can make an effective contribution to meeting requirements for future greenhouse gas reductions. The review, which is nearing completion, is examining the status of all the new and renewable energy technologies and the UK industry and their future prospects in both home and export markets. It is also considering what further research, development, and demonstration is needed in the longer term. I expect to announce the outcome of the review later this year.

Expenditure on the New and Renewable Energy Programme was cut significantly by the previous Government in the years following publication of their policy and strategy in Energy Paper Number 62, entitled "New and Renewable Energy Technology: Future Prospects for the UK", and further cuts were planned. Expenditure under the Wind sub-programme was reduced from £2.7 million in 1994–95 to £1.2 million (net) in 1997–98. Similarly the expenditure under the Solar sub-programme fell from £2.1 million in 1994–95 to £1.6 million (net) in 1997–98.

Since coming into office, I have reversed the planned cuts in the overall programme budget set by the previous Government, increasing provision for 1998–99 by £2 million to £11.1 million (net). For Wind and Solar energy, expenditure in 1998–99 can be expected to remain broadly in line with that in 1997–98, subject to project recruitment and progress. No expenditure on Tidal energy is expected in 1998–99 following the previous

Government's earlier decision to close that programme. Beyond 1998–99 expenditure will depend on the outcome of the current policy review.

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) if he will make a statement on Government policy on renewable energy; [54109]

(2) what plans he has to remove the special treatment offered to renewable energy. [54656]

Mr. Mandelson: The Government are committed to a new and strong drive to develop renewable energy sources in line with our manifesto commitment. To this end, I am reviewing policy towards new and renewable sources of energy, including consideration of what would be necessary and practicable to achieve 10 per cent. of UK electricity needs from renewables by the year 2010 and how renewables can make an effective contribution to meeting requirements for future greenhouse gas reductions. The review, which is nearing completion, is examining the status of all the new and renewable energy technologies and the UK industry and their future prospects in both home and export markets. It is also considering what further research, development, and demonstration is needed for the longer term. I expect to announce the outcome of the review later this year.

Office Hours

Mr. Bercow: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what are the normal office hours of senior civil servants in her Department. [52565]

Mr. Mandelson *[holding answer 27 July 1998]:* Senior civil servants in my Department are required to sign a personal contract which states (for those with a full time contract):

"You are required to work a minimum (over a 5 day week) of 41 hours elsewhere, including daily meal breaks of one hour. As a senior civil servant, you will be required to work such additional hours as may from time to time be reasonable and necessary for the efficient performance of your duties."

The hours worked by part-time senior civil servants are subject to individual arrangements.

Milk Marque

Mr. Charles Kennedy: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what plans she has to refer the consequences of the major dairy companies' refusal to submit bids in the July 1998 Milk Marque selling round to the MMC; and if she will make a statement. [52555]

Mr. Mandelson *[holding answer 27 June 1998]:* The Director General of Fair Trading (DGFT) asked the Monopolies and Mergers Commission (MMC) to investigate the supply of raw milk in Great Britain on 27 January 1998, under the monopoly provisions of the Fair Trading Act 1973.

This is now a matter for the MMC. The reference enables the MMC to look at all relevant aspects of the supply of raw milk in England, Scotland and Wales, and it will take on board the actions of the parties to the latest selling round in its inquiry.

Any evidence that the dairy companies may have colluded in refusing to submit bids in Milk Marque's latest selling round may be a matter to be considered by the DGFT under the Restrictive Trade Practices Act 1976. If the hon. Member has evidence of such collusion he should bring it to the attention of the DGFT at the following address:

Mr. John Bridgeman
Director General of Fair-Trading
Office of Fair Trading
Field House
15–25 Bream's Buildings
LONDON
EC4A 1PR.

Asbestos

Mr. Cox: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what guidance her Department issues to those constructing buildings for which it is responsible on the use of materials containing asbestos. [52308]

Dr. Howells: My Department does not undertake the construction of new buildings. However, in the refurbishment of existing buildings the Department meets all its statutory duties related to the removal of asbestos, and the Department's overriding policy is not to use asbestos based materials during the construction phase of the works and not to specify the use of such materials.

Research Establishments

Mr. Singh: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what assessment the Government have taken on the previous Administration's Prior Options reviews of the public sector research establishments. [52149]

Mr. Battle: During December 1996 the previous Administration completed "prior options" reviews of 38 Public Sector Research Establishments (PSREs), the results of which were announced in January 1997. The outcome for the majority of the establishments was retention in the public sector.

Over the last few months, I and my Ministerial colleagues have been considering our joint approach to the specific outcomes of these reviews. The majority of these proposed a range of measures to ensure the establishments were managed as effectively and efficiently as possible, most of which are already being implemented. The Government have concluded that the implementation of these measures should continue, since they improve value-for-money and the provision of high quality services. This was taken forward in the context of the Government's Comprehensive Spending Review.

The following PSREs were involved in the reviews:

National Weights and Measures Laboratory
Central Laboratory for the Research Councils
Babraham Institute
Institute for Animal Health
Institute of Arable Crops Research
Institute of Food Research
Institute of Grassland and Environmental Research
John Innes Centre
Roslin Institute
Silsoe Research Institute
British Geological Survey

Centre for Coastal and Marine Science
Centre for Ecology and Hydrology
Dunn Nutrition Unit
Radiobiological Mechanisms Unit[1]
Radiobiological Biology Unit
Toxicology Unit
Virology Unit[2]
Central Science Laboratory
Directorate of Fisheries Research[3]
Horticulture Research International
Veterinary Laboratories Agency
Health and Safety Laboratory
National Institute of Biological Standards and Control
National Radiological Protection Board
Public Health Laboratory Service
Police Scientific Development Branch
Fisheries Research Services
Forestry Commission Research Division
Hannah Research Institute
Macaulay Land Use Research Institute
Moredun Research Institute
Rowett Research Institute
Scottish Agriculture Science Agency
Scottish Crop Research Institute

[1] Comprising the former Mammalian Genetics Unit and the Radiation and Genome Stability Unit

[2] Under the previous Administration, it was agreed to transfer the Virology Unit to the University of Glasgow. However, it has since been decided not to transfer the Unit, since the complex practical issues flagged in the original announcement have proved insurmountable, and the benefits are uncertain. Closer scientific links will be pursued in other ways. Staff at the Institute have already been informed

[3] Now named the Centre for Environment, Fisheries and Aquaculture Science.

We shall examine opportunities for commercial exploitation of research ideas originating in these establishments.

ADAS and the Building Research Establishment were privatised by the previous Administration.

Funeral Industry

Mr. Lansley: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations he has received concerning the regulation of the United Kingdom funeral industry; and if he will make a statement. [53040]

Dr. Howells *[holding answer 28 July 1998]:* During the course of discussions with interested parties on the measures to regulate pre-payment funeral plans, the Department has received representations concerning regulation of the "at need" funeral industry. We have called upon the industry to raise standards of consumer services. I do not believe that registration of funeral directors is warranted or justified. I have every confidence that funeral directors are, on the whole, offering high standards of service and believe that it would be unfair to burden them with the additional costs of regulation.

Credit Interest Rates

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what steps he is taking to protect consumers from retailers who charge excessive interest for credit. [53693]

Mr. Mandelson: The extortionate credit provisions of the Consumer Credit Act 1974 already apply to retailers and other lenders. The Director General of Fair Trading is consulting on the adequacy of these provisions. Before considering further action I will study the evidence this exercise produces and his proposals.

Departmental Research

Mr. Fabricant: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will list the cost of all research undertaken by his Department since May 1997, excluding the cost of green papers and other public consultation documents drafted by his officials; and if he will list in each case the organisations which undertook that research. [52699]

Mr. Mandelson *[holding answer 29 July 1998]:* Disaggregated information in the form requested, which is not held centrally within the Department, could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Airports

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will refer the issue of the ownership of Edinburgh, Glasgow and Aberdeen airports by the same company to the MMC. [54519]

Dr. Howells: Any competition concerns arising from the common ownership of these airports should be made to the Director General of Fair Trading, who will investigate.

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will list those organisations that (i) opposed and (ii) supported the ownership of the three south-east of England airports by the same company during the last MMC investigation of this issue. [54518]

Ms Glenda Jackson: I have been asked to reply.

The question of the continued ownership of the three airports by BAA plc was not part of the references by the CAA to the MMC initiating the 1996 quinquennial review. The MMC's consideration of whether there should be a change in the structure of ownership was instead based on whether the three airports had been pursuing a course of conduct for which this would be an appropriate remedy. The CAA references did ask whether there had been courses of conduct which operated or might have been expected to operate against the public interest, and this question was the focus of comment from most of the 87 parties which expressed views. The MMC found that there was no such course of conduct for which a change in the structure of ownership would be an appropriate remedy.

Persistent Inquirers

Mr. Sanders: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry which of his Department's agencies have procedures to identify persistent inquirers for information. [53954]

Mr. Mandelson: DTI's executive agencies provide a considerable amount of information to their customers and to the general public in pursuit of their objectives. None has particular procedures for identifying persistent inquiries for information.

Sellafield

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make it his policy to ensure no additional financial resources are provided to BNFL to subsidise the programme of liquid radioactive waste treatment required at Sellafield following decisions agreed at the Ministerial meeting of the Ospar Convention in Sintra. [54400]

Mr. Battle: The Government will continue to set financial targets for BNFL which take into account the cost of dealing with the nuclear liabilities for which they are responsible.

Vanity Publishers

Jackie Ballard: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans he has to regulate vanity publishers. [53429]

Mr. Mandelson *[holding answer 30 July 1998]:* I have no plans to introduce specific legislation on vanity publishing. I believe that existing consumer protection legislation is adequate to deal with those unscrupulous companies who may seek to exploit authors. This includes the Trade Descriptions Act 1968, the Misrepresentation Act 1967, the Supply of Goods and Services Act 1982 and the Control of Misleading Advertisements Regulations 1988.

Political Advisers

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what steps he has taken to ensure that conflicts of interest do not arise in cases where political advisers are not paid out of public funds. [53600]

Mr. Mandelson *[holding answer 30 July 1998]:* I do not have any political advisers who are not paid out of public funds.

Bookmakers' Odds

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he proposes to include the display of odds by on-course bookmakers within the scope of legislation implementing the EC Directive 98/6/EC on Consumer Protection in the Indication of Prices of Products Offered to Consumers. [53717]

Dr. Howells *[holding answer 30 July 1998]:* No. EC Directive 98/6/EC (in common with previous UK and EU legislation in this area) relates specifically to the prices of products and does not cover betting odds.

Neither my Department, nor the Home Office, which is responsible for betting policy, has received any representations that the UK's implementing legislation should be extended in this way.

Policy Agenda Meeting

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he accepted the invitation to speak to a meeting, organised by GPC Market Access, on the policy agenda of the Labour Party Conference, the European Union and other matters. [53609]

Mr. Mandelson *[holding answer 30 July 1998]:* No formal invitation was issued.

Welsh Language Scheme

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry on what date his Department received notification from the Welsh Language Board in relation to the need to prepare a Welsh language scheme; on what date his Department and the Board held consultations on such a scheme; when a scheme was formally submitted to the Board; and if it has been approved. [53354]

Mr. Mandelson *[holding answer 30 July 1998]:* My Department has not received any such notification.

Executive Agencies

Mr. Livsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what reviews are currently being carried out in respect of *(a)* the Radiocommunications Agency, *(b)* Companies House, *(c)* the Patent Office, *(d)* Employment Tribunals Service and *(e)* ACAS; and if he will indicate their remit. [53276]

Mr. Mandelson *[holding answer 30 July 1998]:* No reviews are currently being carried out in respect of these bodies.

Departmental Policies (Scientific Advice)

Dr. Iddon: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on the implementation of the Office of Science and Technology's guidelines on the use of Scientific Advice in Policy Making by Government Departments. [55236]

Mr. Mandelson: The Government place great importance on the implementation of the guidelines as a way of ensuring the highest standards of integrity and openness in their use of scientific advice. The Government's Chief Scientific Adviser, Sir Robert May, has recently compiled a report in conjunction with departmental Chief Scientists on how the guidelines are being implemented by Departments. The main conclusions from this work are set out in a report, a copy of which has been today placed in the Library of the House.

The guidelines were prepared only a year ago but it is encouraging to see that there is already a high level of compliance across Departments. The report contains a number of examples of good practice, but it is also clear that there is a good deal of scope for further action. There is a considerable amount which Departments can learn from each other and we look forward to further progress in the next twelve months.

New Millennium Experience Company

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry on what date the Accounts and Annual Report for the New Millennium Experience Company will be published. [54393]

Mr. Mandelson: They were published yesterday.

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what proportion of his working week he intends to allocate to the Millennium Experience. [54441]

Mr. Mandelson: I will spend as much time as is necessary on matters relating to the New Millennium Experience Company.

Electricity Industry

Mrs. Brinton: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment he has made of the implications for the supply of electricity following the decision to close eight nuclear power stations within 10 years; and which sectors of the electricity generation market he expects to develop further capacity to account for any shortfall. [53314]

Mr. Battle: There has been no decision to close eight nuclear power stations within the next 10 years.

The Government are currently considering responses to the consultation document on their Review of Energy Sources for Power Generation and will announce their policy when the review is complete.

Mrs. Brinton: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry by what proportion carbon dioxide emissions are increased per unit of electricity generated by the fitting of FGD technology to an average coal-fired power station. [53311]

Mr. Battle: The increase in the production of carbon dioxide emissions per unit of electricity from a coal-fired power station fitted with Flue Gas Desulphurisation (FGD) of the wet limestone type fitted in the UK varies with a number of factors such as the sulphur and chlorine content of the coal and the electrical load, but would be typically in the range 3.5–7 per cent. This would be derived from the sulphur dioxide neutralisation process and from the corresponding drop in thermal efficiency of the power station arising from the electricity needed to power the FGD plant.

Mrs. Brinton: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment he has made of whether the United Kingdom policy of discriminating against new gas-fired power stations will conflict with European Commission competition rules. [53323]

Mr. Battle: The Government's proposals arising from the Review of Energy Sources for Power Generation, announced for consultation on 25 June, are considered to be fully consistent with European law.

Mrs. Brinton: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether the *(a)* current and *(b)* forthcoming rounds of coal contracts for electricity generation involve subsidy from (i) public funds or (ii) the generators; and what the levels of subsidy are likely to be. [53325]

Mr. Battle: In the preliminary conclusions of its Review of Energy Sources for Power Generation, the Government made it clear that coal purchase decisions, including price and other terms of supply, were a commercial matter for the generators. They also made it clear that they did not propose to subsidise any part of the UK coal industry.

Mrs. Brinton: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what steps he is taking to ensure that the gas-fired electricity generating industry is not damaged by unfair competition. [53324]

Mr. Battle: The government's proposals arising from the Review of Energy Sources for Power Generation were published for consultation on 25 June. We are now considering the responses and will announce our final conclusions shortly, once the material has been assessed.

Mrs. Brinton: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what estimate he has made of the percentage contribution to United Kingdom energy needs of clean coal technology in *(a)* 2000, *(b)* 2005, *(c)* 2010, *(d)* 2015 and *(e)* 2020. [53327]

Mr. Battle: No estimates have been made on the percentage contribution cleaner coal technology will eventually make to UK energy supply or when existing coal capacity will be replaced. The timing for investment in cleaner coal technology is a matter for the generating companies.

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will list the coal-fired electricity generation plant in the United Kingdom, together with the expected operational life of each plant. [54251]

Mr. Battle: Electricity generators are private sector companies and the operational life of their plant is a commercial matter for them.

According to the Electricity Association, the trade association for the electricity industry, there are 24 coal fired power stations in the United Kingdom:

National Power: Aberthaw B, Blyth A, Blyth B, Didcot A, Drax, Eggborough, Willington B, Tilbury B

PowerGen: Cottam, Ferrybridge C, Fiddlers Ferry, Ratcliffe, Kingsnorth

Eastern Group: Drakelow C, High Marnham, Ironbridge, Rugely B, West Burton

Scottish Power: Cockenzie, Longannet, Methil (coal slurry)

Alcan: Lynemouth

Nigen: Belfast West, Kilroot.

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) if he will set out for each United Kingdom planning region the estimated capital investment represented by all current outstanding applications for sections 14 and 36 Electricity Act consents; [54252]

(2) if he will list for each United Kingdom planning region the estimated employment in *(a)* construction, *(b)* manufacturing and *(c)* operation if all current application for sections 14 and 36 Electricity Act consents were granted. [54253]

Mr. Battle: No such estimates are available. This is not information collected for the purposes of section 36 of the Electricity Act 1989 and section 14 of the Energy Act 1976.

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what contribution to the Government's target of a 20 per cent reduction in Carbon Dioxide emissions will be made by the electricity industry. [53986]

Mr. Mandelson: The Government will publish shortly a consultation paper on the policy options for achieving their climate change targets. This will focus on their

legally binding target to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 12.5 per cent. as well as looking at measures for moving beyond that to its domestic goal of a 20 per cent. reduction in CO_2. The paper will look at the scope for emission reductions in all sectors, including the electricity industry.

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on the Government's policy of building *(a)* gas-fired and *(b)* coal-fired power stations. [53980]

Mr. Battle *[holding answer 31 July 1998]:* I refer the hon. Member to paragraph 2 of chapter 5 of the consultation document on the Review of Energy Sources for Power Generation, published on 25 June 1998.

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what priority he accords to obtaining cheaper electricity for consumers in determining his energy policy. [53984]

Mr. Mandelson: The consultation document of 25 June 1998 proposed the continuation of the existing energy policy objective of secure, diverse and sustainable supplies of energy at competitive prices.

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what international agreements cover the operation of the electricity interconnector between the United Kingdom and France; what principal obligations they impose on the parties; and when they are subject to renegotiation. [54672]

Mr. Battle: The operation of the electricity interconnector between the United Kingdom and France is covered by a private commercial agreement between the National Grid Company plc and Electricité de France signed in 1993, the terms of which are confidential. I understand that this agreement expires in 2001.

Gas-fired Power Stations

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what estimate he has made of the impact on investment of the extended moratorium on the construction of gas-fired power stations. [54003]

Mr. Battle: In relation to gas-fired power stations, if, as a result of a stricter consents policy, plant does not proceed which otherwise would have done, then the corresponding investment will obviously not take place. It is not possible to quantify the overall effect precisely, because both the number of applications which would be made, and whether they would have actually gone ahead, are uncertain.

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry until what date he proposes to continue the moratorium on the building of new gas-fired power stations. [54237]

Mr. Battle: I refer the hon. Member to paragraph 2 of chapter 5 of the consultation document on the Review of Energy Sources for Power Generation, published on 25 June 1998.

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on the arrangements under which companies with consent to build or run gas power stations may buy gas on long-term contract. [54120]

Mr. Mandelson: This is a matter upon which views were sought in the consultation on the preliminary conclusions of the Review of Energy Sources for Power Generation. We shall be announcing our conclusions shortly, once the responses to the consultation have been assessed.

Parcelforce

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on the future of Parcelforce. [54243]

Mr. Mandelson: As my right hon. Friend the President of the Council announced on 6 April 1998, *Official Report*, column *63*, the Government are committed to the Post Office remaining in the public sector. Against that background, the Government are reviewing the Post Office's organisation, structure and financing with a view to ensuring that the Post Office can be given greater commercial freedom to enable it to compete effectively in the UK and overseas. The review includes consideration of the future status of Parcelforce, and the potential for its return to profitability

National Minimum Wage

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment he has made of the impact of the minimum wage on inflation levels. [54108]

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what discussions he has had with the Chancellor of the Exchequer regarding the wage inflation implications of the minimum wage. [54454]

Mr. Mandelson: The Government do not believe that the decisions they have taken on the National Minimum Wage will have an adverse effect on inflation.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if his Department will publish forecasts on employment levels of the impact of the introduction of the minimum wage. [54453]

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) if his Department will now publish forecasts of the jobs impact of the minimum wage; [54245]

(2) what assessment his Department has made of the different employment impacts in different regions of the United Kingdom of the introduction of the minimum wage. [54936]

Mr. Ian Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will publish his Department's forecasts of the effect on jobs of the minimum wage. [54514]

Mr. Ian McCartney: I refer the hon. Members to the reply given to the hon. Member for Banbury (Mr. Baldry) on 23 June 1998, *Official Report*, column *473*.

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what is the timetable for the planned implementation of the national minimum wage legislation. [54032]

Mr. Ian McCartney: In her statement announcing the Government's response to the Low Pay Commission's recommendations on 18 June 1998, *Official Report*,

column 507, the then President of the Board of Trade announced that the National Minimum Wage would be implemented from April 1999.

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what studies he has carried out into the indirect impact of implementation of the national minimum wage on wage differentials. [54670]

Mr. Ian McCartney: The Government share the view of the Low Pay Commission that at the rate it is proposed to set the National Minimum Wage any impact on pay differentials should be limited. There is little empirical evidence to suggest that a minimum wage set at a sensible level, as we have done, should cause workers to press for restoration of differentials.

Millennium Dome (Sponsors)

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will place in the Library a copy of the standard terms and conditions of a corporate sponsorship agreement with the New Millennium Experience Company Limited. [54398]

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, pursuant to the answer of 27 July 1998, *Official Report*, column *82*, if he will list the range of benefits offered to sponsors by the NMEC. [54578]

Mr. Mandelson: The uniqueness of the Millennium Experience has required the New Millennium Experience company (NMEC) to develop policies, strategies, and standards across many aspects of the project for which there are no templates, precedents, or off-the-shelf solutions. This has applied to the sponsorship arrangements in particular. The Company's strategy is to deliver its testing sponsorship target through a range of sponsorship categories, each with terms and conditions and benefits commensurate with the level of sponsorship involved. During the first phase the Company has concentrated on the Founding Partner category at a sponsorship value of at least £12 million. The standard terms, conditions, and benefits applying to each category of sponsorship are being documented formally, and I will ensure that copies are placed in the Library of the House as soon as they are completed.

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) what inducements are offered to companies to sponsor zones in the Millennium Experience; and what advertising is permitted in these zones; [51275]

(2) what rules will govern the promotion by firms sponsoring zones in the Millennium Dome of themselves and their products and services in the zones sponsored; [52524]

(3) what advertising by commercial sponsors is to be allowed in the Millennium Experience brochures. [52525]

Mr. Mandelson: The New Millennium Experience Company (NMEC) retains overall editorial control of all exhibit zones and other features within the Millennium Experience Dome. This enables the company to protect the integrity of the Experience as the focus for the nation's Millennium celebrations and to protect its educational, inspirational and enjoyment values. There are no "inducements" offered to companies to sponsor exhibit zones; each company takes its own commercial decision as to the benefits of being involved and associated with this unique, once-in-lifetime project. The broad terms, conditions and benefits applying to the different categories of sponsorship are being formally documented by the NMEC and copies will be placed in the Library of the House as soon as they are completed.

Community Pharmacies

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assurances his Department gave to the Community Pharmacy Action Group in relation to resale price maintenance. [54242]

Dr. Howells: We have made it clear to the Community Pharmacy Action Group, as we did to the House, that we recognise the important role that community pharmacies play and that we would expect the Restrictive Practices Court to consider fully the issues relating to the retention and abolition of resale price maintenance for over-the-counter medicines, including the effect on local communities of possible pharmacy closures. We have also said that we would wish to take a robust line with the European Commission if, following a decision by the Restrictive Practices Court with respect to the continuation of the exemption for over-the-counter medicines under the Resale Prices Act, the Commission took action which flew in the face of that decision.

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what estimate he has made of the number of community pharmacies which will close as a result of the ending of resale price maintenance. [54241]

Mr. Ian McCartney: My Department has not made an estimate.

The Director General of Fair Trading has considered the impact upon community pharmacies of the removal of resale price maintenance in his January 1998 report "Material Changes in the Medicaments Market since 1970". A copy of his report has been placed in the Library of the House.

Emission Targets

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment he has made of the impact of projected increases in the quantity of coal to be burned on the UK's emission targets. [54002]

Mr. Battle: I refer the hon. Member to paragraph 19 of chapter 5 of the consultation document published on 25 June.

Energy Prices

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment he has made of the impact of the measures contained in the Government's recent statement on energy policy on prices to consumers. [53999]

Mr. Battle: I refer the hon. Member to paragraphs 17 and 18 of Chapter 5 of the consultation document published on 25 June.

Leave Entitlements

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if an annual leave entitlement of three weeks under the Working Time Directive will be applicable in

those industries which have not normally offered such leave; and what would be the cost to business of this entitlement. [54033]

Mr. Ian McCartney: All workers under the scope of the working time regulations will have an entitlement to paid annual leave. Workers involved in transport, sea fishing, other work at sea and doctors in training are excluded from the Working Time Directive. An estimate of the costs and benefits are set out in the regulatory appraisal included in the consultation document. A copy is available in the Library of the House.

Competition Bill

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he will announce the fee to be charged to businesses seeking advice from the Director General of Fair Trading under the provision of the Competition Bill [*Lords*]. [54095]

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he expects to announce the fee which will be charged to businesses under the Competition Bill proposals. [54239]

Mr. Ian McCartney: Clauses 51 and 53 of the Competition Bill [*Lords*] currently before Parliament provide for the Director General of Fair Trading to make rules about procedural matters including the charging of fees. In preparing such rules the Director General must consult such persons as he considers appropriate. Such consultation on fees will take place after Royal Assent, either as part of the general consultation or separately.

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if his Department has revised its estimates of the compliance costs to business arising from the Competition Bill [*Lords*] to reflect changes during the Bill's passage. [54240]

Mr. Ian McCartney: The Department published a revised estimate of compliance costs to business arising from the Competition Bill when the Bill was introduced into the House to reflect such changes made in another place.

Millennium Dome (Power)

Mr. Ian Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what steps he has taken to promote efficient use of power within the Millennium Dome. [54465]

Mr. Mandelson *[holding answer 31 July 1998]:* The Dome structure was conceived and developed as an energy and resource-efficient means of housing a range of exhibits and attractions appropriate to the conditions of the Greenwich peninsular site. The Dome does not provide a conventionally controlled environment; it is not air conditioned, and heating and cooling provisions have been minimised to reflect the fact that visitors will be wearing clothing appropriate to "outdoor" conditions. In addition, the translucency of the Dome cladding material allows the interior to be naturally lit for much of the year. It is inevitable that operating a large-scale visitor attraction requires a significant quantity of power, but the New Millennium Experience Company (NMEC) will seek to minimise this requirement where it is practical to do so.

Poverty Pay

Mr. Ian Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will define poverty pay; and what are his plans to eliminate it. [54470]

Mr. Ian McCartney: Poverty pay is where an individual has to work excessive hours at low rates of pay to ensure a decent standard of living for themselves and their families. The National Minimum Wage, along with other measures such as the Working Families Tax Credit, forms part of the Government's strategy to make work pay and put an end to such exploitation.

Employment Law Reform

Mr. Ian Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what proposals he has for employment law reform; and in which areas of employment practice. [54471]

Mr. Ian McCartney: The Government's proposals to reform employment law and to encourage good employment practices based on partnership were published in the Fairness at Work White Paper on 21 May.

Working Time Directive

Mr. Ian Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how long he will give companies to adjust their employment systems once the regulations are passed that will bring into effect the Working Time Directive and the requirement to give three weeks paid holiday. [54466]

Mr. Ian McCartney: The Working Time Regulations, which implement the Working Time Directive, come into force on 1 October.

Tech Stars Steering Group

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what is the current membership of the Tech Stars Steering Group; when it last met and what matters were discussed; and when it will next meet. [54511]

Mr. Battle: The current membership of the Tech Stars Steering Group is:

Ronald Cohen (Chair): Apax Partners and Co.
Peter Agar: CBI
Sue Birley: Imperial College
Hermann Hauser: Amadeus Capital Partners Ltd.
Guy Herrington: DTI SME Policy Directorate
Alistair Keddie: DTI Innovation Unit
Craig Pickering: HM Treasury
Adrian Piper: Bank of England.

The last meeting was 3 July 1998 (Dr. Hauser was unable to attend) at which the Group discussed progress on current actions in the areas of commercialisation of university research and corporate venturing. It also discussed what actions the Group might take in the area of European risk capital markets, and an interest was shown in understanding more about the US Small Business Innovation Research scheme.

The next meeting will be in late September, although a date has yet to be fixed.

Competitiveness Working Party

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what is the current membership of the competitiveness working party on maximising competitiveness in Europe; when it last met; what matters were discussed; and when it will next meet. [54507]

Mr. Mandelson: Membership of the competitiveness working party on maximising competitiveness in Europe, chaired by Lord Simon of Highbury, is as follows:

Peter Agar, Deputy Director-General, Confederation of British Industry

Keith Bogg, Divisional Director, Marks & Spencer plc

Sir John Carter, Chief Executive, Commercial Union plc

C. K. Chow, Chief Executive, GKN plc

Iain Evans, Chairman, The LEK Partnership

Donald Hepburn, Senior Business Economist, Unilever plc

John Langston, Chief Executive Officer—Automotive, TI Group plc

Peter Lehmann, Commercial Director, Centrica plc

Christopher King, Chairman, Avon Rubber plc

Henry Manisty, Head of Government and Regulatory Affairs, Reuters Ltd.

Keith McCullagh, Chief Executive Officer, British Biotech plc

John Mellon, Director, Reed Elsevier plc.

The group last met on 22 April and the agenda comprised four topics: the development of the future White Paper on competitiveness; the current Government campaign to prepare business for the introduction of a single currency in Europe; the Social Chapter and European employment legislation; and standards and mutual recognition within the European Single Market.

A date has not yet been fixed for the meeting of the group.

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what is the current membership of the Competitiveness Working Party on enhancing business performance through developing individuals; when it last met and what matters were discussed; and when it will next meet. [54510]

Mr. Mandelson: The Competitiveness Working Party on enhancing business performance through developing individuals last met under the chairmanship of the Minister of State, my hon. Friend the Member for Makerfield (Mr. McCartney) on 10 March to discuss employability and the first draft of the report to the Secretary of State. No further meetings are currently planned. The current membership of the Working Party is:

Brendan Barber, Deputy General Secretary, Trades Union Congress

Bruce Collings, General Manager, Ethicon Endo-Surgery Ltd.

David Compston, Managing Director, Allott & Lomax

Jeremy Crook, Chief Executive, Black Training and Enterprise Group

Jeannie Drake, Deputy General Secretary, Communication Workers Union

Anthony Dubbins, General Secretary, GMPU

John Edmonds, General Secretary, GMB

Professor Alan Gibb, Chairman, Small Business Centre, Durham University Business School

Allan Johnston, Personnel Director, British Steel plc

Mike Kinski, Chief Executive, Stagecoach Holdings

Anne Minto, Director—Human Resources, Smiths Industries

Tony Morgan, Managing Director, Industrial Society

Stephen Moss, Chairman, Springboard

John Oliver, Chief Executive, Leyland Trucks Ltd.

Bryan Sanderson, Managing Director, The British Petroleum Company plc

Peter Smith, Chief Executive, Wigan Borough Council

Ann Toler, Head of Personnel, Boots The Chemists Ltd.

Perween Warsi, Managing Director, S&A Foods Ltd.

Cecilia Wells, HR Consultant

Gwenda Williams, Human Resource Manager, Hyder plc.

Coal Industry

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what estimate he has made of the number of redundancies in the coal mining industry in the next three years. [53985]

Mr. Mandelson: Levels of employment in the coal-mining industry will depend upon commercial decisions taken by the private sector coal companies.

International Space Station

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, pursuant to his predecessor's letter of 27 May, what was the result of the review by the Manned Space Board and the International Relations Committee of ESA of the policy and financial implications of changes to the International Space Station schedule. [54056]

Mr. Battle: The Manned Space Board and the International Relations Committee of ESA are continuing to keep these issues under review. There have been no developments affecting the UK since the letter by the then President of the Board of Trade, now President of the Council, of 27 May 1998.

Coral-Ladbrokes Merger

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he has received the report of the Monopolies and Mergers Commission on the proposed sale of Coral to Ladbrokes; and if he will make a statement. [54668]

Dr. Howells: The Monopolies and Mergers Commission (MMC) have delivered their report on the acquisition by Ladbrokes of the Coral betting business to the Secretary of State. The report will be published as soon as practicable.

New Environmental Technologies

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment he has made of the potential market for British manufacturers of new environmental technologies. [54849]

Mr. Battle: Research suggests that the total global environmental market is worth $280 billion now and likely to grow to over $640 billion by 2010. More details can be found in "Global Environmental Markets: An Update", published by the Government's Joint Environmental Markets Unit.

Post Office

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on the future of the *(a)* the Post Office and *(b)* Parcelforce. [54655]

Mr. Mandelson: As announced by my right hon. Friend the President of the Council when President of the Board of Trade, on 6 April 1998, *Official Report*, column *63*, the Government plan to give the Post Office greater commercial freedom so that it can meet the challenges of the domestic and international markets, and deliver improved efficiency, effectiveness and service standards. The Government commissioned a review of public sector options for achieving this. It encompasses consideration of Parcelforce. The review is proceeding apace and I hope to announce our proposals in the Autumn.

Nuclear Reprocessing Industry

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, pursuant to the answer to the hon. Member for Bury, North (Mr. Chaytor) of 9 July 1998, *Official Report*, column *631*, when he expects the transport of spent fuel from Germany to Sellafield will resume. [54419]

Ms Glenda Jackson: I have been asked to reply.

My Department has responsibilities for the safe transport of radioactive materials. My German counterpart with these responsibilities announced, on 25 May, a ten point plan which, when fully implemented, would allow shipments to resume. At present I am unaware of any established timetable for this implementation. My officials are in contact with their German counterparts and will give any help possible to enable them to bring this matter to a satisfactory conclusion. I must emphasise that the resumption of shipments of spent fuel within Germany is a matter for the German Authorities.

Overseas Visits

Mr. Wilkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what was the total cost to public funds of his recent visit to Brazil including the cost incurred by accompanying officials broken down by *(a)* travel costs and *(b)* accommodation and subsistence. [52840]

Mr. Mandelson *[holding answer 28 July 1998]:* The cost of my trip to Brazil, as Minister without Portfolio, was approximately £6,400 for travel and £328 for accommodation. I was not accompanied by officials from the UK.

Mr. Wilkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on the purpose of his recent visit to Brazil; and how many officials accompanied him on the visit. [52839]

Mr. Mandelson *[holding answer 28 July 1998]:* As Minister without Portfolio I undertook an official programme of meetings and visits in Brazil to cement the close personal relations between my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and President Cardoso, and to deepen ties between the two governments and countries so as to strengthen our economic partnership. This programme included meetings with President Cardoso and Government Ministers and speeches at the University of Brasilia and the British Chamber of Commerce in Sao Paulo. I was not accompanied by officials from the UK but received excellent support from the British Embassy and the Consulate General in Sao Paulo and Rio de Janeiro.

HEALTH

Departmental Research

Mr. Fabricant: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the cost of all research undertaken by his Department since May 1997, excluding the cost of green papers and other public consultation documents drafted by his officials; and if he will list in each case the organisations which undertook that research. [52703]

Ms Jowell *[holding answer 29 July 1998]:* The term research covers a wide range of activities from scientific and engineering research through to consultancies and public opinion surveys. The information requested is not held centrally.

Invalid Vehicle Service

Mr. Hepburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the consultants' report following their review of the invalid vehicle service. [54618]

Mr. Boateng: We have considered this report carefully and decided to accept the consultants' recommendations that the Invalid Vehicle Service (IVS) should close on 31 March 2003, with help being given to drivers to take up alternative forms of transport. The scheme was closed to new drivers in 1976 and with around 720 invalid three-wheeler vehicles left on the road, it is becoming increasingly difficult to maintain this service. We now need to plan ahead and safeguard the interests of the remaining drivers. The long lead-in period before closure will give drivers the time to look at all the options available. Those leaving the scheme will be eligible for the higher rate mobility component of the Disability Living Allowance and drivers will be able to use this to switch to modern four-wheeler cars, scooters, and powered wheelchairs, possibly taking advantage of the Motability scheme. Help with driving lessons and adaptations to vehicles will be given.

Tobacco

Mr. Efford: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he will publish the Eleventh Annual report of the Committee for Monitoring Agreements on Tobacco Advertising and Sponsorship. [54619]

Mr. Dobson: Shortly. Copies will be placed in the Library.

NHS Trust (Debts)

Angela Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he plans to change the debt structure of NHS trusts; and if he will make a statement. [55194]

Mr. Milburn: *The New NHS* White Paper made clear the Government's intention to abolish the internal market in the National Health Service and amend the NHS trust financial regime to make it more transparent and more suitable for a public service based partnership. As part of our programme to achieve this aim, we are changing the

debt structure of NHS trusts. We have already taken steps to stop issuing long-term interest-bearing loans to NHS trusts to finance their capital expenditure. Instead, we are issuing Public Dividend Capital (PDC). The NHS Executive will now be making arrangements to replace existing interest-bearing debt with PDC without the application of premiums or discounts because the Exchequer funds NHS trusts' normal debt servicing costs. This will supersede the present, market driven financial structure, reduce bureaucracy and provide a simpler, clearer and more understandable arrangements, in tune with NHS trusts' status as part of the public sector.

Clinical Oncologists

Mr. Amess: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he is taking to address shortages of clinical oncologists. [54933]

Ms Jowell: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to the right hon. Member for Maidstone and The Weald (Miss Widdecombe) on 29 July 1998, *Official Report*, column *380*. Clinical oncology is also known as radiotherapy.

Green Transport

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 31 March 1998, *Official Report*, column *510*, on departmental transport arrangements, what further changes he has made. [53994]

Ms Jowell: The Department is working towards the target announced in the White paper, "A New Deal for Transport", that all headquarters buildings and main buildings occupied by executive offices and government offices for the regions should have green transport plans by March 1999 and all other key buildings by March 2000. Work has started on preparing green transport plans but no changes have yet been made to departmental transport arrangements.

NHS Computers

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many networked computers are currently in use in the National Health Service. [54130]

Mr. Boateng: This information requested is not available centrally.

Specialist Workforce Advisory Group

Mr. Best: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the effect of the advice and practices of the Specialist Workforce Advisory Group on *(a)* waiting list numbers and *(b)* the provision of services in smaller hospitals. [54036]

Mr. Boateng: The Specialty Workforce Advisory Group (SWAG) advises Government about the numbers of doctors in higher specialist training needed to meet estimated requirements for consultants four to six years ahead. SWAG's first set of recommendations was for the year 1996–97. The effect, in terms of the numbers of doctors completing training and taking up consultant posts, and thus contributing to the reduction of waiting lists, is beginning to be felt. SWAG's planning process takes account of the views of the National Health Service and the medical profession about service needs. The deployment of consultants supplied through national workforce planning is for trusts and health authorities to determine.

Radiotherapy

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the variation by region in waiting time for cancer patients awaiting radiotherapy in the NHS; and in what percentage of cases this exceeds clinical guidelines. [54115]

Mr. Boateng: I shall write to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

Eye and Dental Checks

Dr. Brand: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will estimate the amount of money that *(a)* eye tests and *(b)* dental checks save the NHS each year by identifying conditions early in those eligible. [53752]

Mr. Milburn: The information on which to base these estimates is not available centrally.

Dr. Brand: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* NHS eye tests and *(b)* NHS dental checks were performed in England and Wales, by year, from 1992 to 1998; and how many he estimates will be performed in 1998–99. [53753]

Mr. Milburn: The information available is in the table. We do not yet have estimates for 1998/99.

England and Wales

million

Year	*National Health Service sight tests*	*Adult dental examinations carried out by General Dental Service dentists*
1991–92	5.31	20.6
1992–93	5.90	21.1
1993–94	6.33	20.6
1994–95	6.80	20.4
1995–96	6.95	20.3
1996–97	7.27	20.0
1997–98	7.47	20.6

Eye Tests

Dr. Brand: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will estimate the number of pensioners who *(a)* will be eligible to and *(b)* will actually take up the Government's extension of free eye tests; what are the estimated costs of this scheme; and what assessment he has made of the potential savings arising from the early diagnosis of eye conditions. [53751]

Mr. Milburn: We estimate that between 6 million and 7 million additional people aged 60 or over will become eligible for free National Health Service sight tests from 1 April 1999. Assuming this results in about 2 million more sight tests per annum, additional costs of some £30 million will be incurred over current annual expenditure on sight tests of £110 million. Optometrists regularly identify signs of eye diseases such as glaucoma during sight tests but we cannot yet assess the health gains which result.

Accolate

Dr. Brand: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimates his Department has made of *(a)* the potential cost to the NHS of the drug accolate, *(b)* the number of people who currently use inhalers to control asthma, *(c)* the cost per dose of the drug and *(d)* the date when accolate will be available on prescription. [53750]

Mr. Milburn: Accolate (Zafirlukast 20mg tablets) was launched by Zeneca on 20 July 1998. It is therefore already available on National Health Service prescription. It is licensed for the treatment of asthma. The dose is 20mg twice daily and costs £25.69 for 56 tablets. No estimate of the potential cost to the National Health Service has been made. The number of people in England with asthma sufficiently severe to require regular medical supervision is estimated to be around 2 million, of whom the majority will be using inhaler treatment for some part of the time.

Residential Care

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 27 July 1998, *Official Report*, column *93*, concerning his Department's guidance LAC (98), what evidence he has submitted to the Royal Commission on topping-up payments. [54128]

Mr. Boateng: A factual note on topping-up has been prepared for the Royal Commission and copies are available in the Library.

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he intends to issue his Department's forthcoming White Paper on the registration and inspection of residential care homes. [54038]

Mr. Boateng: The Department's Social Services White Paper will be published when Parliament returns after the summer recess.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 21 July 1998, *Official Report*, column *531*, concerning his Department's guidance, LAC (98)9, if he will place in the Library the legal advice that led Ministers to issue the revised guidance. [54477]

Mr. Boateng: The answer of 21 July 1998 concerned the Department's guidance LAC(98)8, not LAC(98)9. Its purpose was to clarify the legal position which has existed since 1948. The Department's view of the legal provisions is set out in chapter 6 of the publication A New Partnership for Care in Old Age which is available as a command paper 3242 in the Library.

Trust Mergers

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he expects to have concluded his evaluation of the expression of interest submitted by Merton and Sutton, Wandsworth and Roehampton, Twickenham and Richmond community health care trusts in relation to trust mergers. [54019]

Ms Jowell: We shall consider the merits of the proposal carefully before deciding whether public consultation should take place. We hope to be able to reach a decision shortly.

National Service Frameworks

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what timescale his Department is working to in drawing up national service frameworks. [53996]

Mr. Boateng: Each National Service Framework is being developed with the assistance of an expert reference group. The reference groups for coronary heart disease and mental health have begun their work. Their emerging findings will be available in autumn 1998, prior to publication of the National Service Frameworks in Spring 1999. This will enable health authorities, together with their partners, including local authorities, to begin to plan their Health Improvement Programmes for implementation from April 1999.

Departmental Publications

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many of his Department's publications have been made available in *(a)* Braille, *(b)* audio tape and *(c)* large print in 1997–98; and what percentage of the total number of publications this represents. [54268]

Ms Jowell: Publications made available in Braille, audio tape and large print by this Department for 1997–98 are given in the table.

Information on the percentage of the total number of publications this represents in each case could be provided only at a disproportionate cost. The Department does not have a central record of all publications produced.

1997–98

Braille	*Audio tape*	*Large print*
HB6—A Practical Guide for Disabled People	HB6—A Practical Guide for Disabled People	HB6—A Practical Guide for Disabled People
Our Healthy Nation Green Paper Summary	Our Healthy Nation Green Paper Summary	Our Healthy Nation Green Paper Summary
How to Get the Best from Maternity Services	Health Service Careers Booklet on the Occupation of Physiotherapist	How to Use Your Hearing Aid
	Keep Warm Keep Well	Keep Warm Keep Well
	Well Women Today and Tomorrow	Health & Well-Being—A Guide for Older People
	The Healthy Way	Acting on Complaints
	NHS Pension Agency Scheme Guide	A Guide to Receiving Direct Payments
		Direct Payment—information leaflet
		Sound Advice—'What do I do about Flu' and 'Flu Vaccinations' summaries
		Sound Advice—'Think Malaria' summary
		Sound Advice—'Travel Safe' summary

Purchasing Pilots

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what arrangements his Department has made for evaluating the experience and outcomes of total purchasing pilots; and when the findings will be published. [53995]

Mr. Boateng: The total purchasing pilot project has been independently evaluated by a research consortium led by Professor Nick Mays of the King's Fund. An interim report covering the period October 1995 to March 1997 was published by the King's Fund on 7 July 1998 and a final report covering the period up to March 1998 is expected to be published by January 1999.

Continence Services

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 27 July 1998, *Official Report*, column *94*, concerning continence services if he will publish the terms of reference of the review; and if he will make a statement. [54178]

Mr. Boateng: An announcement will be made shortly.

Dr. Stoate: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if his Department will issue interim instructions to health authorities on the provision of continence services before the new guidance is issued; [54833]

(2) if he will ensure that there are no reductions in existing continence services before his Department issues new guidance; [54842]

(3) if he will make a statement on the delays in the review of continence services and the issue of new guidance. [54841]

Ms Jowell: I will be making an announcement about the review of continence services shortly.

Nottingham Health Authority

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he proposes to appoint a new chairman of the Nottingham Health Authority; for how long the post has been left vacant; and for what reasons it has been left vacant since the retirement of Sir David White. [54218]

Mr. Milburn: The regional chairman will shortly be making further recommendations to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the chairmanship of Nottingham Health Authority. This post has been vacant since 1 April 1998 while suitable candidates were identified and interviewed.

Health Authority Board Members

Mr. Etherington: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the health authorities in England and Wales which do not have a general practitioner as a non-executive member of their board. [54895]

Ms Jowell: The 58 health authorities in England which do not have a general medical practitioner as a chairman or non-executive member are listed in the table.

Appointments to Welsh health authorities are a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales.

List of health authorities which do not have GP non-executive members

Region—Anglia and Oxford
- Bedfordshire
- Berkshire
- Buckinghamshire
- Cambridgeshire and Huntingdon
- East Norfolk
- North West Anglia
- Northamptonshire
- Suffolk

Region—North Thames
- Barnet
- Brent and Harrow
- Camden and Islington
- Ealing, Hammersmith and Hounslow
- Enfield and Haringey
- Hillingdon
- Kensington, Chelsea and Westminster
- North Essex
- South Essex
- West Hertfordshire

Region—North and West
- Bury and Rochdale
- East Lancashire
- Liverpool
- Manchester
- North Cheshire
- North West Lancashire
- Salford and Trafford
- Sefton
- South Lancashire
- St. Helen's and Knowsley
- West Pennine
- Wirral

Region—Northern and Yorkshire
- North Cumbria
- North Yorkshire
- Sunderland

Region—South and West
- Cornwall and Isles of Scilly
- Isle of Wight
- North and Mid Hampshire
- Somerset
- Southampton and South West Hants

Region—South Thames
- Bromley
- East Kent
- East Sussex, Brighton and Hove

Region—Trent
- Barnsley
- Leicestershire
- North Nottinghamshire
- Nottingham
- Rotherham
- Sheffield
- South Derbyshire
- South Humber

Region—West Midlands

Dudley

Herefordshire

North Staffordshire

Shropshire

Solihull

South Staffordshire

Worcestershire.

Millennium Compliance

Mr. Hammond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 21 July 1998, *Official Report*, column *526*, on the cost of ensuring millennium compliance throughout the NHS, what factors underlie the discrepancy between the figure given and his Department's earlier estimate of £5.7 million. [54504]

Mr. Boateng: The reason for the discrepancy between the figure given in my Answer of 21 July and the Department's earlier estimate of £5.7 million is that the latter refers only to planned expenditure by the central Department, whereas the former is the total cost to the wider National Health Service of ensuring millennium compliance.

Central Department plans and costs are reported to my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster on a quarterly basis. He has arranged for completed questionnaires and a summary to be placed in the Library and published on the internet. A further update by the Department will be available in September.

Mr. Hammond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 27 July 1998, *Official Report*, columns *94–99*, on millennium compliance, what checks he carried out to ensure that the data provided by trusts and health authorities as at 31 March were accurate; and how those checks accounted for the delays in his answer. [54576]

Mr. Milburn: Further advice was requested from officials on the figures from trusts and health authorities. When this had been provided and considered, a reply was given directly.

Beta-interferon

Mr. Hammond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the availability of beta-interferon for treatment of people suffering from multiple sclerosis by health authority, indicating for each health authority the budget for beta-interferon expressed in terms of amount per patient with relapsing remitting MS fulfilling the criteria defined in the relevant Department of Health executive letter. [54938]

Mr. Boateng: The information requested is not available. It is not our policy to allocate resources centrally for particular treatments. The costs of prescribing all drugs are met from within health authority allocations, taking account of local priorities. The National Institute for Clinical Effectiveness will in due course provide advice to health authorities to enable more consistent availability across the country.

Sandwell Healthcare NHS Trust

Mr. Hammond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the relative position of Sandwell Healthcare NHS Trust in England and Wales in terms of *(a)* management costs as a percentage of total budget, *(b)* percentage of surgical cases handled as day cases and *(c)* costs per completed consultant episode. [53735]

Mr. Boateng: In 1997–98, the planned management costs for Sandwell Healthcare National Health Service Trust were £3.7 million, 5.2 per cent. of their trust income. Total trust management costs for England were planned to be £1.2 billion, 5.1 per cent. of total trust income in England.

In 1996–97 (latest available figures), the Trust treated 69.1 per cent. of its elective surgical admissions as day cases, compared to 53.7 per cent. nationally.

In 1996–97 (latest available) the average cost per Finished Consultant Episode was £850 for the trust. Nationally the average was £1,120.

Source:

Hospital Episode Statistics, NHS Executive.

Rough Sleepers Initiatives

Mr. Caton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which health authorities in England have dedicated resources for initiatives relating to the problem of rough sleeping; how much they spent in the last year for which figures are available; and on what projects. [52428]

Mr. Boateng: The information requested is not available centrally.

However, since 1994–95, funding for five of the six multi-disciplinary community psychiatric outreach teams which form one strand of the Government's Homeless Mentally Ill Initiative (HMII) has been included in the Thames health authorities' regional allocations. In 1994–95, this funding amounted to some £1.76 million. Additionally, in 1998–99, the East London and City Health Authority is allocating £10,000 towards the costs of the HART HMII outreach team. City and Hackney Community Services NHS Trust also contributes some £5,000 towards HART's costs.

The Department has approved non cash-limited funding of £558,000 in 1998–99 for twenty eight primary care projects for homeless people. These projects are designed to help meet the health care needs of the entire range of homeless people, including rough sleepers.

Staff Turnover

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the staff turnover rates for each NHS trust for people employed in posts *(a)* ancillary and maintenance, *(b)* medical and dental, *(c)* nursing and midwifery, *(d)* professional and technical and *(e)* administrative, clerical and managerial posts; and what were the equivalent figures for each of the last five years. [54615]

Ms Jowell: The information requested is not collected centrally. For the information that is available on turnover of staff in the National Health Service, I refer the hon. Member to the reports of the Review Body for Nursing staff, Midwives and Health Visitors, copies of which are in the Library.

Sickness Absence

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what are the current rates of sickness absence in each health trust for people employed in *(a)* ancillary and maintenance, *(b)* medical and dental, *(c)* nursing and midwifery, *(d)* professional and technical and *(e)* administrative, clerical and managerial posts; and what were the equivalent figures for each of the last five years. [54612]

Ms Jowell: Statistics of the incidence of ill-health among the National Health Service workforce are not collected centrally. Guidance has been issued to help NHS managers locally to collect and act upon sickness absence data.

Hearing Aids

Dr. Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will take steps to *(a)* monitor the level of NHS hearing aids that go unused after being provided by adult audiology and hearing aid services and *(b)* increase the level of use of NHS hearing aids amongst current owners; [54426]

(2) what assessment he has made of the level of customer satisfaction from users of NHS adult audiology and hearing aid services; [54425]

(3) what assessment his Department has made of the level of awareness amongst NHS hearing aid users of the role and benefits of the T switch on hearing aids. [54427]

Mr. Boateng: The type of hearing aid provided under the National Health Service is a matter for the clinician concerned, in consultation with the patient. A central unit of the NHS Supplies Authority negotiates contracts with manufacturers for the supply of a standard range of NHS hearing aids which meet the needs of the majority of patients. It is for hearing aid centres to purchase and supply an alternative model if the clinician considers that it is clinically necessary for an individual patient. The NHS does not directly monitor the number of hearing aids that are not used, but independent research suggests that a significant number of hearing aids may not be used or are not used effectively.

We do not have any plans to commission research into customer satisfaction of audiology services at the moment.

The Departmental publication "How to use your hearing aid" which is extremely popular with audiology service users, includes a chapter on using the T position on the control switch of hearing aids.

Hospital Discharges

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps his Department is taking to reduce the number of delayed discharges from hospitals of patients who are awaiting social services funding or assessment. [54638]

Mr. Boateng: The Department is undertaking a number of relevant activities. Part of the £269 million additional funding for the National Health Service in England which was announced last October is aimed at reducing delayed discharges and some of the money was transferred to social services for this purpose. For 1998–99, the special transitional grant for community care services has a condition attached to it that some funds should be invested in services with the objective of improving procedures for needs assessment, hospital discharge arrangements and preventing unnecessary admission to hospital or residential or nursing home care.

Part of the £417 million additional funding announced in the budget is aimed at tackling NHS waiting lists by improving primary, community, mental health and social services. The Department's inspectors are routinely involved in an active programme of monitoring local authorities' hospital discharge arrangements and will be publishing a report shortly. Our Better Services for Vulnerable People initiative requires health and local authorities to develop joint investment plans, recuperation and rehabilitation services for older people and improved procedures for multidisciplinary assessment of older people. Our review of hospital discharge guidance will include consideration of how we can resolve the difficulties around delayed discharge.

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list by region the number of delayed discharge patients currently occupying hospital beds who are awaiting social services funding or assessment. [54637]

Ms Jowell: Information is not available in the format requested. However, information is available on the number of people aged 75 and over ready for discharge, but still occupying an acute hospital bed because they are awaiting completion of assessment or local authority funding. The most recent information is provided in the table.

	Total number of patients aged 75 and over ready for discharge but still occupying a hospital bed because they are:			
Region	*awaiting local authority funding*	*awaiting completion of assessment*	*Total number of patients aged 75 and over ready for discharge but still occupying a hospital bed*	*Total number of patients aged 75 and over occupying an acute hospital bed*
Northern and Yorkshire	155	243	846	7,258
Trent	37	95	454	4,923
Anglia and Oxford	120	140	754	4,608
North Thames	347	376	1,231	6,346
South Thames	102	205	780	6,617

Region	Total number of patients aged 75 and over ready for discharge but still occupying a hospital bed because they are: awaiting local authority funding	awaiting completion of assessment	Total number of patients aged 75 and over ready for discharge but still occupying a hospital bed	Total number of patients aged 75 and over occupying an acute hospital bed
South and West	169	100	752	6,876
West Midlands	67	149	628	4,647
North West	139	141	650	6,225
England	1,136	1,499	6,095	47,500

Source:
National Health Service Executive Quarterly Monitoring Activity Data—1997–98 Quarter 4

Hospital Maintenance

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list by NHS region the hospital maintenance backlog on 1 July. [53295]

Mr. Milburn: Information about backlog maintenance as at 1 July 1998 is not available. The latest available figures relate to the year ended March 1997, and are as follows:

Cost to upgrade to Condition B

	£000
	Total
Northern and Yorkshire	389,804
Trent	207,031
Anglia and Oxford	241,965
North Thames	774,657
South Thames	369,546
South and West	234,293
West Midlands	361,041
North West	276,627
Total	2,854,964

Notes:
1. Backlog maintenance is defined as "the amount of money required to bring the physical condition of the estate, the statutory safety condition and the fire safety condition, up to Condition B
2. Condition B is broadly defined as 'sound, operationally safe, and exhibits only minor deterioration'
3. The figures for the year 1997–98 will be available in November 1998

Waiting Lists

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what changes his Department has made to the criteria for assessing numbers of patients on *(a)* in-patient and *(b)* out-patient waiting lists; and if he will publish the (i) current and (ii) previous criteria. [53316]

Mr. Milburn: No changes have been made to the criteria for the assessment of numbers on National Health Service in-patient and out-patient waiting lists. Guidance is set out in the NHS Executive's Data Manual (published in January 1997), the NHS Waiting Times Good Practice Guide and Guidelines for Good Administrative Practice (both published in January 1996). Copies of which are available in the Library.

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the validity and accuracy of the waiting list initiative results submitted to the NHS Executive for the last three quarters. [53317]

Mr. Milburn: Waiting list data are subject to well established validation and checking processes.

Operations (Cancellation)

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will place in the Library figures *(a)* by health authority and *(b)* overall on the number of operations cancelled on the day of, or the day after, admission to a hospital, and the numbers of those patients not readmitted within a month, by quarter, for each of the last three years. [53318]

Mr. Milburn: Copies of Quarterly Statistics on Cancelled Operations by Health Authorities for 1997/98 and information for earlier years are available in the Library.

NHS Staff

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the total number of *(a)* NHS clerical, administrative and management staff, *(b)* NHS hospital doctors and GPs and *(c)* NHS nurses and midwives in each year since 1995. [53299]

Mr. Moore: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the total number of *(a)* NHS clerical, administrative and management staff, *(b)* NHS hospital doctors and general practitioners and *(c)* NHS nurses and midwives in each year since 1995. [53291]

Mr. Milburn: The information requested can be found in the Department's statistical bulletins: "*Hospital, Public Health Medicine and Community Health Service Medical and Dental Staff in England: 1986 to 1996*" (the latest year for which information is available), "*Statistics for General Medical Practitioners in England: 1987 to 1997*" and "*NHS Hospital and Community Health Services Non-medical Staff in England: 1987 to 1997*", copies of which are available in the Library.

NHS Salaries

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the amount spent on salaries and wages costs for *(a)* general and senior managers,

(b) nurses and midwives and *(c)* administrative and clerical staff by NHS region for each financial year from 1991–92 to 1997–98. [53296]

Mr. Milburn: Copies of the information requested have been placed in the Library. Figures for 1997–98 are not yet available.

NHS Consultants

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much *(a)* his Department, *(b)* the NHS and *(c)* his Department's agencies spent on external consultants in each year since 1995. [53330]

Ms Jowell: Expenditure by the Department of Health, its agencies, and the National Health Service[1] since 1995 is as follows:

Year	DH £ million	NHS trusts £ million	Health Authorities £000	Agencies £ million
1994–95	18.469	68.326	[2]59.302	2.331
1995–96	18.504	89.369	[2]77.982	2.096
1996–97	[3]14.518	107.152	21.698	1.582
1997–98	[3]11.848	[4]—	[4]—	1.632

[1] Information on consultants is not collected separately for the NHS but is included in information on external contract staffing and consultancy

[2] Includes figures for Regional Health Authorities

[3] Includes figures for Regional Offices of the NHS Executive, which became part of the Department of Health in April 1996

[4] Not yet available

Note:

Part of the explanation for the apparently decreasing trend in Departmental and agency expenditure is the adoption of a new definition of consultancy, agreed by Ministers during 1997–98 and implemented in-year

Hospital Output Measures

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what financial penalties will be imposed on hospitals which fail to meet their target output measures. [54950]

Mr. Boateng: We expect health authorities (and in due course Primary Care Groups) increasingly to develop service agreements with National Health Service trusts which include appropriate incentives and sanctions to reward good performance and support improvement where necessary.

Health Statistics

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to the Green Paper, Cm 3805, "New Ambitions for our Country: A New Contract for Welfare", page 83, what assessment he has made of the health of the population as a whole in terms of *(a)* longevity and *(b)* years free of illness, at present and as at April 1997 and March 1998. [54605]

Ms Jowell: No data on longevity or on years free of illness are available for the present moment in time or for April 1997 or March 1998. The most recent data on expectation of life at birth in England and Wales are based on an average of 1994, 1995 and 1996 and are 74.4 years for males and 79.6 years for females. The most recent estimates available for the average expectation of life free of self-reported limiting long-standing illness are for 1994 and are 59.2 years in males and 62.2 years in females. The latter figures were presented in the "Our Healthier Nation" Green Paper published in February 1998.

Ambulance Ages

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 27 July 1998, *Official Report*, column *98*, if he will provide a breakdown of the estimated cost of his informal assessment of ambulance ages. [54223]

Mr. Boateng: The breakdown of the estimated costs of the informal assessment is £2,245 for staff time and £22 for fax and telephone charges.

Ambulance Services

Dr. Tony Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many ambulance services are currently meeting the standard that life threatening emergencies receive a response in less than eight minutes on 75 per cent. of all occasions; and if he will list those services which currently *(a)* meet, and *(b)* fail to meet this standard. [53076]

Mr. Boateng: At present ambulance services are expected to reach 95 per cent. of all emergency calls within 14 minutes (urban services) and 19 minutes (rural services). In 1997–98 27 out of 37 ambulance services in England reached this standard. Full details are in the Departmental publication, *Ambulance Services, England 1997–98*, copies of which are available in the Library.

By the year 2000–01 ambulance services in England will also be expected to reach 75 per cent. of life-threatening calls within eight minutes. In 1997–98 only Staffordshire Ambulance Service achieved this standard.

Public Register

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the public registers which his Department have responsibility for. [47352]

Mr. Milburn *[holding answer 29 June 1998]:* The Department does not have responsibility for any registers which it is required to make public.

Health Services Accreditation

Mrs. Lait: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what is the time scale for the disposal of Health Services Accreditation; [48680]

(2) what criteria will be used to judge the best offer for Health Services Accreditation; [48685]

(3) how many expressions of interest in Health Services Accreditation had been received by the closing date for application; [48683]

(4) what is the process to be used for the disposal of Health Services Accreditation. [48684]

Mr. Boateng: Health Service Guidelines "NHS Trading Agencies: Future Arrangements" HSG 94/54, copies of which are available in the Library, are being applied to judge the best offer and to dispose of Health Services Accreditation. This says "the objective should be to ensure the best long-term value for money for the NHS".

The date for the receipt of formal proposals from interested organisations was 30 June 1998. The evaluation panel met for the first time in mid-July to consider these proposals and agree a timetable for the disposal of Health Services Accreditation. Prior to the closing date, 32 expressions of interest had been received of which 5 have proceeded to formal proposals.

Correspondence

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many letters per day his office receives; how many staff are employed to answer these; what targets are set in respect of such letters; and what is the current performance against targets. [50688]

Ms Jowell: Currently 11 members of staff are employed solely to deal with correspondence addressed to Ministers, although others provide draft replies as part of their normal duties. With regard to the volume of correspondence received and targets met in respect of that correspondence, I refer my hon. Friend to the reply given by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary on 20 July 1998, *Official Record*, column *363*.

Women's Issues

Jackie Ballard: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to the answer of 24 June 1998, *Official Report*, column *557–58*, prior to 18 May, what mechanisms were used to determine how legislation passed in the current session would affect women; what consultation he had with women's organisations; and if he will make a statement. [49085]

Ms Jowell: We actively consult a wide variety of stakeholders including those who have particular expertise on gender related issues, as legislative proposals for health and social services are developed.

Furthermore, the Cabinet sub committee on women's issues, of which I am a member, reviews and develops the Government's policy and strategy on issues of special concern to women.

Carers

Mr. O'Hara: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will estimate the number of people in the United Kingdom who will be caring for parents and children or parents and grandchildren in 2015 by gender, age and employment status of carer; and if he will make a statement. [54161]

Mr. Boateng: As part of my work on the National Carers Strategy, I shall be considering whether, and if so on what basis, to make projections of future numbers of informal carers.

Asylum Seekers

Ms Buck: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the special grants made to each London borough in 1997–98 for the reimbursement of costs incurred in the support of adult asylum seekers, their children and families and unaccompanied asylum seekers, stating in each case the amounts of grant *(a)* paid, *(b)* claimed and *(c)* paid as a percentage of the total claimed in England and Wales. [49438]

Ms Jowell: The following tables show the amount of special grants paid to each London Borough in 1997/98 and the percentage of the total claimed as a percentage of the total claimed in England. The figures requested for Wales are a matter for my right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Wales.

Adult asylum seekers accommodation grant

Local Authority	*(a) Total grant due in 1997/98 (£)*	*(b) Total grant claimed in 1997/98 (£)*	*(c) Percentage of England total grant*
Barking and Dagenham	365,627.92	365,627.92	0.9
Barnet	792,668.00	792,668.00	2.0
Bexley	60,045.00	60,045.00	0.2
Brent	2,481,633.90	2,481,633.90	6.2
Bromley	133,420.00	148,062.38	0.3
Camden	2,921,840.00	3,592,120.00	7.3
Corporation of London	95,900.00	96,080.00	0.2
Croydon	628,314.45	628,314.45	1.6
Ealing	1,565,363.00	1,565,363.00	3.9
Enfield	231,560.00	271,739.00	0.6
Greenwich	495,797.93	495,797.93	1.2
Hackney	3,027,990.00	3,027,990.00	7.6
Hammersmith and Fulham	1,406,618.00	1,406,618.00	3.5
Haringey	1,671,951.00	1,671,951.00	4.2
Harrow	748,971.00	748,971.00	1.9
Havering	25,900.00	33,124.55	0.1
Hillingdon	446,136.00	446,136.00	1.1
Hounslow	402,322.29	402,322.29	1.0
Islington	1,339,320.00	1,823,325.00	3.4
Kensington and Chelsea	2,177,140.00	2,249,217.00	5.5
Kingston	145,047.00	145,047.00	0.4
Lambeth	3,535,414.00	3,535,414.00	8.9
Lewisham	1,862,381.00	1,862,381.00	4.7
Merton	462,308.79	462,308.79	1.2
Newham	2,496,568.00	2,496,568.00	6.3
Redbridge	422,810.00	481,630.00	1.1

Adult asylum seekers accommodation grant

Local Authority	*(a) Total grant due in 1997/98 (£)*	*(b) Total grant claimed in 1997/98 (£)*	*(c) Percentage of England total grant*
Richmond upon Thames	263,852.13	263,852.13	0.7
Southwark	1,198,810.00	1,605,882.19	3.0
Sutton	115,085.58	115,085.58	0.3
Tower Hamlets	519,820.00	555,260.00	1.3
Waltham Forest	623,275.82	623,275.82	1.6
Wandsworth	585,480.00	688,417.00	1.5
Westminster	3,838,660.00	4,623,193.00	9.6
Total	37,088,230.81	39,765,420.93	92.94

Persons from abroad grant claims 1997–98

Local Authority	*(a) Grant paid to Local Authorities (£)*	*(b) Grant claimed by Local Authorities (£)*	*(c) Percentage of the total claimed in England*
Barking and Dagenham	201,340	201,340	0.6
Barnet	990,504	990,504	2.8
Bexley	31,210	31,210	0.1
Brent	1,440,786	1,440,786	4.1
Bromley	129,941	129,941	0. 4
Camden	1,589,314	1,589,314	4.6
Corporation of London	6,250	6,250	0.02
Croydon	233,470	233,470	0.7
Ealing[1]	296,636	1,028,186	2.9
Enfield	1,122,395	1,122,395	3.2
Greenwich	326,789	326,789	0.9
Hackney	1,013,572	1,013,572	2.9
Hammersmith and Fulham	1,366,848	1,366,848	3.9
Haringey	2,170,310	2,170,310	6.2
Harrow	433,119	433,119	1.2
Hillingdon	307,517	307,517	0.9
Hounslow	902,657	902,657	2.6
Islington	652,092	652,092	1.9
Kensington and Chelsea	1,312,224	1,312,224	3.8
Kingston	242,848	242,848	0.7
Lambeth	1,705,850	1,705,850	4.9
Lewisham	937,292	937,292	2.7
Merton	358,514	358,514	1.0
Newham	3,026,435	3,026,435	8.7
Redbridge	789,418	789,418	2.3
Richmond Upon Thames	85,947	85,947	0.2
Southwark	1,377,908	1,377,908	3.9
Sutton	34,878	34,878	0.1
Tower Hamlets	316,521	316,521	0.9
Waltham Forest	764,363	764,363	2.2
Wandsworth	1,183,570	1,183,570	3.4
Westminster	2,752,307	2,752,307	7.9
Totals	33,971,635	28,834,375	82.6

[1] Ealing revised their claim too late in the last financial year 1997/8. The balance will be paid in the present financial year

Note:

In addition the grant claimed by each authority is in accord with the rules of the Special Grant Report No 28

Unaccompanied childrens' grant

Local Authority	*(a) Total grant paid in 1997/98 (£)*	*(b) Total grant claimed in 1997/98 (£)*	*(c) Percentage of England total grant*
Croydon	741,569.00	1,584,569.00	15.24
Hillingdon	115,660.00	1,303,470.00	2.38
Westminster	441,179.00	897,163.00	9.06
Kensington and Chelsea	255,613.00	805,731.00	5.25
Corporation of London	32,616.00	29,254.00	0.67
Havering	—	12,426.00	—
Bromley	—	159,184.00	—
Merton	—	48,880.00	—
Total	1,586,637.00	4,840,677.00	32.6

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

Degree Courses

Mr. Ian Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will make a statement on the progress of the Government's policy on increasing the proportion of the population taking a first degree. [54503]

Mr. Mudie: The Government have demonstrated their commitment to the principle that anyone who has the capability for higher education should have the opportunity to benefit from it through the expenditure plans announced by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State on 15 July 1998, *Official Report*, column 411–13. These will allow for some 35,000 extra full-time and part-time students in higher education in England in the academic year 1999–2000 and will give scope for widening access to higher education and increasing the proportion of the population taking a first degree or other undergraduate course. Further details will be announced in due course.

Mr. Ian Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what is his estimate of how many United Kingdom students will start degree courses in England and Wales in September; and how many started in *(a)* 1997 and *(b)* 1996. [54502]

Mr. Mudie: The information for 1996 and 1997 is given in the table:

Home entrants[1] to undergraduate courses in Higher Education Institutions
England and Wales

thousand

	Full-time	*Part-time*	*Total*
1996–97			
First degree	244.6	26.7	271.4
Other undergraduate	42.8	82.5	125.4
Total	287.5	109.3	396.7
1997–98[2]			
First degree	252.9	25.7	278.5
Other undergraduate	41.8	86.7	128.5
Total	294.7	112.3	407.6

[1] Figures exclude the Open University because changes to the way their data are reported between the two years would otherwise distort the comparisons
[2] Provisional

The Department does not publish forecasts of entrants to higher education. It is therefore too early to say how many students will start a degree course in September 1998.

School Inspectors

Mr. Amess: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many HM school inspectors were appointed in the years *(a)* 1996, *(b)* 1997 and *(c)* 1998 to date; and how many of those appointed were previously (i) headteachers, (ii) deputy head teachers and (iii) teachers. [54934]

Ms Estelle Morris: This is a matter for HM Chief Inspector of Schools. I have asked him to write to the hon. Member and to place a copy of his letter in the Library.

Nansfield School, Brierfield

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what is the anticipated cost of the Ofsted inspection of Nansfield school, Brierfield, to be carried out in August; and how many inspectors will be involved. [54436]

Ms Estelle Morris: That is a matter for HM Chief Inspector, Chris Woodhead. I have asked him to write to my hon. Friend and to place a copy of his letter in the Library.

Teachers

Mr. Ian Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what is the minimum pay of a newly qualified teacher relative to the average salary for newly qualified graduates. [54501]

Ms Estelle Morris: The minimum starting pay of a newly qualified teacher with a good honours degree as at 1 December 1998 will be £15,012 (£17,178 in Inner London). The median salary in 1998 for newly qualified graduates covered by the latest survey of the Association of Graduate Recruiters is £16,500.

Mr. Ian Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many teachers are currently employed in England; and how many were in each of the last five years. [54560]

Mr. Charles Clarke: The full time equivalent number of teachers employed in maintained nursery, primary, secondary, and special schools, pupil referral units and education elsewhere in England in January 1998, and in January in each of the previous five years, is shown in the following table.

thousand

Year	*Number*
1993[1]	415.6
1994	409.3
1995	411.8
1996	412.4
1997	412.8
1998[2]	411.4

[1] Figures for 1993 include sixth form colleges. Sixth form colleges are excluded from 1994–98
[2] 1998 data are provisional

Mr. Ian Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what assessment he has made of the reasons given by teachers for leaving their profession prior to normal retirement age; and if he will publish them. [54486]

Mr. Charles Clarke: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has made no such assessment.

Mr. Ian Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what assessment he has made of the availability of trained teachers to meet the planned expansion of education provision. [54485]

Mr. Charles Clarke: The supply of an adequate number of well-trained and well-motivated teachers is central to our aim to raise standards in schools.

We set each year targets for the number of trainees who need to enter initial teacher training courses in order to meet the future demand for newly qualified teachers. The

calculations take account of the likely demand in future years—including any changes resulting from current education initiatives, such as measures to reduce infant class sizes or improve the provision for under-fives. Details of the process by which targets are set may be found in the recent DfEE publication "Teacher Supply and Demand Modelling: A technical description", a copy of which has been placed in the Library.

Policies are expected to have a greater effect upon the demand for primary teachers than upon that for secondary teachers. The targets for recruitment to primary training courses have been exceeded in each of the last 10 years.

We will be reviewing recruitment targets in the autumn and will issue targets for courses starting in 1999/2000.

Schools (Computers)

Mr. Ian Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will make a statement about the availability of computers in schools ; and what plans he has *(a)* to replace obsolete machines and *(b)* to increase the number of computers in schools. [54495]

Mr. Mudie: Over £100m of additional financial support is being provided to schools through the Standards Fund in 1998–99 to help improve information and communications technology. This will contribute substantially to the replacement of obsolete equipment and increasing the numbers of computers in schools.

Mr. Ian Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what plans he has to provide funds for additional staff to assist teachers to maintain and operate schools' computers. [54496]

Mr. Mudie: Schools are currently free to enter maintenance contracts with their specialist suppliers. Schools may also deploy some of the £100 million of expenditure being made available in 1998–99 for the National Grid for Learning to provide teachers with basic technical training on the use of computers. In addition, an Initial Teacher Training National Curriculum in Information and Communications Technology will commence this September, and some £230 million pounds will be allocated from National Lottery sources over the next four years for the retraining of serving teachers in these new technologies. Advice on maintenance and other aspects of schools' Information and Communication Technology will be available from Local Authority subject advisers and the British Educational Communications and Technology agency.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many networked computers are currently in use in schools in England and Wales. [54129]

Mr. Mudie: Evidence of the number of computers in schools in England which are connected to an internal network will be published later this year as part of the Department's statistical survey of ICT in schools. Educational matters in Wales are the responsibility of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales.

Ministerial Meetings

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many meetings Ministers have had with Manpower since 1 February; and on what matters. [54492]

Mr. Mudie: Ministers, their Special Advisers and other civil servants meet many people in the course of their work. This properly includes meetings with interest groups outside Government. This liaison is intended to help Ministers draw upon outside contributions—from academics, think-tanks, trade and industry associations, private sector organisations, trade unions and others, as well as relevant experience from other countries—during the process of policy analysis and development. But they must observe the requirements of propriety: for instance they must not provide confidential information without authorisation, or allow improper influence on policy. It is not our policy to make information on meetings or their content public.

University Students (Computers)

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what steps he is taking to ensure that all university students have relevant computer skills before they commence their course. [54688]

Mr. Mudie: The requirements for university entry are a matter for the individual institutions to decide.

The Government recognise however the importance of key skills, including IT skills, and want to move as soon as possible to a position where they are a normal part of everyone's post-16 education and training. The Qualifications and Curriculum Authority is currently piloting a single key skills qualification in schools which includes IT as a constituent element.

The Department has also been encouraging universities and their admission tutors to consider a wider set of qualifications and skills, such as IT, than those traditionally considered for entry. One such initiative is the UCAS Tarif Project, which has received substantial Government funding and whose proposals have been considered and supported by Minsters in principle.

In addition, the Department is funding a number of development projects working with universities to explore and promote the acquisition of key skills (including IT) as part of university study.

Green Transport

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment, pursuant to his answer of 27 March 1998, *Official Report*, column *343*, on departmental transport arrangements, what further changes he has made. [54006]

Mr. Mudie: The Department is working towards the target announced in the White Paper 'A New Deal for Transport', that all headquarters buildings and main buildings occupied by Executive Agencies and Government Offices for the Regions should have green transport plans by March 1999 and all other key buildings by March 2000.

The DfEE expect to have a green transport plan in place for its main buildings by late autumn 1998.

The DfEE is currently investigating alternative fuels for use in its official vehicles. A liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) car has been ordered for use by the Secretary of State.

All DfEE main sites took part in the National Cycle Week as part of the programme to raise staff awareness.

School Sports

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what guidelines his Department has issued on the minimum number of sports which schools should offer. [54654]

Mr. Charles Clarke: Physical education must be taught to all children throughout their compulsory schooling. The National Curriculum for physical education consists of six areas of activity and schools have a degree of freedom in deciding which activities to teach.

The Department does not issue guidelines on which sports schools should offer. However, primary schools are required to teach swimming; and secondary schools must teach competitive team and individual games.

Pre-school Education

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what estimate he has made of the number of pre-school education places in Gloucestershire to be commissioned by local authorities from registered partner providers in the voluntary and private sectors in the academic year 1998–99. [54646]

Mr. Charles Clarke: Gloucestershire's Early Years Development Plan for 1998–99, which was approved by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State in March, offers a free place for every eligible four-year-old in the local authority area. The Plan estimates that 273 places will be in the private, independent and voluntary sectors in the autumn term 1998, 2,109 in the spring term 1999, and 4,394 in the summer term 1999.

Employment Service

Mr. Ian Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many people are currently employed by the Employment Service; how many there were two years ago; and what is his forecast of the number that will be employed in two years' time. [54497]

Mr. Andrew Smith: Responsibility for the subject of the question has been delegated to the Employment Service agency under its Chief Executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Leigh Lewis to Mr. Ian Bruce, dated 31 July 1998:

As the Employment Service is an Executive Agency, the Secretary of State for Education and Employment has asked me to reply direct to your question which asks the number of people currently employed by the Employment Service, how many there were two years ago and what the forecast number will be in two years time. This is something which falls within the responsibilities delegated to me as Chief Executive of the Agency.

On 1 July the Employment Service employed 33,607 people; on 1 July 1996 the number employed was 41,820. Staffing for future years will be determined nearer the time according to our business needs.

I hope this is helpful.

Mr. Ian Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how much his Department spent on training Employment Service staff in cash terms and as a percentage of the costs of running the service in 1997–98; and what are his plans for 1998–99. [54498]

Mr. Andrew Smith: Responsibility for the subject of the question has been delegated to the Employment Service agency under its Chief Executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Leigh Lewis to Mr. Ian Bruce, dated 31 July 1998:

As the Employment Service is an Executive Agency, the Secretary of State has asked me to reply direct to your questions concerning the costs of training Employment Service staff. This is something which falls within the responsibilities delegated to me as Chief Executive of the Agency.

In 1997–98, the Employment Service invested £12.8 million in the delivery and support of training for its staff. This represented 1.4 per cent. of the Agency's total running costs.

These costs do not include the salary, travel and subsistence costs of staff while receiving training. These are estimated at a further £11.8 million.

For 1998–99, we plan to invest approximately £12 million in the training and development of our staff. This is likely, again to represent 1.4 per cent. of the Agency's total running costs. We project that a further £10.7 million will be spent on the salary, travel and subsistence costs of staff while receiving training.

I hope this is helpful.

Grammar Schools

Mr. Amess: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what representations he has received on the proposed balloting arrangements for grammar schools; and if he will raise the threshold to trigger a ballot to 25 per cent. of school registered parents. [54935]

Ms Estelle Morris: The deadline for responses on the draft grammar school ballot regulations is today. As at 30 July, 196 responses had been received. All responses will be analysed and we will be considering carefully the points raised before laying the regulations before Parliament. This includes determining the appropriate threshold for petitions.

Assisted Places Scheme

Mr. Ian Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many United Kingdom pupils were in *(a)* private education, *(b)* state education and *(c)* funded under the assisted places scheme in each of the last five years. [54484]

Ms Estelle Morris: The available information for pupils in the United Kingdom is shown in the table.

thousand

	Private education	*State education*	*Assisted places scheme*[1]
1992–93	612.9	8,900.3	32.4
1993–94	607.7	8,963.3	33.0
1994–95	607.5	9,106.1	33.5
1995–96	609.4	9,207.0	33.7
1996–97	615.9	9,291.0	37.6

[1] Great Britain only. The assisted places scheme does not operate in Northern Ireland
[2] Provisional

Advanced Skills Teachers

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) if he will list the procedures for the assessment and identification of advanced skills teachers; [52990]

(2) who will be responsible for identifying teachers to be appointed as advanced skills teachers. [52991]

Ms Estelle Morris: It is for schools to create Advanced Skills Teacher posts and identify candidates to fill those posts. Before a candidate can be appointed to an AST post, he or she must undergo an assessment against national standards appropriate to the best teachers. The assessors are suitably qualified persons employed by Westminster Education Consultants. The assessors are responsible for confirming that candidates are suitable for AST status; the schools may then appoint such candidates to AST posts.

Local Government Finance, Dorset

Mr. Ian Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how much Dorset County Council spent on education relative to the Government's standard spending assessment level in 1997–98; and if he will revise the standard spending assessment to reflect this. [54499]

Ms Estelle Morris: Dorset's financial returns indicate that it spent some £14.5 million (12.4 per cent.) above the level of its education SSA in 1997–98. We are reviewing the education SSA formula to make it fairer for 1999–2000, but it would be wrong to use individual LEA patterns of spending directly in the formula, since they are not independent of local authority policies.

Special Needs

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what date has been set for publication of the Government's proposals on special educational needs following the recent consultation exercise on the Government's paper, "Excellence for All Children". [54040]

Mr. Charles Clarke: A date has not yet been set. Taking account of the many thoughtful comments on "Excellence for all Children", and of advice from the National Advisory Group on special educational needs, we expect to publish an action programme in the early autumn.

School Finances

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many head teachers have been *(a)* suspended and then reinstated and *(b)* dismissed following investigations of financial irregularities concerning their school's finances in each year since 1987; and how many were subsequently convicted of a criminal offence. [54435]

Mr. Charles Clarke: Of the information requested *(a)* is not collected centrally, and *(b)* could be provided only at disproportionate cost, since manual searches through individual records would be required.

University Research

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) what recent representations he has received concerning the system of dual funding for research in universities; and what plans he has to change the system; [47048]

(2) what assessment he has made of the efficiency and effectiveness of the dual funding system for university research; and if he will make a statement. [47049]

Mr. Mudie: The outcome of the Comprehensive Spending Review has demonstrated the Government's commitment to invest in strengthening the science base and modernise the UK's research performance through the dual support system, while ensuring that the Higher Education Funding Councils and the Research Councils work closely together to deliver better value for money and transparency in the use of research funds. Over the three years up to 2001–02, an additional £1.4 billion will be provided for research, including £1.1 billion through the science budget and the Wellcome Trust and a further £0.3 billion to support universities' research through the Higher Education Funding Council for England. This additional investment responds to the concerns expressed by the National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education (the Dearing Committee) about research infrastructure in universities and to the conclusion by that Committee, which was endorsed in the responses to consultation on the Committee's report and more recently by the House of Commons Science and Technology Committee, that the dual support system should remain in place.

Miners' Retraining

Caroline Flint: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will list the training programmes to support miners to retrain for employment in other industries since 1979. [49354]

Mr. Battle: I have been asked to reply.

Between 1979 and 1984, training programmes were not offered to miners because many of those affected by colliery closures either took early redundancy or were relocated at another colliery. From 1984 to 1988, miners who left the industry and wished to receive training for alternative employment received funding for such training from the British Coal Corporation. From 1988 to 1994, miners were able to attend centres run by British Coal Enterprise (BCE), a subsidiary company of the British Coal Corporation and discuss their training needs with qualified job consultants.

In cases where there was a reasonable chance of job-specific or skills enhancement training resulting in successful employment, then such training was funded by BCE. There was no definitive list of training courses available. At privatisation at the end of 1994, training programmes for miners seeking employment in other industries are the responsibility of the private coal companies. However, this Government will provide assistance to mining communities through Welfare to Work and other schemes, and to specific projects through the Single Regeneration Budget. EU funding is also available through EU Structural Funds which provide financial assistance that supports training and retraining in coalfield areas via RECHAR programmes. Moreover,

training programmes are provided through the Department for Education and Employment, and are available to ex-miners who satisfy the eligibility criteria. These programmes include Employment Training and Training for Work. Support is also available under the New Deal. In addition, the Government have recently received the report of the Coalfields Taskforce. They have warmly welcomed the report and have promised positive action to follow up the recommendations. The Government wish to see regeneration in all areas of need, regardless of the date of collier closures.

New Deal

Mr. Healey: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many people his Department is committed to employing during 1998 under *(a)* the subsidised job option and *(b)* the unsubsidised job option of the New Deal programme. [52589]

Mr. Mudie: During this year the wider Education and Employment Department comprising the DfEE Headquarters and the Employment Service aim to recruit up to 320 subsidised New Deal Participants.

In addition we expect that a number of unsubsidised participants will be recruited during or after the Gateway stage through the normal recruitment channels via fair and open competition.

Mr. Gerrard: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many people, by Employment Service region, are *(a)* refusing to participate in the New Deal and *(b)* have had their jobseeker's allowance sanctioned as a consequence of refusal. [52549]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The total number of sanctions to be included in the quarterly analysis of Adjudication Office decisions for the period 30 June 1998 is 68, for:

failing to attend a place on a New Deal opportunity,

giving up a place on a New Deal opportunity without good cause, or

losing a place on a New Deal opportunity through misconduct,

as follows:

Employment Service Region	*Number of Sanctions*
London and South East	6
East Midlands and Eastern	3
South West	3
West Midlands	8
Yorkshire and the Humber	12
North West	8
Northern	12
Wales	9
Scotland	7
Great Britain Total	68

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many young people to date have been sanctioned under the New Deal for the young unemployed. [54122]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The total number of sanctions to be included in the quarterly analysis of Adjudication Office decisions for the period 30 June 1998 is 68, for:

failing to attend a place on a New Deal opportunity,

giving up a place on a New Deal opportunity without good cause, or

losing a place on a New Deal opportunity through misconduct.

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment when he expects the first figures and results of the New Deal 25 Plus to be available; and if he will publish them. [54123]

Mr. Andrew Smith: We are only a month into the New Deal 25+ and it is too soon to report on actual or likely take-up of opportunities. The Government Statistical Service will publish the first robust and reliable statistics, covering the period July-September, in December. I am considering whether it will be possible to make provisional management information available earlier than that; and will do so if I can.

Mr. Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what has been to date the unit cost for each trainee in the New Deal Gateway. [54191]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The amount spent on each participant in the Gateway depends on their individual needs and the amount of time they spend on the Gateway. It is too early to give an accurate average cost for participants.

Asbestos

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what guidance his Department issues to those constructing buildings for which it is responsible on the use of materials containing asbestos. [52313]

Mr. Mudie: Any construction contracts let by DfEE prohibit the use of asbestos. The most recent such contract for Castle View House, Runcorn ensured that no asbestos was used in the construction.

Guidance on use of asbestos in buildings is contained in the PACE property management guidance. Health and Safety Executive publications and the Control of Asbestos at Work Regulations 1987.

Domestic Violence

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will evaluate the cost to his Department arising from violence within families; and if he will make a statement. [52441]

Mr. Mudie: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Home Department on 29 July 1998, *Official Report*, column *258*.

Grants and Loans

Mr. Reed: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will list the names of the non-statutory organisations or bodies in receipt of section 17 grants or loans from his Department in 1997–98 and 1998–99, stating in each case *(a)* the amount, *(b)* whether a grant or loan, and *(c)* the purpose of making the grant or loan. [48645]

Ms Estelle Morris: Regulation 17 of the Education (Grant) Regulations 1983 has been superseded by Regulation 15 of the Education (Grant) Regulation 1990. Grants made under the Education (Grant) Regulations 1990 in 1997–98 and 1998–99 and their purpose, are shown in a table, copies of which have been placed in the Library.

Departmental Vehicles

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will list for *(a)* the Department and *(b)* bodies listed in the National Asset Register how many vehicles are currently (i) owned and (ii) leased; if he will indicate their (1) fuel types and (2) engine cubic capacities; and how many vehicles are expected to fall due for replacement in each of the years 1998–99, 1999–2000 and 2000–01. [49222]

Mr. Mudie: The information provided below is in respect of vehicles owned and leased by the DfEE, its Non Departmental Public Bodies (NDPBs) and the Employment Service Agency (ES).

Currently 1,316 vehicles owned and 493 vehicles leased, 900 of which are petrol and 909 diesel.

Engine cc	*Petrol*	*Diesel*	*Owned*	*Leased*	*Replacement cycle* 1998–99	1999–2000	2000–01
Up to 1600cc	321	64	364	21	1	1	1
1600–1799cc	145	265	325	85	392	257	145
1800–2000cc	284	516	560	240	337	120	15
2001–2500cc	132	57	61	128	18	8	5
2501–3000cc	18	6	5	19	4	2	1
3001–3500cc	0	0	0	0	—	—	—
3501–4000cc	0	0	0	0	—	—	—
4001–4500cc	0	0	0	0	—	—	—
4501–5000cc	0	0	0	0	—	—	—
5000+ cc	0	1	1	0	—	—	—
Total	900	909	1,316	493	—	—	—

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment, pursuant to his answer of 28 July 1998, *Official Report*, column 143, concerning vehicle replacement, what guidance he has issued concerning the replacement policy for the vehicle fleet. [54480]

Teachers' Pay

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how much money has been provided in the budget for his Department set out in the Comprehensive Spending Review for performance related pay for teachers in *(a)* 2000–01 and *(b)* 2001–02. [52254]

Ms Estelle Morris *[holding answer 27 July 1998]*: The £19 billion additional resources for education announced by my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary to the Treasury on 12 June to allow for an investment in modernisation. A Green Paper will be published before the end of the year on the Future of the Teaching Profession. Decisions on teachers pay which may result from those consultations will be taken at a later stage.

Mr. Ian Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what advice he will give to the independent review body on teachers' salaries. [54500]

Ms Estelle Morris: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will write in the near future to give the School Teachers' Review Body its remit for the 1999–2000 pay round, and will follow this up with detailed evidence and representations in September. The Review Body's terms of reference will be consistent with those published in paragraph 4.23 of the White Paper Modern Public Services for Britain (Cm 4011).

School Standards and Framework Bill

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) when he intends to publish the regulations provided for in Clauses *(a)* 9 , *(b)* 12, *(c)* 1 and 3, *(d)* 23, *(e)* 21, *(f)* 26, *(g)* 25, *(h)* 27, *(i)* 32, *(j)* 37, *(k)* 40, *(l)* 41, *(m)* 42, *(n)* 43 and *(o)* 64 of the School Standards and Framework Bill (HL 94); [52568]

(2) when he intends to publish the regulations provided in Clauses *(a)* 68, *(b)* 69, *(c)* 84, *(d)* 85, *(e)* 86, *(f)* 87, *(g)* 88, *(h)* 93, *(i)* 99, *(j)* 100, *(k)* 102, *(l)* 107 and *(m)* 120 of the School Standards and Framework Bill. [52570]

Ms Estelle Morris *[holding answers 27 July 1998]*: It is not possible to give precise details of the timing of publication of regulations at this stage. The Government will make sure that all relevant parties are kept fully informed of how and when they will be affected by the various sets of regulations.

Information Technology

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how much his Department spent on IT itemising *(a)* personal computers, *(b)* main-frame, *(c)* mini-computers and *(d)* file servers in the last year for which figure are available. [52880]

Mr. Mudie: My Department has spent the following amounts on buying new IT products in the 1997–98 financial year:

Department For Education and Employment Head Office: £5.06 million made up of

Personal Computers (including portable computers): £4.08 million

Mainframe: £0.03 million

Servers (including mini-computers): £0.95 million

Employment Service

The majority of purchases of these items were as part of projects which also included the purchase of other products and services, such as printers and installation or configuration. It is not possible to isolate the spend on these items. The Employment Service total capital spend on buying IT was £11 million for 1997–98.

Accountancy Qualifications

Mr. Pearson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment for what reasons funds are made available to further and higher education institutions to support students studying towards AAT, CIMA, ACCA and ACA qualifications. [52243]

Mr. Mudie *[holding answer 28 July 1998]:* Funds are made available to support students studying for accountancy qualifications on the same basis as for other professional qualifications.

LEAs (Performance Results)

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will ensure that the publication of performance results for local education authorities includes information about the number of schools covered and indicates clearly when schools covered have changed because of a temporary closure. [52993]

Ms Estelle Morris *[holding answer 28 July 1998]:* There are no plans to list in school performance tables, schools which may have closed since the previous year's tables were published. However, where a secondary school opens during the academic year in question, this is made clear in that year's tables.

Teachers (Time Off)

Mr. Amess: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what guidance his Department has issued to schools and local education authorities on the granting of time off to school teachers who are also local councillors in respect of their council duties. [52975]

Ms Estelle Morris *[holding answer 28 July 1998]:* Guidance in the Department's Circular 13/89 (paragraph 36) makes clear that this is one of the activities for which teachers must be allowed to take reasonable time off work.

Personal, Social and Health Education Advisory Group

Mr. Tredinnick: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what resources his Department has given to the Advisory Group on Personal, Social and Health Education in Schools. [52742]

Ms Estelle Morris *[holding answer 28 July 1998]:* The Department has provided the National Advisory Group on Personal, Social and Health Education in Schools with accommodation and administrative support for their meetings. The members of the Advisory Group and those of its Expert Panel of Advisers have been reimbursed for the travel and other expenses they have incurred in attending meetings.

Mr. Tredinnick: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will make a statement on the work of the Advisory Group on Personal, Social and Health Education in Schools since its inception. [52743]

Ms Estelle Morris *[holding answer 28 July 1998]:* The National Advisory Group on Personal, Social and Health Education in Schools has met four times since it was established in May. It will provide initial advice in September on a national framework for Personal, Social and Health Education in schools. The curriculum aspects of this advice will be considered by the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority in the context of the review of the National Curriculum.

Parent Education

Mr. Tredinnick: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) if he will list the schools which *(a)* he has visited and *(b)* plans to visit which have parent education programmes to develop relationship skills and improve children's behaviour and achievements in the classroom; and if he will make a statement; [52739]

(2) if he will list the parent education programmes receiving Government financial support and the amounts of the awards since 1 May 1997; [52740]

(3) what funding priority is given to supporting parent education programmes that have been established for four years or more; [52741]

(4) what assessment he has made of the value of extending parent education to *(a)* all families and *(b)* families with recognised difficulties. [52745]

Ms Estelle Morris *[holding answer 28 July 1998]:* In the Education White Paper "Excellence in schools" (Cm 3681), my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State emphasises the important role parents have in helping their children learn. There are many exemplary local projects aimed at developing parenting skills and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is always eager to learn about these whenever he visits schools.

Since May 1997, the Department has contributed some £84,000 to the Community Education and Development Centre Share project which supports parents in helping their children at home with early reading, writing and maths. In addition, we are funding a joint National Stepfamily Association/Parentline project to provide training courses for their helpers on ways in which parents and the wider extended family can support and promote children's learning.

The Government are also committed to extending the Family Literacy Initiative and are giving £4 million to support it in this financial year. This Initiative enables parents and their children to learn literacy skills in small, intensive courses run in co-operation with local schools. There are currently 600 courses in 126 LEAs reaching around 6,000 parents and their children. An independent

evaluation by the National Foundation for Educational Research has shown the Initiative to be effective in assisting both children and parents to improve their literacy skills.

The Sure Start programme, announced on 15 July by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, will include the provision of parent education, among other services, to all families in areas of deprivation. Some of the pilot phase of Early Excellence Centres also offers parent education.

My right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State will be closely involved in the establishment of the new Family and Parenting Institute announced on 23 July by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Home Department. This Institute will be funded by Government to increase the profile of parenting and encourage the development of support for *all* parents.

Bedfordshire County Council

Ms Moran: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will assess the level of education provision made by Bedfordshire County Council. [53003]

Ms Estelle Morris *[holding answer 28 July 1998]:* A recent Ofsted/Audit Commission inspection of Bedfordshire LEA found that overall the LEA provided effective support in contributing to improvements in the quality of education. The report also confirmed that the authority had a high level of surplus school places. The LEA is currently undertaking a review to identify the scope for reducing surplus capacity.

School Closures

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what assistance his Department makes available to schools which have to accommodate increased numbers as a result of the temporary closure of a nearby school. [52992]

Ms Estelle Morris *[holding answer 28 July 1998]:* The Department has no specific programme of assistance to schools in the general circumstances described. Where proposals are published to close a school and fall to the Secretary of State for decision, the effects on other schools are among the factors taken into account by the Department before a decision is made. However, funding for those other schools depends on the terms of the local management of schools scheme for the LEA concerned. Where capital building work is the issue, LEAs can apply to this Department for support in the form of Supplementary Credit Approvals. However, resources are very limited and all requests are considered alongside other competing claims.

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will make a statement on the Government's policy on temporary school closures; and what advice his Department has given to local education authorities on such closures. [52995]

Ms Estelle Morris *[holding answer 28 July 1998]:* Where proposals to close schools and establish new schools in the premises fall to the Secretary of State to decide under current legislation, they are considered on their individual merits, in the light of the circumstances of each case and of objections received. The Department has not given any specific advice to local education authorities on such closures.

Christ's School

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he has received a proposal from the London Borough of Richmond to close Christ's School in the Borough and reopen it after a 12 month period. [52994]

Ms Estelle Morris *[holding answer 28 July 1998]:* No proposal has been received from the London Borough of Richmond in respect of Christ's School.

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will list for Christ's School in the London Borough of Richmond *(a)* the number of pupils on roll at the beginning of the summer term 1998, *(b)* the boroughs of residence of the pupils and *(c)* the ethnic minority communities from which pupils are drawn. [52997]

Ms Estelle Morris *[holding answer 28 July 1998]:* Information on pupils in schools at the beginning of the summer term is not collected centrally. The 1997 Secondary School Performance Tables contain the latest available information on the number of pupils at Christ's School. They show that there were 546 pupils at Christ's School in January 1997. Information on the ethnicity of pupils at individual schools is not published centrally.

Information on the residence of pupils is not collected centrally.

Standards and Effectiveness Unit

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many staff are employed in the Standards and Effectiveness Unit of his Department; and what is the budgeted cost of the unit for *(a)* the current year and *(b)* the next three years. [52989]

Ms Estelle Morris *[holding answer 28 July 1998]:* The number of staff is 117. The projected salary cost for these staff is £3.4 million in financial year 1998–99. Decisions about the level of funding for the next three years have not yet been determined.

Jobs (East London)

Mr. Love: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will list the *(a)* jobs created and *(b)* jobs secured by the (i) East London and (ii) Lea Valley Objective 2 Area in each year since its creation, broken down into (1) manufacturing, (2) service and (3) distribution sectors; and if he will make a statement. [53254]

Mr. Mudie: Since its introduction in 1994 the East London and Lea Valley Objective 2 programme has received support from the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and the European Social Fund (ESF). Over this period 32,637 jobs have been created or retained (tables 1 and 2).

We do not hold information on the number of jobs created broken down by sector and we can only provide calendar year information for ESF because this is based on annual approvals. We do not hold information in this way for ERDF.

Table 1: ESF

Year	Employment	From training into self employment	Total
1994	845	132	977
1995	2,278	138	2,416
1996	4,256	539	4,795
1997	n/a	n/a	1,777
Total	7,379	809	9,965

Table 2: ERDF

	1994 to June 1998
Jobs created (inc. temporary jobs)	9,394
Jobs retained	13,278
Total	22,672

Statistics

Ms Buck: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will list, for each education authority area, the percentage of the school population which has been permanently excluded from school, by ethnic origin. [53566]

Ms Estelle Morris: Information on the percentage of the school population who were permanently excluded from school in the 1996–97 school year, by ethnic group, will be published in a Statistical Press Notice in September.

Ms Buck: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will list, for each local authority area, the number and percentage of pupils categorised as being in each of the categories of ethnic origin for which data are collected. [53565]

Ms Estelle Morris: Information on the number and percentage of pupils in each ethnic group in each local education authority area in England in January 1997 was published in the Department's Statistical Press Notice 341/97, which is available in the Library.

Additional Funding

Mr. Rooney: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what additional funds have been allocated to the Bradford area since 1 May 1997 over and above previous plans listed by (i) capital and (ii) revenue, indicating for each whether they were subject to a bidding process. [53212]

Ms Estelle Morris: Nationally, the Government have provided an additional £835 million for revenue purposes in 1998–99 over and above the previous Administration's plans and an additional £423 million for capital purposes. The table shows the capital and revenue allocations for 1997–98 and 1998–99 for Bradford. The allocations were wholly or partly subject to a bidding process except the education standard spending assessment.

£ million

	1997–98	1998–99
Revenue Funding		
Education SSA	215.6	225.1
GEST/Standards Fund	3.8	5.9
Capital Funding		
ACG+SCA	3.6	4.8
New Deal for Schools 1	1.1	—
New Deal for Schools 2	—	1.4
Class size reduction	—	0.2
Outside toilets	—	0.1
Energy efficiency	—	0.2

Notes:

1. The 1997–98 Education SSA figure has been adjusted to take account of nursery vouchers
2. The specific grant programme was known as Grants for Education Support and Training (GEST) in 1997–98 and the Standards Fund in 1998–99. The figures relate to the size of the programme and therefore include the LEA contribution as well as the grant
3. Annual Capital Guidelines (ACGs) and Supplementary Credit Approvals (SCAs) represent loan sanction
4. The New Deal for Schools allocations in both 1997–98 and 1998–99 represent new funding over and above previous plans. Funds to reduce class sizes, replace outside toilets and energy efficiency projects are all additional to previous plans

Departmental Research

Mr. Fabricant: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will list the cost of all research undertaken by his Department since May 1997, excluding the cost of green papers and other public consultation documents drafted by his officials; and if he will list in each case the organisations which undertook that research. [52698]

Mr. Mudie: I refer the hon. Member to the Department's Annual Report on Research, published on 31 July 1998, which details all the research funded by the Department in the period 1 April 1997 to 31 March 1998. Copies of this report have been placed in the Library. Details of research commissioned since 1 April 1998 are shown in the following table.

Project title	Contractor	Total cost (£)
Perceptions of the Audit Burden	Belvedere Associates	5,000
Long term labour market changes and implications for skill requirements	Business Strategies Ltd.	7,313.50
Development of HEQED's dissemination strategy	Communication Management PR	24,400
Evaluation of the Higher Education Regional Development Fund	ECOTEC Research and Consulting	65,540
Evaluation of the 1997 Prospectus projects	ECOTEC Research and Consulting	148,000
Progress and retention on Youth Programmes	ECOTEC Research and Consulting	15,900
An Evaluation of Careers Service Work with Disaffected Young People (SBU-EORP1 Paying Invoices)	ECOTEC Research and Consulting Ltd.	83,833.00
Research on the Role of Informal Learning in the Workplace	ECOTEC Research and Consulting Ltd.	47,904.00

Project title	*Contractor*	*Total cost (£)*
Early Career Paths of Graduates and Diplomats	Higher Education Careers Service	82,250
Modern Apprenticeships in Licensed premises	HRH Associates	13,600
TECs as Market Makers—Update	HRH Associates	4,000
Family friendly employment—the business case	Institute for Employment Studies	54,001.00
Value for Money Case Study	Jennifer Green Ltd.	1,300
TEC/CCTE Core Business (Block 4)	John Embleton	6,750
An Evaluation of the Premier League Football Club Initiative	National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER)	48,120.00
OECD International Research Project: Programme for Developing Indicators on Student Achievement on a Regular Basis	Office for National Statistics	544,601.00
Sub-degree provision: Employer and Student Focus Groups	Public Attitude Surveys	45,401
Employer Support for part-time study by employees	Public Attitude Surveys	27,891
Survey of Training Provider Views of Post Training Follow-up	Scriven Associates	1,000
YCS database manipulation and enhancement	Social and Community Planning Research (SCPR)	3,800.00
Government Offices Role in Education	Steve Brooking and Brian Richards	1,970
Evaluation of new approaches to work experience and the work related curriculum (ORF)	SWA Consulting	119,421.00
The impact of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995: The employers' response	SWA Consulting	97,560.00
Research on the Labour Market Relevance of TEC Activities	The Host Consultancy	45,686.00
Evaluation of effectiveness of "Cities in Schools" provision	University of Cambridge	60,000.00
The Effective Use of Learning Support Assistants (LSAs) and their Training Needs	University of Manchester	57,783.00
Evaluating the impact of the Enterprise in Higher education programme	York Consulting	47,700

Schools (London)

Mr. Love: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many pupils attended *(a)* local authority comprehensive, *(b)* grant maintained, *(c)* grammar and *(d)* independent secondary schools in each London borough in each of the last five years. [53559]

Ms Estelle Morris: The available information is shown in a set of tables, copies of which have been placed in the Library.

Family-friendly Policies

Dr. Starkey: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will make a statement on progress in implementing the Government's family-friendly policies. [54026]

Ms Hodge: The White Paper "Fairness at Work" set out the Government's intentions on rights concerned with parental leave, part-time and working time. The framework document "Meeting the Childcare Challenge" describes the Government's plans for the National Childcare Strategy. Following consultation exercises on both documents, the Government will be making further announcements in the autumn. Other aspects of family friendly policy, including promotion of the business benefits and examples of effective practice, are also being taken forward.

Training and Enterprise Councils

Mr. Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what assessment he has made of the *(a)* training achievements and effectiveness and *(b)* value for money of training and enterprise councils. [54403]

Mr. Mudie: The work of each TEC is assessed by its Government Office on an ongoing basis. All TECs are required to meet a set of minimum licensing standards designed to demonstrate continuous improvement, value for money and accountability. Government Offices will, for the first time this year, publish annual reports on their assessment of the performance of their TECs.

We have also implemented a research and evaluation programme on TECs and copies of study reports are available in the Library.

Mr. Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what estimate he has made of the proportion and amount of budget spent on management and administration costs by each training and enterprise council in 1997–98. [54402]

Mr. Mudie: This information is not yet available for 1997–98. Copies of the audited accounts are placed in the Library as they become available.

Information on administrative costs and the proportion of overall income spent on administration is stated in the consolidated annual statutory audited accounts of most of the English TECs. Companies law allows TECs to present their income and expenditure accounts using two different formats which can be adapted by adding further detail. Most TECs have chosen the format which includes disclosure of administrative costs which include staff and premises costs and other overhead. We are asking that those TECs that do not currently identify administrative costs reconsider the format they have adopted for the presentation of their accounts.

Persistent Inquirers

Mr. Sanders: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment which of his Department's agencies have procedures to identify persistent inquirers for information. [53953]

Mr. Andrew Smith: Responsibility for the subject of the question has been delegated to the Employment Service agency under its Chief Executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Leigh Lewis to Mr. Adrian Sanders, dated 31 July 1998:

The Employment Service is the only Executive Agency of the Department for Education and Employment (DfEE) and the Secretary of State has asked me to reply direct to your question about which of his Department's agencies have procedures to identify persistent enquiries for information. This is something which falls within the responsibilities delegated to me as Chief Executive of the Agency.

The Employment Service has no formal procedure to identify persistent enquiries for information. Like the DfEE, we handle all requests for information in line with the requirements of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information: second edition (1997), and the 6 Whitehall Standards.

Our Regions and Head Office Divisions can forward to our Head Office Secretariat details of anyone who appears to be repeatedly dissatisfied with the way in which their enquiries have been handled. In these cases our Head Office Secretariat will generally deal with all further enquiries from the individual concerned.

I hope this is helpful.

Overseas Visits

Mr. Wilshire: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will list those who have accompanied (i) him and (ii) his departmental Ministers on overseas visits since 1 January indicating *(a)* the venue of the visit, *(b)* the purpose of the visit, *(c)* the names of those involved, *(d)* the job of those involved, *(e)* the reasons why they were included in the visit and *(f)* the cost to public funds. [53846]

Mr. Mudie: I will write to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

Departmental Publications

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many of his Department's publications have been made available in *(a)* Braille, *(b)* audio tape and *(c)* large print in 1997–98; and what percentage of the total number of publications this represents. [54273]

Mr. Mudie: To give a precise answer to this question could only be done at disproportionate cost. During 1997–98, however, the Department produced 22 Braille editions of publications and 23 audio tape versions for people with visual impairments.

The Department's policy is to ensure that publications that will be of very wide public interest are available in formats that are suitable for people with visual impairments.

Additional Educational Needs

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) what representations he has received concerning the impact of proposed changes to the methodology for relating to the index for additional educational needs; [53997]

(2) what evaluation he has made of the impact on funding for London local authorities if the current indicators contained in the additional educational needs index are replaced with a two stage process for picking indicators. [53998]

Ms Estelle Morris: The Government have received a number of different representations supporting and opposing proposals to revise the current index for additional educational needs. The Government will not evaluate any of the options or take final decisions on the education SSA methodology for 1999–2000 until the autumn, after they have considered the views of local government as a whole. We have a manifesto commitment to ensure a fair distribution of grant.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Departmental Reviews

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the reviews his Department initiated in the years *(a)* 1974–75, *(b)* 1979–80 and *(c)* 1992–93. [48521]

Mr. Straw: The information requested is as follows:

Session 1974 (6 March-31 July 1994)

British nationality law: discussion of possible changes, HMSO 1977, Cmnd 6795, ISBN 0101679505

("Shortly after taking office the Government, in accordance with the Labour Party Manifesto of February 1974, set up a group to examine what should be done. This discussion document is based largely on this work"—preface, page 4)

Report of the Committee on the Future of Broadcasting, HMSO, 1977 Cmnd 6753, ISBN 0101675305 (Chairman: Lord Annan)

("On 10 April 1974, Mr. Roy Jenkins, then Home Secretary, announced his decision to set up our Committee and appointed our Chairman . . . "—page 3)

Report of the Working Party on the Special Constabulary, Home Office, 1996

(A report by the Police Advisory Board for England and Wales.—"We were set up in July 1974 as a Working Party of the Police Advisory Board with instructions to review such aspects of the employment and conditions of service of special constables".—introduction)

The Red Lion square disorders of 15 June 1974: report of inquiry by the right hon. Lord Justice Scarman, HMSO, 1975, Cmnd 5919, ISBN 010159190X

(Appointed by the Home Secretary pursuant to section 32 of the Police Act 1964 to "review the events and actions which led to disorder in Red Lion Square on 15 June . . . "—page 1)

Session 1974–75 (22 October 1974–12 November 1975

*Future fire policy: a consultative document HMSO 1980 ISBN 0113407319

Report of the Advisory Group on the Law of Rape, HMSO, 1975, Cmnd 6532, ISBN 0101635206 (Chairman: The hon. Mrs. Justice Helibron DBE)

"The Home Secretary appointed us in July 1975 with the following terms of reference . . . "—introduction

The feasibility of an experiment in the tape-recording of police interrogations: report of a Committee appointed by the Home Secretary, HMSO, 1976, Cmnd 6630, ISBN 01016630O5 (Chairman: W N Hyde, Home Office)

("We were appointed by you (The right hon. Roy Jenkins) to consider the feasibility of an experiment in the tape-recording of police interrogations . . . We have had 12 meetings between April 1975 and July 1976"—introduction, page 1)

Session 1979–80 (9 May 1979–13 November 1980)

Home Office statement on the background, circumstances and action subsequently taken relative to the disturbance in "D" wing at Her Majesty's Prison Wormwood Scrubs on 31 August 1979; together with the report on an Inquiry by the Regional

Director of the South East Region of the Prison Department, HMSO, 1982, House of Commons Paper 199, Session 1981–82, ISBN 0102199825:

"On 19 October 1979, the Secretary of State instructed Mr. Keith Gibson, Regional Director of the South East Region of the Prison Department, to provide a comprehensive report . . . " (introduction page 3)

Review of the Public Order Act 1936 and related legislation, HMSO, 1980 Cmnd 7891, ISBN 0101789106:

"In a statement in the House of Commons on 27 June 1979 about the disturbances at Southall on 23 April, the Home Secretary announced that he was instituting a review of the Public Order Act 1936 . . . "

The establishment of an independent element in the investigation of complaints against the police:

Report of a Working Party appointed by the Home Secretary HMSO, 1981 Cmnd 8193 ISBN 0101818307

("We were appointed by you (the right hon. William Whitehall) . . . We have held five meetings between July and December 1980")

Young offenders, HMSO, 1980, Cmnd 8045, ISBN 0101804504

("In the Queen's speech at the opening of the present parliament, the Government undertook to publish before the end of the session, proposals for strengthening the law relating to juvenile and young offenders in England and Wales"—page 1)

Session 1992–93 (27 April 1992–5 November 1993)

Compensating victims of violent crime: changes to the Criminal Injuries Compensation Scheme, HMSO, 1993 Cm 2434, ISBN 0101243421

("On 28 November 1992, the then Home Secretary (Kenneth Clarke) answered a Parliamentary Question from Sir John Wheeler MP in which he reaffirmed the Government's commitment to improving services to victims of crime (Official Report, column 457 . . . This White Paper sets out the Government's plans in more"—page 1)

Disclosure of criminal records for employment vetting purposes: a consultation paper by the Home Office, Home Office, 1993, Cm 2319, ISBN 010123192X

Inquiry into policy responsibilities and rewards: report, HMSO, 1993, Cm 2280, ISBN 0101228023

("Our Inquiry was established in July (1992) last year . . . "—page iii)

Police reform: the Government's proposals for the Police Service in England and Wales: White Paper, Home Office, 1993, Cm 2281, ISBN 0101228120

(Statement by the Secretary of State for the Home Department in House of Commons on 28 June 1993 (Official report Vol 227, column 665–676)

Reforming the law on Sunday trading: a guide to the options for reform, HMSO 1993, Cm 2300, ISBN 0101230028

("The Government is to introduce a bill which will enable Parliament to decide whether Sunday trading should be regulated by law . . . "—page 1)

Review of Police discipline procedures: a consultation paper, Home Office, 1993

(Statement on consultation document by Home Secretary in a written answer to a question by Sir John Wheeler MP on 30 March 1993 (Official Report Vol 222, column 111–112))

Prisons (London)

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the education budget for each London prison in 1998–99. [52782]

Mr. George Howarth: The education budget for each London prison is listed in the table.

London prisons education budgets, 1998–99

Establishment	*Education budget* £
Brixton	359,500
Feltham	571,500
Holloway	388,000
Latchmere House	18,000
Pentonville	278,000
Wandsworth	225,000
Wormwood scrubs	280,000

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many staff vacancies for prison officers there were in each London prison on 1 July. [52784]

Mr. George Howarth: There are currently 53.5 vacancies for prison officers in the eight London prisons. Details are shown in the table.

Prison officer vacancies in London on 1 July 1998

Establishment	*Prison officer vacancies as at 1 July*
Belmarsh	14
Brixton	17
Feltham	10
Holloway	2
Latchmere House	0
Pentonville	0
Wandsworth	0
Wormwood Scrubs	20.5

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has for future work projects for Wandsworth Prison. [52783]

Mr. George Howarth: Funds have been made available for the following works projects at Wandsworth for the current financial year:

- refurbish A and B wings (work commenced, to open in the Autumn);
- convert workshop to chapel/mosque/workshop (work commenced);
- convert F wing chapel/gym to visits area (work commenced);
- redevelop existing accommodation to legal visits area (work commenced);
- new gymnasium (at tender stage);
- provision of new fire and general alarms (to commence later this financial year);
- submetering for energy management programme (work almost complete).

The following projects have been identified and will be considered if funds become available this financial year: new external store; reinstate E wing exercise yard; repairs to temporary kitchen; repair chimneys; structural repairs to G and K wing dry area and gable ends to officers' mess.

The following projects have been identified and will be prioritised for bidding in the next financial year, 1999–2000: a new gate, new visitors' centre; new main stores; disperse boilers, new kitchen, new laundry, new industries and training; refurbish E, G, H, and K wings.

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* men and *(b)* women held in each London prison on 20 July were classified as category A inmates. [52785]

Mr. George Howarth: Belmarsh is the only London prison which holds category A prisoners. On 20 July, there were 73 male category A prisoners held in Belmarsh prison. There are currently no category A females held in London prisons. Additionally, 18 male category A prisoners were held in Highdown prison, Surrey, which also serves the London area.

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many inmates there were at each London prison on 20 July. [52787]

Mr. George Howarth: The latest available information is for 30 June 1998 is given in the table.

Population in London Prison Service establishments on 30 June 1998

Prison Service establishment	*Population on 30 June 1998*
Belmarsh	866
Brixton	557
Feltham	886
Holloway	516
Latchmere House	189
Pentonville	1,146
Wandsworth	907
Wormwood Scrubs	1,340

Information Technology

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how much his Department spent on IT itemising *(a)* personal computers, *(b)* main-frame, *(c)* mini-computers and *(d)* file servers in the last year for which figures are available. [52879]

Mr. Straw: During the financial year 1997–98, the Home Office, inclusive of the Prison Service, spent £9,430,500 in total on Information Technology hardware, software and maintenance services. More precise details covering expenditure for some smaller agencies and other associated bodies would be available only at disproportionate cost.

CS Gas

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what research *(a)* his Department and *(b)* the Police Scientific Development Branch have carried out to analyse the concentrations of CS and CS sprays which have been purchased by police forces since 1996; when this research was carried out; what were the results of this research; and if he will place the results of this research in the Library; [53152]

(2) pursuant to his answer of 16 June 1998, *Official Report*, columns *173–4*, on CS spray, if he will place in the Library copies of the documentation of the competitive national tendering process managed by the Metropolitan Police on behalf of the Association of Chief Police Officers on the purchase of CS sprays; [53155]

(3) if he will place in the Library a copy of the aerosol incapacitants guidelines governing the use of CS spray by police officers; [53154]

(4) pursuant to his answer of 16 June 1998, *Official Report*, columns *173–74*, on CS spray, what studies his Department has undertaken into the concentrations of CS in CS sprays which are used by police officers in the United States of America; and what conclusions were drawn from them; [53151]

(5) if his Department or the Police Scientific Development Branch are aware of, or have been informed of, any research carried out by police forces to analyse the concentrations of CS in CS sprays which have been purchased by police forces since 1996; when this research was carried out; who carried out this research; what were the results of this research; and if he will make a statement. [53156]

Mr. Michael: A copy of the invitation to tender is being obtained and will be placed in the Library shortly. Documents submitted by tenderers will not be placed in the Library because of their commercially sensitive nature.

CS spray has not been widely used by police officers in the United States of America. From the limited information available from its use there, it appears that concentrations of 1 or 2 per cent. are not effective as an incapacitant. The reasons for choosing a 5 per cent. concentration were given in the Answer I gave to my hon. Friend on 16 June 1998, *Official Report*, column *266*.

In November 1996, an analysis arranged by Avon and Somerset Constabulary of one canister showed a concentration of 6.8 per cent. weight to volume. The Home Office Police Scientific Development Branch arranged for a further two canisters to be analysed, and discovered concentrations of 5.4 per cent. and 6.1 per cent. Canisters were not withdrawn because the small additional amounts of CS which would be delivered operationally were not significant. A copy of a note by the Police Scientific Development Branch dated 4 February 1997 and entitled "CS Concentration in Alsetes Spray" has been placed in the Library. The concentration of CS in equipment supplied to police forces is set out in the specification issued jointly by the Association of Chief Police Officers and the Police Scientific Development Branch in March 1997, copies of which have previously been placed in the Library. CS concentrations were tested as part of the national tendering process and any product purchased as part of that process should comply with the specification.

Individual chief officers are responsible for ensuring that the equipment they issue to their officers is of the appropriate specification. Copies of guidelines issued by the Association of Chief Police Officers on police use of CS spray are already in the Library.

Defence Evaluation and Research Agency

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many contracts or agreements have been commissioned by his Department with the

Defence Evaluation and Research Agency of the Ministry of Defence since January 1996; and what was the duration, nature and value of each. [53153]

Mr. Straw: Two contracts have been let by the Police Information Technology Organisation with the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency of the Ministry of Defence since January 1996. Details are:

1. A consultancy contract for the operation of a Trials and Testing Programme for the TCAS 791 Collision Warning System, which commenced on 1 November 1997 and was completed on 15 March 1998.

2. A consultancy contract for a study to consider the introduction of Packet Data Base Stations in Home Office Allocations, which commenced on 28 January and was completed on 20 February 1998.

The value of the contracts was £109,301.

Prisoners

Fiona Mactaggart: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many and what proportion of *(a)* male and *(b)* female prisoners had (i) no previous convictions, (ii) one or two previous convictions and (iii) three or more previous convictions on the most recent available date. [52837]

Mr. George Howarth: The available information regarding prisoners with previous convictions is based on samples of the sentenced prison population in England and Wales taken at the end of June each year. As this information is based on samples, the results can only be expressed in percentage terms.

The most recently available data relate to samples of those adult males, adult females and male young offenders in prison at the end of June 1996 and are given in the table. Information relating to female young offenders with previous convictions is not available due to the relatively small number of such prisoners.

Population in prison under sentence by number of previous convictions, 30 June 1996

		Percentage			
		Previous convictions not found	Number of previous convictions		
	All		Nil	1–2	3 and over
Adult males[1]	34,848	9	22	16	54
Adult females[2]	1,476	17	37	15	30
Young male offenders[3]	6,349	10	21	21	48

[1] Excludes fine defaulters

[2] Rounded estimate which therefore may not add to 100

[3] Based on a sample of 8,601 adult males

[4] Based on a sample of 1,536 adult females

[5] Based on a sample of 3,281 young male offenders

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prisoners were on *(a)* basic level, *(b)* standard level and *(c)* enhanced level of the incentives and earned privileges scheme, in each prison in England and Wales on the last date for which figures were available. [53339]

Mr. George Howarth: The provisional figures for 1 June 1998, which are subject to final validation, are given in the table.

Prisoners on basic, standard and enhanced regimes

Prison name	Basic	Standard	Enhanced
Acklington	7	274	361
Agecroft	0	0	0
Albany	5	135	311
Aldington	4	74	62
Altcourse	25	384	201
Ashwell	79	248	161
Askham Grange	0	30	92
Aylesbury	10	238	52
Bedford	7	334	23
Belmarsh	12	695	93
Birmingham	109	851	89
Blakenhurst	21	549	64
Blantyre House	24	34	60
Blundeston	16	249	72
Brinsford	127	258	120
Bristol	29	432	94
Brixton	27	147	305
Brockhill	0	117	21
Buckley Hall	6	210	162
Bullingdon	39	715	80
Bullwood Hall	11	82	47
Camp Hill	9	333	91
Canterbury	6	271	2
Cardiff	86	403	207
Castington	19	44	267
Channings Wood	20	276	295
Chelmsford	5	397	39
Coldingley	8	203	83
Cookham Wood	1	102	57
Dartmoor	11	556	69
Deerbolt	64	268	86
Doncaster	63	798	215
Dorchester	5	172	16
Dover	8	279	28
Downview	0	108	234
Drake Hall	0	151	115
Durham	31	715	148
East Sutton Park	0	61	36
Eastwood Park	4	198	51
Elmley	6	658	228
Erlestoke	9	125	169
Everthorpe	11	355	96
Exeter	2	349	73
Featherstone	10	541	41
Feltham	71	613	207
Ford	0	267	161
Foston Hall	0	98	35
Frankland	24	250	155
Full Sutton	19	266	251
Garth	3	533	105
Gartree	8	80	277
Glen Parva	80	618	96
Gloucester	22	248	23
Grendon	4	4	86
Guys Marsh	12	313	77
Haslar	0	138	16
Hatfield	18	114	13
Haverigg	4	313	212
Hewell Grange	0	132	59
Highdown	8	710	51
Highpoint	25	462	202
Hindley	11	428	29
Hollesley Bay	16	16	261
Holloway	26	411	77
Holme House	15	870	78
Hull	18	328	138
Huntercombe	21	197	101
Kingston	0	0	141

Prisoners on basic, standard and enhanced regimes

Prison name	*Basic*	*Standard*	*Enhanced*
Kirkham	33	200	167
Kirklevington	0	42	134
Lancaster	57	73	87
Lancaster Farms	29	260	160
Latchmere House	6	14	168
Leeds	35	889	223
Leicester	17	303	38
Lewes	5	431	28
Leyhill	0	164	227
Lincoln	12	414	150
Lindholme	0	581	92
Littlehey	22	497	112
Liverpool	12	1,125	303
Long Lartin	44	121	177
Low Newton	4	258	37
Lowdham Grange	4	73	414
Maidstone	9	312	238
Manchester	27	299	798
Marchington	0	0	0
Moorland	57	593	119
Morton Hall	11	118	71
Mount	8	447	146
New Hall	7	274	75
North Sea Camp	0	140	66
Northallerton	8	238	5
Norwich	34	534	130
Nottingham	2	344	59
Onley	53	454	91
Parc	10	598	88
Parkhurst	31	242	138
Pentonville	4	852	270
Portland	10	433	121
Preston	75	540	46
Ranby	19	414	137
Reading	1	108	98
Risley	13	322	351
Rochester	13	316	53
Send	0	29	36
Shepton Mallet	7	198	10
Shrewsbury	150	108	78
Stafford	146	375	104
Standford Hill	0	151	220
Stocken	3	349	105
Stoke Heath	258	195	136
Styal	0	244	34
Sudbury	0	240	261
Swaleside	214	367	17
Swansea	2	246	75
Swinfen Hall	21	158	123
Thorn Cross	1	140	79
Usk	1	1	219
Verne	3	323	246
Wakefield	25	332	256
Wandsworth	69	627	197
Wayland	2	417	217
Wealstun	7	7	285
Weare	0	342	25
Wellingborough	1	291	34
Werrington	82	45	37
Wetherby	15	194	96
Whatton	2	140	94
Whitemoor	38	260	200
Winchester	0	436	179
Wolds	29	192	177
Woodhill	40	584	70
Wormwood Scrubs	6	816	358
Wymott	14	617	151

Note:

Agecroft and Marchington prisons not yet open

British Nationality (Applications)

Ms Ryan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many applications for British nationality are currently outstanding for applicants registered as resident in Enfield North. [53247]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The information is not available in the form requested as applications are not recorded according to the parliamentary constituency in which an applicant is living. Nationality Directorate records indicate that there are 481 applications outstanding from persons who have given an address with an Enfield postcode.

Remand Prisoners

Fiona Mactaggart: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* male and *(b)* female prisoners were remanded in custody to await trial or sentence in 1997; what was the average daily number on remand; and what percentage subsequently received custodial sentences. [52838]

Mr. George Howarth: In 1997, 58,092 males and 3,974 females were remanded in custody awaiting trial. 33,988 convicted males and 2,426 convicted females were remanded in custody awaiting sentence. The average monthly remand population in 1997 was 8,057 untried males and 3,475 convicted unsentenced males. The corresponding figures for females were 396 and 203 respectively.

Of those remanded in custody at some stage in magistrates' courts proceedings, provisional information shows that 46 per cent. of males and 31 per cent. of females were sentenced to immediate custody.

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what data his Department has collated on the average time spent by prisoners on remand in custody awaiting trial over each of the last five years; and if he will make a statement. [54027]

Mr. George Howarth: The information requested is given in the table. Information on the estimated average number of days in custody for untried prisoners is published in "Prison statistics England and Wales" (table 2.1 of the 1996 edition, Cm 3732), a copy of which is in the Library. Information for 1997 has been taken from draft tables prepared for the 1997 edition of "Prison statistics England and Wales" which is due to be published today.

Estimated average time spent in custody for untried prisoners in prisons in England and Wales, 1993–97

Year	*Estimated average number of days in custody*	
	Males	*Females*
1993	55	39
1994	59	44
1995	56	43
1996	53	41
1997	51	36

[1] Time spent in Prison Service establishments before conviction, acquittal etc.

[2] Estimated from number of receptions and average population

Women Prisoners

Fiona Mactaggart: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many women were received into prison under sentence, excluding those sentenced for fine default, in 1997; and what was the breakdown of their offence categories. [52835]

Mr. George Howarth *[holding answer 28 July 1998]:* The information requested is given in the table.

Receptions of sentenced females into prisons in England and Wales by offence in 1997

Offence	*Number*
Violence against the person	660
Sexual offences	14
Burglary	180
Robbery	173
Theft and handling	1,734
Fraud and forgery	403
Drugs offences	750
Other offences	787
Offence not recorded	146
Total	4,847

Provisional figures

Custody (Girls)

Ms Julie Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many girls aged under 18 years from Wales were in custody at the last date for which figures are available. [53261]

Mr. George Howarth *[holding answer 29 July 1998]:* The available information is for those 15, 16 and 17 year old females held in Prison Service establishments in England and Wales who were first committed to custody from a Welsh court. As at 30 June, provisional information indicates that there was one such prisoner.

Departmental Research

Mr. Fabricant: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the cost of all research undertaken by his Department since May 1997, excluding the cost of green papers and other public consultation documents drafted by his officials; and if he will list in each case the organisations which undertook that research. [52697]

Mr. Straw *[holding answer 29 July 1998]:* The term 'research' covers a wide range of activities, from scientific and engineering research through to consultancies and public opinion surveys. The information requested is not held centrally and could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

Comprehensive Spending Review

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if, pursuant to the Comprehensive Spending Review, he will list the real terms changes in spending on the *(a)* Prison Service, *(b)* police and *(c)* Probation Service, in each of the next three years. [53337]

Mr. Straw: The table shows the real terms year on year increases produced by the allocation of total Home Office provision to the three services. The allocation may be subject to adjustment, particularly in the second and third years.

£ million 1998–99 prices

	1999–2000	*2000–01*	*2001–02*
Prison service	10	11	11
Police[1]	3	23	107
Probation service[2]	12	19	21

[1] Based on planned spend in 1998–99, which includes an additional £112m above the original baseline

[2] The increases shown are based on Total Standard Spending for these services.

Prisons (Expenditure)

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the total expenditure needed to meet each of the Prison Service's three projections for the required number of prison places, in each year until 2005; if he will give the figures at constant real terms cost per prison place; and if he will make a statement. [53341]

Mr. George Howarth: The Prison Service has not based its expenditure projections on any one of the three population scenarios. The Comprehensive Spending Review settlement, which includes £179 million over the period to complete the programme for increasing capacity, provides the Service with a realistic plan for coping with rising numbers over the period.

But, as recent experience has shown, it is very difficult to forecast trends precisely several years ahead. It is expected that the policies that we are pursuing to increase public confidence in community-based punishment will have an impact on population trends by the end of the period.

The Comprehensive Spending Review covers only the years 1999–2002 and the forecasts of cost per uncrowded place only over that period.

The Comprehensive Spending Review Settlement provides for a real terms cost per uncrowded place[1] increase of 0.9 per cent. over the three years. Expressed as a year-on-year basis, this represents a 1.7 per cent. increase in the first year (1999–2000); a 0.2 per cent. reduction in the second year (2000–01) and a 0.6 per cent. reduction in the third year (2001–02).

The costs per uncrowded prison place underlying these percentages at 1992–93 prices (the year used by the Prison Service against which to measure its Key Performance Indicators, as this was the year before it became an agency) are listed with the equivalent figures at 1998–99 prices:

£

	1992–93 prices	*1998–99 prices*
1999–2000	20,540	23,986
2000–01	20,498	23,937
2001–02	20,379	23,798

[1] Figures do not include costs or places of prisons designed, constructed, managed and financed (DCMF) by the private sector

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the need for extra *(a)* prison places and *(b)* prisons in each of the next

three years; what is the planned spending per prison place over the next three years; and what is the expected capital spending on prisons over the next three years. [53338]

Mr. George Howarth: Resources are in place to increase the operational capacity of the prison estate by a further 4,500 places over the next three financial years.

The building programme will deliver 1,350 places in 1998–99 and 550 in 1999–2000 in the form of houseblocks and cell reclamation places at existing prisons.

New prisons will provide an additional 1,200 places in 1999–2000 and 1,400 places in 2000–01.

The Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR) settlement provides for a real terms cost per uncrowded place increase of 0.9 per cent. over the three years of the CSR. Expressed as a year-on-year basis this represents a 1.7 per cent. increase in the first year (1999–2000); a 0.2 per cent. reduction in the second year (2000–01); and a 0.6 per cent. reduction in the third year (2001–02).

The CSR settlement provides, in real terms at 1998–99 prices, capital expenditure for the Prison Service of £150 million (1999–2000), £131 million (2000–01) and £130 million (2001–02).

Figures do not include costs or places of prisons designed, constructed, managed and financed (DCME) by the private sector.

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to the Comprehensive Spending Review, if he will provide a breakdown of the total amount of extra funding which will be allocated to *(a)* prison places and *(b)* rehabilitation and other programmes in prison, in each of the next three years, in real terms; and if he will make a statement. [53340]

Mr. George Howarth: In the three years from 1999–2002, the Prison Service will spend an extra £62 million (1999–2000), £54 million (2000–01) and £54 million, in real terms at 1998–99 prices, on prison places.

In the three years from 1999–2002, the Prison Service will spend an extra £72 million (1999–2000), £60 million (2000–01) and £70 million (2001–02), in real terms at 1998–99 prices, on rehabilitation and other programmes in prison. These funds are in addition to the previous Government's planned expenditure for the Prison Service.

Security Services

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list those European Community working groups attended by the security services. [53775]

Mr. Straw: Members of the Security Service routinely attend the Terrorism Working Group under the Justice and Home Affairs Council. They may attend other European Union Working Group meetings in a supporting role where the Security Service has a direct interest in the subject matter under discussion or where its expertise is needed.

EU K4 Committee

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the nature of the United Kingdom delegation to the European Community's K4 Committee. [53776]

Mr. Straw: The United Kingdom representative on the Committee set up under Article K4 of the Treaty on European Union is Mr. Timothy Walker, Director General of the Immigration and Nationality Directorate of the Home Office. He is accompanied by other members of the Home Office and members of the United Kingdom Permanent Representation in Brussels. Representatives from other Government Departments, such as the Lord Chancellor's Department and Her Majesty's Customs and Excise, sometimes attend in a supporting role, depending on the subject matter under discussion.

Youth Justice

Mr. Wood: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what additional resources will be provided to local areas piloting the youth justice provisions set out in the Crime and Disorder Bill *[Lords]*. [53965]

Mr. Michael: There will be some funding available to help the pilot areas put in place the programmes and forms of intervention needed to undertake work under the final warning scheme and the new court orders which are to be piloted. We will discuss with the pilot areas how available funds can be used most effectively within their area.

Overseas Visits

Mr. Wilshire: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list those who have accompanied (i) him and (ii) his departmental Ministers on overseas visits since 1 January indicating *(a)* the venue of the visit, *(b)* the purpose of the visit, *(c)* the names of those involved, *(d)* the job of those involved, *(e)* the reasons why they were included in the visit and *(f)* the cost to public funds. [53836]

Mr. Straw: All overseas visits by Ministers are conducted in accordance with the principles set out in the Ministerial Code. Information in the precise form requested is not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. The available information is set out in the table.

Name of Minister	*Dates*	*Place visited*	*Purpose*	*Accompanied by*	*Cost (£)*
Michael O Brien MP	4 January to 14 January 1998	Pakistan, India and Bangladesh	To observe entry clearance posts	2 officials [1]	7,133
Secretary of State	13 to 14 January 1998	Madrid	Meetings with the Spanish Minister of The Interior and the Spanish Minister of Justice	3 officials	1,700
Secretary of State	26 January 1998	Brussels	Meetings with the European Parliament Civil Liberties Committee, the EPLP and the ELDR	3 officials; 1 Special adviser	1,120
Joyce Quin MP	28 January 1998	Brussels	To address the European Presidency Racism and Xenophobia Debate	4 officials	1,630

Name of Minister	Dates	Place visited	Purpose	Accompanied by	Cost (£)
Secretary of State	4 to 6 February 1998	Washington, USA	Accompany Prime Minister—meetings with National Institute of Justice, Baltimore Police Department, Department of Justice and Attorney General Reno	1 official, 1 Special adviser	283
Michael O'Brien MP	10 to 11 February 1998	Brussels	To attend the 'Let's Kick Racism Out of Football' Seminar	2 officials	655
Lord Williams of Mostyn QC	15 to 16 February 1998	Paris	To address the OECD Workshop on Global Network Society	1 official	356
Joyce Quin MP	8 to 9 March 1998	Prague	To discuss EU enlargement	2 officials	1,300
Secretary of State and Joyce Quin MP	18 to 19 March 1998	Brussels	To attend the Justice and Home Affairs Council meeting	11 officials	5,200
Lord Williams of Mostyn QC	21 to 25 March 1998	Thailand	To launch a UK funded course on Child Sex Exploitation	1 official	3,000
Joyce Quin MP	26 March 1998	Amsterdam	To address the Dutch Probation Conference	1 official	500
Joyce Quin MP	16 to 17 April 1998	Warsaw	To discuss EU enlargement	2 officials	1,022
Joyce Quin MP	21 to 22 April 1998	Vienna	To address the UN Crime Commission	1 official	1,258
Joyce Quin MP	28 April to 1 May 1998	Budapest	To discuss EU enlargement	2 officials	1,600
Secretary of State	14 May 1998	Vienna	Meetings with the Austrian Interior Minister and Minister of Justice	2 officials	1,225
Lord Williams of Mostyn QC	26 to 27 May 1998	Milan	To visit the European Centre for the Validation of Alternative Methods (ECVAM)	3 officials	1,500
Secretary of State and Joyce Quin MP	27 to 29 May 1998	Brussels	To attend the Justice and Home Affairs Council meeting	10 officials	3,500
George Howarth MP	7 to 10 June 1998	New York	To attend the UN Special Commission on Drugs	2 officials	3,000
Joyce Quin MP	29 to 30 June 1998	Brussels	To address the European Presidency Civil Liberties and Legal Affairs Committees	2 officials	704
George Howarth MP	30 June 1998	Brussels	To address a meeting of the EU Civil Liberties and Internal Affairs Committee	4 officials	1,533

Travel and accommodation costs not met by Home Office

Police (Numbers)

Mr. Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the number of police officers in each of the police authorities in Wales for each of the last five years and the projections for the next three years. [54540]

Mr. Michael: The information requested in respect of the last five years is set out in the table.

Ministers have no direct control over police numbers. Under legislation passed by the previous Government in 1994, it is for individual chief constables to determine the number of police officers in their force, on the basis of the resources made available to them. No decisions have yet been made on funding allocations for individual police authorities over the next three years.

Total police officer strength, Welsh forces 1994-98

Police force	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998
Dyfed Powys	965	976	991	1,005	1,002
Gwent	993	997	1,044	1,243	1,233
North Wales	1,352	1,366	1,378	1,369	1,396
South Wales	3,131	3,014	3,027	2,976	2,986
Total	6,441	6,353	6,440	6,593	6,617

As at 31 March each year

Provisional figures

Persistent Inquirers

Mr. Sanders: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department which of his Department's agencies have procedures to identify persistent inquirers for information. [53050]

Mr. Straw: Home Office Agencies do not operate procedures to identify persistent inquirers for information. All requests for information received under the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information are routinely monitored, but no Agency has found it necessary to introduce specific procedures.

Police (Bicycle Patrols)

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list for each police force in England the number of officers who routinely patrol on a bicycle. [54408]

Mr. Michael: The use of bicycles to patrol is an operational matter for the chief officer of the force concerned and information on the number of officers deployed in this way is not recorded centrally.

Homosexuality

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many persons have been convicted for voluntarily engaging in homosexual acts involving persons of between 16 and 18 years of age in each of the years since 1994. [53970]

Mr. Michael: Information for 1994 to 1996 (latest available) is given in the table. It does not include offences such as male rape or indecent assault on a male.

Number of males cautioned, prosecuted and convicted[1] for specific homosexual offences by age, 1994-96
England and Wales

Year/offence	Aged 16	Aged 17
1994		
Buggery offences		
Cautioned	5	3
Prosecuted	9	13
Convicted	4	6
Indecency between males		
Cautioned	3	5
Prosecuted	1	3
Convicted	1	2
1995		
Buggery offences		
Cautioned	1	
Prosecuted	3	3
Convicted		5
Indecency between males		
Cautioned	1	1
Prosecuted		4
Convicted		2
1996		
Buggery offences		
Cautioned	3	1
Prosecuted	4	
Convicted	1	
Indecency between males		
Cautioned	2	5
Prosecuted		
Convicted		

[1] Includes persons proceeded against in earlier years or for other offences.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people under the age of 18 years were arrested for consenting homosexual activity but then released without charge in the latest year for which figures are available. [54659]

Mr. Michael: Information on the particular offence for which a person is arrested is not collected centrally.

Police (Community Relationships)

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how he plans to develop better relationships between the police and *(a)* inner city and *(b)* ethnic minority communities. [53963]

Mr. Michael: The Government are committed to developing better relationships between the police and all sections of the society they serve. My right hon. Friend gave his full personal endorsement to the thematic report on Police Community and Race Relations, published by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMIC) last October.

The report concluded that, although much work had been done by police forces in this area, performance was patchy and further steps needed to be taken to ensure that racism and discrimination were eliminated.

The main recommendations of the report were that forces should: publicly re-affirm their commitment to investing in good community and race relations as a core function of policing; give a higher priority to dealing with neighbourhood incidents and anti-social behaviour; clearly state that they regard the behaviour of officers who show racial or other prejudice in their behaviour and language as completely unacceptable; continue to attract minority ethnic recruits and retain them; and consider a community and race relations audit to identify areas needing improvement. The report also recommended that training in community and race relations should be given greater emphasis, and that priority should initially be targeted towards first line supervision.

In order to co-ordinate the implementation of the report, a working group has been set up under Home Office chairmanship, on which the Association of Chief Police Officers, HMIC, the Commission for Racial Equality and the Black Police Associations are represented. A key part of the work to follow up the report will be undertaken by HMIC in the autumn. All forces will be asked to report on the progress they have made on the issues raised in the report and a further inspection will be undertaken of 15 forces.

The Home Office is currently tendering for a new contract to provide independent specialist support to the police service in community and race relations training. The new contract will contain two elements: integration of community and race relations throughout the national curriculum of police training; and support and training to individual forces to place community and race relations firmly within operational policing. One of the ways in which a better relationship can be developed between the police and the community will be through the involvement of the community in the needs analysis, the implementation and the evaluation of this new training strategy.

On 24 July, the Home Office submitted written evidence to the Inquiry into matters arising from the death of Stephen Lawrence. That evidence gives a fuller account of work in progress or planned to improve relations between the police and the communities they serve. That evidence is available in the Library.

Party Conferences

Mr. Gordon Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 23 July 1998, *Official Report*, columns *617–18*, (1) what assessment he has made of the means available to the Lancashire Police Authority to fund the shortfall between the estimated cost of policing the Labour Party Conference in 1998 and the special grant made available to it under the Police and Magistrates' Court Act 1994; [54077]

(2) pursuant to his answer of 23 July 1998, *Official Report*, columns *617–18*, what estimate he has made of the shortfall between the estimated cost of policing the Labour Party Conference in 1998 and the special grant made available to the Lancashire Police Authority. [54076]

Mr. Michael: It should be borne in mind that until 1996 no contribution was made from central funds to help with the costs of political party conferences. The Government have maintained the level of total grant at £1.5 million in 1997 and 1998. We are currently reviewing the arrangements.

The Lancashire Police Authority has estimated that the additional costs of policing the Labour Party Conference at Blackpool will be £1.284 million. This is £534,000 more than the special grant they will receive from my Department, but it represents less than 0.5 per cent. of the force's budget of £177 million.

It is for the Chief Constable to decide how to find the additional resources. The force could use its reserves, which were expected to be around £2.9 million as at 31 March, or find the money from efficiency savings elsewhere in the force budget.

Asylum Seekers

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, (1) pursuant to his oral statement of 27 July 1998, *Official Report*, columns 35–38, what estimate he has made of the cost of establishing new national machinery to plan and co-ordinate provision for asylum seekers; [54388]

(2) pursuant to his oral statement of 21 July 1998, *Official Report*, column 918, if he will give a breakdown of the funding transferred to his Department from other departments for the support of asylum seekers; and what assumptions he has made about the number of asylum seekers who will be in receipt of such support in that period. [54386]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The provisional level of funding for asylum seeker support allocated to the Home Office is £350 million in 1999–2000, £300 million in 2000/01 and £250 million in 2001/02. Detailed plans have yet to be developed and the cost of establishing new national machinery to plan and co-ordinate this provision has not yet been assessed.

The funding assumes that the numbers of asylum decisions and appeals disposals will be in line with the provisional plans set out in the White Paper published on 27 July. We aim that, by April 2001, most initial asylum decisions will be made within two months of receipt and most appeals to an adjudicator will be heard within a further four months.

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his oral statement of 27 July 1998, *Official Report*, columns 35–38, what estimate he has made of the number of asylum seekers who will receive leave to enter or remain and who applied for asylum *(a)* before 1 July 1993 and *(b)* between 1 July 1994 and 31 December 1995. [54389]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The proportion of the estimated 10,000 asylum claims made before 1 July 1993 awaiting an initial decision and the estimated 20,000 claims awaiting an initial decision made between 1 July 1993 and 31 December 1995 which will qualify for leave to enter or remain will depend upon the numbers to whom the special considerations set out in paragraphs 8.29 and 8.30 of the White Paper "Fairer, Faster and Firmer—A Modern Approach to Immigration and Asylum" (Cm 4018) are found to apply. Some of these people will not be granted either indefinite leave to remain or exceptional leave to remain under our proposal.

Sir Norman Fowler: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if staff will be transferred from the Department of Social Security to his Department to run the new benefit in kind support system for political asylum seekers; and if he will make a statement. [54046]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: No decision has yet been taken on the kinds of staff needed to operate such a scheme, or how they might be recruited.

Sir Norman Fowler: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to disperse political asylum seekers around the country; what kind of accommodation will be provided; and if he will make a statement. [54049]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The Government's proposals for new support arrangements for asylum seekers are set out in paragraphs 8.17–8.26 of the White Paper "Fairer, Faster and Firmer—A Modern Approach to Immigration and Asylum" (Cm 4018). The aim is that, where asylum seekers are in genuine need of accommodation, this should be provided at a wider range of locations than under present arrangements, which have resulted in a heavy concentration in London and certain other areas. The type of accommodation offered to any particular asylum seeker is likely to vary: it will depend on what is available and at what cost, and on such factors as the presence or otherwise of dependants.

Sir Norman Fowler: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department by what date he expects that the 30,000 applications for political asylum made prior to December 1995 will be determined; and if he will make a statement. [54048]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: As indicated in the White Paper "Fairer, Faster and Firmer—A Modern Approach to Immigration and Asylum" (Cm 4018), we are aiming to clear the backlog of undecided asylum claims before April 2001.

Sir Norman Fowler: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department by what date he expects that his proposed system of benefits in kind for asylum seekers will be operational; what benefits in kind will be available; and if he will make a statement. [54044]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The date on which such a system becomes operational will depend on when the necessary legislation is enacted. The type of provision envisaged is explained in paragraph 8.21 of the White Paper "Fairer, Faster and Firmer—A Modern Approach to Immigration and Asylum" (Cm 4018).

Sir Norman Fowler: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if all those who made an application for political asylum prior to July 1993 and whose applications are still outstanding will be individually interviewed before any decision is taken on their application, and if he will make a statement. [54043]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: No. It is unlikely that very many of these applicants will need to be interviewed. Some applicants will already have been interviewed and others will have provided full details of their asylum claim by way of a self-completion questionnaire commonly in use at the time these applications were made. The decision whether to interview will be taken individually as each case is examined.

Employees Over 60

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* men and *(b)* women employed by (1) his Department and (2) his Department's agencies have contracts of employment which permit them to retire after their 60 birthday. [53055]

Mr. Straw: The normal retirement age for staff in the Home Office is 60, with the following exceptions:

prison officer grades who were in post prior to 1 September 1987 have a minimum retirement age of 55 and a maximum retirement age of 60.

operational service grades, prison auxiliaries and night patrol officers in the Prison Service and industrial grade staff throughout the Home Office have a minimum retirement age of 60 but may remain in employment up to the age of 65 subject to continued fitness and efficiency.

The numbers of industrial grades employed on 24 July 1998 were as follows:

Department	*Men*	*Women*
(1) *Home Office* (excluding agencies)	39	6
(2) *Agencies*		
(i) Prison service	2,610	230
(ii) UK Passport agency	0	0
(iii) Forensic science service	0	0
(iv) Fire service college	41	0

The numbers of operational service grades, prison auxiliaries and night patrol staff in the Prison Service employed on 30 June 1998 were as follows:

	Men	*Women*
(1) Operational service grades	3,247	951
(2) Prison auxiliaries	573	238
(3) Night patrol staff	252	324

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* men and *(b)* women aged over 60 years were employed by (i) his Department and (ii) his Department's agencies on 1 January. [53060]

Mr. Straw: Figures for staff aged over 60 on 1 January in the Home Office and Agencies are set out below:

	Number over 60 (male)	*Number over 60 (female)*	*Total*
Home Office excluding Agencies	34	14	48
Fire Service College	5	0	5
Forensic Science Service	2	0	2
United Kingdom Passport Agency	14	14	28
Her Majesty's Prison Service	987	60	1,047
Total	2,028	148	1,129

The Home Office and Agency figures (excluding the Prison Service) include 11 industrial grade staff. These staff have a minimum retirement age of 60 but may remain in service until 65 subject to continued fitness and efficiency.

The Prison Service figures include industrial grade staff. These account for approximately a third of the total. Of the remainder, the majority are operational service grades, prison auxiliaries, and night patrol staff. All these staff have a minimum retirement age of 60 but may continue in service up to age 65 subject to continued fitness and efficiency.

Non-departmental Public Bodies

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the non-departmental public bodies in existence on 1 May 1997 that *(a)* have been disbanded, *(b)* will be disbanded in the next 12 months, *(c)* have had their functions transferred to (i) another non-departmental public body and (ii) a democratically elected body, *(d)* have been renamed but continue to perform a similar role and *(e)* have been unchanged; if he will indicate in (c) (ii) the relevant successor body; what new non-departmental public bodies have been established since 1 May 1997; and how many non-departmental public bodies his Department currently is responsible for. [53865]

Mr. Straw *[holding answer 30 July 1998]:* None of the non-departmental public bodies (NDPBs) for which my Department is responsible, has been disbanded since 1 May 1997, although I expect that, subject to Parliamentary approval, the Advisory Committee on Service Candidates will be abolished shortly.

No Home Office NDPB has had its functions transferred either to another NDPB or a democratically elected body, and none has continued to perform a similar function under a different name.

Details of all NDPBs in existence on 1 May 1997 sponsored by this Department are listed in "Public Bodies 1997". Since that date, we have established as NDPBs the Police Information Technology Organisation and the Race Relations Forum.

My Department is currently responsible for 35 NDPBs, plus 135 Boards of Visitors to penal establishments.

Child Sex Abuse

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many sexual abuse offences were committed within the family by *(a)* natural parents and *(b)* step parents in each of the last five years. [54072]

Mr. Michael: From the figures collected centrally on the numbers of sexual offences recorded by the police, it is not possible to distinguish the relationship between the offender and the victim.

Task Forces

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the task forces and advisory groups composed of independent members which have been set up by his Department since 1 May 1997, indicating in each case *(a)* their remit, *(b)* their membership, *(c)* how many members are (i) scientists, (ii) engineers, (iii) small business people or representatives of small businesses, *(d)* any remuneration members receive for their services and *(e)* their budget. [53286]

Mr. Straw *[holding answer 30 July 1998]:* A Task Force on Youth Justice was established in June 1997 and is being wound up this month. Its remit and membership were published in the reply I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Brigg and Goole (Mr. Cawsey) on 17 June 1997, *Official Report*, columns *99–100*. The membership of the Task Force drawn from outside the civil service remained unchanged. One independent member came

from the business community, the others from public services business community, the others from public services dealing with young people who offend or are at high risk of offending. None were employed as engineers, scientists or by small businesses. The Task Force had no budget and members were not remunerated. To date, £2,440 of their travel expenses have been refunded from the running costs of my Department.

I announced the membership of the Race Relations Forum in the reply I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Leicester, East (Mr. Vaz) on 21 May 1998, *Official Report*, columns *450–51*. Detailed terms of reference have not yet been finalised, but the purpose of the Forum is to advise the Government, in the formulation and implementation of their policies, on issues affecting ethnic minority communities. I am not aware that any of the Forum's members is a scientist, engineer or a representative of small business. The Forum has no budget and members are not remunerated.

Following its first meeting on 23 June, £257.90 has so far been refunded to members from the running costs of my Department for their travel and subsistence.

Court Welfare Service

Angela Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how the Government intend to take forward consideration of the case for setting up a new court welfare service. [54870]

Mr. Straw: Following my announcement on 16 February 1998, *Official Report*, column *465*, of a review of the scope for improving the effectiveness of the welfare services currently provided by several agencies in family proceedings through the creation of a new unified service, my noble and learned Friend the Lord Chancellor and my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Health and Wales and I are today publishing a consultation paper seeking wider views on these issues. Copies of the paper are being placed in the Library, are being sent to a wide range of interested bodies and will be gladly sent to individuals on request. The closing date for response is 13 November.

Criminal Appeals

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department in how many of the cases tried on indictment where convictions were quashed following referral to the Court of Appeal by the Secretary of State, exercising his powers under section 17 of the Criminal Appeal Act 1968, compensation was paid to the appellant; what was the amount of compensation paid in each case; and how many such compensation claims remain outstanding for each year between 1990–91 and 1996–97. [54106]

Mr. Michael: The consideration of eligibility for compensation is subject to an application being made. It does not follow that all those whose cases were referred to the Court of Appeal during the period in question, and whose convictions were subsequently quashed, will necessarily have applied to the Home Office for compensation. Of the relevant individuals who did apply, the available information is as follows:

Year conviction referred	*Number who subsequently qualified for compensation*	*Number of claims not yet settled*
1990	17	12
1991	11	1
1992	8	3
1993	4	2
1994	2	1
1995	4	3
1996	6	4
1997	—	—

The year in which a case is referred to the Court of Appeal will not usually be the same year in which the appeal is heard, nor in which a decision to pay compensation is taken

The eligibility for compensation of one individual whose conviction was referred to and quashed by the Court of Appeal in 1997 has yet to be determined

Note:

It is not practice to give details of the amounts awarded in individual cases

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) in how many cases, for each year between 1990–91 and 1996–97, where convictions tried on indictment were referred to the Court of Appeal by the Secretary of State for the Home Department in exercise of his powers under section 17 of the Criminal Appeal Act 1968 *(a)* the appeal was allowed, *(b)* the appeal was dismissed, *(c)* a re-trial was ordered and *(d)* the appeal is awaited; [54104]

(2) how many convictions in cases tried on indictment were referred to the Court of Appeal by the Secretary of State in exercise of his powers under section 17 of the Criminal Appeal Act 1968 for each year between 1990–91 and 1996–97. [54102]

Mr. Michael: The number of convictions referred to the Court of Appeal from 1990–97, and the outcome, are given in the table.

Convictions in cases tried on indictment referred to the Court of Appeal by the Home Secretary under section 17 of the Criminal Appeal Act 1968, 1990–1997

		Outcome of Appeal	
	Case (defendants)	*Allowed*	*Dismissed*
1990	7 (20)	7 (20)	0
1991	10 (12)	10 (12)	0
1992	8 (11)	5 (8)	3 (3)
1993	8 (9)	5 (6)	3 (3)
1994	9 (12)	5 (5)	4 (7)
1995	15 (17)	9 (9)	5 (7)
1996	9 (12)	6 (9)	2 (2)
1997	3 (3)	1 (1)	1 (1)

Court of Appeal ordered a re-trial in one case
One case has been stayed by order of the Registrar
One case outstanding

Mr. Diarmuid O'Neill

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the steps taken by the Police Complaints Authority investigating the shooting of Diarmuid O'Neill to obtain statements from *(a)* Brian

McHugh and *(b)* Patrick Kelly since December 1997, indicating when (i) letters were sent and (ii) appointments made and with what notice; how many appointments were cancelled following approaches to legal representatives; what responses were received; when statements were taken; what assessment has been made of the impact of a transfer of the prisoners on the investigation; and what further steps are necessary to complete the investigation. [53990]

Mr. Michael: I understand that the investigating team wrote to solicitors representing Brian McHugh on 13 January to arrange an interview with their client. The solicitors were subsequently notified on 23 March that an appointment had been made to visit Mr. McHugh in prison. The solicitors replied on 1 April to say that Mr. McHugh would not make a statement. Officers visited Mr. McHugh on 7 April and he declined to co-operate with the investigation.

The investigating team wrote to solicitors representing Patrick Kelly on 28 January. An appointment to interview him in prison on 10 March was cancelled because his legal representative could not be present. The solicitors were notified on 25 March that another appointment had been made and he was eventually seen on 8 April in the presence of his legal representative. He declined to provide a statement.

The Police Complaints Authority (PCA) subsequently wrote to the solicitors representing the men on 27 May to make another request for their co-operation with the investigation, but no reply has been received.

The investigating officer is continuing his inquiries and has yet to complete the interviews of the police officers involved in the incident. The PCA has not made any assessment of the impact of a transfer of the prisoners.

Criminal Cases Review Commission

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he will lay a copy of the first annual report of the Criminal Cases Review Commission before Parliament; and if he will make a statement. [54105]

Mr. Michael: The Commission's first annual report was laid before Parliament on 20 July, and copies were placed in the Library. I welcome the report, and am pleased to note that the Commission is able to record a generally favourable reception to its openness, accessibility and independence, and of the thoroughness and professional competence of its case reviews.

Homosexual Acts (Prosecution)

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many men, aged between 16 and 18 years, during the last 10 years, have been *(a)* prosecuted and *(b)* convicted, for activities relating to homosexual acts in private. [54937]

Mr. Michael: Information for 1986 to 1996 (latest available) is given in the table. It does not include offences such as male rape or indecent assault on a male.

Number of males cautioned, prosecuted and convicted for specific homosexual offences by age, 1986–96
England and Wales

Year/offence	*Aged 16*	*Aged 17*
1986		
Buggery offences		
Cautioned	6	7
Prosecuted	2	9
Convicted	3	9
Indecency between males		
Cautioned	20	7
Prosecuted	2	5
Convicted	–	5
1987		
Buggery offences		
Cautioned	–	–
Prosecuted	8	7
Convicted	3	7
Indecency between males		
Cautioned	–	–
Prosecuted	–	1
Convicted	–	–
1988		
Buggery offences		
Cautioned	–	–
Prosecuted	9	17
Convicted	7	8
Indecency between males		
Cautioned	–	–
Prosecuted	1	12
Convicted	1	10
1989		
Buggery offences		
Cautioned	11	3
Prosecuted	11	6
Convicted	7	4
Indecency between males		
Cautioned	16	12
Prosecuted	7	12
Convicted	3	11
1990		
Buggery offences		
Cautioned	8	6
Prosecuted	7	17
Convicted	6	8
Indecency between males		
Cautioned	10	10
Prosecuted	4	12
Convicted	2	10
1991		
Buggery offences		
Cautioned	9	6
Prosecuted	9	14
Convicted	3	9
Indecency between males		
Cautioned	3	7
Prosecuted	1	3
Convicted	1	3
1992		
Buggery offences		
Cautioned	5	5
Prosecuted	10	7
Convicted	6	4
Indecency between males		
Cautioned	6	10
Prosecuted	2	5
Convicted	–	2

Number of males cautioned, prosecuted and convicted for specific homosexual offences by age, 1986–96
England and Wales

Year/offence	Aged 16	Aged 17
1993		
Buggery offences		
Cautioned	5	4
Prosecuted	9	9
Convicted	4	1
Indecency between males		
Cautioned	1	4
Prosecuted	1	1
Convicted	—	—
1994		
Buggery offences		
Cautioned	5	3
Prosecuted	9	13
Convicted	4	6
Indecency between males		
Cautioned	3	5
Prosecuted	1	3
Convicted	1	2
1995		
Buggery offences		
Cautioned	1	—
Prosecuted	3	3
Convicted	—	5
Indecency between males		
Cautioned	1	1
Prosecuted	—	4
Convicted	—	2
1996		
Buggery offences		
Cautioned	3	1
Prosecuted	4	—
Convicted	1	—
Indecency between males		
Cautioned	2	5
Prosecuted	—	—
Convicted	—	—

Includes persons proceeded against in earlier years or for other offences
Not available

Paedophiles

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to require convicted paedophiles subject to the Sex Offences Register to inform the authorities if they plan to travel abroad. [53981]

Mr. George Howarth: We will shortly be starting a review of the effectiveness of the registration provisions of the Sex Offenders Act 1997. The question of convicted sex offenders who travel abroad will form part of that review.

Asia Europe Child Welfare Initiative

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what his Department's policy is towards the objectives of the Asia Europe Child Welfare Initiative; and if he will make a statement. [53982]

Mr. Michael: The objective of the ASEM child welfare initiative is to develop practical co-operation between Asia and Europe in the fight against commercial sexual exploitation of children through the exchange of ideas and information and the promotion of models of good practice. The initiative is led by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, with the full support and participation of the Home Office, the police, the Department of Health and other Government Departments, as well as the non-governmental organisations concerned with children who have been closely involved.

The Government take the combating of the commercial sexual exploitation of children very seriously. This Government have implemented the Sex Offenders Act 1997, which both creates a requirement for sex offenders to register their names and addresses, and any changes to these, with the police, and enables crimes against children abroad to be prosecuted in this country. The United Kingdom police have carried out training courses for police and prosecutors in the Philippines, Thailand and Sri Lanka. Within the United Kingdom, the Government have undertaken to issue joint Home Office/Department of Health guidance to the police and social services on dealing with children in prostitution on an inter-agency basis with the intention of diverting them from prostitution.

The ASEM child welfare initiative is breaking new ground in seeking to develop practical responses to this most difficult problem. We regard it as making a valuable contribution to our own strategy to combat the sexual exploitation of children at home and abroad.

Young Offenders

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will review the procedure whereby minor offences committed by a young offender remain on their record and affect opportunities for employment. [54687]

Mr. Michael: The retention of records of convictions and cautions held in national or local police records are subject to the Association of Chief Police Officer (ACPO) weeding guidelines, which are currently under review. In general, the retention period for criminal records depends on the seriousness of the offence and whether the subject of the record reoffends. Criminal records are retained for the purposes of crime prevention and detection and the apprehension and prosecution of offenders. The weeding guidelines do not differentiate between the criminal records of juvenile and adult offenders.

Police records are only disclosed for the purpose of viewing a person's suitability for employment where there are important considerations of public interest to justify departure from the general rule of confidentiality. In addition, the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974 applies to all convictions of the court. The length of the rehabilitation period, after which a conviction is spent, depends on the sentence passed by the court, and, for offenders aged under 18, the rehabilitation period for many sentences is halved. The Rehabilitation of Offenders Act does not apply to cautions, reprimands and final warnings. We shall be considering whether the Act should apply to these non-judicial disposals and will be consulting on the issue.

Fatal Road Crashes

Dr. Stoate: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many manslaughter charges have been

brought following fatal road crashes for each of the last 10 years; how many have been brought against *(a)* drivers and *(b)* managers; and how many have resulted in convictions. [54844]

Mr. Michael: The numbers shown below for a charge of manslaughter following road incidents between the years 1987–96, are those initially recorded as manslaughter by the police.

The numbers for conviction are those currently recorded as manslaughter.

There is not information held centrally on the number of convictions brought against drivers and managers.

Number of manslaughter cases initially recorded by the police following fatal road incidents and those currently recorded as manslaughter, 1987–1996

Year	Manslaughter charges	Manslaughter convictions
1987	6	3
1988	8	1
1989	28	4
1990	16	7
1991	21	3
1992	3	2
1993	12	4
1994	11	—
1995	9	—
1996	8	1

Hillgrove Farm, Minster Lovell

Mr. David Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when his Department last inspected the animal breeding establishment Hillgrove Farm, Minster Lovell, Oxfordshire; with what results; and what assessment he has made of the standard of animal welfare at this establishment. [54222]

Mr. George Howarth: The establishment was last visited by a member of the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Inspectorate in early May. The visit was unannounced. The inspector reported that standards of care, accommodation and animal welfare were satisfactory. On the basis of this advice, I am satisfied that Hillgrove Farm continues to operate both within the terms of the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986 and the conditions of its Certificate of Designation.

Prisons (Gardening)

Mr. Wyatt: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 22 July 1998, *Official Report*, column *544*, what are the ingredients of the five commercial chemical products used in gardening at the three Isle of Sheppey prisons. [54959]

Mr. George Howarth: The ingredients of the five commercial chemical products used at Elmley prison are listed below:

Casoron G: used for weed control in shrub beds a granular product containing 6.75 per cent. dichlobenil/2.6—dichlorobenzonitrite

Mosstox: used for moss control contains dichlorophen 340 grams/litre(g/l) used in dilution. 27.9 per cent. with water (w/w)

Roundup Bioactive: used for weed control contains 360 g/l glyphosate, present as 480 g/l (41.1 per cent. w/w) of the isopropylamine salt of glyphosate

Supertox 30: used for control of broad leaf weeds in grass contains 190 g/l (16.9 per cent. w/w) mecoprop and 90 g/l (8.03 per cent. w/w) 2.4—D as diethanolamine salts

Trik: used for weed control contains aminotriazole 28 per cent. w/w, diuron, sodium hydroxide and 2.4—D.

My hon. Friend the Member for Gateshead, East and Washington, West (Ms Quin), said in the answer she gave my hon. Friend on 22 July 1998, *Official Report*, column *544*, that all three prisons are happy to discuss environmental issues with interested parties.

European Children

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will support the proposal put to his Office for a millennium lottery specifically to fund longitudinal studies of European children in the next century, sponsored by the European Forum for Child Welfare; and if he will make a statement. [54203]

Mr. George Howarth: We have not received any proposals. They would need to be put to the Gaming Board, and would have to comply with the requirements of the Lotteries and Amusements Act 1976. Under the Act, it is unlawful for tickets in unauthorised lotteries, including overseas lotteries, to be sold, or for such lotteries to be advertised, in Great Britain.

Probation Service

Angela Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he hopes to publish his proposals on the future of the Probation Service and for improving their joint effectiveness with the Prison Service; and if he will make a statement. [54968]

Mr. Straw: I shall be publishing a consultation document shortly, entitled "Joining Forces to Protect the Public", which seeks views on my plans for reforming the organisational structure of the probation services, and for improving its systems of accountability and its joint effectiveness with the Prison Service. Copies will then be placed in the Library.

The proposals are the product of the emerging findings of the Prisons-Probation Review which I announced on 16 July 1998, last year, *Official Report*, columns 172–73, and which formed part of the Comprehensive Spending Review. Among other things, the document sets out our proposals for creating a modern unified national Probation Service as a Next Steps Agency, forming part of the Home Office, directly accountable to the Home Secretary through a Chief Executive. The proposals form one part of our wide-ranging programme to modernise and improve the performance of the criminal justice system in England and Wales. The consultation exercise will continue until 27 November, and I shall announce final decisions before the end of the year.

To assist the consultation process, I shall also make available the report of the review of options which has informed our proposals.

Europol

Angela Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what measures are being put in place to ensure that the United Kingdom complies with the

provisions in the Europol Convention related to breaches of discretion or confidentiality following its entry into force on 1 October. [54969]

Mr. Straw: Article 32(4) of the Europol Convention requires that prior to the entry into force of the Convention, each member state shall introduce the provisions required under national law to proceed against breaches of discretion or confidentiality. To this end, I am certifying the Europol Convention as an agreement to which an international organisation is a party, under section 12(2)(b) of the Official Secrets Act 1989. This will have the effect of ensuring that members and employees of Europol will be treated as "government contractors" for the purposes of the Official Secrets Act, and will ensure that the United Kingdom will comply fully with the relevant provisions in the Convention.

Mr. Cash: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the United Kingdom role in data exchange in Europol. [54953]

Mr. Michael: The role of Europol and European Union member states in relation to Europol is set out in the Europol Convention. The role of the United Kingdom will be the same as any other member state.

Corruption

Angela Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to reform and consolidate the law on corruption; and what progress has been made on the recommendations by the Committee on Standards in Public Life to (i) clarify the law on corruption in relation to hon. Members and (ii) introduce a new statutory offence of misuse of public office. [55130]

Mr. Straw: As a Government, we are committed to ensuring high standards in both public and private life. On 9 June last year, I published a consultation document on the reform of the corruption statutes entitled "The Prevention of Corruption: Consolidation and Amendment of the Prevention of Corruption Acts 1889–1916: A Government Statement", a copy of which is in the Library. This had been preceded in December 1996 by the publication of the Home Office discussion document "Clarification of the Law Relating to the Bribery of Members of Parliament", an issue on which the Committee on Standards in Public Life had earlier reported. In November last, the Joint Committee on Parliamentary Privilege embarked on its current inquiry into Parliamentary Privilege, including the law of corruption as it relates to hon. Members; and in March, the Law Commission for England and Wales helpfully published its proposals in its report No. 248: "Legislating the Criminal Code: Corruption". We are also committed to supporting and giving effect to international efforts through the European Union, the Council of Europe and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) to deal with international aspects of corruption, including implementing the OECD Convention on Combating Bribery of Foreign Public Officials in International Business Transactions. These domestic and international initiatives taken together provide us with a sound basis on which to review and modernise the law of corruption.

Although we are still awaiting the recommendations of the Joint Committee on Parliamentary Privilege we have (as I announced on 24 June 1998, *Official Report*, column *520*) set up two inter-departmental groups to examine (i) the Law Commission's Report on Corruption and (ii) the possibility of a new statutory offence of misuse of public office. It is clear from the many representations received that there is much to support the Law Commission's recommendations for the common law of bribery and the present statutory offences of corruption to be restated in a modern statute, with a clear definition of what is meant by acting in a corrupt manner. At this stage, we also accept, in principle, the Law Commission's proposal that there should be a single offence of corruption to cover both public and private sectors. This reflects the reality that some functions which would, in the past, have been carried out by the public sector are now carried out by public/private partnerships or in the private sector. It also reflects the importance of ensuring equally high standards of probity in all aspects of life, whether in the public or the private sector. The inter-departmental working group on corruption expects to complete its work by the end of the year. When it has done so, I propose to publish a paper setting out the Government's detailed proposals for the consolidation and amendment of the law on corruption. When available, I will also take into account the views of the Joint Committee on Parliamentary Privilege.

The level of response to the consultation paper about a possible new offence of misuse of public office and the quality of replies demonstrates the importance of, and interest in, public probity. The Committee on Standards in Public Life in its third report recommended that all holders of public office should be covered equally by a statutory offence of misuse of public office, which enables action to be taken against them in the event of misconduct which is serious, but does not entail bribery and corruption. This is a complex area. The inter-departmental working group set up to consider the recommendation by the Committee on Standards in Public Life in this area, with the assistance of the Criminal Law Commissioner as recommended by the Committee on Standards in Public Life, is looking carefully at the inter-relationship between any new offence, existing offences, civil remedies and disciplinary codes. It is also taking into account proposals being developed by my right hon. Friend, the Deputy Prime Minister and the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions on the establishment of a new Standards Board for local government and the creation of a new code of conduct for local councillors. As with corruption, this inter-departmental working group also expects to complete its work by the end of the year.

Green Transport

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 27 March 1998, *Official Report*, column *302*, on departmental transport arrangements, what further changes he has made. [54014]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: My Department is working towards the target announced in the White Paper 'A New Deal for Transport', that all headquarters buildings and main buildings occupied by Executive Agencies should have green transport plans by March 1999, and all other key buildings by March 2000. These targets have been incorporated into my Department's Greening Operations Policy. The policy also includes the following aim:

"to minimise the impact of the Department's travel arrangements on the environment by reducing the level of unnecessary travel and encouraging those who have to travel to do so in a way that minimises the environmental impact".

Listening Devices

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what guidance he has given to *(a)* police forces and *(b)* MI5 in respect of the use of long-range microphones and the civil liberty implications thereof; [54193]

(2) if it is the practice that the use by *(a)* police and *(b)* MI5 of listening devices which do not require his prior authorisation, of comparable effectiveness of those which do, are used only against targets and in cases where authorisation for those listening devices which do require such authorisation might reasonably be expected to be forthcoming; and if he will make a statement; [54574]

(3) what steps he has taken to ensure that listening devices not requiring approval by warrant are not used by *(a)* the police and *(b)* MI5 to conduct exercises that would be unlikely to be approved by warrant were they conducted by listening devices that did require such authorisation; and if he will make a statement; [54573]

(4) what steps he intends to take to ensure those listening devices presently available to the police and the security services but not covered by legislation requiring specific authorisation before their use are brought within the remit of legislation to require such specific authorisation to be obtained. [54192]

Mr. Michael: The deployment by the police and the Security Service of listening devices in circumstances not covered by the Intelligence Services Act 1994 or the Police Act 1977 (when implemented) is an operational matter for chief constables and the Director General respectively.

The Association of Chief Police Officers is overseeing a project to establish national standards for police and Customs activity in relation to a range of covert law enforcement activity. The Security Service operates in accordance with its statutory functions and subject to statutory oversight. In accordance with long standing policy, I do not propose to comment on matters relating to its operations, including the equipment and sensitive techniques which it employs.

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department under what circumstances warrants for interception are agreed to where the prevention or detection of serious crime is not a factor. [54575]

Mr. Straw: The Interception of Communications Act 1985 provides that the Secretary of State may issue an interception warrant if he considers that it is necessary in the interests of national security, for the purpose of preventing or detecting serious crime or for the purpose of safeguarding the economic wellbeing of the United Kingdom. In deciding whether a warrant is necessary, the Secretary of State is required to consider whether the information could reasonably be acquired by other means. And, where the purpose of the warrant is to safeguard the economic wellbeing of the United Kingdom, the information which is required must relate to the acts or intentions of persons outside the British Islands.

Departmental Publications

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many of his Department's publications have been made available in *(a)* Braille, *(b)* audio tape and *(c)* large print in 1997–98; and what percentage of the total number of publications this represents. [54274]

Mr. Straw: Information on the numbers of documents published in alternative formats such as audio tapes will normally be considered by officials with responsibility for the documents in question. This information is not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Driving Offences

Mrs. Brinton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what has been the average penalty for *(a)* causing death by dangerous driving and *(b)* careless driving in each of the last 10 years; [53302]

(2) what estimate he has made of the number of charges of causing death by dangerous driving that are reduced to careless driving during the course of trials. [53301]

Mr. Michael: Information taken from the Home Office Court Proceedings database on average penalties is given in table A.

No estimate has been made of the number of charges of causing death by dangerous driving that are reduced to careless driving during the course of trials. Table B, which uses data from the same database, compares the number of persons committed for trial from the magistrates' courts to the Crown Court for these two offences with the number tried in the Crown Court.

Table A: Average court penalties given for offences of (a) causing death by dangerous driving and (b) careless driving: 1986–96
England and Wales

Offence/Court penalty	*1986*	*1987*	*1988*	*1989*	*1990*	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*	*1995*	*1996*
Causing death by dangerous driving											
Immediate custody											
Average sentence length (months)	15.3	16.8	18.4	16.3	16.8	18.5	20.7	22.7	27.4	34.6	31.4
Careless driving											
Fine											
Average fine (£)	66	70	75	90	100	105	106	122	127	127	127

The data are based on instances where the offence is the principal offence

Source:
Home Office Court Proceedings database

Table B: Number of defendants prosecuted, committed for trial and tried for offences[1] of (a) causing death by dangerous driving and (b) careless driving, 1994–96
England and Wales

Offence/court	*1994*	*1995*	*1996*
Causing death by dangerous driving			
Magistrates' courts			
Prosecutions	235	247	260
Committed for trial	229	229	244
The Crown Court			
Total tried[2]	231	240	241
Careless driving			
Magistrates' courts			
Prosecutions	56,657	54,939	50,291
Committed for trial	3	2	6
The Crown Court			
Total tried[2]	151	190	228

[1] The data are based on instances where the offence is the principal offence
[2] The data cover defendants either acquitted or convicted of the offence. Hence they cover those who were prosecuted under a more serious offence but acquitted or convicted of the offence and do not cover those prosecuted for the offence but acquitted or convicted of a lesser offence
Source:
Home Office Court Proceedings database

Mrs. Brinton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proportion of road deaths resulted in convictions for *(a)* manslaughter, *(b)* causing death by dangerous driving, *(c)* careless driving, *(d)* causing death by careless driving under the influence of drink or drugs and *(e)* no conviction, in the last year for which figures are available. [53300]

Mr. Michael: There were 3,598 road deaths for England and Wales in 1996. The number of prosecutions and convictions in 1996 are shown in the table for the offences specified, and the respective proportion of all road deaths.

	Prosecutions	*Percentage of all road deaths*	*Convictions*	*Percentage of all road deaths*
Manslaughter	4	0.1	1	0.1
Causing death by dangerous/careless driving	333	9.3	245	6.8
Causing death by careless driving under the influence of drink and drugs	63	1.8	65	1.8
Causing death by aggravated taking	27	0.8	18	0.5
No prosecution	3,171	88.1	—	—
No conviction	—	—	3,269	90.7

[1] Figures for causing death by dangerous and careless driving have been counted together since 1992
[2] Includes 2 cases of manslaughter charges reduced at court

Mrs. Brinton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if juries are informed of the maximum penalties attached to the offences of *(a)* careless driving and *(b)* dangerous driving. [53303]

Mr. Michael: The jury's role is solely to determine the facts of the case and to reach a verdict. Juries are not made aware of the consequences of conviction.

Schengen Information System

Mr. Cash: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his document, "UK Presidency of the EU, Half Way Mark", if he will make a statement on the application of openness to UK nationals under the Schengen Information System. [54951]

Mr. George Howarth: Schengen, and the Schengen Information System in particular, is currently an inter-governmental arrangement outside the structures of the European Union. The United Kingdom is not a party to, or a participant in, Schengen.

When the Treaty of Amsterdam comes into force, the Schengen arrangements will be brought within the structures of the European Union but will not apply to the United Kingdom unless we choose to take part. The arrangements for data protection and subject access in respect of the Schengen Information System, once within the European Union, have not yet been decided.

Justice and Home Affairs Council

Mr. Cash: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will place a copy of the minutes of the 19 March Justice and Home Affairs Council on new openness measures in the Library. [54949]

Mr. Straw: The openness measures agreed at the Justice and Home Affairs Council on 19 March did not extend to Council minutes, which are not made publicly available in the interests of protecting the confidentiality of Council proceedings. But I reported on the outcome of the meeting in the reply I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Slough (Fiona Mactaggart) on 8 April 1998, *Official Report*, columns *256–67*. The openness measures which were under discussion by the Justice and Home Affairs Council are set out in Council document 6407/98 (JAI 6), a copy of which was placed in the Library following the Council meeting.

Household Insurance (No-claims Bonus)

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the likely impact of the trends in the numbers of no-claims bonuses for household insurance on reporting rates of household crimes. [54822]

Mr. Michael: It is not possible to determine the effect of trends in the number of no-claims bonuses on reporting rates of household crimes. This is because there are no

centrally held figures on the proportion of household insurance policies that have a no-claims bonus, or on whether the number has changed over time.

Evidence from the 1996 British Crime Survey suggests, however, that any drop in claims, for whatever reason, is likely to reduce levels of reporting. Victims of nearly three-quarters of incidents not reported to the police said they would have reported if they had made a claim.

No claim was made in about two-thirds of incidents covered by insurance. Protecting a no-claims bonus was the reason given in only a fifth of these. There are no comparative figures to assess whether this proportion is higher than it would have been in the past.

Active Community Task Force

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the current membership of the Prime Minister's task force on the active community; and when it will next meet. [54487]

Mr. Michael: The task force has not yet been established.

Metropolitan Police (Malpractice)

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has received about the level of malpractice within the Metropolitan Police. [54037]

Mr. Michael: We have received a number of representations from hon. Members and from members of the public on subjects related to corruption within the Metropolitan Police.

The Commissioner of Police for the Metropolis has publicly stated his determination to tackle corruption in the Metropolitan Police. The Commissioner tells me that, unfortunately, while the overwhelming majority of his officers are honest, professional and brave, and will never do anything wrong throughout their service, there is a small number who are involved in corrupt, dishonest and unethical behaviour. The actions of these officers sap the morale of their honest colleagues and undermine the confidence of the public in the police service.

My right hon. Friend and I are regularly updated by the Commissioner and the Deputy Commissioner on their progress in tackling corruption in the Metropolitan Police.

Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Constabulary will be conducting a review into integrity in police forces in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. I welcome this review, which will inform chief constables of good practice and ensure corrective action so that the high standards of service and integrity set by British police officers will be maintained.

DNA Techniques

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his letter FC/98 333/1039/3 of 18 June 1998, what progress has been made by the Forensic Science Service in exploring how the police might utilise DNA techniques. [54053]

Mr. Michael: The National DNA Database was established in April 1995. The success of the database has stimulated joint research between the Forensic Science Service and police forces on how to make best use of the information that DNA analysis can provide to support crime investigation. Some progress has been made in developing tests that may help to determine the race, hair and eye colour, for example, of the suspect from a stain left at the scene of a crime. Research presently underway with several police forces is aimed at evaluating the usefulness of this information in helping to identify suspects.

Prisoners (Prescription Drugs)

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to introduce new guidelines on prescription drugs for prisoners, with particular reference to *(a)* Largactil, *(b)* Melleril and *(c)* other neuroleptic drugs. [54213]

Mr. George Howarth: Published Prison Service healthcare standards set out guidelines on the prescription of medicinal drugs to prisoners. The guidelines require prison doctors to exercise appropriate clinical judgment, and for Prison Service establishments to provide a safe, efficient and cost-effective pharmaceutical service to prisoners which complies with legal requirements, professional standards and ethical codes, commensurate with those in the National Health Service.

There are no plans at present to revise these guidelines.

Prisoners (Psychiatric Help)

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to review the quality and the amount of psychiatric help provided to prisoners with problems of mental ill health. [54214]

Mr. George Howarth: The provision of mental healthcare in prisons was reviewed by the independent standing Health Advisory Committee (HAC) for the Prison Service, which published a report containing 16 recommendations for improvements last autumn. Implementation of the HAC's recommendations is being considered by the Joint Prison Service/National Health Service Executive working group, established to advise on options for improving prisoners' health care. The joint working group has been looking at, among other improvements, ways of increasing the contributions made by the NHS to mental health services for prisoners.

Reasoning and Rehabilitation Programme

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the Reasoning and Rehabilitation programme, in Holloway and Cookham Wood; and what plans he has to extend this scheme. [54215]

Mr. George Howarth: Reasoning and Rehabilitation is a nationally accredited offending behaviour programme. Its delivery at individual establishments is reviewed annually as part of the Prison Service's offending behaviour programme accreditation process. The 1996–97 review showed that Cookham Wood and Holloway are implementing the programme well.

To maintain the quality of programme delivery, the Prison Service modifies the number of successful completions of the programme by prisoners by reference to an implementation quality rating. In 1997–98, the adjusted figure for Cookham Wood was 14 completions and for Holloway 20.9. Under plans made before the outcome of the Comprehensive Spending Review was announced, Cookham Wood was predicting 24 completions for 1998–99 and Holloway 21.

The Prison Service plans to increase significantly the number of completions of accredited offending behaviour programmes across the whole estate over the next three years.

Prisoners (Statistics)

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what are *(a)* the numbers and *(b)* the proportions of prisoners who are (i) Asian and (ii) Afro-Caribbean. [54212]

Mr. George Howarth: The latest available information on the ethnicity of prisoners is for 30 June 1998 and is given in the table

Percentage of prisoners in prison by ethnic group on 30 June 1998

Ethnic group	*Number*	*Percentage of total prison population*
White	53,647	82
Black		
African	1,396	2
Caribbean	4,870	7
Other	1,747	3
Total	8,013	12
South Asian		
Indian	694	1
Pakistani	1,151	2
Bangladeshi	169	–
Total	2,014	3
Chinese and other ethnic	2,053	3
Total	65,727	100

(Provisional figures)

– Less than 0.5 per cent.

Note:

Percentages have been calculated independently and may not sum to 100.

Prison Medical Staff

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proposals he has to ensure that the qualifications of medical staff in prisons are parallel to those of the National Health Service. [54217]

Mr. George Howarth: The Directorate of Health Care is working with an expert committee, comprising representatives of the Royal Colleges of General Practitioners, Medicine and Psychiatry, to establish a Health Care Standard for the continuing professional development of doctors working in prisons in England and Wales. This new Standard will include essential person specifications and competencies for the employment of prison doctors.

Women's Prisons (Staff)

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to review the numbers of women doctors, nurses and gynaecologists employed in women's prisons. [54216]

Mr. George Howarth: The overwhelming majority of nurses employed in women's prisons are female. The number of women doctors employed in women's prisons can vary due to the use of external general practitioners and other locum doctors. The most recent available figures show that 10 out of 31 doctors employed in women's or mixed prisons were female.

Women prisoners who wish to see a female doctor or nurse have their wishes met wherever possible. A Women's Health Care Standard is being developed, which will include a requirement for protocols, to be agreed locally, for women prisoners who wish to consult female doctors or nurses to have their wishes respected.

Prison Officers (Statistics)

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what are *(a)* the numbers and *(b)* the proportions of prison officers who are (i) Asian and (ii) Afro-Caribbean. [54211]

Mr. George Howarth: The information requested is as follows:

The number of prison officer grades who are

(i) Asian: 159

(ii) Afro-Caribbean: 172

The proportion of prison officer grades who are

(i) Asian: 0.68 per cent.

(ii) Afro-Caribbean: 0.73 per cent.

Primary Purpose Rule

Sir Norman Fowler: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is his current estimate of the effect that the abolition of the primary purpose rule has had upon the number of spouses granted leave to enter the United Kingdom for a probationary year prior to settlement; and if he will make a statement. [54047]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: I will write to the right hon. Member.

Police Service

Sir Norman Fowler: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the strength of the police service in England and Wales, broken down to show *(a)* police and *(b)* civil staff (i) in total and (ii) by police force. [54045]

Mr. Michael: At the end of March 1998, there were in total 126,944 police officers and 53,480 civilian support

staff. This is 214 fewer police officers and 469 more civilians than there were on 31 March 1997. The table sets out the information requested.

Force	Police officers	Civilian Support Staff
Avon and Somerset	2,975.9	1,392.8
Bedfordshire	1,078.5	522.7
Cambridgeshire	1,291.4	573.6
Cheshire	2,035.9	813.9
City of London	824.9	348.4
Cleveland	1,483.4	586.4
Cumbria	1,163.5	451.5
Derbyshire	1,772.2	787
Devon and Cornwall	2,961.5	1,185.8
Dorset	1,310	700.4
Durham	1,514.8	556.5
Dyfed Powys	1,002.3	340.6
Essex	2,928.5	1,252.5
Gloucestershire	1,103.9	422.7
Greater Manchester	6,948.7	2,660.6
Gwent	1,232.8	467
Hampshire	3,489.5	1,330.9
Hertfordshire	1,739.9	830.8
Humberside	2,021.2	786.2
Kent	3,251.8	1,521.3
Lancashire	3,257.1	1,142.7
Leicestershire	1,983.1	774.1
Lincolnshire	1,191.1	539.8
Merseyside	4,217.4	1,502.4
Metropolitan Police	26,192.7	12,432.3
Norfolk	1,429.6	646.4
Northamptonshire	1,168.7	577
Northumbria	3,766.7	1,356.8
North Wales	1,396	525
North Yorkshire	1,367.2	542.9
Nottinghamshire	2,322.6	986.6
South Wales	2,986.2	1,241.3
South Yorkshire	3,182	1,243
Staffordshire	2,292.1	900.5
Suffolk	1,185.8	583.4
Surrey	1,608.4	743.2
Sussex	3,037.7	1,201
Thames Valley	3,775.5	1,826.7
Warwickshire	924.1	409.8
West Mercia	2,011.8	1,007.6
West Midlands	7,156.5	2,816.5
West Yorkshire	5,154.7	2,429.9
Wiltshire	1,148.3	519.2
Total strength of the forces	124,885.9	53,479.7
Central services	736	
Regional Crime Squads	1,289	
Inter force units	33	
Total police service strength	126,943.9	53,479.7

Central services includes officers seconded by forces to national police training, NCIS, Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and the Information Technology Organisation

From 1 April 1998 regional crime squads became the National Crime Squad

These are units set up between forces to provide a common service. An example of this is the Regional Driving School at Devizes

Age of Consent

Dr. Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to alter the provisions in the Sex Offenders Act 1997 relating to those convicted for crimes which would be legal if the age of consent were reduced to 16 years for homosexual acts. [53927]

Mr. Michael: The issue will be considered in due course.

Dr. Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to issue new guidance on the sentencing of men aged between 16 and 18 years for engaging in consenting homosexual acts in private. [53928]

Mr. Michael: None. Sentencing guidelines are a matter for the Court of Appeal, which provides guidance on the appropriate sentencing range for criminal offences through its judgments in individual cases.

The Crime and Disorder Bill [*Lords*] also contains provisions to build on and improve the current system of sentencing guidelines. Provisions in the Bill place a statutory duty on the Court of Appeal to consider producing sentencing guidelines. There will also be a new sentencing advisory panel established by the Bill, which will give advice to the Court of Appeal on sentencing.

Mohammed Al Fayed

Mr. Gerald Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects to make a decision on the application for British citizenship by Mr. Mohammed Al Fayed. [54903]

Mr. Straw: It is not our practice to comment on individual applications. Decisions are taken when we have completed our consideration of whether an applicant meets the statutory requirements for British citizenship.

Prison Farms

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the privatisation of HM prison farms. [54110]

Mr. George Howarth: There are no plans to privatise prison farms. However, a number of prisons are involved in Private Finance Initiative projects or partnership agreements.

In May 1997, the Prisons Board agreed to the recommendations of the Prison Service Agricultural Review team, which was commissioned to consider the need and size of prison agricultural activities. The implementation of these recommendations will result in agricultural land which is no longer required by the Prison Service being sold, and the phasing out of potato and pig production. Any staff employment places in these particular enterprises would be absorbed into other activities. Work is continuing with the monitoring of dairy herds and developing the role of vegetable distribution centres.

The review recommended continued involvement with private sector companies. The primary purpose of seeking such partnerships is to offer good value for money in providing prisoners with work, maximising current unrealised production and, more importantly, the injection of capital funds.

The largest current Private Finance Initiative project operating in the prison farms sector involves mushroom packaging at Kirkham prison. Discussions are taking place on establishing other such enterprises in a number of prisons.

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on livestock and produce grown and reared in prisons for sale on the open market. [54111]

Mr. George Howarth: There are a number of commercial sales generated from agricultural and horticultural activities in prisons. They are regarded as sources of income which can be offset against the cost of running the establishment from which the sales have been generated. Prison Service policy is that prices obtained should be in line with the local, and, where appropriate, national, price for a comparable product.

Immigration

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department on what date the presenting officer's Unit in his Department received the papers from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office relating to immigration appeal GV100/46408/AP; and if he will make a statement. [54279]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The explanatory statement was sent from the British High Commission, Islamabad, on 5 February. It was received within my Department on 17 February, it was processed and forwarded to the Immigration Appellate Authority on 7 April for the appeal to be listed.

Race Relations Act

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to assess the recommendations relating to Employment in the Public Service, as contained in the document Proposals for Change, submitted to him by the Commission for Racial Equality, on the reform of the Race Relations Act 1976. [53242]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The Commission for Racial Equality's Third Review of the Race Relations Act 1976 contains a large number of proposals for amending the Act. My right hon. Friend announced on 23 June that the Home Office would welcome views on these and other proposals he has received. This consultation period will run until 6 November. The Government will reach a view on all the proposals once the consultation has finished.

Written Answers to Questions

Wednesday 2 September 1998

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Press Office

Mr. Ian Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many people currently work for his Department's Press Office. [54468]

Mr. Mandelson *[holding answer 31 July 1998]:* There are 23 staff, including administrative support, currently working in the Department of Trade and Industry's Press Office. In addition, there are 6 vacant posts in the process of being filled.

EU Working Time Directive

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will defer the coming into force of the Working Time Directive from 1 October 1998 to 1 January 1999 to allow more time for consideration of the implementing regulations. [54031]

Mr. Ian McCartney *[holding answer 31 July 1998]:* The timetable for implementation was announced in February 1998. We published draft regulations for consultation in April 1998. We laid regulations on 30 July 1998, which will come into force on 1 October 1998. There has been plenty of time for consideration of the Government's proposals.

Foreign Coal Producers (Subsidies)

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what proposals his Department has to take action in respect of the subsidies given to German and Spanish coal producers by their Governments. [54238]

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what action he proposes to take in respect of the amount of subsidies given to German and Spanish coal producers by their Governments. [54000]

Mr. Battle *[holding answer 31 July 1998]:* In the case of Spain we have formally complained to the European Commission about discriminatory application of limits on the sulphur content of coals from different ECSC resources, and have received assurances that UK coal will be treated on the same basis as Spanish coal. This should open the Spanish market to a range of English deep-mined coals.

We have also laid a formal complaint against Spanish state aid for coal questioning whether the required criteria of ultimate viability has been fulfilled for all those producers receiving operating aid under the ECSC Coal State Aid code. We are pressing for confirmation from the Spanish authorities that a subsidy of 1 peseta per kilowatt/hour available to Spanish power-station operators burning Spanish coal is equally available in respect of UK coal.

In the case of Germany, we conveyed a complaint to the European Commission on behalf of Celtic Energy Ltd. setting out how state aid provided to Sophia Jacoba and Ibbenburen mines led to a distortion in the anthracite market in the ECSC and particularly in the UK. Following an investigation the Commission found there had been abuse of state aid and reached a decision on 29 July requiring repayment of nearly DM 20 million state aid by the German producers. This decision provides UK producers with an assurance that such unfair practices will not recur and should help to open up continental markets for competitive UK exports of anthracite.

We made representations to the Commission in March 1998 on the proposed merger of the three remaining German hard coal producers, urging the need for full transparency of future state aid, and for further consideration to be given of the assets being acquired by Ruhrkohle. The Commission approved the structure of the merger of the three companies on 29 July but subject to conditions on divestment and segregation of the company's import activities.

Formal complaints against German state aid for power station anthracite have been submitted by Consolidated Coal and Evans and Reid (the agents for Tower Colliery) and RJB Mining in respect of state aids for German coal production more generally. In June 1998 the Commission approved state aid of DM 10.4 billion for German coal production and 438 billion pesetas for Spanish coal production. I understand that RJB Mining is lodging an appeal to the European Court against these Decisions.

The Government are monitoring closely the commercial negotiations UK producers are conducting on the export of power-station coal and briquettes to the German market in competition with state-aided German coal.

It is important that the Commission interprets the Coal State Aids Code strictly and we will continue to press for an open and competitive coal market in Europe.

Electricity Industry

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on his policy in respect of further vertical integration in the electricity industry; and if he will make a statement. [54001]

Mr. Battle *[holding answer 31 July 1998]:* Decisions on company structure in the electricity sector are commercial matters subject to any restrictions imposed through licences and, in the case of mergers, to consideration under the provisions of the Fair Trading Act 1973.

Mr. Ian Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on the reforms which the Government propose to make to the price-setting mechanism for the pool price of electricity. [54462]

Mr. Battle *[holding answer 31 July 1998]:* The Director General of Electricity Supply published his Report on the Review of Electricity Trading

Arrangements on 29 July. I shall need to consider the proposals he has put forward before deciding what action to take.

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on the anticipated demand for new electricity generation capacity, taking account of granted consents and anticipated retirement of coal-fired and Magnox plant. [54893]

Mr. Battle: Retirement of all existing coal, oil, or nuclear plant will be a commercial matter for its owners, subject to approval by the regulator who may require it to be offered for sale. Need for new plant will depend on retirement decisions as well as on future demand for electricity.

Mr. Ian Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what target he has set for the proportion of electricity to be produced from renewable sources following the Kyoto agreement. [54823]

Mr. Battle: The Government are committed to a new and strong drive to develop renewable energy sources in line with our manifesto commitment. To this end, I am reviewing policy towards new and renewable sources of energy, including consideration of what would be necessary and practicable to achieve 10 per cent. of UK electricity needs from renewables by the year 2010, and how renewables can make an effective contribution to meeting our national and international commitments for future greenhouse gas reductions. The review, which is nearing completion, is examining the status of all the new and renewable energy technologies in the UK industry, and their future prospects in both home and export markets. It is also considering what further research, development, and demonstration is needed for the longer term. I expect to announce the outcome of the review later this year.

Coal Industry

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what estimate he has made of the likely number of job losses in the coal industry over the next three years. [54004]

Mr. Battle *[holding answer 31 July 1998]:* Levels of employment in the coal-mining industry will depend upon commercial decisions taken by the private sector coal companies.

Mr. Ian Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what is his estimate of the number of people that will be employed in the coal industry in 2002. [54824]

Mr. Battle: Levels of employment in the coal-mining industry will depend upon commercial decisions taken by the private sector coal companies.

Trade Unions

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will exempt small and medium sized businesses from his proposed statutory trade union recognition requirements. [54457]

Mr. Ian McCartney *[holding answer 31 July 1998]:* As stated in the Fairness at Work White Paper, the Government propose to exempt firms employing twenty or fewer employees from the statutory recognition procedure.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will raise the threshold for the size of firm required to recognise a trade union. [54456]

Mr. Ian McCartney *[holding answer 31 July 1998]:* The Government's current policy on the threshold is as set out in the Fairness at Work White Paper, which was published on 21 May 1998.

Millennium Dome (Sponsorship)

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, (1) pursuant to his oral answer to the hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow), of 27 July 1998, *Official Report*, column 14, if he will list the amount of the contributions made by (i) British Telecom, (ii) BSkyB, (iii) Manpower, (iv) Tesco, (v) Marks and Spencer, (vi) British Airways and (vii) BAA plc; [54431]

(2) pursuant to his oral answer of 27 July 1998, *Official Report*, column 14, to the hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow), if he will list each private sector sponsor and the amount of the contribution; [54432]

(3) pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member of Pontefract and Castleford (Yvette Cooper) of 24 February 1998, *Official Report*, column *204*, if he will list those companies which had made commitments coming up for detailed negotiation which are now sponsors and the amount of their sponsorship; [54434]

(4) pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Pontefract and Castleford (Yvette Cooper) of 24 February 1998, *Official Report*, column *204*, if he will list those of the 40 potential sponsors who have now made contractual commitments to sponsorship. [54433]

Mr. Mandelson *[holding answer 31 July 1998]:* As announced by the New Millennium Experience Company (NMEC) in its press release on 24 February 1998, the total sponsorship support from these companies for the Millennium Experience is £58.8 million. Press releases were issued on the same day by British Telecom (BT), BSkyB, Manpower, and Tesco—the first four Founding Partner sponsors. BT's said that it was

"investing £12 million in the national Millennium programme",

BSkyB's said that it will be

"committing a minimum of £12 million to the project",

Manpower's said that its president

"confirmed the £12 million",

and Tesco's said that their total

"investment would be £12 million".

British Airways and BAA together, as confirmed in the NMEC's February press release, are providing £10.8 million. Marks & Spencer was announced as the fifth Founding Partner on 1 June. The Millennium Experience project, and its cash budget, incorporates both the Dome at Greenwich and a linked programme of country-wide initiatives, activities, and events running prior to and during 2000. The Founding Partner and other sponsorships span both aspects of the Experience.

Others who have confirmed their support for the Millennium Experience are the Corporation of London, whose press notice on 24 February stated that its £6 million sponsorship is on the basis that it is matched by City business; GEC and BAe, who have both been supporters of the project since its early development phase in 1996. Additionally, Camelot are official ticket distributors through their Lottery terminals.

I cannot at this stage name other companies in sponsorship discussions with the NMEC, or the potential level of sponsorship support under discussion or negotiation in particular cases. I must respect the commercial confidentiality expected by the companies concerned where they do not wish, at this stage, to announce their involvement. To do otherwise would jeopardise the NMEC's negotiating position and, ultimately, the success of the project.

Millennium Dome (Sponsorship)

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Minister without Portfolio, pursuant to his answer of 17 July 1998, *Official Report*, column *316*, on the Millennium Experience, what incentives he offers to individuals, companies or other organisations to sponsor zones within the Millennium Dome which are not available to the New Millennium Experience Company; what is the minimum monetary commitment required of them; and when that has to be made available to the New Millennium Experience Company. [52176]

Mr. Mandelson: The New Millennium Experience Company (NMEC) is responsible for all matters relating to sponsorship of the Millennium Experience. Its strategy is to deliver its testing sponsorship target through a range of sponsorship categories each with terms and conditions and benefits commensurate with the level of sponsorship involved. There is no minimum monetary commitment required. The timing of when the sponsorship is made available is a matter for the Company and the individual sponsor.

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Minister without Portfolio how much has now been committed by sponsors to the Millennium Experience; and how much of this is *(a)* in cash and *(b)* in kind. [51941]

Mr. Mandelson: The New Millennium Experience Company (NMEC) has announced a total of £87 million and has commitment at Board level from other sponsors, whose own commercial considerations require that details remain unannounced at this stage. This takes the level of sponsorship secured to above £100 million. Whilst the detailed negotiations between the NMEC and the companies are concerned with progress towards contractual terms, it is not possible to state the split between cash and in kind.

Energy Policy

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he will make a statement on energy policy. [54236]

Mr. Battle *[holding answer 31 July 1998]:* I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry to the right hon. Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood) on 29 July 1998, *Official Report*, column *354*.

Competitiveness Working Parties

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what is the current membership of the competitiveness working party on increasing business investment; when it last met; what matters were discussed; and when it will next meet. [54506]

Mr. Mandelson *[holding answer 31 July 1998]:* The UK Competitiveness Working Party on Investment last met on Monday 15 June under the Chairmanship of Lord Hollick to discuss the part business might play in implementing various of its earlier recommendations. Current membership is as follows:

Sir David Barnes: Zeneca plc
Professor Kumar Bhattacharyya: University of Warwick
Ronald Cohen: Apax Partners & Co. Ventures Ltd.
Chris Evans: Merlin Scientific Services Ltd.
Amelia Fawcett: Morgan Stanley Group (Europe)
Robert Fleming: Pace Micro Technology plc
Alan Hughes: University of Cambridge
Judy Lever: Blooming Marvellous Ltd.
Roger Lyons: MSF
John Melbourn: 3i plc
Magnus Mowat: Allen plc
Helen Murlis: Hay Management Consultants Ltd.
Tom O'Neill: Pilkington Optronics Barr Stroud Ltd.
David Ritchie: DTI West Midlands
Dominic Shorthouse: Rolls Royce plc
Malcolm Taylor: Bridgeport Machines Ltd.
David Watson: BP International Company plc

No further meetings are currently planned.

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what is the current membership of the competitiveness working party on promoting the best of best practice; when it last met; what matters were discussed; and when it will next meet. [54508]

Mr. Mandelson *[holding answer 31 July 1998]:* The members of the Competitiveness UK Best Practice Working Party are Alec Daly (CBI), James Dyson (Dyson Domestic Appliances), Sir Tom Farmer (Kwik Fit), Jackie Kernaghan (Forte UK), Tina Mason (Dutton Engineering), Professor Colin New (Cranfield School of Management), Amber Paul (Caparo Industries), Dr. Rosemary Radcliffe (Coopers & Lybrand), John Saunders (Business Link—Hereford and Worcester) Fiona Skinner (RF Brookes), Cob Stenham and Lynn Williams (TUC).

The working party last met on 1 July 1998, to review how its recommendations to the Secretary of State were being taken forward and in particular reviewed progress on the development of the CBI led national best practice campaign "Fit for the Future". No further meetings of the Working Party are currently planned.

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what is the current membership of the competitiveness working party on making the most of the information age; when it last met and what matters were discussed; and when will it next meet. [54509]

Mr. Mandelson *[holding answer 31 July 1998]:* The membership of the Information Age Competitiveness Working Party is as follows:

Barbara Roche MP, Minister for Small Firms, Trade and Industry (Chair)

Sir Jeremy Beecham, Chairman, Local Government Association

Alan Calder, Chief Executive, Business Link London City Partners

Julia Collins, Partner, Coopers & Lybrand

Sue Davidson, Director, BT Business Connections, BT plc

Brian Davis, Chief Executive, Nationwide Building Society

Ron Dunn, Chairman and Chief Executive, Ascada Ltd.

Mike Fischer, President, Research Machines plc

Balram Gidoomal, Chairman, Winning Communications Ltd.

Nigel Hartnell, Managing Director, ICL Services

James Uehir, Chief Executive, Ipswich Borough Council

Terry Leahy, Chief Executive, Tesco plc

William Sargent, Joint Managing Director, FrameStore

Peter Swann, Professor of Economics and Management of Innovation, Manchester Business School

Suzanna Taverne, Financial Director, Financial Times

Tony Young, Secretary General, Communication Workers Union

The last meeting was held on 25 June 1998, when Working Party members discussed a range of ideas on ways of promoting the potential Competitiveness Benefits of Information and Communication Technologies for UK business, particularly small firms. No further meetings of the Working Party are currently planned.

Multilateral Agreement on Investment

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will publish reports of the unofficial negotiations on the Multilateral Agreement on Investment which have taken place since the Ministerial meetings in April; and if he will make a statement. [54249]

Mr. Wilson *[holding answer 31 July 1998]:* My hon. Friend the Minister for Small Firms, Trade and Industry reported to the Commons Select Committee on European Legislation on the negotiations on the Multilateral Agreement on Investment (MAI) on 8 July. She undertook to keep the Committee informed of further developments in negotiations.

Wide informal discussions have taken place, both with other negotiating countries and interested parties, but no formal records are kept of these contacts.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans he has to ensure that hon. Members are given access to the full list of exemptions for each signatory of the Multilateral Agreement on Investment. [54250]

Mr. Wilson *[holding answer 31 July 1998]:* On signing the Multilateral Agreement on Investment (MAI) each country's list of exemptions will be published. At this stage in the negotiations, however, the full list of country exemptions is not available. Countries submitted their lists as confidential documents and we therefore cannot release them without the consent of the countries concerned. The UK, however, has always made its list available and has been placed in the Library of the House.

My officials will explore with other countries negotiating with MAI the possibility of making their lists public and, if consent is given, I will ensure these are also placed in the Library.

Balance of Trade

Mr. Stevenson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will list the balance of trade in *(a)* steel, *(b)* ceramics and *(c)* coal in (i) volume and (ii) value in each of the last five years. [53238]

Mrs. Roche: The information is given in the following table:

UK balance of trade in iron and steel, ceramics and coal 1993-97

Year	*Iron and steel*	*Ceramics*	*Coal*
Value (£ million)			
1993	678	222	-624
1994	756	241	-539
1995	721	320	-549
1996	515	350	-629
1997	231	224	-641
Volume (metric tons)			
1993	3,016	-100,500	-15,666
1994	2,321	-67,788	-14,244
1995	1,573	-13,322	-15,558
1996	2,544	-8,463	-17,001
1997	2,496	-152,390	-19,169

Notes:
Because of the diverse nature of the products included in the figures for ceramics (i.e. high value/low volume porcelain and low value/high volume items such as ceramic tiles and other construction products) the trade balance in volume terms can be erratic
HM Customs and Excise Business Monitors MA20, MM20 A and MQ20 Eurostat Intra and Extra EU Trade

Export Promoter Scheme

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on the operation and cost of the Export Promoter Scheme in each year since 1990. [54162]

Mr. Wilson: The Export Promoter Initiative was launched in late 1992 as a partnership between industry and Government which would spearhead the UK's efforts to win overseas business. The initiative involves seconding senior executives from British companies with appropriate international trade expertise to the Department

for about two years. Their role as Export Promoters (EPs) is to bring to bear their experience of particular countries and sectors and use this impartially to advise and assist both SMEs and larger enterprises. The initiative is now a rolling programme of recruitment with EPs being replaced as secondments are completed.

Employers are asked to bear their secondees' payroll costs although in practice the department has to make a financial contribution by negotiation in 3 our of every 4 appointments. The department provides support budgets for EPs for their travel, subsistence, promotions, etc.

Since its early days, when the target number of EPs was 100, the initiative has settled to a current level of about 80 EPs on secondment at any one time.

The cost of the scheme each year since its inception has been as follows:

	£ million
1993–94	2.0
1994–95	5.6
1995–96	6.3
1996–97	5.8
1997–98	4.6

An evaluation report of the Export Promoter Initiative in 1997 found it to be highly valued by UK business, and the current Government remain strongly committed to the Initiative.

Export Forum

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment he has made of the Export Forum's recommendations as to target markets. [53462]

Mr. Wilson *[holding answer 31 July 1998]:* These recommendations are being implemented in the new scheme of Support for Exhibitions and Seminars Abroad (SESA), which was announced on 25 March 1998, and in the rolling programme of target market campaigns which we are launching this year. Some, such as the Export Explorer for Western Europe, have already been introduced and others will follow in the Autumn. As recommended by the Export Forum, the list of target markets will be kept under regular review.

Export Opportunities (Defence and Security) Service

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will list the support provided by his Department to the Export Opportunities (Defence and Security) Service operated by the Defence Manufacturers Association and the Association of Police and Public Security Suppliers in the last year for which figures are available. [54166]

Mr. Wilson: The establishment of the Export Opportunities (Defence and Security) Service was one of the winning projects announced by the President of the Board of Trade on 29 May 1997 in the Government's Sector Challenge initiative. The Department is providing support of up to £101,625 over a period of three years. £8,587 in grant was paid in 1997–98. £10,699 in grant has been paid so far in this financial year.

Science Budget

Mr. Alasdair Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will list the spending recipients of the science budget in the year 1997–98; what the allocation will be for 1998–99; and what are the planned figures for *(a)* 1999–2000 and *(b)* 2000–2001. [54580]

Mr. Battle *[holding answer 31 July 1998]:* The information for 1997–98 and 1998–99 is as follows:

Science budget allocations

£ million

	Allocation 1997–98	Allocation 1998–99
BBSRC	183.300	186.549
ESRC	64.896	67.450
EPSRC	386.373	388.382
MRC	289.070	293.208
NERC	165.116	172.556
PPARC	191.850	191.628
International Subscription Reserve	8.800	15.213
CCLRC	1.450	1.462
Pensions	11.530	13.298
Royal Society	22.271	22.621
Royal Academy of Engineering	3.370	3.436
OST Initiatives	2.302	2.376
Joint Research Equipment Initiative	—	4.147
LINK/Foresight	—	1.000
Total	1,330.327	1,363.326

Because of the Comprehensive Spending Review there were no specific planning figures for the subsequent years. The allocations for 1999–2000 and 2000–01 will be announced in the autumn.

Competitiveness Advisory Group

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what is the current membership of his Competitiveness Advisory Group; when it last met and what matters were discussed; and when it will next meet. [54512]

Mr. Mandelson *[holding answer 31 July 1998]:* The current membership of the Competitiveness Advisory Group is as follows:

Sir Jeremy Beecham, Chairman, Local Government Association

C. K. Chow, Chief Executive, GKN

Sir Terence Conran, Chairman, Conran Holdings

John Edmonds, General Secretary, GMB

Dr. Chris Evans, Chairman, Merlin Ventures

Sir Richard Evans, Chief Executive, British Aerospace

Geraid Frankel, Chair, Industry Forum

Ian Gibsort, Managing Director and Chief Executive, Nissan Motor Manufacturers

Anthony Greener, Joint Chairman, Diageo

Jan Hall, Partner, Stuart Spencer and Associates

Terry Leahy, Chief Executive, Tesco

Judy Lever, Director, Blooming Marvellous

Dr. Tony Marchington, Chief Executive, Oxford Molecular Group

John Monks, General Secretary, Trades Union Congress

Rosemary Radcliffe, Head of Economics, Coopers & Lybrand

Bryan Sanderson, Managing Director, British Petroleum

Cob Stenham, Deputy Chairman, Telewest

Sir Richard Sykes, Chairman and Chief Executive, Glaxo Wellcome

Adair Turner, Director General, Confederation of British Industry

Perwegn Warsi, Managing Director, S&A Foods

The Competitiveness Advisory Group last met on 30 June 1998. Three main issues were discussed: the progress of the Competitiveness UK White Paper; a report from the Small Firms Working Group; and the competitiveness strategy for the South East Region. A date has not yet been fixed for the next meeting of the Group.

Departmental Environmental Policy

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what environmental activities her Green Minister has undertaken since being appointed. [50064]

Mr. Battle: I have considered "environmental-related issues" on a day-to-day basis, reflecting their importance in the work of DTI, and the Government's commitment to the overall objective of sustainable development. I have taken a number of steps to ensure that sustainable development is properly integrated into all of the Department's work. This includes: circulation of copies of the recently published guidance on environmental appraisal to all directorates and to staff at all levels, to be supported by staff training sessions; a series of seminars with prominent speakers from industry and NGOs to raise the level of understanding of sustainable development issues and the implications of our work; and a Sustainable Development network throughout the DTI and Government Offices to provide a focal point for two-way communication with the 50-strong Environment Directorate which provides a central contact point for advice and information to all staff on environmental issues. My Department has contributed to the revision of the UK Sustainable Development Strategy and work is underway on the development of a DTI sustainable development strategy.

Virtually all of the DTI's responsibilities, from energy, trade, and science and technology policy through to sectorial sponsorship (including that in respect of the environmental and waste management industries) to consumer affairs are related to activities which have impacts on the environment, and implications for sustainable development which can be significant.

I have made sustainable development a priority across my science and research portfolio, in particular with regard to the Foresight Programme. Through its identification of a vision for the future and the development of practical initiatives to realise that vision, it can make a substantial contribution in the life of this Parliament to our long term policy objectives. Foresight is already promoting a number of initiatives which have the potential to make an important contribution to sustainable development. For example, the Foresight LINK Awards launched on 1 September 1997 have a declared preference for projects addressing the broad theme of "A Cleaner World". Another Foresight initiative, the "Foresight Clear Zones" programme aims to help in the development of technology that will improve local air quality and reduce congestion within our urban centres, making them cleaner, but at the same time accessible and commercially thriving.

Awards have been made to six projects underway across the country that demonstrate "technology for liveable cities". The "Sustainable Technologies for a Cleaner World" conference on 19 May 1998, which I addressed, raised awareness of the market opportunities presented by the key environmental challenges of the future. The conference focused on future markets for cleaner technologies and processes and environmental products which will exist in 2010, in the UK and globally. It considered how the UK should best respond to these opportunities through R&D and other necessary actions.

I have promoted and provided practical help and support for the UK Environmental goods, services and technologies industry at home and overseas through the Joint DTI/DETR Environmental Markets Unit (JEMU).

JEMU has identified a number of significant overseas markets for the UK environmental industry and is helping the sector to exploit the commercial opportunities which these markets represent.

On 18 March 1998 my right hon. Friend the Minister for the Environment and I launched a business plan for JEMU which outlines the way in which the Unit will work with the environmental industry over the next three years.

Finally, I am developing systems for environmental appraisal of polices and programmes and implementing greening government operations. I have attended two Green Minister's meetings, a bilateral meeting with the Minister for the Environment, and gave oral evidence to the Environmental Audit Committee in relation to their Greening Government inquiry.

Millennium Dome (HFCs)

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Minister without Portfolio what air-conditioning units which do not emit hydrofluorocarbons were considered for use in the Dome; and if he will make a statement. [51290]

Mr. Mandelson: Despite an open and flexible tender process, only one proposal for a non-HFC cooling system for the Dome was submitted to the New Millennium Experience Company (NMEC). This proposed the use of ammonia refrigerant. However, the NMEC did consider a number of other possible cooling systems during the design process and reviewed options again following suggestions made by Greenpeace. In each case it was concluded that, given the unique nature of the Millennium Experience, the tight deadlines and fixed budget, the units that have now been selected offer the safest, most flexible solution. The chiller units for the Dome are hermetically sealed so as to give zero emissions of HFC in normal operation. Accepting that actual leakage is dependent upon maintenance protocols, detection and repair procedures, the NMEC is committed to a realistic target of less than 1 per cent. leakage during the year of the Experience's operation.

Millennium Dome (Exhibit Zone)

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Minister without Portfolio what progress he has made in defining British characteristics for the purposes of the @ Now Zone of the Millennium Dome. [48833]

Mr. Mandelson: It is not the New Millennium Experience Company's (NMEC) aim or intention to define British characteristics in the UK@Now exhibit zone. The content of the zone aims to explore the UK population's view of themselves and their country, and the perceptions of others about the UK. Research and consultation which the NMEC will be undertaking will ensure that the views of the UK public are reflected in this zone.

Millennium Experience (Environmental Impact Assessments)

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Minister without Portfolio, pursuant to the answer to the hon. Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn) of 29 June 1998, *Official Report*, column *67*, what environmental impact assessments he has commissioned of the Millennium Dome and associated developments including parking and travel arrangements, for the new Millennium Experience exhibition at Greenwich; and what plans he has to apply the green Government policy guidelines to further developments at the Greenwich site. [51406]

Mr. Mandelson: The planning application for the Millennium Experience at Greenwich submitted to the London Borough of Greenwich in 1996 included detailed assessments of the likely environmental, traffic and other impacts of the project. In addition to this the New Millennium Experience Company (NMEC) has prepared an Environmental Plan setting out an integrated programme of sustainable site management for the Millennium Experience site. This plan has been accepted by the London Borough of Greenwich as the basis for the delivery of the NMEC's environmental commitment. The plan is regularly reviewed and updated to reflect the evolving nature of the project. Additionally, the NMEC liaise regularly with the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions and take into account all relevant Government guidance and policy.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Diplomatic Staff

Mr. Jim Murphy: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the *(a)* individual and *(b)* combined total capital value of each of the UK's diplomatic posts abroad. [54681]

Mr. Fatchett: I shall write to my hon. Friend shortly and place copies of the letter in the Libraries of the House.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Overseas Property

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will list the properties *(a)* owned and *(b)* rented or leased by her Department outside the United Kingdom; the purposes for which they are designated and the annual running costs for each property. [54442]

Mr. Foulkes: The Department for International Development owns the following three domestic properties outside the United Kingdom each of which are used to house aid personnel and have an average annual running cost of approximately £1,000:

11 Hendikz way, Harare

11 Brentford, Harare

20 Epping road, Harare

Domestic properties are purchased only where there are significant cost advantages. A large number of domestic properties are rented on behalf of aid personnel overseas details of which could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

DFID leases office accommodation directly with local landlords in Pretoria and New Delhi. Annual running costs of each are approximately £400,000 and £100,000 respectively. Other overseas office accommodation is either shared or sub-leased from the FCO. A contractual Agreement is being negotiated with the FCO.

Written Answers to Questions

Thursday 3 September 1998

NORTHERN IRELAND

Northern Ireland Bill

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if she will list those persons and organisations *(a)* she, *(b)* her ministers and *(c)* her officials have met concerning the role of the Equality Commission and Human Rights Commission in respect of undertakings given during the passage of the Northern Ireland Bill. [55457]

Mr. Ingram: I shall write to my hon. Friend as soon as possible.

HEALTH

Departmental Vehicles

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many of the vehicles due for replacement by *(a)* his Department and *(b)* bodies listed in National Asset Register in (i) 1998–99, (ii) 1999–2000 and (iii) 2000–01 will be replaced by vehicles using (1) petrol, (2) diesel, (3) natural gas, (4) electric batteries and (5) other. [52628]

Ms Jowell *[holding answer 28 July 1998]:* It is not possible to provide the information requested as each case is considered, on merit, at the time of replacement. Each replacement must be justified and economic and environmental factors will be taken into account by the Department.

Tobacco White Paper

Mr. Syms: To ask the Secretary of State for Health on what dates meetings have taken place between health *(a)* Ministers and *(b)* officials and (i) the British Medical Association, (ii) Action on Smoking and Health, (iii) the Health Education Authority, (iv) the Tobacco Manufacturers Association, (v) representatives of tobacco retailers and (vi) trade ministers representing tobacco workers in connection with the preparation of the prospective White Paper on Tobacco. [53382]

Ms Jowell: Ministers and officials have met, and are continuing to meet, representatives from the organisations listed above and others. A full list of the organisations with which the Government has consulted, as work on the Tobacco White Paper has progressed, will be in the White Paper when published.

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what progress has been made by Her Majesty's Government in relation to the employment impact assessment of increased taxation and advertising controls on tobacco products prior to the publication of the White Papers. [53689]

Ms Jowell: Discussions are taking place with interested parties on all aspects of the White Paper, which will include a Regulatory Impact Assessment (RIA). Matters covered by the EC Tobacco Advertising Directive will be assessed in an updated RIA before being implemented in UK law.

Mr. Walter: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the dates on which meetings have taken place between *(a)* Ministers and *(b)* officials and (i) the British Medical Association, (ii) Action on Smoking and Health, (iii) the Health Education Authority, (iv) the Tobacco Manufacturers Association, (v) representatives of tobacco retailers and (vi) trade unionists representing tobacco workers, in connection with the preparation of proposals that may be contained in the prospective White Paper on tobacco control. [53727]

Ms Jowell *[holding answer 30 July 1998]:* Ministers and officials have met, and are continuing to meet, representatives from the organisations listed above and others. A full list of the organisations with which the Government have consulted, as work on the Tobacco White Paper has progressed, will be in the White Paper when published.

Task Forces

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the task forces and advisory groups composed of independent members which have been set up by his Department since 1 May 1997, indicating in each case *(a)* their remit, *(b)* their membership, *(c)* how many members are (i) scientists, (ii) engineers, (iii) small business people or representatives of small businesses, *(d)* any remuneration members receive for their services and *(e)* their budget. [53289]

Ms Jowell *[holding answer 30 July 1998]:* Copies of the information requested have been placed in the Library.

Continence Services

Dr. Stoate: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if his Department will ensure that continence services are not commercially retailed by providers of continence products. [54843]

Ms Jowell: In common with all retail organisations, continence product suppliers are free to make decisions on the products and services that they supply.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

New Millennium Experience Company

Mr. Ian Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what steps his Department is taking to encourage businesses to contribute towards the Millennium Dome; and if he will list those which have done so. [54464]

Mr. Mandelson *[holding answer 31 July 1998]:* The Department of Trade and INdustry will have no role as regards sponsorship of the Millennium Dome. As sole shareholder of the New Millennium Experience Company (NMEC) I will continue to receive advice on millennial matters, including sponsorship, from officials at the Department for Culture, Media and Sport. I would also

refer the hon. Member to the answer given to the hon. Member for Christchurch (Mr. Chope) today, *Official Report*, column *879*.

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if his Department is now the sponsoring department for the Millennium Commission; and if he will make a statement. [54391]

Mr. Mandelson *[holding answer 31 July 1998]:* The Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) will remain as the sponsoring department for the Millennium Commission. Officials from the Department will continue to support me in my role as the sole shareholder in the New Millennium Experience Company (NMEC).

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if the grant memorandum between the Millennium Commission and the New Millennium Experience Company will be altered following changes in departmental responsibilities; and if he will make a statement. [54390]

Mr. Mandelson *[holding answer 31 July 1998]:* No changes will need to be made to the grant memorandum between the Millennium Commission and the New Millennium Experience Company. I will remain as shareholder of the New Millennium Experience Company, and will continue to be advised in this role by officials from the Department for Culture, Media and Sport.

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when the shares in the New Millennium Experience Company were transferred from the Minister without Portfolio to the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry. [54392]

Mr. Mandelson *[holding answer 31 July 1998]:* No transfer was necessary as the shares are held in my name rather than my position in Government.

Foreign Coal Producers (Subsidies)

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will ensure that coal subsidised by EU Governments is not imported into the UK. [54657]

Mr. Mandelson: Our commitments under our membership of the European Coal and Steel Community and the World Trade Organisation prevent us from imposing import controls in the way suggested. But we have taken, and will continue to take, a strong line against European state aid for coal where it distorts competition in the UK market.

We have already taken action within the European Coal and Steel Community to prevent unfair competition from German graded anthracite in the UK market. We conveyed a complaint to the European Commission on behalf of Celtic Energy Ltd. setting out how state aid provided to Sophia Jacoba and Ibbenburen mines led to a distortion in the anthracite market in the ECSC and particularly in the UK. Following an investigation the Commission found there had been abuse of state aid and reached a decision on 29 July requiring repayment of DM20 million state aid by the German producers. This decision provides UK producers with an assurance that such unfair practices will not recur and should help to open up continental markets for competitive UK exports of anthracite. For the future it is important that the Commission interprets the Coal State Aids Code strictly; we question the continuing availability of large scale state aid for coal producers except in the context of clearly defined closure programmes. Elsewhere, we are examining carefully the extent to which Polish housecoal and power-station coal is being sold in the UK market at prices below production costs, and will pursue the matter vigorously. We will continue to press for an open and competitive coal market in Europe and an end to practices which discriminate unfairly against UK exports.

Written Answers to Questions

Monday 19 October 1998

DEFENCE

Strategic Defence Review

Mr. Linton: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what has been the outcome of the inquiry into the leak of the Strategic Defence Review White Paper. [55672]

Mr. George Robertson: A copy of the Strategic Defence Review White Paper was leaked to the Opposition Front Bench and to the press on the afternoon and early evening of Tuesday 7 July. As soon as I learned about the leak, I asked the Cabinet Secretary to authorise an immediate and thorough investigation into how it came about. This inquiry has been conducted by two independent investigators. It has now been completed.

I regret that, after extensive inquiries, the investigators were not able to identify the person responsible for the leak. They have, however, established the course of events on the afternoon and evening of 7 July with a high degree of probability.

The investigators concluded that on 7 July a photocopy of the White Paper was sent by an authorised recipient within Government to the Opposition Front Bench; and that subsequently four copies were made within the House and made available to selected journalists. The first newspaper to receive a copy was *The Daily Telegraph*. Further copies went to *The Times*, the *Financial Times* and the *Daily Mail*, apparently in phased distribution because of the bulk of the document being copied. The investigators found no evidence to suggest that, in addition to the copy sent to the Opposition, a second authorised recipient sent copies to the newspapers.

The investigation revealed some small weaknesses in the generally very successful procedures for the distribution of the White Paper. None of them was a likely cause of the leak. The necessary steps will be taken to ensure that these small errors are not repeated. In itself the leak was of no significance to national security. But I am naturally most concerned that someone working for the Government breached security in this way. Ten thousand copies of the White Paper were circulated under embargo in advance of its publication. It appears that only one of the authorised recipients did not respect its confidentiality.

The leak was a gross discourtesy to Parliament; and I once again express my anger and my apologies for the fact that it occurred.

Mr. Maples: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Lichfield (Mr. Fabricant) of 28 July 1998, *Official Report*, columns 198–99, what public opinion research was undertaken in May in respect of the public presentation of the SDR; how much it cost; and what was the purpose of the research. [54667]

Mr. George Robertson: My Department commissioned two items of public opinion research: a qualitative focus group study which reported in May 1998, and a questionnaire in an omnibus survey conducted over one week (28 May to 3 June 1998). The combined cost was £49,655.50. The purpose of the research was to explore the public's attitudes, feelings and knowledge regarding the key issues covered in the Strategic Defence Review. This was in keeping with the Government's declared objective of achieving a national consensus on the defence of the country.

Chemical Weapons

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment's evaluation of whether short-term exposure to mustard gas causes bone marrow depression and the resulting immunosuppression in the long term [54539]

Mr. Doug Henderson: This is a matter for the Chief Executive of the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency. I have asked the Chief Executive to write to my hon. Friend.

Letter from John Chisholm to Mr. Ken Livingstone, dated 7 August 1998:

I have been asked to reply to your question about DERA's evaluation of whether short term exposure to mustard gas causes bone marrow depression and the resulting immunosuppression in the long term.

DERA's Chemical and Biological Defence sector (CBD) has not performed any research into either bone marrow depression or immunosuppression following short term exposure to mustard gas. However, CBD is aware from both the available literature on the subject and the experience gained through assisting in the clinical management of Iranian casualties in the UK during the late 1980s that bone marrow depression and severe immunosuppression can result from a single high does exposure to mustard, particularly after liquid exposure under occluded conditions.

A total of four out of approximately thirty Iranian casualties treated in the UK developed bone marrow depression as a result of contamination of a large proportion of their body surfaces with mustard. This depression of their bone marrow and immune competency progressed rapidly and resulted in their deaths from overwhelming infection with a few days; such rapidly decreasing bone marrow function proved to be resistant to treatment with both blood and cell transfusions.

I hope this is helpful.

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment's evaluation of whether short-term exposure to mustard gas causes chronic skin ulceration and scar formation. [55329]

Mr. Doug Henderson: This is a matter for the Chief Executive of the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency. I have asked the Chief Executive to write to my hon. Friend.

Letter from John Chisholm to Mr. Ken Livingstone, dated 19 October 1998:

I have been asked to reply to your question about the effects of short term exposure to mustard gas.

I informed you in my letter of 20 August 1997, printed in the Official Report Col 660 dated 27 October, that DERA's Chemical and Biological Defence sector (CBD) has reviewed the available literature documenting the effects of short term exposure to mustard gas. In my earlier letter I explained that historical evidence from the

First World War, and more recent nursing of Iranian patients in the UK in the mid 1980s, indicates that short term exposure to mustard gas affects the skin, eyes and respiratory tract. The effects on the skin consist of reddening followed by blistering; similar effects are seen at the other affected areas. Once the blisters rupture, ulceration of the skin following; these injuries take a long while to heal.

The long term effects of mustard exposure have most frequently been documented in people previously employed in the manufacture of mustard gas. In a study of 488 workers from the Okuno-jima war gas plant, 115 showed pigmentary skin changes and 22 showed evidence of basal cell cancer and Bowen's disease (pre-invasive cancer). Thus far, there has only been one report describing the long term effects of mustard exposure on the skin of war veterans. A group of Iranian solders were monitored for almost two years following exposure to mustard during the Iran-Iraq war of 1984–1988. Of the exposed casualties, 41% developed pigmentary disorders. No other clinical abnormalities have so far been identified.

I hope this is helpful.

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment's evaluation of the effect on human health in *(a)* the long-term and *(b)* the short-term of exposure to phosgene. [55320]

Mr. Doug Henderson: This is a matter for the Chief Executive of the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency. I have asked the Chief Executive to write to my hon. Friend.

Letter from John Chisholm to Mr. Ken Livingstone, dated 19 October 1998:

I have been asked to reply to your question about possible effects on human health of long term and short term exposure to phosgene.

I informed you in my letter of 21 July [illegible] printed in the Official Report Col 472 dated 21 July, that DERA's Chemical and Biological Defence sector (CBD) was undertaking studies to determine the short term effects of exposure to phosgene as part of an ongoing research programme. These studies are not yet complete.

CBD's evaluation of the long-term effects is based on information available from the First World War when phosgene was used extensively. Inhalation of the gas causes immediate irritation of the respiratory passages. The effects on the lung, which can be fatal, may not become apparent for two to six hours after exposure.

If exposure does not prove fatal the lung usually recovers within a few weeks. However, the results of long term reviews of the health of First World War veterans exposed to phosgene have indicated that the incidence of chronic bronchitis and emphysema is higher in these veterans than in age matched control groups.

I hope this is helpful.

Women (Recruitment)

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to encourage women to join the armed forces. [55359]

Mr. Doug Henderson: The Armed Forces are committed to maximising career opportunities for women. In April this year, the number of posts in the Army open to women increased from 47% to 70%. Three quarters of posts in the Royal Navy are now open to women. Additionally, as part of the Strategic Defence Review, we announced that 1,300 posts filled by Royal Navy and Army personnel in specialists units attached to the Royal Marines would be open to women. In the RAF, women are eligible for 96% of all posts. Women are excluded from posts only where their presence would be detrimental to combat effectiveness, or for practical or medical reasons.

All three Services welcome applications from women, and are making considerable efforts to encourage them to apply to join the Armed Forces. In particular, the Army regularly publishes recruitment advertisements and editorials in national and female titles. The RAF has published a recruitment brochure specifically targeted at female inquirers entitled "The World at Your Feet—Women in the RAF", and has recently run an advertising campaign featuring the most senior RAF female officer.

Royal Ordnance, Bridgwater

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he has come to a decision on the sale of Royal Ordnance, Bridgwater to a French company. [54920]

Mr. Spellar: The position remains as set out in my previous answer to the hon. Member on 19 December 1997, *Official Report*, column *383*. The strategic implications of any joint venture between Royal Ordnance and an overseas company would be examined with great care as part of the consideration by the appropriate regulatory authorities.

Medical Officers

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what are the restructured pay scales for qualified general medical practitioners and general dental practitioners in the rank of major. [54915]

Mr. Doug Henderson: The restructured daily pay scales for qualified general medical practitioners and general dental practitioners in the rank of major will come into effect on 1 December 1998, and will be:

1 December 1998	*Pay scale*
Qualified general medical practitioners:	
On appointment	131.51
After 1 year in rank	133.53
After 2 years in rank	135.55
After 3 years in rank	137.59
After 4 years in rank	140.45
After 5 years in rank	143.31
After 6 years in rank	145.05
After 7 years in rank	146.78
After 8 years in rank	148.51
Unqualified general medical practitioners:	
On appointment	106.09
After 1 year in rank	112.81
After 2 years in rank	119.59
After 3 years in rank	121.62
After 4 years in rank	123.64
After 5 years in rank	125.66
After 6 years in rank	127.70
After 7 years in rank	130.56
After 8 years in rank	133.43
General dental practitioners:	
On appointment	124.36
After 1 year in rank	126.38
After 2 years in rank	128.40
After 3 years in rank	130.44
After 4 years in rank	133.30
After 5 years in rank	136.16

1 December 1998	Pay scale
After 6 years in rank	137.90
After 7 years in rank	139.63
After 8 years in rank	141.36

Gulf Veterans Medical Assessment Programme

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what resources have been made available to the Gulf Veterans Medical Assessment Programme for work from 1 September; what is the duration of Professor Harry Lee's contract; what is the total value of his contract; and if he will make a statement on the progress of the programme. [55421]

Mr. Doug Henderson: The Ministry of Defence has been running a Medical Assessment Programme (MAP) for Gulf veterans since Autumn 1993. In that time, over 2,600 patients have been seen by the Programme's physicians. A detailed paper covering the diagnostic results of the first 1,000 patients seen at the MAP has been submitted to an independent medical journal for publication. The MOD also plans to commission a thorough audit of the MAP later this year, focusing on all aspects of patient care and on the service it provides.

Following an open competition, Professor Harry Lee took up his post as Head of the MAP on 1 September this year. He has been employed on a two year fixed term appointment which, as is usual with contracts of this kind, is extendable. The salary range for the grade at which Professor Lee has been employed—Principal Medical Officer—is £41,606 to £64,346.

The annual cost of running the MAP is approximately £¼m. This level of resources is appropriate to handle the current rate of new referrals to the Programme. Accordingly, no additional resources have been allocated to the MAP as a direct consequence of Professor Lee's appointment.

The MAP currently forms part of the Baird Health Centre at St. Thomas' Hospital, London.

Armed Forces (Homosexuals)

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on his consultations with the chiefs of staff on the treatment of homosexuals in the armed forces. [52218]

Mr. Doug Henderson: The issue of homosexuality and the Armed Forces will be reviewed in this Parliament, as part of the policy reviews undertaken in preparation for the passage of the next Armed Forces Bill due in 2001. The Government will form a view on the weight of the evidence, taking into consideration EC and national law as well as the views of the Armed Forces. We will then seek to establish the way forward in consultation with the Chiefs of Staff.

Trident

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his Department's estimate of the explosive power of the nuclear warheads deployed on the Trident submarine system. [51884]

Mr. George Robertson *[holding answer 24 July 1998]:* The 48 nuclear warheads deployed on each Trident submarine will have an explosive power one third less than the 32 warheads carried on each Polaris submarine under the Chevaline modification. Details of the explosive yield of our Trident warheads are covered by Exemption 2 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

Departmental Vehicles

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much his Department expects to spend in each year from 1998–99 to 2000–01 on vehicle replacements. [54990]

Mr. Spellar: I have written to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Motorcycle Parking

Mr. Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many motorcycle parking spaces exist at each office or site for which his Department is responsible; and how many are secure spaces. [55260]

Mr. Spellar: Motorcycle parking facilities exist at a number of Ministry of Defence and Agency sites. However, records of the precise numbers and types of space are not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost. The provision of parking facilities in general will be considered during the preparation of my Department's Green Transport Plans.

Shipyards (Aircraft Carriers)

Mr. Etherington: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the United Kingdom shipyards with the capacity to design and build the two larger aircraft vessels planned for service from 2012 as announced on 8 July. [55278]

Mr. Spellar: There are a number of UK Shipyards with the capacity to design and build the two larger aircraft carriers planned to enter service from 2012. These include VSEL at Barrow-in-Furness; Harland and Wolf Belfast; Swan Hunter Tyneside; and the ship construction yard in Birkenhead previously owned by Cammell Laird.

The Procurement Strategy being developed for the acquisition of the carriers envisages a design, build and initial support contract being placed competitively with a prime contractor who need not be a shipbuilder. It is not, therefore, necessarily the case that the shipbuilder will be responsible also for the design of the new carriers.

Naval Field Gun Crews

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what was the cost of each of the three Royal Navy field gun crews in each of the last five years; [55645]

(2) how many service personnel have been involved and over what period in the field gun competition of the Royal Tournament in each of the last five years; and what was the cost of those personnel. [55646]

Mr. George Robertson: I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Gulf War (Compensation Claims)

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many claims for compensation from Gulf War service personnel and civilians his Department has received to date. [55649]

Mr. Doug Henderson: Up to 15 October 1998, my Department had received 116 claims for compensation arising from a variety of incidents from Service personnel and civilians following Gulf War service. These include claims relating to road traffic and other accidents which occurred in the Gulf region in 1990/1 and claims alleging medical negligence in the treatment of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). In addition, at 15 October 1998, my Department had registered 1,736 current notices of intention to claim compensation from Service personnel, members of their families, and civilian Ministry of Defence employees and contractors in respect of illnesses allegedly arising from the Gulf War.

Royal Tournament

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what injuries have been incurred by military personnel participating in the Royal Tournament in each of the last five years; and how many working days were lost through those injuries; [55650]

(2) what was the total cost to his Department of support for the Royal Tournament in each of the last five years. [55647]

Mr. George Robertson: I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Royal Navy (Undermanning)

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many Royal Navy ships are currently undermanned; of which types; and to what extent. [55648]

Mr. Doug Henderson: The major ships of the Surface Flotilla all experience a degree of gapping which, on average, amounts to 5 per cent. of the full crew complement, and in the case of minor ships this average is 4 per cent. There are no submarines operating below their full crew complement.

Military Satellites

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the UK's decision not to participate in the tri-national project to develop a military satellite. [55361]

Mr. Spellar: In the period up to August this year, the UK had been considering a range of procurement options, covering collaborative, National conventional, and Public Finance Initiative (PFI) options, for satisfying the Project Definition (PD) phase requirements for the next generation of UK military satellite communications, known generically as Skynet 5. The preferred option had been a collaborative programme involving France and Germany, known as Trimilsatcom.

Following a thorough evaluation of the options by the UK, it was clear that Trimilsatcom would not meet the UK's requirements in an affordable way, and would not be ready in time to replace our existing satellites when they went out of service. The assessment also showed that a National PFI approach had the potential to offer an affordable and timely solution. It was therefore decided that the UK would not proceed with the Trimilsatcom PD programme.

Future Offensive Air System

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) if he will make a statement on the timetable for the development of the Future Offensive Air System; [55352]

(2) if he will make a statement on the progress of his Department's evaluation of the Future Offensive Air System. [55351]

Mr. Spellar: The Future Offensive Air System, FOAS, will replace the capability currently provided by the Tornado GR fleet in the offensive support role in about twenty years' time. As confirmed in the Strategic Defence Review White Paper (Cmd 3999), a wide range of options to fulfil the FOAS requirement will continue to be examined, including manned aircraft, remotely piloted/unmanned air vehicles and cruise missiles. Feasibility studies into the various options are underway and are progressing well.

Joint Strike Fighter

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the timetable for the introduction of the Joint Strike Fighter. [55353]

Mr. Spellar: The Joint Strike Fighter, JSF, is a US Department of Defense project. The UK is participating in the Concept Demonstration Phase of the US programme as a full collaborative partner, JSF being a strong contender to meet our Future Carrier Borne Aircraft requirement. First flights of the JSF concept demonstration aircraft are scheduled for the year 2000. Subsequently, a decision will be taken on whether to join the next phase of the US programme, or to follow one of the alternative options currently being studied. The Future Carrier Borne Aircraft is due to enter service around 2012.

Training Exercises

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 30 July 1998, *Official Report*, column *444*, what was the outcome of the review of his Department's training methods; and what is his policy on future defence exercises involving the shooting of pigs. [55396]

Mr. Doug Henderson: UK military participation in the Danish Armed Forces medical exercises involving the use of pigs remains suspended pending the completion of our review.

HMS Cromer (Submarine)

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if the remote-operated submarine abandoned by HMS Cromer has been replaced. [54923]

Mr. Doug Henderson: On 17 March 1998, HMS Cromer was obliged to temporarily abandon her Remote Controlled Mine Disposal Vehicle (RCMDV) while assisting in the location of the wreck of a fishing vessel. As soon as HMS Cromer returned to base port her

RCMDV was replaced by a spare, in order to restore the warship's capability. As the original vehicle was recovered and will be returned to service shortly, it will not be necessary to purchase a replacement.

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what disciplinary action has been taken concerning *(a)* the logs of and *(b)* the decision to abandon HMS Cromer's yellow submarine. [54922]

Mr. Doug Henderson: None.

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when HMS Cromer's remote-operated submarine was purchased and at what cost; and what it would cost to replace. [54924]

Mr. Doug Henderson: HMS Cromer's Remote Controlled Mine Disposal Vehicle was purchased in 1996. As configured, the unit cost of a vehicle on this contract was some £230K. As the vehicle was recovered and will be returned to service shortly it is not necessary to purchase a replacement.

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when HMS Cromer lost her yellow remote-operated submarine; what attempts were made to find it; when the decision was taken to abandon it; and if he will make a statement. [54925]

Mr. Doug Henderson: On 17 March 1998 the Mine-hunter, HMS Cromer, dispatched a Remote Controlled Mine Disposal Vehicle (RCMDV) in an attempt to assist the Marine Accidents Investigation Branch in locating the wreck of the fishing vessel Margaretha Maria. In the process of making a positive identification of the wreck, the RCMDV became entangled in the sunken trawler's nets. Its location was confirmed but, as it could not readily be recovered at that time, it was temporarily abandoned to enable HMS Cromer to continue with each scheduled duties. The RCMDV was subsequently picked up by a trawler. The salvors have submitted a salvage claim but as yet no settlement has been agreed.

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he has settled the salvage claim in respect of the yellow submarine lost from HMS Cromer; and for what sum. [54921]

Mr. Doug Henderson: No settlement has yet been reached with regard to this salvage claim.

Chinook Helicopters

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to purchase Allied Signal Incorporated upgraded gas turbine engines for the Chinook helicopter fleet; and when the Royal Air Force will lift the reduced weight limit on British Chinooks. [55467]

Mr. Spellar: We have no plans to upgrade the Allied Signal 712F engines fitted to the RAF's Chinook HC Mk2 fleet, but we are pursuing the procurement of minor modifications to improve commonality, thereby reducing spares holdings, with the 714A engines fitted to the eight Chinook HC Mk3 aircraft to be delivered to the RAF in early 2001.

The Chinook HC Mk2 was cleared to operate to its full flight envelope at an all up mass of 24,500 kg under an amended Controller Aircraft Release which was signed on 30 September.

Training (Private Land)

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many landowners, and in respect of what acreage, have withdrawn their consent to military training on private land since 30 April; and what impact this will have on man training days. [54912]

Mr. Spellar: Four landowners have withdrawn consent for military training to take place on their land since 30 April 1998. The total land area withdrawn was 6,376 acres and 650 man training days were lost. Two of these landowners have since reinstated permission for training to take place on their property. The continued withdrawal of the remaining land is not expected to have any lasting effect because military exercises have been rescheduled to take place elsewhere.

Chevaline Nuclear Warheads

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence for what reasons the specific plans for the dismantlement of Chevaline nuclear warheads are deemed to be covered by exemption 1 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information. [55431]

Mr. George Robertson: Specific details of the programme to dismantle Chevaline nuclear warheads are classified as they could be used to provide insights into the UK's nuclear weapon production capabilities. The information was therefore withheld under Exemption 1 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

Trimilsatcom Collaborative Programme

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what has been the cost to *(a)* United Kingdom public funds and *(b)* each of the two tri-national consortiums of the UK's participation in the Trimilsatcom collaborative programme with France and Germany; and what were the equivalent costs to (i) France and (ii) Germany. [55472]

Mr. Spellar: Expenditure by the UK Ministry of Defence on work specifically associated with Trimilsatcom initiative has amounted to approximately £3.0M. Of this sum, approximately £2.7M was spent on studies, and the information obtained will be utilised on future stages of the UK Skynet 5 national programme. The balance of the money was spent on the Joint Programme Office which was set up in Paris to manage the programme. While no definitive information is available, it is believed that expenditure by both France and Germany will have been of similar magnitude. The MOD has no knowledge of the expenditure by the two trinational consortia in support of their commercial bids for the project.

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what will be the cost of his decision not to enter the project definition stage of the Trimilsatcom collaborative programme with France and Germany [55471]

Mr. Spellar: The cost to the UK of its decision not to enter the project definition stage of the Trimilsatcom collaborative programme with France and Germany is limited to those administrative costs associated with the Joint Programme Office, JPO, in Paris, which was set up to manage the project. These costs are currently estimated to be approximately £0.3M, of which approximately £33k is attributable to the UK's share of the direct costs of winding up the JPO.

VC10 Aeroplane (Repairs)

Mr. Maples: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what work has been carried out since 1 May 1997 on XV.108; who instructed that the work be done; what was the nature of the work; and what was the cost of the work and on which departmental budget it fell. [55563]

Mr. Spellar: I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Government Purchase Card

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what use *(a)* his Department and *(b)* its agencies are currently making of the Government Purchase Card; what savings he estimates are being achieved as a result; what plans he has to expand use of the card by his Department and its agencies; and if he will make a statement. [55174]

Mr. Spellar: The use of purchasing procurement cards was one of my Department's SMART procurement initiatives which was endorsed by the Strategic Defence Review (SDR) and we are implementing a pilot scheme.

A number of sites in support areas have been selected to pilot the Government Procurement (GPC) cards, which will be used to purchase goods and services such as motor transport spares, office machinery, books and training courses. The GPC will not be used to buy major items of equipment.

Cards will be issued under the Pilot scheme this month, and the scheme will be reviewed after three months. Introduction of the GPC across the Department will follow and will be based upon the experience gained from the Pilot scheme.

Procurement Costs

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 31 July 1998, *Official Report*, column 720, to the hon. Member for Cynon Valley (Ann Clwyd), for which equipment items he estimates that overseas orders have reduced the procurement costs in each of the last three years; and what is his estimate of the savings. [55644]

Mr. Spellar: I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Buried Ordnance Clearance

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he will commence the clearance of buried ordnance in fields next to the Defence Nuclear Chemical and Biological Centre at Winterbourne Gunner; and if he will make a statement. [54918]

Mr. Spellar: I have written to the hon. Member and the operation to clear buried wartime ordnance at Winterbourne Gunner will commence in November. A copy of my letter has been placed in the Library of the House.

Nuclear Material

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to the answer of 28 July 1998, *Official Report*, column *199*, if he will list the names of the contractors holding nuclear materials owned by his Department. [54866]

Mr. Spellar: I am withholding the full list of contractors holding MOD owned nuclear material under the terms of Exemption Category 1 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information. However, nuclear fissile material is held by the following contractors:

British Nuclear Fuels plc.

Hunting BRAE Ltd.

Rolls Royce & Associates Ltd.

Royal Ordnance plc.

AEA(T).

Employees Over 60

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many *(a)* men and *(b)* women employed by (1) his Department and (2) his Department's agencies have contracts of employment which permit them to retire after their 60 birthday. [53058]

Mr. Spellar *[pursuant to his reply, 30 July 1998, c. 451–52]:* I regret that the response I provided to the hon. Member's question on employees over 60 contained an inadvertent error.

My answer stated that civil servants have no formal contract of employment. Whilst this is correct for the vast majority of civil servants, following the formation of the Senior Civil Service on 1 April 1996, staff at that level have been provided with formal contracts of employment.

ENVIRONMENT, TRANSPORT AND THE REGIONS

Departmental Vehicles

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how much his Department expects to spend in each year from 1998–99 to 2000–01 on vehicle replacements. [54982]

Ms Glenda Jackson: I refer the hon. Member to my answers of 28 July 1998, *Official Report*, column *151*, and of 31 July 1998, *Official Report*, column *620*. Information on vehicle replacement costs will be available when property managers have reviewed their replacement policy in preparing Green Transport Plans. The first plans are to be completed by end March 1999.

Gas-fired Power Stations

Mrs. Brinton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what assessment he has made of the environmental cost in terms of emissions if no new planning consents for gas-fired power stations are granted before April 2000; and if he will make a statement. [55239]

Mr. Meale: I refer my hon. Friend to the Environmental Appraisal contained in the Government's White Paper on Energy Policy, which was published on 8 October.

Birmingham Northern Relief Road

Mr. John M. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement on progress on the Birmingham Northern Relief Road and projected completion of its various stages. [55314]

Dr. Reid: Progress on the BNRR depends on the outcome of the statutory challenge to the Orders for the Scheme, which was heard on 5 and 6 October. Assuming the decision is in the Department's favour, and there is no appeal, then the Orders for the scheme can be implemented. This should take about a year, with the road opening about three years after that.

Water Companies

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what powers private water companies have to require customers to pay for water in advance under the Water Industry Act 1991. [55562]

Mr. Meale: Water and sewerage undertakers' powers to charge are provided under section 142 of the Water Industry Act 1991, which enables an undertaker to adopt such methods and principles for the calculation and imposition of the charges as appear to the undertaker to be appropriate. But these powers must be exercised within the framework of the regulatory system overseen by the Director General of Water Services.

The long-established practice of water companies is to charge unmeasured bills in advance. Companies offer a range of payment options, of which payment in six-monthly instalments is the most widely used. Measured bills are paid in arrears.

Motorcycle Parking

Mr. Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many motorcycle parking spaces exist at each office or site for which his Department is responsible; and how many are secure spaces. [55255]

Ms Glenda Jackson: A summary of the spaces available for parking motorcycles is as follows:

Department/Agency	*Number of spaces*	*Secure spaces*
DETR (Central)	211	187
DETR (Agencies)	340	161
Government offices for the regions	26	24
A breakdown of the summarised information is as follows:		
(1) DETR Central		
Headquarters (Eland House)	20	20
Headquarters (Ashdown House)	15	15
Headquarters (Great Minster House)	30	30
Headquarters (Hastings)	20	10
Headquarters (Other)	41	41
ASD (Hemel Hempstead)	2	0
Highwood Pavilions (Bristol)	0	0
Traffic Area Network (various)	16	16
Procurement and Prequalification System Division	12	0
Air Accidents Investigation Branch	45	45
Construction Market Intelligence Division	10	10
(2) Agencies		
Maritime and Coastguard Agency	6	0
Driving Standards Agency	189	53
Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency	39	16
Highways Agency	76	72
Planning Inspectorate Executive Agency	20	20
Queen Elizabeth II Conference Centre	0	0
Vehicle Certification Agency	10	0
Vehicle Inspectorate	0	0
(3) Government Offices for the Regions[1]		
GO-North East	0	0
GO-North West	0	0
GO-Merseyside	0	0
GO-Yorkshire and Humberside	13	13
GO-West Midlands	0	0
GO-East Midlands	4	4
GO-Eastern	2	0
GO-South East	7	7
GO-South West	0	0
GO-London	0	0

[1] The Secretaries of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, Trade and Industry, and Education and Employment share responsibility for Government Offices in England.

Government Purchase Card

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what use *(a)* his Department and *(b)* its agencies are currently making of the Government Purchase Card; what savings he estimates are being achieved as a result; what plans he has to expand use of the card by his Department and its agencies; and if he will make a statement. [55177]

Mr. Meale: *(a)* DETR (Central) is not currently using the GPC but plans to implement a pilot scheme using the Card and it is intended that the business case will be prepared by December 1998.

(b) The Agencies are not currently using the GPC, but some have plans to implement the Card as follows:

Highways Agency

The Agency is not using the GPC at present, but plans to use it as soon as Visa have undertaken an evaluation in support of the agency's Business Case.

Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency (DVLA)

The Agency is not currently using the GPC; it has plans to introduce it although no specific date has been agreed.

Vehicle Inspectorate Executive Agency

The agency is currently using the GPC but intends to pilot its use by December 1998.

Driving Standards Agency

The Agency has no plans to implement the GPC at present but may do so at a later date.

Maritime and Coastguard Agency

The Agency is not currently using the GPC. It will be reviewing the benefits of using the GPC as a result of work being done by DETR and will decide by the end of 1998 whether to implement it.

Vehicle Certification Agency

The Agency is not currently using the GPC and has no plans at this time to do so.

Planning Inspectorate

The Agency is not currently using the GPC and has no plans at this time to do so. It is aware of its possible benefits and will continue to assess its suitability for use.

QE11 Conference Centre

The Agency is not using the GPC and has no plans to implement it.

Gospel Oak to Barking Line

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what discussions he has held with *(a)* Railtrack and *(b)* train operating companies concerning the electrification of the Gospel Oak to Barking line. [55515]

Ms Glenda Jackson: None. Railtrack is investing £40 million on the North London Lines over the next 3 years, mainly to improve clearances and remove line speed restrictions, of which £2.9m is allocated for electrification work between now and 2001. Railtrack is considering AC electrification for the route between Harringay and Wembley, but electrification east of Harringay is not proposed at present.

Bletchley to Bicester Line

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when he expects to receive proposals on the re-opening of the railway line from Bletchley to Bicester; and if he will make a statement. [55512]

Ms Glenda Jackson: Re-opening of this section of railway line forms part of the proposals received from the East-West Rail Consortium for a rail link from Ipswich/Norwich to Swindon. My officials, and those from the Franchising Director's office, are discussing with the Consortium the detailed business case for the project.

Standard Spending Assessments

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what representations he has received concerning the operation of the standard spending assessment formula for Inner London; and if he will make a statement. [55519]

Mr. Raynsford: We have received a number of representations about possible changes in Standard Spending Assessments and their effect in relation to authorities in Inner London and elsewhere. We are considering the arguments for and against the changes and expect to announce our proposals at the end of November or the beginning of December.

Mr. Lansley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if the latest ONS figures for change in population by county since the 1991 Census will be reflected in the standard spending assessment calculations for 1999–2000. [55426]

Ms Armstrong: We will announce our proposals on standard spending assessments around the end of November or the beginning of December. We have, however, received no suggestions that we should change the past practice of using the most up-to-date population estimates published by the Office for National Statistics. These are currently the mid-year 1997 estimates which were published on 27 August 1998 in the Population Estimates Monitor PPI 98/1 (corrected in September for four local authority areas and two health authority areas).

Mr. Lansley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will reform the area cost adjustment to the standard spending assessment for local authorities to reflect the specific costs they incur and the costs they meet arising from the general labour market pressures in their area, in time for the 1999–2000 financial year. [55427]

Ms Armstrong: A wide range of options for changing standard spending assessments were set out in the report of the Standard Spending Assessment Sub-Group. I recently met with the Local Government Association and the Association of London Government to hear their views on the 1999–2000 SSA Settlement. We are now considering the merits of all of the options for change, including possible changes to the area cost adjustment, and expect to announce our conclusions around the usual time in late November or early December.

Virgin Railways

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what meetings have been held by *(a)* Ministers and *(b)* officials of his Department with Virgin Railways to discuss their performance levels; and if he will make a statement. [55511]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The Franchising Director is responsible for overseeing train operators' performance levels. Following unacceptable performance levels, the Franchising Director has required all train operators to produce action plans setting out how they will deliver improved performance. He has also agreed improved Passenger's Charter compensation arrangements with Virgin Rail as part of the package of passenger benefits secured in exchange for his agreement to the acquisition by Stagecoach Holdings of 49 per cent. of the Virgin Rail Group.

GTRM (Steve Hedley)

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what representations he has received concerning the dismissal of Steve Hedley by GTRM; and if he will make a statement. [55516]

Ms Glenda Jackson: No such representations have been received.

Rail Traffic

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will list the projects currently being evaluated for the re-opening of *(a)* disused, *(b)* mothballed and *(c)* freight-only lines to regular passenger rail traffic. [55513]

Ms Glenda Jackson: Proposals under consideration for developing the rail network to extend passenger services are set out in the Railtrack's 1998 Network Management Statement. Copies of the Statement have been sent to all MPs and placed in the Parliamentary Libraries. Further copies are available upon request from Railtrack.

Detergents, Paints and Plastics

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement on the progress of the review of British Chemicals' policy on compounds in detergents, paints and plastics announced in July. [55365]

Mr. Meale: A consultation document "Sustainable Production and Use of Chemicals" was published on 27 July, and the consultation will last until 27 October.

The document seeks views on a range of proposals relating to environmental policies on common industrial and commercial chemicals. It addresses a number of key areas: European legislation on new and existing chemicals; eco-efficiency in the chemicals industry; research needs; streamlining procedures for addressing the risks posed by chemicals; and ways of improving the transparency of the process.

A Seminar was held on 12 October to stimulate responses to the consultation. A copy of the proceedings will be placed in the House Library.

Timber

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions pursuant to his Department's letter EE/p50/134/14/98 of 24 July what was the result of his Department's inquiries into permethrin timber treatments in Germany. [55364]

Mr. Meale: The Health and Safety Executive has obtained and considered a copy of the Study carried out by the Fraunhoffer Institute of Toxicology and Aerosol Research. The products tested were public hygiene insecticides which, where they are applied to surfaces, are formulated and applied specifically to create an exposed surface residue of active ingredient which kills insects when they come in contact with it. These differ from wood preservative insecticides which are formulated to penetrate the surface of the wood. Thus the study is of limited value for those considering the use of permethrin as a wood preservative in Great Britain.

Equal Opportunities

Mrs. Ellman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what guidance he intends to give to the proposed regional development agencies to ensure equality of opportunity for women in relation to employment, training and access to managerial positions. [53476]

Mr. Meale: Each RDA will be required, by its Financial Memorandum, to develop and implement an equal opportunities policy covering all aspects of its work, to be committed to and promote equality of opportunity, and, in the exercise of all its functions, to ensure fair treatment for all.

Highway Authorities

Sir Peter Emery: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans his Department has to amend the New Roads and Street Works Act 1991 to enable highway authorities to recover costs for time expended on dealing with *(a)* the issue of notice requiring the avoidance of unnecessary delay or obstruction by an undertaker executing street works, *(b)* the recovery of costs of a joint inspection to agree the apportionment of financial liability regarding permanent reinstatement, *(c)* the recovery of costs for time spent providing traffic management advice relating to street works and *(d)* the recovery of income lost during the suspension of on-street parking bays to facilitate street works by the statutory undertaker. [53764]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The Department has no plans for primary legislation to amend the New Roads and Street Works Act 1991. However items *(a)*, *(b)* and *(c)* referred to in the question appear capable, in principle, of being met by regulations under section 150 of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989. We are willing to consider a reasoned case for making such regulations if one is put forward.

We have already made regulations under the 1989 Act concerning item *(d)*. Item 6 of Table 2 in the Schedule to the Local Authorities (Transport Charges) Regulations 1998 provides that a local authority may charge for costs involved in suspending the use of a parking place. There is, however, no power for local authorities to recover income lost while a parking place is suspended. A major reason for this is that motorists can generally be expected to pay to park at other parking places in the area, which would increase the occupancy rate at those places.

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will publish his Department's analysis of PFI projects and the final data on the preferred deals. [55205]

Mr. Meale: The Department has not commissioned a formal analysis of PFI projects. General information is provided each year in the Department's annual report. The details of significant PFI deals are set out in Departmental press releases.

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions to what timescale the Government intend to publish PFI contracts. [55203]

Mr. Meale: The Department will make available on request all new contracts, including PFI contracts, to which it is a party. Those parts of contracts for which there are legitimate reasons for confidentiality will not be disclosed, although I would expect this information to become available after a limited period. This is in

accordance with the Department's policy to make available contract documents which was set out in a statement by Lady Hayman on 23 July.

Channel Tunnel Rail Link

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when he expects the commercial confidentiality restraints on the publication of the risk assessment in respect of the Government guarantee of the £3.8 billion loan to the Channel Tunnel Rail Link consortium no longer to apply. [55204]

Ms Glenda Jackson: As my right hon. Friend the then Chief Secretary explained in his answer of 29 June 1998, *Official Report*, column 28, the Government's participation in the Channel Tunnel Rail Link was assessed using a model of London and Continental Railway's future finances. The risk assessment was likewise based on that model, which will remain confidential until such time as disclosure would not affect the commercial interests of the company.

Rural Schools

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will estimate the effect on Norfolk's SSA calculation of the introduction of a sparsity factor in relation to rural schools. [55028]

Ms Armstrong: The Ward Sparsity factor in the Education SSA calculations contributes approximately £13.422m towards Norfolk CC's Education SSA for 1998–99 of £270.064m.

A120

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what is the start date for the A120 Stansted to Braintree road improvement scheme; and if he will make a statement. [55286]

Ms Glenda Jackson: This scheme is included in our Targeted Programme of Improvements listed in "A New Deal for Trunk Roads in England". That means that the scheme will definitely start within the next seven years, subject only to any outstanding statutory procedures. Detailed decisions on the timing of the schemes have yet to be made.

St. John's Wood Underground Station

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will ascertain from London Underground what the cost was of the most recent refurbishment of escalators at St. John's Wood Underground Station: what will be the cost of the newly announced refurbishment; and why the work has to be repeated. [55333]

Ms Glenda Jackson: In 1990–91 and in 1995, major essential maintenance work had to be carried out simply to keep the escalators running. At the time, London Underground did not have the investment funds available for the sort of work now planned for the St. John's Wood escalators.

Between 1 December 1990 and February 1991, £50,000 had to be invested in one of the escalators to replace life expiring wiring and systems connected to that wiring and also to fit replacement brakes. This enabled the escalator to continue operating to safety standards.

Between January 1995 and March 1995, £120,000 had to be invested on essential maintenance work on a second escalator. This work, to enable the escalator to continue running was, again, replacing life expired wiring and systems connected to that wiring as well as modifying the escalator controller. Had funds then been available for replacement, obviously London Underground's engineers would have preferred that route rather than the 'patch and mend' solutions which technical staff have been forced to implement over years of under-funding.

The work that is now planned is, rather than a repeat of this refurbishment, virtually a full replacement of the two machines. At a cost of £2.3 million each, every part of the escalators is being replaced, the step chain, the motors, the panelling, the DC to AC power supply conversion and the wooden steps which will now be replaced with metal steps. Only the metal frames that support the escalators themselves will not be replaced.

This is much more fundamental work than that carried out earlier in the decade and should keep the escalators running safely for another 40 years. The only closure necessary in the future should be for routine maintenance rather than the more fundamental work carried out in 1991–92 and 1995 or the almost replacement and rebuilding scheduled to be carried out now.

Salisbury Transport Study

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what funds he will make available for integrated transport and environmental schemes as part of the Salisbury Transport Study in *(a)* the current financial year, *(b)* 1999–2000 and *(c)* 2000–01. [55297]

Ms Glenda Jackson: An allocation of £250,000 was provided for 1998–99 for capital transport expenditure within the Salisbury package area. For 1999–2000, a bid of £2.844 million has been made by Wiltshire County Council for the Salisbury package, as part of the Transport Policies and Programmes (TPP) bids. These are currently being assessed and details of the settlement are likely to be announced in December. It is expected that bids for 2000–01 will be submitted in July 1999.

Roads (Wiltshire)

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (1) how he will include a bypass of Chicklade in his A303(T) road improvement west of Stonehenge; [55296]

(2) how he will fund the A303(T) improvement at Stonehenge announced on 31 July; [55294]

(3) if the A303(T) improvement at Stonehenge will include a grade-separated junction at Long Barrow Roundabout; and what are the reasons for this decision. [55295]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The scheme will be taken forward on the understanding that at least a third of the costs will be funded from Heritage sources. The precise

sources will be for consideration nearer the time but are likely to include contributions from the Heritage Lottery Fund and from English Heritage's receipts from a new visitor centre at Stonehenge.

A grade separated junction to the west of Stonehenge at Long Barrow Roundabout will be one of the options to be considered at the detailed design stage in taking forward the Stonehenge proposals. A decision will be based on the five criteria used for the Roads Review.

A series of studies was announced in the Roads Review to look at the problems on the trunk road network not addressed by the targeted programme of improvements. One of these studies will be the corridor London to South West and South Wales. Amongst its aims will be to consider capacity problems on the single carriageway sections on the A303, matters of safety, and the impact caused by seasonal traffic. This will include the section A303 through Chicklade. A decision on a bypass around Chicklade will be taken in the light of the results of that study.

A14

Mr. Lansley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will list the number of *(a)* accidents, and *(b)* resulting (i) injuries and (ii) fatalities recorded on the A14 between Cambridge and Huntingdon in each of the last two years. [55428]

Ms Glenda Jackson: Complete records are available only for accidents involving personal injuries. The Police do not necessarily keep statistics about damage-only accidents. The number of injuries resulting from Personal Injury Accidents (PIAs) recorded on the A14 between Cambridge and Huntingdon in the last two full calendar years is:

Year	*Total PIAs*	*Fatal*	*Serious*	*Slight*	*Total*
1996	79	0	15	107	122
1997	80	1	14	108	123
Total	159	1	29	215	245

Roads Programme

Mr. Lansley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will publish the quantitative criteria on which he based his selection of projects for inclusion in the Roads Programme. [55430]

Ms Glenda Jackson: This information is included in a document entitled *A New Deal for Trunk Roads: Understanding the New Approach to Appraisal*. Copies are available in the Library.

Countryside Commission

Mr. Letwin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will review the funding and resources of the Countryside Commission; and if he will make a statement. [54927]

Mr. Meacher: Since coming into power, the Government have undertaken a comprehensive review of countryside and rural expenditure. As a result of this review, my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister announced, on 27 March 1998, *Official Report*, columns *289–91*, the merger of the Countryside Commission and parts of the Rural Development Commission to create a new body to champion rural England and the English countryside. On 29 July 1998, *Official Report*, columns *246–47*, I subsequently announced that the new agency would, in addition to the grant-aid it will inherit from the two existing agencies, be given almost £9m extra in 1999–2000. Part of this money will be used to cover necessary restructuring costs; the remainder will enable the agency to make an effective start by strengthening its work in promoting and conserving the natural landscape, supporting rural communities and promoting access to and enjoyment of the countryside.

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions in what circumstances the Countryside Commission is obliged to take into account the assets of organisations to which it provides grant-aid when determining the amount of grant it allocates; and if it made such an assessment in respect of the grant to the CLA to promote the Access 2000 scheme. [55411]

Mr. Meacher: The Countryside Commission satisfies itself before offering any grant that the applicant organisation appears to be financially sound and has the capacity to manage the project to completion and to the standards required by the Commission's grant conditions. It made a full assessment in this case.

Organophosphates

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what is his Department's current evaluation of the extent to which *(a)* short-term and *(b)* long-term exposure to organophosphorus compounds produces chronic illnesses. [55334]

Mr. Meacher: Organophosphorus (OP) compounds are toxic and on present available evidence it seems very likely that exposure to high doses can result in long-term ill health in addition to acute toxic effects. What is still questioned in some quarters is the long-term effect of prolonged low-level exposure, and research has been commissioned into this. The research is being carried out by the Institute of Occupational Medicine in Edinburgh. Its report is expected next summer.

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will list the reviews and research into the effect of organophosphorus compounds on human health which his Department has initiated since 1 May 1997, indicating who is carrying out the research and when it is expected to be completed. [55335]

Mr. Meacher: Two such projects have been initiated since 1 May 1997 by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE). The first, an in-vitro investigation of the relative inhibitory effects of organophosphates (OPs) and carbamates towards pseudocholinesterase in human blood, is being carried out by HSE's Health and Safety Laboratory (HSL) in Sheffield. This project began in August 1997 and ended in June 1998. The HSL report is expected later this year. The second, a study of sheep farmers to investigate the hypothesis that genetic

differences lead to variations in individual responsiveness to OPs, is due to begin in November 1998 and end in October 1999. The study is being carried out by the University of Manchester's School of Epidemiology and Health Sciences.

Although not initiated within the timescale indicated, there is also under way a major 3-year epidemiological study by the Institute of Occupational Medicine (IOM) in Edinburgh on the health effects of prolonged low-level exposure to OPs in sheep dippers. The IOM report is expected next year. This research is jointly funded by HSE, the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and the Department of Health.

Empty Dwellings (London)

Mr. Love: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many *(a)* local authority, *(b)* registered social landlord and *(c)* private dwellings have been empty for (i) less than six months, (ii) less than one year and (iii) over one year in each London borough for the past five years. [55290]

Mr. Raynsford: The information requested has been placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

Mortgages (Insurance Protection)

Mr. Love: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what assessment he has made of the impact since October 1995 of private insurance protection in reducing mortgage arrears and re-possessions of owner-occupier housing; and if he will make a statement. [55291]

Mr. Raynsford: This Department has made no such assessment. However, DETR and DSS Ministers will be meeting the Council of Mortgage Lenders and the Association of British Insurers later this month to discuss their proposals to improve the cover and take-up of Mortgage Payment Protection Insurance.

Household Waste (Greater London)

Mr. Love: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has for dealing with the disposal of household waste in Greater London; what is the projected future use of *(a)* landfill, *(b)* incineration and *(c)* recycling in dealing with that waste; and if he will make a statement. [55289]

Mr. Meale: At present, decisions on the projected future use of landfill, incineration and recycling in Greater London are not for DETR but for the local authorities.

However, we recognise that there is a need for a strategic lead on municipal waste in London. That is why we will be giving the new Mayor for London a statutory duty to prepare and implement an integrated municipal waste management strategy for London. The strategy will encourage use of the various recovery, treatment and disposal options in line with the waste strategy for England and Wales which will be published by the end of 1999.

In the meantime, we are providing London Boroughs with up to £12 million under the Capital Challenge Programme to introduce kerbside waste collection schemes as part of an initiative to promote recycling across the city. In the first 18 months of the 3 year programme, over 1 million homes have been brought into the scheme and the recycling rate has risen from around 5 to 11 per cent. The future use of landfill, incineration and recycling will depend on several factors, including the Mayor's strategy, efforts to reduce the amount of waste produced, efforts to promote recycling and find markets for recovered materials, and the availability of landfill.

Bus Employees Superannuation Trust

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how much has been spent in legal fees, to date, from public funds, in respect of the case of the Bus Employees Superannuation Trust *(a)* in defending the case of the Department of Transport and *(b)* by the Official Solicitor, and others, facilitating and supporting the case of the Trustees. [55603]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The then Secretary of State announced on 27 November 1996, *Official Report*, columns *271–72*, that the Department was prepared to meet the legal costs of the NBC pension trustees, in order to pursue litigation in respect of the Bus Employees Superannuation Trust. Expenditure to date on meeting the legal, actuarial, and other costs of the litigation on the Bus Employees Superannuation Trust and the closely related litigation on the National Bus Pension Fund is as follows:

(a) DETR costs: £131,000

(b) NBC pension trustees (reimbursed by this Department through the Official Solicitor): £415,000

This expenditure represents 0.5 per cent. of the original NBC pensions surplus (after tax) of £122 million.

Transport (Women)

Laura Moffatt: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what measures in the New Deal for Transport will benefit women using public transport. [53473]

Ms Glenda Jackson: Our *New Deal for Transport* will benefit women using public transport by putting a greater emphasis on better quality transport services; providing safer public transport through initiatives such as the Secure Station Scheme; improving the quality of the pedestrian environment; and promoting land use policies which encourage local services. These measures are in addition to the mainstreaming of women's transport needs throughout the development and application of transport policies and programmes through, for example, gender audit checklists for transport planners and operators and revised Planning Policy Guidance taking full account of women's transport needs.

We are committed to improving transport services for women—the Ministerial Sub-Committee on Women's Issues considered the issue at its inaugural meeting.

Area Cost Adjustments

Mr. Rammell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what is *(a)* the level of area cost adjustment and *(b)* the proportion

of standard spending assessment comprising area cost adjustment for each local authority to which it is applied in 1998–99. [55284]

Mr. Raynsford: A table showing these figures for each local authority has been placed in the House of Commons Library.

Mr. Rammell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when he will announce his plans to consult on possible changes to the calculation of area cost adjustments. [55285]

Mr. Raynsford: A wide range of options for changing standard spending assessments were set out in the report of the Standard Spending Assessment Sub-Group. We recently met with the Local Government Association and the Association of London Government to discuss their views on the 1999/2000 SSA Settlement. We are now considering the merits of all of the options for change, including possible changes to the area cost adjustment, and expect to announce our conclusions around the usual time in late November or early December.

Radioactive Waste

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement on the impact in the UK of Euratom Directive 96/29 on *(a)* radioactive waste management policy for low activity, short-lived waste, *(b)* the recycling of mildly radioactively contaminated metals and *(c)* the existing regulations covering exposure of nuclear industry workforce to radiation. [54865]

Mr. Meale: Council Directive 96/29 Euratom, to be implemented by Member States by 13 May 2000, constitutes an updating of earlier standards in the light of more recent knowledge and its impact will not, therefore, be great. It lays down basic safety standards for the protection of workers and the general public against the dangers arising from ionising radiation; this area is already well regulated and the strict international standards governing it are, and will continue to be, applied rigorously.

The Ionising Radiations Regulations 1985 currently regulate exposures to ionising radiations in all industries, including nuclear. Since 1985, the exposure of nuclear workers has decreased considerably, and therefore, the impact of the Directive will be limited. Earlier this year, the Health and Safety Commission published a Consultative Document containing proposals for revised Ionising Radiations Regulations and supporting Approved Code of Practice in response to the revised Directive. The Health and Safety Executive is currently considering the responses.

Consideration is being given to those aspects of the Directive implemented by the Radioactive Substances Act 1993 (RSA 93) and associated regulations which control the disposal of radioactive substances on non-nuclear sites. A consultation document will be issued in due course on the principles involved.

"Access to the Open Countryside"

Mr. Tipping: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many responses he has received to his consultation paper, "Access to the Open Countryside in England and Wales". [55486]

Mr. Meacher: My Department has received over 2,000 formal responses to the consultation paper.

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what progress is being made to improve access to the countryside; and what plans he has for legislation on access to open land. [55020]

Mr. Meacher: The Government are considering carefully responses to the consultation paper, "Access to the Open Countryside in England and Wales". We are examining all options, both statutory and voluntary, for achieving greater access. We shall announce our conclusions as soon as possible.

Ministerial Visit to China

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement on his visit to China. [55031]

Mr. Prescott: The central theme of my visit to China was the environment. I was accompanied by a water industry trade mission and held talks with Zhu Rongi, Wu Bangguo and other senior Chinese leaders on climate change, water and other issues. All the talks were marked by warmth and goodwill, with excellent access to Chinese thinking on the issues we discussed.

On climate change, we had a useful in-depth discussion. The Chinese confirmed they were committed to a range of policies whose effects would limit the rate of growth of greenhouse gases. They agreed to an informal dialogue on climate change and indicated a willingness to co-operate more closely with the UK in related areas. Further talks between officials took place last month. These exchanges are demonstrating the kind of trust between key developed and developing nations which is essential to keep the negotiations on climate change on track.

The Chinese have accorded high priority to the provision of water and waste water services. They are suffering severe shortages, and climate change could make these worse. There is recognition at the highest levels that their aims can be achieved only with the help of the private sector and foreign expertise. Following my visit, I am exploring new ways in which we might assist the process, to help the Chinese learn from UK experience and to provide new opportunities for UK companies.

During the visit, we achieved a major success on air services with confirmation that a new agreement between Britain and China would go ahead, opening Shanghai to British carriers for the first time and providing extra services to Beijing for British airlines.

In other areas, I received confirmation of a freight forwarding licence for P&O.

My visit and discussions laid the ground for my right hon. Friend's visit earlier this month.

Advertising Structures

Dr. Vis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make

a statement on his policy regarding the granting by highways authorities of licences under section 50 of the New Roads and Street Works Act 1991 for commercial advertising structures and private street signs, or other structures promoting a commercial or sectional interest, upon land having public highway or trunk road status. [55480]

Ms Glenda Jackson: A structure bearing an advertisement may sometimes constitute apparatus for the purposes of the New Roads and Street Works Act 1991. Any decision about whether it is appropriate to grant a street works licence under section 50 of that Act in any particular case is entirely for the street authority (normally the highway authority) concerned.

In the case of trunk roads in England, the Highways Agency, acting for the Secretary of State as the highway authority, does not permit advertisements on land having trunk road status, with the sole exception of small signs identifying the sponsors of environmental improvements, usually at roundabouts, for which section 50 licences are not used. Erection of these signs is granted under individual agreements between Highway Agency and the sponsor, and the design and content are subject to Highway Agency approval.

Concessionary Bus Fares

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when he expects to implement a nationwide scheme of concessionary bus fares for pensioners; what impact this scheme will have on pensioners currently receiving travel tokens of a fixed monetary value; and if he will reimburse local authorities in full for the costs of implementing and administering the scheme. [55433]

Ms Glenda Jackson: Our White Paper 'Transport: The Way Ahead' proposed a minimum concessionary fare scheme for pensioners of half fare for bus travel, with a maximum £5 per year charge for a bus pass. Implementation of this proposal will depend on Parliamentary time being found for the necessary primary legislation. There will be consultation with local government and other relevant organisations about what future arrangements there should be for token schemes and other aspects of the proposal, including finance.

Water Charging

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will outlaw the practice of companies placing weekly water arrears payments on customers' electricity meters. [53913]

Mr. Mandelson: I have been asked to reply.

This is a matter for the Director General of Electricity Supply.

However, I understand that the use of electricity pre-payment meters to recover water debts may not be consistent with the provisions of the Electricity Act 1989. My Department has written to the Director General.

Renewable Energy

Mrs. Brinton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (1) what plans he has to increase the share of renewable energy sources in United Kingdom energy consumption; [48894]

(2) what Government incentives will be given to encourage the use and development of renewable energy and energy efficient technologies. [48895]

Mr. Battle: I have been asked to reply.

The Government are committed to a new and strong drive to develop renewable energy sources. At 30 June 1998, 235 projects, comprising 570 MW (declared net capacity) of renewables generating capacity had been commissioned under the four Non-Fossil Fuel Obligation (NFFO) Orders for England and Wales, two Scottish Renewables Obligation (SRO) Orders and two Northern Ireland NFFO (NI-NFFO) Orders. In addition a further 261 projects comprising 1177 MW of contracted capacity have been made in England and Wales under the fifth Non-Fossil Fuel Obligation (NFFO-5) Renewables Order, which I laid in Parliament on 24 September 1998. The purpose of NFFO Orders is to secure additional generating capacity from renewables in order to help them enter the commercial electricity generating market. NFFO-5 is the first step in our new and strong drive for renewables. I have also launched a consultation document on arrangements for incorporating the development of offshore wind energy into the Non-Fossil Fuel Obligation (NFFO) Order process.

Fossil Fuel Levy support for renewables under NFFO was around £116m in 1997–98. Separately, the DTI's new and renewable energy programme supports research, development, demonstration and technology transfer activities (£11.1m provision for 1998–99). I have already reversed the planned cuts in the renewables R&D budget which the previous Government had made.

Today about 2% of our electricity comes from renewables, mostly from large scale hydro. Non-Fossil Fuel Obligation (NFFO) Orders already laid or in train will add about 3% by around 2003 (equivalent to about a further 1000 MW).

Within weeks of coming into office, I instigated a review to consider what would be necessary and practicable to achieve 10% of UK's electricity needs from renewables by the year 2010 and how renewables can make an effective contribution to meeting requirements for future greenhouse gas reductions. The review, which is nearing completion, is examining the status of all the new and renewable energy technologies and the UK industry and their future prospects in both the home and export markets. It has also been considering what further research and development, and demonstration is needed. I expect to announce the outcome of the review later this year.

The use of energy efficient technologies is encouraged through a range of Government programmes, including the Home Energy Efficiency Scheme, the Energy Efficiency Best Practice Programme, and support for the Energy Saving Trust. The Government will be seeking views on further possible measures within their consultation on climate change later in the year.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Cervical Smear Tests

Mr. Austin: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many cytology laboratories in Northern Ireland are sending their cervical smears to other laboratories for interpretation. [55307]

Mr. McFall: None.

Dr. Starkey: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the average time taken for a patient to receive the results of their cervical smear test; and what percentage take longer than the recommended four weeks. [55209]

Mr. McFall: The average time taken for a patient to receive the results of her cervical smear test is three weeks. Less than 10 per cent. take longer than the recommended four weeks.

Dr. Starkey: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland for each health and social services board in Northern Ireland, what is the average time taken for a patient to receive the results of their cervical smear test; and what percentage take longer than the recommended four weeks. [55213]

Mr. McFall: The information requested is as follows:

Health and Social Services Board	*Average time for results*	*Percentage over 4 weeks*
Eastern	2 weeks	Nil
Northern	2 weeks	Nil
Southern	4 weeks	20
Western	4 weeks	20

Motorcycle Parking

Mr. Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many motorcycle parking spaces exist at each office or site for which her Department is responsible; and how many are secure spaces. [55258]

Mr. Paul Murphy: There are no separate records maintained of the total number of secure motorcycle parking spaces at government premises in Northern Ireland and this information could be obtained only at a disproportionate cost. Motorcyclists are, however, able to leave their machines in all government owned car parks and to have there the same level of security for their machines as for motor vehicles.

Government Purchase Card

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what use *(a)* her Department and *(b)* its agencies are currently making of the Government Purchase Card; what savings she estimates are being achieved as a result; what plans she has to expand use of the card by her Department and its agencies; and if she will make a statement. [55181]

Mr. Paul Murphy: The Government Procurement Card was formally launched in Northern Ireland on 2 April 1998 and a contract signed with Ulster Bank to provide full purchasing card facilities for all NI Government Departments and Agencies.

A pilot implementation is being undertaken by the Department of Health and Social Services, using the free consultancy available under the agreement to facilitate the introduction of the card. This should be completed by the end of October 1998.

Guardsmen Fisher and Wright

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland on what occasion she has met *(a)* relatives of Guardsmen Fisher and Wright and *(b)* the Scots Guards Association to discuss their case since 1 August. [55023]

Mr. Ingram: Since 1 August 1998, the Secretary of State has not met with the relatives of Guardsmen Fisher and Wright or the Scots Guards Association.

Civil Servants

Mr. Robert McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many candidates applied, in May 1997, for promotion to Civil Service Grade 7, and if she will provide a breakdown of the successful candidates by their religious background. [55542]

Mr. Paul Murphy: A competition for promotion to Administrative Grade 7 in the Northern Ireland Civil Service was launched in May 1997. The competition is a two-stage exercise with candidates deemed eligible at the end of Stage 1 to compete in individual Departmental competitions for promotion to Grade 7. A total of 414 candidates participated in the competition and, of these, 97 were deemed eligible to participate in Stage 2 Departmental competitions. Up until 30 September 1998, a total of 53 candidates have been promoted to Administrative Grade 7 following departmental competitions. The competition will remain open until July 1999. The community backgrounds of those participating, those deemed eligible to participate in Stage 2 competitions and those successful in obtaining promotion to date are as follows:

Community background	*Number participating in the competition*	*Number eligible to participate in stage 2 competitions*	*Number successful to date (30 September 1998)*
Protestant	265	54	28
Roman Catholic	134	42	25
Not determined	15	1	—
Totals	414	97	53

Fraud

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what steps she has taken in reported cases of *(a)* doctors, *(b)* opticians and *(c)* pharmacists who have defrauded the National Health Service; and if such incidents are reported to their professional bodies. [55532]

Mr. McFall: General medical, dental and ophthalmic practitioners and community pharmacists are independent contractors, whose contracts for services are with their respective NI Health and Social Services Board. Consequently, where cases of suspected fraud are detected, the responsibility for having these investigated lies with the HSS Boards. Following internal investigations, individual cases, where appropriate, are

referred to the police. In addition, each case is also considered for referral to the appropriate professional body.

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many cases of possible fraud have been identified in boards or agencies of the DHSS since 1995; and what steps were taken to investigate them. [55576]

Mr. McFall: The following table provides the information requested in relation to Health and Social Services bodies.

No cases of possible fraud have been identified in respect of the Child Support Agency or the Health and Social Services Estates Agency.

In the Social Security Agency (SSA) 8 cases of internal fraud have been identified since 1995 in relation to the administration of social security benefits. When internal fraud is suspected, a formal investigation is carried out in accordance with set procedures and under the direction of an Agency Director.

As far as external fraud is concerned, a total of 43,581 cases of possible benefit fraud were identified in the Social Security agency for the tax years from 1995 to 30 September 1998.

The Agency investigates all allegations of benefit fraud. Investigations are carried out by fraud officials and where evidence of fraud is found prosecution of offenders is considered.

HSS bodies

Year	*Total number of cases*	*Number of cases confirmed as erroneous*	*Action taken*
1995	1	—	Officer dismissed
1996	2	—	1 No further action possible. Individual responsible not traced 1 Police investigation handled nationally
1997	6	1	2 Currently at court 1 Disciplinary Hearing—officer resigned 1 No criminal offence—referred to Disciplinary Committee 1 Under police investigation
1998	9	1	4 under police investigation—one of which referred to General Medical Council 3 under internal investigation—one of which referred to Disciplinary Committee 1 Officer dismissed

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if she will make a statement on the report "Controls to Prevent and Detect Fraud in Family Practitioner Service Payments". [55578]

Mr. McFall: I welcome the report by the Comptroller and Auditor General "Controls to Prevent and Detect Fraud in Family Practitioner Service Payments". The report has been laid before Parliament and may be considered by the Public Accounts Committee. Parliamentary convention precludes me from commenting on the specific detail of a Northern Ireland Audit Office report at this stage.

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many cases of possible fraud have been identified in agencies of the DED since 1995; and what steps were taken to investigate them. [55577]

Mr. Ingram: The information requested is as follows:

1995–96: nil

1996–97: 2

1997–98: nil

1998–99: (to date) nil.

Recidivism

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many convicted prisoners released since 1 January 1997 have re-offended; what was the nature of their new offences; what illegal organisations they were associated with before their imprisonment; and what association they have with such organisations now. [55492]

Mr. Ingram: Statistical information in the precise form requested could be provided only at disproportionate cost. I am, nevertheless, able to provide statistical information on similar themes.

The following table includes information on numbers of convicted prisoners released since 1 January 1997 and whether or not they were convicted of scheduled offences. It also includes information on the numbers of life sentence or Secretary of State's Pleasure prisoners released since that date and those who have had their life licence revoked.

No information is routinely available on the overall reconviction of prisoners released since 1 January 1997; their reconvicted offences; or their current association with illegal organisations.

Table 1: Numbers of prisoners discharged from sentences of immediate custody since 1 January 1997 according to scheduled[1] or non-scheduled offences

Offence type	*Number*
Scheduled offences	898
Non-scheduled offences	1,490
Total	2,388
Number of life sentence/SoSP prisoners released	[2]47
Number whose licences were revoked	0

[1] As listed in Schedule 1 of the Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Act 1996

[2] All scheduled offences

Notes:

1. Releases up until 7 September 1998
2. Excludes those committed and released from custody in default of the payment of fine
3. A licence may be revoked if the Secretary of State considers that continued liberty would be a risk to public safety. In many cases, the licensed prisoner will have been charged with or convicted of a new criminal offence, but this is not required by law

Social Security Officers

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many officers worked from each social security office during *(a)* 1995, *(b)* 1996 and *(c)* 1997. [55585]

Mr. McFall: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Social Security agency under its Chief Executive, Mr. Chris Thompson, and I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Chris Thompson to Rev. Martin Smyth, dated 13 October 1998:

I have been asked to reply to your Parliamentary Question about the number of officers employed in each social security office during the years 1995, 1996 and 1997.

The total number of staff employed in each of our local social security offices and centralised benefit offices in the years 1995, 1996 and 1997 are shown on the attached table. The figures which include part-time and casual employees reflect the numbers of staff in post at 31 March for each of the years in question.

I hope this information is helpful for your purposes.

Staff figures for 1995, 1996 and 1997

Social security and central benefit offices	*1995*	*Total 1996*	*1997*
Andersonstown	121	115	134
Antrim	75	74	85
Armagh	67	68	70
Ballymena	69	75	64
Ballymoney	53	52	44
Ballynahinch	30	26	25
Banbridge	47	43	35
Bangor	69	71	67
Carrickfergus	52	50	39
Coleraine	97	102	102
Cookstown	44	44	42
Corporation Street	162	168	175
Downpatrick	45	46	58
Dungannon	90	83	89
Enniskillen	95	97	82
Falls Road	122	124	80
Foyle	175	184	183
Holywood Road	110	114	101
Kilkeel	33	32	18
Knockbreda	88	91	80
Larne	59	58	48
Limavady	48	50	43
Lisburn	89	88	67
Lisnagelvin	58	54	53
Lurgan	74	72	53
Newcastle	36	38	37
Newry	124	127	126
Newtownabbey	76	79	64
Newtownards	68	68	63
Omagh	68	75	84
Portadown	55	51	60
Magherafelt	72	80	62
Shaftesbury Square	107	106	79
Shankill	71	75	53
Strabane	74	68	61
Castle Court	1,079	1,092	1,068
Castle Buildings Pensions	142	116	[1]0
Commonwealth House Child Benefit Office	124	130	[2]0
Windsor House Child Benefit and Pensions	0	0	259
Belfast Benefit Centre[3]	641	675	596
Total	4,709	4,761	4,449

[1] Pensions Branch was relocated to Windsor House
[2] Child Benefit Office was relocated to Windsor House
[3] The Belfast Benefit Centre provides "back office" benefit processing services for several London offices of the Benefits Agency in Great Britain

PRIME MINISTER

Overseas Visits

Mr. Wilshire: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list those who have accompanied (i) him and (ii) his departmental Ministers on overseas visits since 1 January indicating *(a)* the venue of the visit, *(b)* the purpose of the visit, *(c)* the names of those involved, *(d)* the job of those involved, *(e)* the reasons why they were included in the visit and *(f)* the cost to public funds. [53840]

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 30 July 1998]:* All overseas visits by Ministers are conducted in accordance with the principles set out in the Ministerial Code. Information is not held in the form requested and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

However, I can confirm that since 1 January 1998 I have been accompanied by officials and others on the following overseas visits:

Date	*Place visited*	*Purpose*
8–13 January	Japan	Bilateral visit
20 January	The Hague	Bilateral visit
4–7 February	Washington[1]	Bilateral visit
20 March	Bonn	Bilateral visit
24 March	Paris	Bilateral visit
10–15 April	Southern Spain	Meeting with Spanish Prime Minister/Holiday
17–21 April	Middle East	Tour in capacity as Presidency of the European Council
1 May	The Hague	Bilateral visit
2 May	Brussels[1]	Special European Council on EMU
19 May	Geneva	50th Anniversary of GATT
1–9 June	Various European capitals	Pre-European Council Tour
17–18 June	Strasbourg	Speech to European Parliament
30 June	Frankfurt[1]	Opening of European Central Bank
1–15 August	Italy	Meeting with Italian Prime Minister/Holiday
15–25 August	France	Meeting with French Prime Minister/Holiday
26 August	Republic of Ireland	Bilateral visit
21 September	New York	Addressing UN General Assembly
5–11 October	China and Hong Kong	Bilateral visit

[1] Indicates that a Ministerial colleague accompanied me

On each occasion, I was accompanied by Private Office staff and security and secure telecommunications staff who travel with a Prime Minister on an overseas visit. This is in line with the practice adopted by previous Administrations.

Minister of State, Cabinet Office

Sir Raymond Powell: To ask the Prime Minister what are the duties and responsibilities of the new Minister of State in the Cabinet Office. [54704]

The Prime Minister: My noble Friend Lord Falconer of Thoroton QC will work with the Minister for the Cabinet Office in pressing forward the coherent formulation and implementation of policy across Government and the delivery of better services across the public sector. He will play a key role in ensuring greater co-ordination of policies across Government.

He will also lead in monitoring the overall performance of the Government in terms of specific policy objectives and policy outcomes, building on the Government's Annual Report published in July.

My noble Friend Lord Falconer will answer in the House of Lords for those matters on which the Minister for the Cabinet Office answers in this House.

Sudan

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the Prime Minister what factors underlay his support for the bombing by the United States of America of the pharmaceutical factory in Sudan; and what assessment he has made of the evidence that the factory produced materials designed to facilitate terrorist activities. [55308]

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Prime Minister what assessment he made of the United States evidence on the role of the Sudanese pharmaceutical factory prior to giving support to the United States attack on the factory. [55440]

The Prime Minister: Our ally, the United States, said at the time of the strike against Al Shifa that they had compelling evidence that the chemical plant was being used for the manufacture of chemical weapons materials. It is established practice under Section 1(c) of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information not to disclose or discuss information received in confidence from foreign Governments.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Prime Minister if he will place in the Library the evidence provided by the United States Government on the role of the Sudanese pharmaceutical factory in the recent attacks on United States embassies. [55441]

Mr. Baker: To ask the Prime Minister what information was passed to his office, and when, by the United States prior to his endorsement of their air strike on Sudan. [55464]

The Prime Minister: It is established practice under Section 1(c) of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information not to disclose or discuss information received in confidence from foreign Governments.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Prime Minister in what quantity o-ethyl methyl phosphonothioic acid was identified in the Sudanese factory attacked by a cruise missile. [55456]

The Prime Minister: The Americans have said publicly that o-ethyl methyl phosphonothioic acid (EMPTA) was present in a soil sample acquired clandestinely at the plant and that this substance is not used in commercial applications; does not occur naturally in the environment; and is not a bi-product of another chemical process.

Cabinet Committees

Mr. Baker: To ask the Prime Minister (1) if he will list the Cabinet Committees on which the right hon. Member for Hartlepool (Mr. Mandelson) presently sits; [55460]

(2) what changes to membership of Cabinet Committees have been made since the Cabinet reshuffle. [55462]

The Prime Minister: I will make a statement shortly.

Counter-terrorism

Mr. Baker: To ask the Prime Minister on what date it was decided to include measures to address counter-terrorism abroad under the emergency legislation to deal with the security situation in Northern Ireland; what factors led to the decision to include such measures; and if he will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: It had long been the intention of the Government to legislate against conspiracy here to commit terrorist and other offences overseas. We had made it clear that we would legislate as soon as the programme allowed. The decision to include the provision to make it an offence to conspire in the United Kingdom to commit offences abroad, in what is now the Criminal Justice (Terrorism and Conspiracy) Act 1998, was taken once it was clear that anti-terrorism legislation would be brought forward following the bombing at Omagh.

In the wake of terrorist activity abroad, including the bombings in Nairobi and Dar es Salaam in August, the Government concluded that it was timely and right to legislate in this way in order to underscore further our total commitment to defeating terrorism wherever it is plotted or executed. The Government's decision was subject to extensive explanation and debate in both Houses of Parliament on 2–4 September. I refer the hon. Member to the *Official Reports* of the proceedings. [55463]

American Air Strikes (Sudan and Afghanistan)

Mr. Amess: To ask the Prime Minister what assessment he has made of the impact on British nationals in *(a)* Sudan and *(b)* Afghanistan of his support for American air strikes on those countries. [55507]

The Prime Minister: The British Government's determination to fight terrorism in all its forms, wherever it may occur and whatever its motivation, is well-known. So is our commitment to the rule of law and to the UN Charter. The Government of the United Kingdom will continue to vigorously support firm action against international terrorism. Terrorists must not be allowed to act with impunity.

There are no reports of British nationals being directly affected as a result of or in reaction to the American action. However, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office has been advising against travel to Afghanistan since 1990 and to Sudan since 21 August 1998. On 25 August 1998 it advised British nationals in Afghanistan to leave immediately. On 27 August British nationals in Sudan were advised to leave unless they had a compelling reason to remain.

There is currently no resident British mission in either country. The British High Commission in Islamabad reports that they are unaware of any British nationals resident in Afghanistan but knows that a small number have visited for short periods since 25 August. The British High Commission in Nairobi reports that there are at present approximately 180 British nationals in Sudan.

Anglo-American Relations

Mr. Amess: To ask the Prime Minister if he will make a statement on the United Kingdom's relations with the United States Government; and when he next plans to meet President Clinton. [55509]

The Prime Minister: Having met President Clinton on a number of occasions, most recently in New York in September, I have no immediate plans to meet him again. However, we are in regular contact.

Government Annual Report

Mr. Amess: To ask the Prime Minister what responses he has received to the Government Annual Report 1997–98; and if he will place them in the Library. [55508]

The Prime Minister: I have received many constructive responses to the Government's Annual Report 1997–98 in the form of letters, faxes and e-mails to the No. 10 website. It would not be appropriate to place copies in the Library as those who replied did so on the understanding that their comments were in confidence. However, I plan to include a summary of the replies received in next year's Report.

European Union (UK Presidency)

Sir Richard Body: To ask the Prime Minister what representations he has received from other European Union countries on the representation of member states in the logo for the United Kingdom presidency. [55394]

The Prime Minister: A number of EU Governments commented on the logo. I am happy to say it was a considerable success.

European Movement

Sir Richard Body: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list the occasions since 1 May when his Office has held meetings with representatives of the European Movement; and if he will make a statement on the issues discussed. [55330]

The Prime Minister: My staff and I have meetings with a wide range of organisations and individuals.

Cabinet Meetings

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Prime Minister, pursuant to his answer of 31 July 1998, *Official Report*, column *604*, if he will list those occasions when the Cabinet has met when Parliament was not in session. [55566]

The Prime Minister: Cabinet has met on a number of occasions when Parliament is not in session.

House of Lords Reform

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Prime Minister what *(a)* consultations he has held and *(b)* reports he has commissioned on (i) abolition of the sitting and voting rights of hereditary peers in the House of Lords and (ii) other reforms of the membership of the House of Lords; and when he proposes to take action on these issues. [55393]

The Prime Minister: The Government will fulfil their Manifesto commitment to abolish the rights of hereditary peers to sit and vote in the House of Lords as a self-contained measure, without further consultation. The Manifesto also made clear our commitment to a wide-ranging review leading to proposals for further comprehensive reform of the House. We intend to establish a time-limited Royal commission to undertake a full examination of the longer term issues. In the meantime we are committed to changing the way that peers are appointed to the transitional House to ensure that the process is modern, transparent and fair.

Lobbyists

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Prime Minister what representations he has received calling for the Government to establish a statutory register of lobbyists; if he will list them; and if he will make a statement. [55202]

The Prime Minister: As far as I am aware, none.

Ministerial Travel

Mr. Maples: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list the rules governing the use of *(a)* RAF planes and *(b)* private charter flights by Ministers; if rules have changed since 1 May 1997; and if departments have to meet the full cost of such use. [55510]

The Prime Minister: The Ministerial Code requires Ministers always to make efficient and cost effective travel arrangements. This principle applies to the use of RAF aircraft and private charter flights. The rules have not changed since 1 May 1997. When Departments charter private aircraft for Ministerial travel they meet the charter costs in full. They also pay for RAF aircraft charges, which are calculated by the hour.

Cabinet Office

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Prime Minister, pursuant to his answer to my hon. Friend for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody) of 28 July 1998, *Official Report*, columns *132–34*, what new resources will be committed to funding the New Centre for Management and Policy Studies within the Cabinet Office; if the research the centre will commission will be published; and if the centre will be covered by the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information. [54867]

Mr. Kilfoyle: I have been asked to reply.

The cost of setting up the new Centre for Management and Policy Studies will be within the CSR settlement agreed for the Cabinet Office. My officials are continuing discussions on implementing the changes announced in the House by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister. Decisions to publish research commissioned by the Centre will be based on its appropriateness. The Centre is expected to abide by the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Parliamentary Timetable

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the President of the Council what progress he has made in proposals for announcing the annual parliamentary timetable in advance. [53590]

Mrs. Beckett: The Modernisation Committee is considering proposals on the parliamentary calendar and I hope it will be able to report soon.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

National Lottery Distribution Fund

Mr. Fabricant: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what is his current forecast of the percentage of the National Lottery Distribution Fund which will be given to each of the good causes in each year from 1999 to 2003. [55589]

Mr. Banks: The National Lottery Act 1998 provided for Lottery income for good causes to be apportioned as follows:

	Percentage
Arts	16⅔
Sport	16⅔
Charities	16⅔
Heritage	16⅔
Projects to mark the Millennium	20
Health, education or the environment (New Opportunities Fund)	13⅓

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has announced that the arts, sport, heritage and charities are each guaranteed 16⅔ per cent. of Lottery proceeds for good causes after the current licence expires in 2001. He has also announced that, due to an increase in forecast Lottery income, these good causes will each receive £50 million more than previously forecast during the licence period, and that the New Opportunities Fund will receive an additional £400 million. This will require adjustments to the current percentage shares and the Government will lay an Order in due course, after consulting the Lottery distributors, to give effect to the necessary changes. When the Millennium Commission has received £2,017 billion, its share will go to the New Opportunities Fund.

Mr. Fabricant: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what is his current forecast of the date on which the Millennium Commission will cease to receive income from the National Lottery Distribution Fund. [55590]

Mr. Banks: The Millennium Commission has been guaranteed a total income of £2.017 billion. When this is reached, its share of income from the National Lottery will go to the New Opportunities Fund. The National Lottery etc. Act 1993 provided for the Commission's funding to continue until 31 December 2000. If it is necessary to extend the Commission's funding life beyond that date, the Government have the power by Order to do so. The Government are currently considering the implications for the Commission of the revised forecast of Lottery income and will make a further announcement in due course.

Motorcycle Parking

Mr. Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many motorcycle parking spaces exist at each office or site for which his Department is responsible; and how many are secure. [55252]

Mr. Chris Smith: My Department does not provide any formal motorcycle parking spaces. However, up to five motorcycles can be securely accommodated in one of our HQ buildings.

A303(T)

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how much money and from which budget head he will commit to the dualling of the A303(T) through the world heritage site at Stonehenge. [55293]

Mr. Alan Howarth: At least one third of the costs will be funded from heritage sources. The precise sources will be for consideration nearer the time, but we envisage that this funding is likely to include contributions from the Heritage Lottery Fund and English Heritage's receipts from a new visitor centre.

Government Purchase Card

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what use *(a)* his Department and *(b)* its agencies are currently making of the Government Purchase Card; what savings he estimates are being achieved as a result; what plans he has to expand use of the card by his Department and its agencies; and if he will make a statement. [55173]

Mr. Chris Smith: My Department plans to implement the Government Procurement Card by the 1999–2000 financial year subject to the outcome of a consultancy exercise which is currently taking place to look at our current processes in order to establish an estimate of any savings. The Royal Parks Agency is also working towards its implementation, but no planned adoption date has yet been established.

BBC

Mr. Wyatt: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (1) if he will urgently review the regulatory role of the BBC Board of Governors; and if he will make a statement; [55277]

(2) if he will add proposals for reform of the BBC's self-regulatory structure into his Department's Green Paper. [55276]

Janet Anderson: There are no plans to review the regulatory role of the BBC Board of Governors.

The Green Paper on the future regulation of broadcasting and telecommunications was published on 21 July. It argues that the present system of regulation has sufficient flexibility to deal with developments in these markets for some time. Views are invited on when it will become necessary to make fundamental changes to the regime, and what regulatory aims, methods and structure might then be appropriate. Decisions on these broad issues must precede consideration of specifics such as the future regulation of public service broadcasting.

World Heritage List Sites

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what role his Department plays in ensuring the protection of sites listed on the World Heritage List outside the United Kingdom; which international bodies have a co-ordinating responsibility; and what liaison takes place between his Department and other departments in protecting such sites. [55416]

Mr. Alan Howarth: My Department liaises closely with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office on current and possible future World Heritage Sites in the UK Overseas Territories. The protection of World Heritage Sites outside the UK and its overseas Territories is the responsibility of the countries concerned. My Department, by agreement with the Home Country Departments, represents the UK as an Observer at meetings of UNESCO's World Heritage Committee (which inter alia considers the protection of sites in accordance with the World Heritage Convention) and pays an annual subscription (£111,215 for 1998) to UNESCO's World Heritage Fund which is used to assist endangered sites. These meetings are also attended by the International Council on Monuments and Sites, and the International Union for the Conservation of Nature, who are the official advisers to UNESCO on cultural and natural heritage issues respectively.

TREASURY

Departmental Vehicles

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much his Department expects to spend in each year from 1998–99 to 2000–01 on vehicle replacements. [54981]

Dawn Primarolo: The Chancellor of the Exchequer expects that his Departments will spend the following amounts on vehicle replacement in the years shown:

1998–1999: £5.9m

1999–2000: £6.1m

2000–2001: £6.2m.

Museum, Arts and Sport Funding

Mr. Denzil Davies: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his oral statement of 14 July 1998, *Official Report*, column 193, what proportion of the £290 million extra resources will come from savings made through cutting quangos. [54926]

Mr. Byers: The Department for Culture, Media and Sport has been allocated £290 million extra resources over the next three years. Further details were announced and consultation papers were issued on 24 July, explaining that, in return for the additional funding, cultural, heritage, tourism and sports organisations will be expected to reform, cut bureaucracy including streamlining quangos and meet the Government's objectives of improving access and achieving excellence. Proposals were set out for new streamlined structures in the arts, in film and in museums and libraries, and to streamline the public body structure in the built heritage, tourism and sports. Final decisions will be made in the light of this consultation.

Government Purchase Card

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what use *(a)* his Department and *(b)* its agencies are currently making of the Government Purchase Card; what savings he estimates are being achieved as a result; what plans he has to expand use of the card by his Department and its agencies; and if he will make a statement. [55166]

Ms Hewitt: The Treasury and its agency, the Debt Management Office, introduced the Government Procurement Card in May of this year and it is now in its third month of live use. There are currently 41 cardholders. The potential savings made until the 23 July were in the region of £4,000 on 129 transactions with a value of £13,800. The departmental policy encourages anyone to have a card who needs to buy low value items for operational reasons.

Childcare Tax Credits

Mr. Webb: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the cost to the Exchequer of the childcare tax credit element of the proposed working families tax credit; and how much of this expenditure will go to those who would otherwise be *(a)* non-taxpayers, *(b)* lower rate taxpayers, *(c)* standard rate taxpayers and *(d)* higher rate taxpayers. [55386]

Dawn Primarolo: The latest estimate of the cost of the childcare tax credit in the Working Families Tax Credit is £200 million in 2000–01, the first full year of the tax credit. Reliable estimates of the cost by the marginal rate of tax of the recipient are not available.

Terrorism Reinsurance Premiums

Mr. Caplin: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he has authorised the Pool Reinsurance Company Limited to change the terrorism reinsurance premiums in 1999; and if he will make a statement. [55670]

Ms Hewitt: I have agreed that premiums in 1999 should, as in 1998, be discounted provided the good claims experience of the past two years continues.

Therefore, from 1 January 1999, the premiums payable for all zones will be discounted by 85 per cent. The discount will be withdrawn if, in the course of the year, significant new claims are notified to Pool Re. This would affect subsequent new or renewed policies.

In addition, other changes to the premium tariff will be introduced which should help simplify the administration of the scheme and reduce its costs.

Arrangements for subsequent years will be determined in the light of experience.

Despite the relatively low level of terrorist activity on the mainland recently, experience has shown that businesses in Great Britain would be well advised to maintain full insurance cover against terrorist damage. This applies whether it is bought through the Government backed arrangements operated by Pool Re or through the alternative arrangements that have been appearing in the insurance market.

Economic and Monetary Union

Sir Richard Body: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if the EMU preparation unit in his Department will have access to funds to print material for general distribution. [55341]

Ms Hewitt: The Government's communication campaign on the euro, which is managed by the Euro Preparations Unit, is aimed not at the general public but at ensuring that UK businesses, especially small and medium sized firms, are aware of the implications of the introduction of the single currency from 1 January 1999.

Sir Richard Body: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to the answer to the hon. Member for Exeter (Mr. Bradshaw) of 16 June 1998, *Official Report*, column *135*, if he will make a statement on the nature of his most recent discussions on the political implications of economic and monetary union with *(a)* EU colleagues and *(b)* hon. Members. [55390]

Ms Hewitt: The Chancellor continues to meet ECOFIN colleagues on a regular basis to discuss a wide range of matters relating to Economic and Monetary Union. Details of ECOFIN meetings are reported to the House.

The House debated all aspects of Economic and Monetary Union on 30 April 1998, *Official Report*, columns *477–519*, in advance of the EMU Special council meeting held on 1–2 May. On 21 July 1998, *Official Repot*, columns, *978–1022* the House held a further debate on EMU as part of an Opposition day debate.

The Government recognise that membership of a single currency has important constitutional implications. We recognise that, to share a common monetary policy with other Member states represents a major pooling of economic sovereignty. But we believe that if the economic case for joining the single currency is clear and unambiguous, then Britain should be part of it. There is no constitutional bar to British membership of the single currency. Nevertheless, we have said that the constitutional implications of joining the single currency are such that any decision by the UK Government to join would require the endorsement of both Parliament and the British people in a referendum.

Sir Richard Body: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what criteria will be used to select non-civil servants serving on the EMU preparation unit in his Department. [55344]

Ms Hewitt: The Chancellor of the Exchequer announced in November last year that the Euro Preparations Unit would be set up to raise awareness and encourage preparatory activity across the UK economy. The unit is staffed by officials from DTI, DfEE and HM Treasury as well as a secondee from HSBC Midland with extensive small business experience.

Motorcycle Parking

Mr. Brake: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many motorcycle parking spaces exist at each office or site for which his Department is responsible; and how many are secure spaces. [55265]

Ms Hewitt: There are 22 motorcycle parking spaces at the Treasury's Headquarters Building in Parliament Street. All spaces are secure. No parking spaces specifically for motorcycles are provided at the Allington Towers office in Victoria, but space can be made available according to demand.

Taxation Relief (Training)

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what action his Department has taken to introduce tax relief for employers who invest in training of their work force; and what proposals he has in this area. [55045]

Dawn Primarolo: Expenditure of employers on the training of their employees is already likely to attract tax relief. When calculating business profits for tax purposes, a deduction is allowed for revenue expenditure incurred wholly and exclusively for business purposes. Expenditure an employer incurs on training employees would generally satisfy this business expenses tax rule and qualify for a tax deduction.

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what action his Department *(a)* has taken and *(b)* proposes to introduce (i) grants and (ii) tax relief for workers on training courses. [55047]

Dawn Primarolo: The current position is that individuals can claim Vocational Training Tax Relief (VTR) on the cost of certain training courses. VTR is not restricted to those in work and benefits non-taxpayers as well as taxpayers. Where an employee's expenditure on job-related external training is not eligible for VTR, it may still qualify for tax relief under an Inland Revenue extra-statutory concession (A64) if the conditions are satisfied.

The current scope of tax relief for individuals' training expenses is being reviewed in relation to individual learning accounts. Our recent consultation paper on the Learning Age (CM 3790) indicated that we are considering targeted public support, which could take the form of grants or tax relief, to encourage people to open individual learning accounts. Officials from the Inland Revenue, Department for Education and Employment and the Treasury are currently exploring options.

Employee Share Ownership

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what action his Department *(a)* has taken and *(b)* plans to take to encourage more employee share ownership schemes. [55046]

Dawn Primarolo: The Government are keen to encourage employee participation through share ownership. In this way, employees are able to share in the success of firms they work for and feel part of the common effort. The existing Inland Revenue approved share ownership schemes enable around $2\frac{1}{2}$ million ordinary men and women to benefit directly, and in a tax-efficient way, from any increase in the value of their companies which their own efforts have helped to bring about.

We remain committed to increasing employee participation through share ownership schemes, and all tax reliefs are kept under review. A tax break is not, however, the only way to encourage the spread of employee participation.

Arthur Andersen and Andersen Consulting

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what Government contracts have been awarded to Arthur Andersen and Andersen Consulting since 2 May 1997. [55157]

Ms Hewitt: No contracts have been awarded to either of these firms since the 2 May 1997.

Financial Services Authority

Mr. Love: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what discussions his Department has held with the Registrar of Friendly Societies regarding the transfer of its functions to the Financial Services Authority to ensure continued recognition of and sensitivity to the special features of organisations currently regulated and supervised by the Registrar; and if he will make a statement. [55220]

Ms Hewitt: Treasury officials have regular discussions with the Registry of Friendly Societies (RFS), the Building Societies Commission (BSC) and the Friendly Societies Commission (FSC), about the transfer of their functions to the Financial Services Authority (FSA). The FSA has also been working with them to develop the new regulatory structure and to ensure a smooth transition to a single regulator, when the Financial Services and Markets Bill becomes law.

In the meantime, as the Chief Secretary to the Treasury announced on 30 July 1998, *Official Report*, columns *410–11*, the FSA plans to enter into contracts with the BSC, the FSC and, in relation to credit unions, the FRS to enable it to carry out functions on their behalf, from January 1999.

Mr. Love: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what discussions his Department has held with the Financial Services Authority regarding harmonisation of the costs of incorporation of the different types of organisations regulated by the Financial Services Authority; and if he will make a statement. [55215]

Ms Hewitt: A draft regulatory impact assessment was contained in part 3 of the consultation document on the Financial Services and Markets Bill. This concluded that the creation of the single financial services regulator, the Financial Services Authority (FSA), would mean savings for a significant proportion of authorised persons in compliance costs and regulatory fees. There would also be some efficiency savings due to co-location of the regulators.

Credit Unions

Mr. Love: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what discussions his Department has held with the representative bodies for credit unions regarding the development of a share protection scheme; and if he will make a statement. [55219]

Ms Hewitt: The Credit Union Act 1979 provides for credit unions establishing a share protection scheme, if they wish to do so, and officials from the Registry of Friendly Societies have held a number of meetings with representative bodies for credit unions on this subject—although the movement has not, so far, introduced such a scheme. A consultation document will be issued shortly on how credit unions should be regulated in the future. This will seek views on whether or not credit unions should be included within the Financial Service Authority's Compensation scheme.

Bootlegging

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many people have been prosecuted for re-selling alcoholic beverages and tobacco brought in from France in the latest available year. [55357]

Dawn Primarolo: The information requested is not available in this form. However, figures are available for the number of prosecutions generated by Excise Verification Officers for the smuggling and/or illicit resale of alcohol and tobacco from the European Union; in the year ending 31 March 1998 there were 417.

Euro

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if the euro will be legal tender in Britain after 1 January 1999. [55405]

Ms Hewitt: No. If, however, parties agree amongst themselves to settle transactions in euro they will be at liberty to do so: just as they can currently choose to deal in other foreign currencies.

Economic Estimates

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what changes he has made to estimates for *(a)* growth, *(b)* unemployment and *(c)* inflation for (i) 1998 and (ii) 1999. [55381]

Ms Hewitt: New forecasts for growth and inflation will be published later this autumn as part of the Pre-Budget Report. These will take account of developments since the Budget forecast was published in March.

Payable Tax Credits

Dr. Naysmith: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the proposed abolition of payable tax credits on dividends from April 1999. [55652]

Dawn Primarolo: My hon. Friend the Paymaster General has this under review and will make an announcement as soon as he is in a position to do so.

Individual Savings Accounts

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if an estimate has been made by the Inland Revenue as to the likely ongoing running costs of ISAs compared to those of PEPs. [55535]

Ms Hewitt: The Inland Revenue published a compliance cost assessment for the individual savings account on 31 July. A copy is available in the Library.

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on how the Inland Revenue's figure for the start-up costs of ISAs being £250 million for the savings industry was derived and provide a breakdown of the costs incurred for new computer installation, staff and sales force retraining and administration. [55534]

Ms Hewitt: The assessment reflects discussions with several potential managers, and comments received during the consultation process. Details of the breakdown of costs in the format requested are not available, since they were generally not known to this degree of precision by potential managers in the savings industry.

Pensions Mis-selling

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer with regard to the current pensions mis-selling review what is the Savings and Investment Board's estimate of the likely total cost of the compensation that will be paid by the life assurance industry; what is the breakdown of this estimate between with profits and unit linked policies; and what proportion of the costs incurred by with profits policies the Savings and Investment Board has estimated will ultimately be met by policy holders through reduced future bonuses. [55536]

Ms Hewitt: The FSA estimates that the total industry bill for the pensions mis-selling review will be in the range of £8 billion to £11 billion. These figures were contained in the FSA consultation document, copies of which were placed in the Library in March. There has been no estimate made of the split between with profits policies and unit linked policies. Nor is it possible to predict what proportion of the estimated total cost incurred by with profits policies will be met by policy holders through reduced future bonuses, due to uncertainties about the ultimate cost to firms.

Financial Services

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer with regard to the sale of financial services through intermediaries, what is the Personal Investment Authority's figure for the proportion sold on commission and those sold by advisers taking a fixed fee. [55537]

Ms Hewitt: No such figures are collected.

Customs

Mr. Wyatt: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what changes there were in the number of customs officers between January 1988 and January 1998. [55656]

Dawn Primarolo: HM Customs and Excise employed 26,654 permanent staff (including Fixed Term Appointees) in April 1988 and 24,112 staff in April 1998, a drop of 2,542.

In respect of "Customs officers" engaged on operational duties (as opposed to VAT, Excise or non-operational staff), 7,754 staff were employed in the preventive (anti-smuggling and baggage check) and frontier customs functions in April 1998, and at the start of the present financial year Customs and Excise employed 3,990 staff in these functions.

On the surface, this represents a fall of 3,764 in the numbers of "Customs officers". However, the figures for the two years are not directly comparable as some former frontier work has moved inland, a change in operational policy meant that more customs work is now undertaken by staff in specialist investigation and intelligence units and the Department's vessels have also been moved to a specialist unit with its own permanent crews. There are no figures available for the number of officers employed on customs work in these areas.

Lone Parents

Mr. Rendel: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) if he will estimate the number and proportion of all families headed by a lone parent indicating how many children live in them, based on the most recent available figures; [55584]

(2) if he will estimate the number and proportion of one parent families headed by a teenage lone parent *(a)* under 20 years and *(b)* under 16 years based on the most recent figures. [55583]

Ms Hewitt: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the Director of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from John Fox to Mr. David Rendel, dated 19 October 1998:

The Director of the Office for National Statistics (ONS) has been asked to reply to your Parliamentary questions on lone parent families. I am replying in his absence.

It is estimated that there were 1.6 million one-parent families with dependent children in Great Britain in 1996, with 2.8 million dependent children living with them. One-parent families formed 21 per cent. of all families with dependent children in 1996. Further details, including definitions, are published in Population Trends, 91, a copy of which is contained in the House of Commons Library.

It is estimated that there were around 40 thousand one-parent families with dependent children headed by a lone parent aged under 20 in Great Britain in 1996, just under 3 per cent. of all such one-parent families. Estimates have not been made of lone parents aged under 16 because of the proportionately larger uncertainty associated with very small sample sizes.

British Household Panel Survey

Mr. Webb: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer by what means tabulations of data from the British Household Panel Survey will be made available to hon. Members. [55638]

Ms Hewitt: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the Director of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Tim Holt to Mr. Steve Webb, dated 19 October 1998:

I have been asked to reply to your recent question asking by what means tabulations of data from the British Household Panel Survey will be made available to honourable Members.

The British Household Panel Survey (BHPS) is funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) and conducted by the Institute for Social and Economic Research (formerly the ESRC Research Centre on Micro-social Change). The data are available from the Data Archive at Essex University. Further information on the BHPS, and details of research which has been carried out using the data, can be obtained from the Institute for Social and Economic Research (telephone number 01206 872957).

Tabulations from the BHPS are regularly published in two annual Government Statistical Service publications: Households Below Average Income (the latest edition was published on 15 October 1998) and Social Trends. Data are also published in the ESRC Working Papers series. These publications and papers are available in the House of Commons Library.

Earnings (Shrewsbury and Atcham)

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many employees in Shrewsbury and Atcham currently earn less than *(a)* £3.60 per hour, *(b)* £2.50 per hour and *(c)* £1.50 per hour. [55243]

Ms Hewitt: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the Director of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Mike Pepper to Mr. Paul Marsden, dated 19 October 1998:

The Director of the Office for National Statistics has been asked to reply to your parliamentary question requesting information about the earnings of employees in Shrewsbury and Atcham. I am replying in his absence.

Estimates of the percentage of employees in Shrewsbury and Atcham earning less than the hourly rates you requested are given below. I am unable to provide numbers because appropriate grossing factors for the New Earnings Survey (NES) sample are not available at very detailed levels of disaggregation such as parliamentary constituencies.

The latest information, from the New Earnings Survey 1998, is contained in the following table.

Employees on adult rates, whose pay for the survey pay-period was unaffected by absence—New Earnings Survey—April 1998 Parliamentary constituency of Shrewsbury and Atcham

	Percentage of employees with hourly earnings (excluding overtime) less than:		
	£1.50	*£2.50*	*£3.60*
All employees	0.4	1.5	9.8

Source:
New Earnings Survey, Office for National Statistics.

I will arrange for a copy of this letter to be placed in the Library.

Economic Growth

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what changes have been made to his Department's estimates of the level of economic growth in 1997. [55485]

Ms Hewitt: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the Director of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from John Kidgell to Mr. Austin Mitchell, dated 19 October 1998:

The Director of the Office for National Statistics has been asked to reply to your Parliamentary question on changes to the level of economic growth in 1997. I am replying in his absence.

The most recent data for 1997, published on 24 September 1998, show that gross domestic product (GDP) at constant market prices rose by 3.5 per cent. compared to 1996. Previous estimates published on 20 August 1998 showed growth in 1997 of 3.4 per cent.

The quarterly path of GDP growth during 1997 shows quarterly growth rates of 1.0, 0.2, 1.0 and 0.7 per cent. in quarters 1 to 4 respectively. This compares with previously published estimates of 0.7, 1.0, 0.8 and 0.6 per cent.

Registered Maternities

Mr. Pollard: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the numbers of registered maternities to women resident in *(a)* St. Albans, *(b)* Dacorum, *(c)* Watford, *(d)* Hertsmere and *(e)* Three Rivers local authority districts which took place in (i) Hemel Hempstead General Hospital, (ii) St. Albans City Hospital, (iii) Watford General Hospital, (iv) Mount Vernon Hospital, (v) Barnet General Hospital, (vi) Chase Farm Hospital, (vii) Northwick Park Hospital, (viii) Luton and Dunstable Hospital, (ix) Stoke Mandeville Hospital, (x) Wycombe General Hospital, (xi) other NHS hospitals, (xii) RAF Halton Hospital, (xiii) other non-NHS hospitals, (xiv) at home and (xv) elsewhere for each of the last five years for which data are available. [55315]

Ms Hewitt: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the Director of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from John Fox to Mr. Kerry Pollard, dated 19 October 1998:

The Director of the Office for National Statistics (ONS) has been asked to reply to your parliamentary question on numbers of registered maternities. I am replying in his absence.

The information requested would only be available at a disproportionate cost.

Abortions

Mr. Woolas: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many women had abortions in each parliamentary constituency and what percentage of these were carried out by the NHS in the last year for which figures are available. [55538]

Ms Hewitt: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the Director of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from John Fox to Mr. Phil Woolas, dated 19 October 1998:

The Director of the Office for National Statistics (ONS) has been asked to reply to your parliamentary question on abortions by parliamentary constituency. I am replying in his absence.

Information on the number of abortions performed on residents of each parliamentary constituency is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Animal Experiments

Sir Richard Body: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will ensure that his Department's proposed freedom of information legislation includes a statutory right of access to information relating to the scientific basis for research involving animal experiments within the United Kingdom. [55346]

Mr. Straw: Section 24 of the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986 prevents the disclosure of information supplied in confidence in relation to applications for licences to carry out scientific experiments on animals.

The Government are committed to review the need for all statutory bars to disclosure as part of the development of legislation on Freedom of Information. That legislation is likely to contain a power to repeal by Order specified existing bars to disclosure.

It is too early to say, however, whether section 24 of the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986 will be repealed in this way.

In reaching a decision on this issue, I shall need to be satisfied that those who are involved in lawful scientific experimentation are not put at risk from the violent activities of some animal rights extremists, or that British science and industry is not damaged by the disclosure of information.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his Department's letter AP98 1/10/333 PO 13469/98 of 23 July, if he has forwarded Neil Boyce's report, Freeze-dried Mice, relating to the overbreeding of animals, to the Animal Procedures Committee; and if he will make a statement. [55363]

Mr. George Howarth: Neil Boyce's report was forwarded to the Animal Procedures Committee at its meeting on 23 July. The Committee is looking at the issue of overbreeding as part of its review of the operation of the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986.

Motorcycle Parking

Mr. Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many motorcycle parking spaces exist at each office or site for which his Department is responsible; and how many are secure spaces. [55254]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The Home Office Central London Estate provides designated areas within it secure car parks for some 50 motorcycles.

Generally, there is provision for parking motorcycles at most offices and sites throughout the rest of the Home Office Estate (including those occupied by the Agencies). However, details are not available centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Government Purchase Card

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what use *(a)* his Department and *(b)* its agencies are currently making of the Government Purchase Card; what savings he estimates are being achieved as a result; what plans he has to expand use of the card by his Department and its agencies; and if he will make a statement. [55180]

Mr. Straw: The Home Office is not currently using the Government Procurement Card (GPC), but it is being used in some agencies.

The extent to which the non-agency Department uses the GPC will depend on an evaluation of its benefits compared with a policy of obtaining consolidated invoices from suppliers with whom we conduct a high volume of transactions. Our preliminary findings are that by reducing the volume of invoices the Department can achieve savings similar to those obtainable from the use of the GPC, whilst retaining the benefit of the detailed management information which our suppliers provide with their invoices.

A pilot project to test the consolidated invoice option and its estimated savings began in August of this year and will conclude by March 1999. Further consideration will then be given to the scope for using the GPC in circumstances where its use would be the most cost-effective solution.

The position in the Department's agencies is as follows:

The Forensic Science Service introduced a procurement card in April 1996, but have since adopted the GPC. Some 60 cards have been issued and account for an average of 300 transactions a month, valued at £50,000 producing savings in excess of £10,000 a month. Up to a further 10 cards are expected to be issued.

The Prison Service is currently piloting the use of the GPC at three prison sites with a view to establishing a business case for possible implementation early in 1999. Full rollout would take approximately 18 months and would enable some 200,000 transactions a year to be processed using the card.

The United Kingdom Passport Agency and Fire Service College also have the use of the GPC under consideration.

Gaming Board

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what are the names, qualifications and experience of members of the Gaming Board appointed in the last 12 months; if he will list the *(a)* vacancies and *(b)* expected vacancies for the Board; and what arrangements are in place for filling them. [54862]

Mr. George Howarth: Mr. Robert Lockwood and Mr. Peter Dean were appointed as Gaming Board members from 1 January 1998 and 18 May 1998 respectively, with Mr. Dean becoming Chairman from 1 July 1998.

Mr. Lockwood's background is as a licensing magistrate, Chief Executive of the London Red Cross and former local authority chief executive. Mr. Dean has a legal background, is the Investment Ombudsman and was Deputy Chairman of the Monopolies and Mergers Commission.

All five Board posts are currently filled. One is expected to become vacant on 31 December 1998 and another on 31 August 1999. Both have been advertised and will be filled by competition.

Child and Youth Workers

Mr. Gale: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will bring forward proposals to strengthen the controls and procedures for vetting those employed and working directly or indirectly with children and young people; and if he will make a statement. [55453]

Mr. Michael: On 4 June 1998, *Official Report*, columns *304–05*, I announced the establishment of an Interdepartmental Working Group on Preventing Unsuitable People from Working with Children and Abuse of Trust. The Group has made a good start on its work and has been asked to make recommendations by the end of the year.

Prison Service

Ms Oona King: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps the Prison Service intends to take to encourage recruitment to the service from ethnic minority communities. [55323]

Mr. George Howarth: The Home Secretary announced at the Labour party conference that he would be setting recruitment targets across the Home Office, with the aim that the workforce properly reflects Britain's multi-racial society.

As an equal opportunities employer, the Prison Service is committed to increasing the numbers of ethnic minority staff which it employs at all levels, consistent with fair and open competition and with recruitment and promotion on merit. Latest figures for the year to 31 March 1998 indicate that 7.8 per cent. of prison officers recruited were from ethnic minorities—more than double the figure for any previous year.

In the last few years, there has been considerable progress on measures taken to encourage ethnic minority staff. These include the following:

as part of the guidance on devolved recruitment, governors have been encouraged to take positive action to redress the current under-representation of people from the ethnic minorities, such as the recent open day organised by prisons in the Doncaster area;

competence-based job simulation and assessment centres for the recruitment of prison officers support the devolved recruitment of prison officers and are increasingly used for promotion at all levels;

the Prison Service has provided placements for three Windsor Fellows this year, and continues to provide mentors from management level staff for ethnic minority undergraduates under the National Mentoring Scheme.

As a result of many years of sustained outreach work, the Service has two members of ethnic minorities who successfully applied for the Accelerated Promotion Scheme in the last year.

In August 1997, the Home Secretary established a monitoring group on the position of ethnic minority staff in the Home Office with the following terms of reference:

"To examine the position of ethnic minority staff in the Home Office, the measures taken to ensure their full representation and employment and to reduce real and perceived disadvantage and to make further proposals for action".

The Prisons Board is fully committed to the monitoring group and is carrying out a comprehensive review in the Prison Service. The review, which is now well underway, will lead to the development of a racial equality action plan which will recommend further measures to stimulate the recruitment of staff from ethnic minorities.

In July 1998, the Prison Service set up a new Race relations group. Its purpose is to ensure that the Service's race relations policies are as good as they can be, and to check that they are operating effectively across all establishments. It will also help to monitor and direct the range of initiatives which are underway, in relation to both staff and prisoners.

Administration of Justice

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to expedite the administration of justice. [54859]

Mr. Michael: This Government have a strong commitment to speeding up justice, particularly in relation to cases involving young offenders where delays have been scandalous in recent years. We aim to tackle delays throughout the criminal justice system and we have pledged to halve the time taken to deal with persistent young offenders from arrest to sentence.

Ministers across Government Departments are co-operating in encouraging all agencies to work together to cut delays. In October 1997, comprehensive guidance was issued in the circular 'Tackling Delays in the Youth Justice System'. This was prepared by six Government Departments and set out good practice to tackle delay in young offenders cases and asked local agencies to set up fast-tracking schemes for persistent young offenders. Many have responded positively: for instance, fast-track schemes for persistent young offenders have been established or are planned in 160 Youth Court areas, compared with 12 a year ago.

The Crime and Disorder Act 1998 contains a number of specific measures for speeding up the system, including provisions to enable straightforward guilty pleas to be dealt with promptly; to improve case management in magistrates courts; and allowing indictable-only cases to start in the Crown Court. Before being implemented nationwide, most of these new procedures are being piloted in Tyneside; Croydon, Bromley and Sutton; Blackburn and Burnley; North Staffordshire; Northamptonshire; and North Wales. Piloting began on 30 September and will run for six months, except for the indictable-only procedure, for which the pilots will begin in January 1999 and will run for a year.

To reinforce the effectiveness of the new procedures for case preparation and management, the Government intend to introduce overall statutory time limits for the prosecution of criminal cases, for which provision is made in the Prosecution of Offences Act 1985 but which has been improved through the Crime and Disorder Act. These time limits, which will also be piloted, will be tougher for young offenders than for adults, and tougher still for persistent young offenders.

Anti-terrorist Legislation

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what consultations he has held with *(a)* the RUC, *(b)* the police in Great Britain, *(c)* civil liberties organisations, *(d)* the Irish Government, *(e)* members of the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee, *(f)* other hon. Members and *(g)* the United States Government, concerning the new anti-terrorist legislation. [55349]

Mr. Straw: There was some informal consultation with a number of individuals and bodies, including some hon. and right hon. Members in the short timescale for the preparation of the Criminal Justice (Terrorism and Conspiracy) Act 1998. I met the Chief Constable of the Royal Ulster Constabulary, the Commissioner of the Garda Siochana and the Assistant Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police, Mr. David Veness, on 28 August. The consultation document on permanent United Kingdom-wide counter-terrorist legislation, to be issued later this year, will provide a further opportunity for comments on the provisions of that Act in the context of broader consideration of the future shape of legislation against terrorism.

Domestic Violence

Ms Moran: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects to make an announcement on the review of domestic violence policy. [53497]

Mr. Michael: Our intention is to do everything we can to give an impetus to policy on domestic violence and implement initiatives as soon as possible, rather than to conduct a formal time-limited review. To address domestic violence, we have implemented the Protection from Harassment Act 1997 and Part IV of the Family Law Act 1996. We have issued guidance on the Crime and Disorder Act setting out our expectation that local crime reduction partnerships will identify the level of domestic violence in their area and incorporate a strategy for tackling it in their wider crime reduction strategy.

We are now seeking further research evidence about domestic violence and improved statistics; and to publicise this and raise awareness of how domestic violence can best be tackled in future.

Women have a more severe experience of domestic violence than men. Our policy is to reflect that fact in everything we do. Our policy is being developed in parallel with measures to address all forms of violence against women.

Terrorist Prisoners

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many persons are serving prison sentences in Great Britain for terrorist offences connected with Northern Ireland; how many of them are serving *(a)* life sentences and *(b)* other indeterminate sentences; to which terrorist group these prisoners belong and how many are in categories *(a)* and *(b)*; how many he estimates will be transferred to Northern Ireland inside the next two years; and how many of those transferred will be eligible for release under the Northern Ireland (Sentences) Act 1998. [55024]

Mr. George Howarth: Six prisoners convicted of terrorist related offences connected with Northern Ireland are currently held in prisons in England and Wales, none of whom is serving a life sentence or other indeterminate sentence. The Prison Service does not record centrally information on organisations to which prisoners may belong. One of the six prisoners has requested a transfer to Northern Ireland. This application is currently under consideration and it is not possible to speculate on the outcome. The eligibility of an prisoner for release under the provisions of the Northern Ireland (Sentences) Act 1998 is entirely a matter for the Sentence Review Commissioners.

Traffic Officers

Dr. Stoate: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to ensure that police traffic officers are given training in the collecting of evidence equivalent to that provided to CID officers responsible for investigating homicides. [55019]

Mr. Michael: We are keen to keep the training of police officers under review to ensure that they receive training in all the skills necessary to carry out their duties. I understand that National Police Training are planning to introduce a new course early next year on Policing Road Deaths in response to a demand from a number of forces for such training to be provided nationally. It is hoped that this course will be attended by both traffic and CID officers of the rank of inspector and above, who might be appointed to supervise such inquiries. The course is intended to provide a thorough grounding in all aspects of road death investigations and to raise awareness of the trauma likely to be caused by such incidents, both to victims and to police officers.

Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary is also currently undertaking a thematic inspection of traffic related police duties, including the training of traffic officers.

It should be remembered that decisions on the nature and extent of the training received by police traffic officers are primarily the responsibility of individual chief police officers. In most forces, if not all, the investigation of the scene of a serious road traffic accident is carried out by Road Accident Investigation Officers, who may be either police officers or civilian support staff, who use mathematical and physical theories and formulae to determine the speed and road position of vehicles at the time of collision. In general, police officers are skilled in managing the scene of a serious road accident and can call on specialist support skills, such as vehicle examiners, where necessary.

If there are suspicious circumstances surrounding the deaths of road users, it is open to chief officers to bring in officers with the appropriate skills, if necessary by appointing a senior detective to serve as the senior investigating officer in order to direct and control all the necessary inquiries.

Prisoners

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what percentage of males aged *(a)* 16, *(b)* 17, *(c)* 18, *(d)* 19, *(e)* 20, *(f)* 21, *(g)* 22, *(h)* 23, *(i)* 24, *(j)* 25, *(k)* 26, *(l)* 27, *(m)* 28, *(n)* 29, and *(o)* 30 years or over (i) are currently in prison, (ii) have served a prison sentence or are currently in prison and (iii) have a criminal record. [55432]

Mr. George Howarth: Information on the male prison population (excluding foreign nationals), by age, in England and Wales on 30 June 1998 as a percentage of the projected general population of England and Wales for the same date is given in table 1.

Information on criminal careers is also published in "Criminal Statistics England and Wales" (Chapter 9 of the 1996 edition, CM 3764), a copy of which is in the Library. These analyses are based on a sample of those born in selected years.

The proportion of males who have ever been sentenced to custody for those born in selected years between 1953 and 1978 is shown in table 2. Rates for the 1973 and 1978 birth cohorts are lower than for those born in earlier years and are consistent with the reduction in custody for these age groups in the late Eighties and early Nineties. The

proportion of males who have been convicted of a "Standard List" offence is shown in table 3. Rates for 1973 and 1978 are also lower than for those born in earlier years and the lower proportion who have a conviction in these age groups reflects the increased use of cautioning in recent years.

Table 1: Male prison population[1] in England and Wales on 30 June 1998, by age, as a percentage of the projected general population in England and Wales on 30 June 1998

Age	Percentage[2]
16	0.21
17	0.44
18	0.70
19	0.89
20	0.88
21	0.88
22	0.89
23	0.80
24	0.78
25	0.72
26	0.66
27	0.63
28	0.58
29	0.55
30+	0.16
Total	0.28

[1] Excludes foreign nationals

[2] Based on comparisons between the prison population in England and Wales on 30 June 1998 and the Government Actuary population projection for England and Wales in mid 1998

Table 2: Estimates of the proportion of the male population who have served a prison sentence or are currently in prison for a standard list offence[1]
England and Wales

Percentage

Age	Year of birth 1953	1958	1963	1968	1973	1978
16	1.6	1.3	1.6	1.4	0.5	0.2
17	2.4	2.3	2.6	2.2	1.0	0.5
18	3.2	3.0	3.5	2.9	1.6	1.0
19	3.8	3.6	4.4	3.6	2.3	1.8
20	4.1	4.1	5.0	4.2	2.8	—
21	4.4	4.4	5.6	4.5	3.5	—
22	4.7	4.8	6.0	4.9	4.0	—
23	4.9	5.2	6.3	5.2	4.2	—
24	5.1	5.5	6.6	5.5	—	—
25	5.3	5.7	6.9	—	—	—
26	5.4	5.9	7.0	—	—	—
27	5.6	6.1	7.2	—	—	—
28	5.8	6.3	7.4	—	—	—
29	5.9	6.4	—	—	—	—
30	6.1	6.5	—	—	—	—
31	6.2	6.7	—	—	—	—
32	6.4	6.8	—	—	—	—
33	6.5	6.9	—	—	—	—
34	6.5	—	—	—	—	—
35	6.6	—	—	—	—	—
36	6.7	—	—	—	—	—
37	6.8	—	—	—	—	—
38	6.9	—	—	—	—	—
39	6.9	—	—	—	—	—

[1] The standard list consists of all indictable and some of the more serious summary offences. See Appendix 5 of Criminal Statistics, England and Wales, 1996 (Cm. 3764) for further details

Table 3: Estimates of the proportion of the male population with a criminal record for one or more standard list[1] offences
England and Wales

Percentage

Age	Year of birth 1953	1958	1963	1968	1973	1978
16	11.9	13.4	12.8	10.6	5.5	4.1
17	14.9	16.7	16.3	13.8	8.7	6.6
18	17.7	19.7	19.9	16.7	11.8	9.9
19	19.9	22.2	22.8	19.2	13.9	—
20	21.7	24.3	25.0	21.2	15.6	—
21	23.3	26.1	26.6	22.9	17.2	—
22	24.7	27.4	27.9	24.2	19.0	—
23	25.9	28.6	28.9	25.3	19.8	—
24	27.0	29.7	29.8	26.0	—	—
25	27.8	30.5	30.7	—	—	—
26	28.7	30.5	31.4	—	—	—
27	29.4	31.7	32.1	—	—	—
28	30.0	32.7	—	—	—	—
29	30.6	32.7	—	—	—	—
30	31.0	33.2	—	—	—	—
31	31.5	33.6	—	—	—	—
32	32.0	34.0	—	—	—	—
33	32.3	34.4	—	—	—	—
34	32.7	—	—	—	—	—
35	33.0	—	—	—	—	—
36	33.2	—	—	—	—	—
37	33.5	—	—	—	—	—
38	33.8	—	—	—	—	—
39	34.0	—	—	—	—	—

[1] The standard list consists of all indictable and some of the more serious summary offences. See Appendix 5 of Criminal Statistics, England and Wales, 1996 (Cm. 3764) for further details

Computers (Scanning)

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what action he proposes to take in respect of the practice of HM Customs officials routinely scanning computer laptops brought into the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement. [55459]

Dawn Primarolo: I have been asked to reply.

HM Customs and Excise do not routinely scan laptops brought into the UK; Customs' anti-smuggling checks are guided by risk profiles and intelligence assessments, in order to concentrate their effort in the most productive areas and cause the minimum delay to the travelling public.

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the practice of HM Customs officials routinely scanning laptops brought into the United Kingdom; what record is kept of information so gleaned and for what purposes; and what safeguards are in place to prevent the misuse of such information. [55461]

Dawn Primarolo: I have been asked to reply.

HM Customs and Excise do not routinely scan laptops brought into the UK; Customs' anti-smuggling checks are guided by risk profiles and intelligence assessments, in order to concentrate their effort in the most productive areas and cause the minimum delay to the travelling public. The aim of checks on laptops is to detect indecent or obscene material, in particular material featuring children; no record is kept of any other information encountered. Officers regularly encounter private or commercial correspondence and similar material in the course of their duties and are bound by their normal duty

of confidentiality. Anyone misusing such information would be subject to Departmental disciplinary proceedings and, if appropriate, dismissal.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Buxton County Court

Mr. Levitt: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what plans he has to improve access to justice at Buxton County Court for people who have *(a)* physical, *(b)* visual and *(c)* hearing disabilities. [53390]

Mr. Hoon: The Court Service is currently undertaking an audit of all courts to establish what facilities exist at each location for people who have physical, visual or hearing disabilities. The audit is scheduled for completion in February 1999. Where requirements for additional or upgraded facilities are identified, these will be addressed, where reasonably practicable, according to priority.

Royal Family

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what plans he has to review for possible release records relating to the Royal Family and Royal Household which are currently closed in the Public Record Office; and if he will make a statement. [53367]

Mr. Hoon: The 1993 White Paper *Open Government* (Cm 2290) stated that records relating to the Royal Family would be treated in the same way as all other records and closed for longer than 30 years only if they fell into one or more of the three criteria governing closure (para. 9.22). It also stated (para 9.28) that all Departments would, as resources could be made available, review all material currently withheld for longer than 30 years to see whether its sensitivity had passed and, if possible, release it. The review process is the responsibility of the Department where the records originated. This process is continuing.

Shrewsbury County Court

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will estimate the effect on the legal aid budget of the closure of Shrewsbury County Court and the relocation of its work to Telford, Ludlow and Oswestry. [53392]

Mr. Hoon: No estimate of the impact on legal aid has been made. Any savings or additional costs to the legal aid fund are likely to be marginal since business will simply transfer elsewhere. Whilst financial implications are important considerations, the costs and practical implications of running a court, the public facilities, waiting times, workload levels and overall standard of service that can be made available over the area as a whole also need to be taken into consideration.

External Legal Advisers

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will make a statement on the external legal advisers he has consulted since 1 May 1997, indicating *(a)* the names of those firms used, *(b)* dates of consultation, *(c)* the cost of using each firm and *(d)* the areas of discussion.

Mr. Hoon: The only firm of external legal advisers consulted by the Lord Chancellor's Department since 1 May 1997 is Messrs Masons who have been retained since November 1996 to provide drafting and general legal advice on a contract for the provision of corporate and financial services and general legal advice on IT contracts for Crown and county courts. Advice has been provided on numerous occasions since 1 May 1997. The total cost since that date is £234,362. [55400]

Possession Orders

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Minister of State, Lord Chancellor's Department what was the average length of time between the serving of a notice of seeking possession on the tenant of a local authority and the granting of possession where the application was successful *(a)* in England and Wales, *(b)* in the West Midlands County and *(c)* in Birmingham in each of the last five years for which records are available; and if he will make a statement on measures he is proposing to speed up the process. [55504]

Mr. Hoon: No figures are collected for waiting times for possession actions. Although there are no current plans to introduce measures to reduce the length of time the possession process can take, it is intended to consider this process in the second stage of the Civil Justice Reforms. No timetable has yet been fixed.

Government Purchase Card

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Minister of State, Lord Chancellor's Department what use *(a)* his Department and *(b)* its agencies are currently making of the Government Purchase Card; what savings he estimates are being achieved as a result; what plans he has to expand use of the card by his Department and its agencies; and if he will make a statement. [55175]

Mr. Hoon: The Government Purchase Card (GPC) is not yet being used. The Court Service plans to introduce the GPC in one area later this financial year, and will assess the scope for further use next year. The Public Record Office will pilot the card later this month, and introduce it in June 1999 if that is favourable. The Land Registry will pilot in January 1999 and introduce it in April 1999 if the test succeeds. The Northern Ireland Court Service and the Public Trust Office are currently reviewing their procurement procedures, and will consider the introduction of the GPC.

Personal Injury Actions

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Minister of State, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will make a statement concerning the implementation of section 10 of the Civil Evidence Act 1995 and section 1 of the Damages Act 1996 following the recent judgments in the House of Lords on multipliers in personal injury actions. [54863]

Mr. Hoon: Section 1 of the Damages Act 1996 came into force in September 1996. The Lord Chancellor and the Secretary of State for Scotland decided not to exercise

the power conferred by that section until they had been able to consider what was said by the House of Lords in Wells *v* Wells and other pending appeals, in which opinions were delivered on 16 July. The section requires them to consult the Government Actuary and the Treasury before any exercise of the power. They are now doing so.

Legal Aid Board

Mr. Soley: To ask the Minister of State, Lord Chancellor's Department if the Legal Aid Board has responded to the Lord Chancellor's request for advice on how best to achieve exclusive contracting of civil advice and assistance; and if he will make a statement. [55673]

Mr. Hoon: The Legal Aid Board have responded to the Lord Chancellor's request for advice on how best to give effect to the Government's policy of exclusive contracting for civil advice and assistance. A copy of their report, and an exchange of correspondence between the Lord Chancellor and the Chairman of the Board, have been placed in the Library of both Houses. The Lord Chancellor welcomes the report and generally accepts the Board's proposals. They will provide an effective way of achieving the Government's policy of targeting quality assured services on people's priority needs for help with basic legal problems. In particular, the proposals will secure our objective of channelling a greater share of funding to the not-for-profit advice sector, and of opening up new ways of delivering advice to people, for instance when they cannot conveniently reach the adviser's office. These are only first steps, but are essential components in building the community legal service promised by the Government in our election manifesto.

Departmental Vehicles

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Minister of State, Lord Chancellor's Department how much his Department expects to spend in each year from 1998–99 to 2000–01 on vehicle replacements. [54984]

Mr. Hoon: The information is as follows:

£

	1998–99	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*
The Court Service	4,050,000	1,551,000	535,000
The Lord Chancellor's Department HQ	16,000	32,000	64,000
Northern Ireland Court Service	0	0	0
HM Land Registry	154,600	175,000	175,000

Planned expenditure by the Court Service reflects a change in August this year from leasing vehicles to outright purchase.

WALES

Cervical Smears

Mr. Austin: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many cytology laboratories in Wales are sending their cervical smears to other laboratories for interpretation. [55305]

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: One laboratory in Wales is currently sending cervical screening work to an adjacent laboratory on a temporary and short-term basis. This is due to end this month.

Dr. Starkey: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales for each health authority in Wales, what is the average time taken for a patient to receive the results of their cervical smear test; and what percentage take longer than the recommended four weeks. [55210]

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: The information requested is as follows:

Health authority	*Average time taken (weeks)*	*Percentage (longer than 4 weeks)*
Bro Taf HA	3.5	16
Dyfed Powys HA	3	0
Gwent HA	4	20
Morgannwg HA	3.5	20.6
North Wales HA	3.75	10

Dr. Starkey: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the average time taken for a patient to receive the results of their cervical smear test; and what percentage take longer than the recommended four weeks. [55206]

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: The average time taken in Wales is 4 weeks; and about 13 per cent. are over 4 weeks.

Motorcycles

Mr. Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many motorcycle parking spaces exist at each office or site for which his Department is responsible; and how many are secure spaces. [55253]

Mr. Ron Davies: There are several secure areas of the car park at my Department's head quarters in Cathays Park specifically dedicated to motorcycles. There is provision at other offices for motorcycling parking.

Measures to increase the proportion of motorcycle users are being considered as part of the development of green transport plans for buildings occupied by my Department and its agency.

Mr. Öpik: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales for what reasons motorcycles were not included in the policy document "Transporting Wales into the Future"; and if he will make a statement. [55399]

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: Chapter 3 of the transport White Paper "A New Deal for Transport—Better for Everyone" covers the role motorcycling can play in the development of an integrated transport policy. Paragraph 1.3 of our Welsh Transport Policy Statement "Transporting Wales into the Future" explains that the general policies set out in the White Paper apply equally in Wales. I did not think it necessary to repeat them all in the Welsh document.

Government Purchase Card

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what use *(a)* his Department and *(b)* its agencies are currently making of the Government Purchase Card; what savings he estimates are being achieved as a result;

what plans he has to expand use of the card by his Department and its agencies; and if he will make a statement. [55167]

Mr. Ron Davies: My Department does not, currently, use the Government Purchase Card. However, we have accepted the offer via the Treasury of a consultancy to undertake a cost/benefit analysis of the introduction of the card. A decision on whether or not to introduce the card will be made in the light of the consultancy report.

Carmarthen-Aberystwyth Rail Track

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what action he is taking to safeguard the trackbed of the former rail link from Carmarthen to Aberystwyth; and if he will make a statement. [55514]

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: Preservation of disused railway trackbeds is a matter for the local planning authorities concerned, within the framework of planning guidance which encourages them to promote public transport opportunities, including the exploration of opportunities to re-open rail routes. I understand that the bulk of the land underlying the former railway line between Carmarthen and Aberystwyth was sold some years ago, although Rail Property Limited retain ownership of a number of railway bridges along the route.

Dyfed Powys Health Authority

Mr. Denzil Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was the cash limit of the Dyfed Powys Health Authority for 1997–98; and what figure has been set for 1998–99. [54913]

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: The initial revenue cash limit authorisations for Dyfed Powys Health Authority were as follows:

Financial year	*£000*
1997–98	274,301
1998–99	283,391

SCOTLAND

Temazepam

Mrs. Irene Adams: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many prescriptions for Temazepam *(a)* capsules and *(b)* tablets were issued in Strathclyde in each year since 1992 and in 1998 to date. [55164]

Mr. Galbraith: The information for Greater Glasgow Health Board for the years 1992 to 1997 and January to June is shown in the table.

Year	*Capsules*	*Tablets*
1992	112,712	99,911
1993	67,401	119,146
1994	41,312	122,848
1995	20,356	110,801
1996	1	112,017
1997	0	105,035
January-June 1998	0	49,803

Government Purchase Card

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what use *(a)* his Department and *(b)* its agencies are currently making of the Government Purchase Card; what savings he estimates are being achieved as a result; what plans he has to expand use of the card by his Department and its agencies; and if he will make a statement. [55171]

Mr. Dewar: My Department began using the Government Procurement Card on a pilot basis in September 1998. The pilot is taking place in two executive agencies and three business areas in the core Department. The pilot exercise will help to determine what savings and other benefits might accrue from using procurement cards, and whether there is a case for expanding their use throughout the Department.

Diffuse Pollution

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on his proposals *(a)* to combat diffuse pollution and *(b)* to implement the recommendations of the Scottish Environmental Protection Agency of 31 August 1998 on diffuse pollution, in relation to nitrate enhancement. [55475]

Mr. Macdonald: The Government are addressing the need to combat diffuse pollution, through the use of preventative and advisory approaches together with legislation. We are also exploring the use of economic instruments ("green taxes"). Our approach will be developed further when we come to implement the EC Water Framework Directive, which is at present in draft form. This will be a matter for the Scottish Executive.

We are currently consulting on proposals for a statutory Nitrate Action Programme in the Scottish Nitrate Vulnerable Zone at Balmalcolm. The programme is specifically aimed at reducing nitrate use.

Antimicrobial Resistance

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, pursuant to the replies by the Under-Secretary of State for Scotland, my hon. Friend the Member for Strathkelvin and Bearsden (Mr. Galbraith), FP 060705 of 13 May and FR 021609 of 18 September, if he will list the Chairman and members of the UK Committee on Antimicrobial Resistance. [55544]

Mr. Galbraith: There is no UK Committee on Antimicrobial Resistance. My letter to my hon. Friend referred to an internal Steering Group of officials which has been set up by the Department of Health to advise Ministers on the terms of the Government's response to the House of Lords Report "*Resistance to Antibiotics and other Antimicrobial Agents*" and is considering other significant developments in the field of antimicrobial resistance.

The Group includes representatives from the Public Health Laboratory Service, the Joint Foods Safety and Standards Group, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, Medicines Control Agency, Office of Science and Technology and The Scottish Office.

Teacher Training

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what reviews he has initiated into teacher training in Scotland since May 1997. [55013]

Mrs. Liddell: In February this year, the Government responded to a report on teacher education and training, prepared by Sir Stewart Sutherland for the National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education. As part of this response we set up a short term working group to look at two specific issues relating to initial teacher education in Scotland—quality assurance and arrangements for managing and developing the type and pattern of provision. I expect to receive a report from the working group within the next few months.

In March we issued for consultation revised draft guidelines for initial teacher education courses in Scotland. These guidelines set out the requirements which courses must meet if they are to be approved by the Secretary of State. We have carefully considered responses to the consultation and finalised revised guidelines will be issued very shortly.

Further and Higher Education

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the amount each further and higher education college in Scotland has acquired from the Scottish Office budget in each year since incorporation in *(a)* cash terms, *(b)* real terms at 1998–99 prices and *(c)* as a percentage of their total income. [55007]

Mr. Dewar: The total of recurrent grant-in-aid and funding in respect of bursaries, restructuring and capital projects made available to incorporated colleges by the Secretary of State, since incorporation, in cash and real terms (at 1998–99 prices) and as a percentage of colleges' total income is shown in the following tables.

Scottish Office funding to colleges in cash terms

£ million

College	*1993–94*	*1994–95*	*1995–96*	*1996–97*	*1997–98*	*1998–99*
Aberdeen College	11.804	13.126	13.591	17.406	17.310	16.393
Angus College	2.637	2.979	3.308	4.693	4.767	4.860
Anniesland College	3.520	4.415	4.292	4.947	5.099	5.238
Ayr College	4.025	4.531	4.852	5.650	5.626	5.767
Banff and Buchan College of Further Education	2.752	2.960	3.382	4.548	4.704	4.638
The Barony College	1.258	1.053	1.589	1.695	1.324	1.256
Bell College of Technology	4.887	5.576	5.937	5.217	4.762	4.478
Borders College	3.644	3.901	4.086	5.190	5.229	4.782
Cambuslang College	3.841	4.018	4.208	4.840	4.767	4.489
Cardonald College	5.530	6.213	6.304	8.479	10.700	10.252
Central College of Commerce	3.578	4.268	4.687	5.148	5.100	5.225
Clackmannan College of Further Education	2.245	2.489	2.500	3.076	2.950	2.956
Clydebank College	6.142	7.006	7.420	7.949	7.485	7.602
Coatbridge College	3.533	4.299	3.807	4.600	4.582	4.673
Cumbernauld College	2.303	2.529	2.874	4.003	3.508	3.583
Dumfries and Galloway College	4.768	5.166	5.452	6.280	6.262	5.842
Dundee College	10.471	11.405	10.911	12.929	11.785	11.592
Elmwood College	3.084	3.131	3.170	3.689	3.517	3.394
Falkirk College of Further and Higher Education	7.482	8.332	8.693	9.816	9.035	9.237
Fife College of Further and Higher Education	6.217	7.078	7.681	8.409	7.613	7.195
Glasgow College of Building and Printing	5.071	6.189	5.979	5.937	6.293	7.101
Glasgow College of Food Technology	2.939	3.491	3.802	4.240	3.760	3.776
Glasgow College of Nautical Studies	3.707	4.140	4.087	4.318	4.299	4.531
Glenrothes College	4.480	4.478	5.068	6.121	5.931	5.968
Inverness College	6.457	6.893	6.857	8.006	7.387	6.852
James Watt College of Further and Higher Education	5.032	6.189	7.759	9.757	10.464	11.810
Jewel and Esk Valley College	7.609	8.117	8.014	8.321	8.078	8.003
John Wheatley College	2.785	3.170	3.494	3.872	4.025	4.025
Kilmarnock College	4.201	4.804	5.337	6.685	7.032	7.160
Langside College	5.216	5.892	6.988	7.196	7.434	7.005
Lauder College	4.601	5.225	5.420	6.530	6.579	6.489
Lews Castle College	2.058	2.140	2.391	2.287	3.037	3.509
Moray College	4.335	4.776	5.154	6.530	6.250	5.748
Motherwell College	6.358	6.708	7.378	9.390	9.840	9.780
North Glasgow College	5.796	6.766	6.455	6.682	6.266	5.909
Oatridge Agricultural College	2.085	2.418	2.114	2.047	2.017	1.986
Perth College	5.166	5.559	5.917	7.312	6.962	6.396
Reid Kerr College	6.978	7.941	8.210	9.646	9.703	9.195
Stevenson College	9.642	10.515	10.260	11.614	13.832	13.310
Stow College	3.233	4.295	4.468	5.231	5.306	5.423
Edinburgh's Telford College	12.168	13.408	13.764	14.932	15.186	15.340
Thurso College	3.437	2.715	3.096	3.306	2.898	2.929
West Lothian College	4.795	6.254	5.324	5.475	5.096	4.938

Scottish Office funding to colleges in real terms at 1998–99 prices

£ million

College	*1993–94*	*1994–95*	*1995–96*	*1996–97*	*1997–98*	*1998–99*
Aberdeen College	13.395	14.674	14.783	18.394	17.812	16.393
Angus College	2.992	3.330	3.599	4.959	4.906	4.860
Anniesland College	3.994	4.935	4.668	5.228	5.247	5.238
Ayr College	4.567	5.066	5.277	5.970	5.789	5.767
Banff and Buchan College of Further Education	3.123	3.309	3.679	4.806	4.841	4.638
The Barony College	1.428	1.177	1.729	1.791	1.363	1.256
Bell College of Technology	5.546	6.234	6.458	5.514	4.900	4.478
Borders College	4.135	4.362	4.444	5.485	5.380	4.782
Cambuslang College	4.359	4.492	4.577	5.115	4.906	4.489
Cardonald College	6.275	6.945	6.857	8.960	11.010	10.252
Central College of Commerce	4.061	4.771	5.098	5.440	5.248	5.225
Clackmannan College of Further Education	2.547	2.782	3.251	3.251	3.035	2.956
Clydebank College	6.969	7.832	8.071	8.400	7.702	7.602
Coatbridge College	4.009	4.806	4.141	4.861	4.715	4.673
Cumbernauld College	2.614	2.827	3.126	4.231	3.610	3.583
Dumfries and Galloway College	5.410	5.775	5.930	6.637	6.443	5.842
Dundee College	11.882	12.750	11.868	13.664	12.126	11.592
Elmwood College	3.499	3.500	3.448	3.899	3.619	3.394
Falkirk College of Further and Higher Education	8.490	9.315	9.456	10.373	9.297	9.23
Fife College of Further and Higher Education	7.055	7.913	8.354	8.886	7.834	7.195
Glasgow College of Building and Printing	5.754	6.919	6.504	6.274	6.475	7.101
Glasgow College of Food Technology	3.335	3.902	4.136	4.481	3.869	3.776
Glasgow College of Nautical Studies	4.207	4.628	4.446	4.563	4.423	4.531
Glenrothes College	5.084	5.307	5.513	6.469	6.102	5.968
Inverness College	7.327	7.706	7.459	8.461	7.601	6.852
James Watt College of Further and Higher Education	5.710	6.919	8.439	10.311	10.767	11.810
Jewel and Esk Valley College	8.634	9.075	8.717	8.794	8.312	8.003
John Wheatley College	3.160	3.544	3.800	4.092	4.142	4.025
Kilmarnock College	4.767	5.371	5.805	7.065	7.236	7.160
Langside College	5.919	6.586	7.601	7.605	7.650	7.005
Lauder College	5.221	5.841	5.896	6.901	6.770	6.489
Lews Castle College	2.336	2.392	2.601	2.417	3.125	3.509
Moray College	4.919	5.339	5.606	6.901	6.431	5.748
Motherwell College	7.215	7.499	8.026	9.923	10.125	9.780
North Glasgow College	6.577	7.563	7.021	7.061	6.448	5.909
Oatridge Agricultural College	2.366	2.703	2.299	2.163	2.076	1.986
Perth College	5.862	6.215	6.436	7.727	7.164	6.396
Reid Kerr College	7.919	8.877	8.930	10.194	9.984	9.195
Stevenson College	10.941	11.755	11.160	12.273	14.233	13.310
Stow College	3.668	4.802	4.860	5.528	5.459	5.423
Edinburgh's Telford College	13.807	14.990	14.972	15.780	15.626	15.340
Thurso College	3.900	3.035	3.367	3.493	2.982	2.929
West Lothian College	5.441	6.991	5.791	5.786	5.244	4.938

Scottish Office funding as a percentage of total income

The total income figure is derived from audited accounts, the latest complete set of which is for the year 1996–97

Percentage

College	*1993–94*	*1994–95*	*1995–96*	*1996–97*
Aberdeen College	64	65	67	72
Angus College	68	67	62	74
Anniesland College	71	74	69	70
Ayr College	63	64	64	64
Banff and Buchan College of Further Education	73	76	75	75
The Barony College	49	46	54	55
Bell College of Technology	48	56	60	47
Borders College	74	74	73	74
Cambuslang College	72	73	73	76
Cardonald College	62	63	65	69
Central College of Commerce	53	60	63	64
Clackmannan College of Further Education	68	70	76	80
Clackmannan College of Further Education	68	70	76	80
Clydebank College	69	70	70	69
Coatbridge College	71	72	72	73
Cumbernauld College	70	73	76	78
Dumfries and Galloway College	70	69	70	70
Dundee College	73	73	69	71
Elmwood College	69	61	57	59
Falkirk College of Further and Higher Education	69	74	72	70

Scottish Office funding as a percentage of total income
The total income figure is derived from audited accounts, the latest complete set of which is for the year 1996–97

Percentage

College	*1993–94*	*1994–95*	*1995–96*	*1996–97*
Fife College of Further and Higher Education	53	58	61	59
Glasgow College of Building and Printing	52	55	58	55
Glasgow College of Food Technology	60	69	72	73
Glasgow College of Nautical Studies	62	64	57	56
Glenrothes College	59	63	60	61
Inverness College	68	69	69	71
James Watt College of Further and Higher Education	56	61	67	68
Jewel and Esk Valley College	64	69	70	66
John Wheatley College	77	78	78	75
Kilmarnock College	67	67	68	70
Langside College	71	73	71	76
Lauder College	60	58	53	50
Lews Castle College	65	60	61	65
Moray College	72	72	71	75
Motherwell College	63	64	64	70
North Glasgow College	70	73	73	76
Oatridge Agricultural College	51	51	49	45
Perth College	66	69	70	68
Reid Kerr College	70	70	71	72
Stevenson College	73	74	76	78
Stow College	54	61	66	68
Edinburgh's Telford College	70	71	72	71
Thurso College	73	72	65	63
West Lothian College	70	73	71	73

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) if he will list each of the further and higher education colleges participating in the University of the Highlands and Islands Project; when they signed contracts to participate in the project; and when these contracts *(a)* expired and *(b)* were renewed; [55002]

(2) who appointed the current principals of further and higher education colleges in Scotland; and where each current principal of a further and higher education college was previously employed; [55003]

(3) what powers *(a)* he and *(b)* the board of management from further and higher education colleges have to (i) appoint, (ii) approve or (iii) dismiss the principal and members of the boards of management from their further and higher education college; [55004]

(4) if he will list the current members of the boards of management for each further and higher education college in Scotland indicating how their appointment met the criteria of being fully representative of local interests in accordance with the terms of the Further and Higher Education (Scotland) Act 1992; [55005]

(5) how his Department monitors use of public money granted to further and higher education colleges in Scotland to ensure propriety in its expenditure; [55006]

(6) what accounts have been presented to his Department by Moray College on the use of Scottish Office funding for further and higher education since the incorporation of the college; [55008]

(7) what guidelines his Department has given to the principals and members of the boards of management of further and higher education colleges on expenses incurred by the principals and members of the boards of management; [55009]

(8) what is the expected deficit for Moray College for the years *(a)* 1997–98 and *(b)* 1998–99; [55010]

(9) what guidelines his Department has issued to the principals and members of the boards of management of further and higher education colleges on employment and personnel appointment procedures, with particular reference to guidance on the employment of family members; [55011]

(10) what guidelines must be followed by the boards of management of further and higher education colleges on the payment of performance-related pay and bonuses to college managers when the college is running a financial deficit; [55012]

(11) if he will investigate the alleged link between adhesive arachnoiditis and the use of Myodil; [55037]

(12) if he will fund the greater use of chronic pain management programmes for sufferers of adhesive arachnoiditis; [55039]

(13) what reassessment of the "Higher Still" reforms has been made since May 1997; [55014]

(14) what changes his Department has made to the requirement for young offenders to be tested for drugs; and what plans he has to require young offenders taking drugs to undertake treatment programmes; [55016]

(15) how much money has been paid by his Department to Moray College for special needs education in each of the years since incorporation expressed in *(a)* cash and *(b)* real terms based on 1998–99 prices; and what audited accounts he has received from Moray College on how this has been spent on special needs education; [54999]

(16) what procedures he has in place to ensure that money granted by his Department to further and higher education colleges for special needs education is spent properly; [55000]

(17) what *(a)* guidelines and *(b)* statutory procedures must be followed by the boards of management of further and higher education colleges when consulting staff and union representatives on management and staff restructuring within the colleges. [55049]

Mr. Dewar: I refer the hon. Member to my letter of 12 October, a copy of which was placed in the House Library.

Crime Victims

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what changes his Department has made to *(a)* the amount of information provided to and *(b)* the protection by law for victims of crime and vulnerable witnesses since May 1997. [55015]

Mr. McLeish: At the end of February we produced a general information leaflet for victims of crime, which explains the criminal justice process in simple terms and provides information about getting help. The leaflet is distributed mainly by the police, who are the first contact a victim or witness who reports a crime has with the criminal justice system. It is also available through Victim Support Scotland and Citizens Advice Bureaux.

I am advised by my noble and learned Friend the Lord Advocate that, in January, the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service in conjunction with the Scottish Court Service launched a Joint Statement on Crown Witnesses, outlining the joint and individual responsibilities of procurators and clerks of court in relation to Crown Witnesses cited in court. The document introduced an undertaking that witnesses at court would be provided with an update on the progress of their case at least once every two hours.

The Lord Advocate's Department also refined and improved the information that is provided to child witnesses and, in March 1998, he launched two new information leaflets for child witnesses who are cited to court. One leaflet is aimed at children under 12 and one is for use by children between 12 and 16. The leaflets provide information about what the child can expect when coming to court to give evidence.

A Scottish Office-led inter-departmental Working Group was set up in late 1997 to examine the issue of vulnerable or intimidated witnesses. The Group's report will be issued as a consultative document on 2 November 1998.

Spinal Treatment

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will fund the replacement of invasive procedures carried out in the course of spinal treatment with non-invasive practices. [55038]

Mr. Galbraith: Health Boards in Scotland are given an annual general revenue allocation and it is for the Health Boards themselves to decide on how best to deploy this funding in meeting the health care needs of their resident population.

Rent Arrears

Mr. Hood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will give a breakdown for rent arrears for each Scottish local authority indicating *(a)* the estimated stock on 31 March 1997, *(b)* the number of households in rent arrears, *(c)* the total rent arrears and *(d)* the percentage in each category of rental income. [55034]

Mr. Macdonald: The available information, taken from returns made by local authorities, is set out in the table.

	As at 31 March 1997			
Council	*Estimated stock*	*Number of houses with rent arrears*[1]	*Total rent arrears* £	*Rent arrears as a percentage of 1996–97 rental income*
Aberdeen City	30,305	8,354	1,314,613	3.20
Aberdeenshire	17,218	4,490	666,484	2.61
Angus	10,721	1,428	117,831	0.89
Argyll and Bute	7,375	3,146	344,601	2.59
Clackmannanshire	6,767	1,750	463,209	4.64
Comhairle nan Eilean Siar	2,115	453	130,502	3.27
Dumfries and Galloway	14,588	4,797	556,007	2.20
Dundee City	23,509	8,277	1,538,703	3.58
East Ayrshire	20,142	5,386	768,475	2.93
East Dunbartonshire	6,840	1,445	711,253	6.63
East Lothian	10,817	4,810	629,792	4.16
East Renfrewshire	4,591	1,195	258,438	4.01
Edinburgh City	33,320	17,025	1,855,641	2.62
Falkirk	23,170	3,792	949,005	3.00
Fife	42,678	10,993	2,485,779	3.92
Glasgow City	105,819	56,482	11,083,000	5.33
Highland	20,097	7,184	1,031,656	2.71
Inverclyde	13,427	5,018	1,523,861	6.89
Midlothian	8,423	2,867	296,430	2.98
Moray	7,821	1,351	201,764	1.80
North Ayrshire	17,837	8,766	1,188,745	4.45
North Lanarkshire	53,774	19,219	2,201,944	2.60
Orkney Islands	1,049	256	49,568	2.70
Perth and Kinross	10,702	1,933	180,453	1.17
Renfrewshire	23,655	6,982	1,186,429	3.33
Scottish Borders	8,609	1,923	272,265	2.13
Shetland Islands	2,375	637	152,301	3.59

Council	Estimated stock	Number of houses with rent arrears[1]	Total rent arrears £	Rent arrears as a percentage of 1996–97 rental income
	As at 31 March 1997			
South Ayrshire	11,932	5,369	814,714	4.38
South Lanarkshire	39,714	10,841	1,665,169	2.48
Stirling	8,974	4,520	950,475	6.20
West Dunbartonshire	15,685	8,781	1,575,786	5.85
West Lothian	17,249	8,956	1,213,945	4.85
Scotland	621,291	228,426	38,378,838	3.75

[1] May include former council houses with outstanding arrears

Police Funding

Mr. Letwin: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the total funding at current prices, made available or planned to Scottish police forces for each year from 1998–99 to 2001–02 *(a)* from central Government and *(b)* via local authorities; and if he will make a statement. [54929]

Mr. McLeish: Grant Aided Expenditure (GAE) figures and budgets for the Scottish police forces for 1998–99 are shown in the table.

£ million

	GAE	Agreed budget set by police authorities
Central	31.559	30.607
Dumfries and Galloway	19.353	19.353
Fife	37.631	36.028
Grampian	59.171	59.171
Lothian and Borders	124.833	124.833
Northern	36.465	34.074
Strathclyde	328.336	328.336
Tayside	53.652	52.536
Total	691.000	684.938

The GAE levels for the police in Scotland for future years have been set as follows:

£ million

Year	GAE
1999–2000	714.7
2000–01	741.9
2001–02	762.8

Decisions have not yet been made about the split of the GAE for individual forces for these three years. Central Government pay police grant of 51 per cent. of actual expenditure up to the specified GAE limit. Local authorities meet the balance with the assistance of revenue support grant from central Government. The amount of revenue support grant paid on police expenditure is not separately identifiable because it is paid on the total eligible expenditure of each local authority.

Scottish Parliament

Mr. Letwin: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list each *(a)* liability, *(b)* undertaking and *(c)* contract with a value over £1 million of the United Kingdom Government that will be transferred to the Scottish Parliament. [54928]

Mr. Dewar: It is not possible to provide at this time a list of each liability, undertaking and contract with a value over £1 million which will transfer to Scottish Ministers. The items to transfer will depend on the situation pertaining at the time of transfer.

Property will be transferred by subordinate legislation under the provisions of the Scotland Bill when it receives Royal Assent. Work is underway to identify the categories of property which will transfer. It is expected that the property transfer orders will be laid before Parliament in the Spring of next year.

Beef and Sheep Premiums

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on delays in the payment of beef and sheep premiums to farmers. [54861]

Mr. Macdonald: Payments were made timeously, meeting established payment targets.

Cervical Smear Tests

Dr. Starkey: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the average time taken for a patient to receive the results of their cervical smear test; and what percentage take longer than the recommended four weeks. [55208]

Mr. Galbraith: For the year ended 31 March 1998 the average reporting time for the results of cervical smear tests in Scotland was 17 days. Figures are collected only for the time from the date a smear test is received by the laboratory to the date the report is issued by the laboratory and does not therefore include the time it takes GPs, family planning clinics etc. to issue the results to patients once they receive them from the laboratory. For this reason, no information is available on the percentage of patients who take longer than 4 weeks to receive their results.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Child Support Agency

20. **Mr. Bob Russell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security many cases were raised by hon. Members with the Child Support Agency *(a)* in the 12 months from 1 May 1997 and *(b)* in each of the four previous 12 month periods. [53493]

Angela Eagle: In the twelve months to the end of April 1998, the Child Support Agency received 21,933 letters from hon. Members concerning operational issues. In the

previous year the figure was 18,473. During the same two year period, the number of cases on the Agency's books rose by around 300,000.

Mr. Rendel: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many representations he has received from *(a)* organisations, *(b)* individual men and *(c)* individual women on the proposals in the CSA Green Paper. [53501]

Angela Eagle: The Green Paper sets out our proposals for a modern Child Support service. The Government want a wide debate on these proposals and welcome all views.

Responses to the consultation exercise should reach this Department by 30 November. Up to the end of September, 741 representations had been received, including 34 from organisations, 649 from individuals, 36 from Departmental staff and 22 from hon. Members.

It is not possible to state how many representations have been made by individual men and women since the gender of respondents cannot always be identified. Of the respondents, 119 gave a parent with care's perspective, 498 a non-resident parent's perspective and 124 were broadly neutral in their point of view.

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if it is CSA policy to overrule divorce settlements which provide for higher maintenance payments than those calculated according to the CSA formula. [55498]

Angela Eagle: Parents with care who are receiving Income Support can be required to co-operate with the Child Support Agency in seeking maintenance unless they have good cause for not doing so. When a valid application is received the Agency is bound by law to assess child maintenance in accordance with the rules of the scheme.

In many cases, the liability that results is substantially higher than that agreed in divorce settlements, but there is no provision for retaining an existing divorce settlement where the child support assessment is for a lower amount.

Disabled People

21. **Mr. Dismore:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a statement on the extension of the New Deal to people with disabilities. [53494]

Mr. Timms: This Government are committed to removing barriers to work and providing active help to people with a long-term illness or disability who want to work. That is why we introduced the New Deal for Disabled People, funded by £195 million from the Windfall Tax.

Over the next two years we will pilot a new Personal Adviser service in twelve areas which will offer support and advice to over a quarter of a million people on incapacity benefits. The first six pilots, to be run by the Employment Service, were launched on 28 September. A further six have been put out to competitive tender and should start early next year. In addition, we are testing ways of helping disabled people into work by funding a number of Innovative Schemes. 10 contracts to run schemes were announced in July and further contracts will be announced next year.

Lone Parents

22. **Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what targets for cost-effectiveness for the new deal for lone parents have been set with regard to the cost per job of the scheme. [53495]

Angela Eagle: The New Deal for Lone Parents aims to help lone parents improve their employability and move from welfare to work. The cost-effectiveness of the New Deal for Lone Parents will be measured by various methods including the reduction in lone parents on Income Support over and above what would have happened in the absence of the programme, and through performance targets. Independent research already shows that the New Deal for Lone Parents is having a moderate but marked effect on the number of lone parents moving off Income Support.

A Cost Benefit Analysis of the New Deal for Lone Parents in the phase 1 prototypes will be available with the rest of the phase 1 evaluation results in Autumn 1999. It will look at the costs and benefits to the exchequer as well as performing an economy wide cost benefit analysis. The structure of the Cost Benefit Analysis for the phase 3 national roll out of the New Deal for Lone Parents is still in the planning stages. This will build on the Cost Benefit Analysis of phase 1, consider the resource implications of the programme generally, judge whether it is cost effective and explore its economic impact.

Income Support

23. **Mr. Robathan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how much his Department spent on income support in the last three months; and what is the projected figure for 1999–2000. [53496]

Angela Eagle: The information is available annually. It is estimated that expenditure on income support will increase from £12.2 Billion in 1998–99 to £12.6 billion in 1999–2000. The figures are consistent with those set out in the Comprehensive Spending Review White Paper published by the Government on 14 July 1998.

Social Security Spending

24. **Mr. Boswell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what has been the annual real terms rate of increase in social security spending since April 1998. [53498]

Mr. Denham: The average rate of real growth of spending on social security benefits over the rest of this Parliament is forecast to be 2 per cent. a year.

Pensions

25. **Mr. Forth:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a statement on the publication of the Green Paper on pensions. [53499]

Mr. Denham: As set out in the Green Paper "New Ambitions for our Country: A New Contract for Welfare" (Cm 3805) we will publish a Green Paper on pensions later this year. There will be a period of further consultation before final proposals are developed.

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is his assessment of the cost of re-linking the annual calculations of the state pension based on *(a)* a 1980 and *(b)* a 1998 base line. [53490]

Mr. Denham: If the basic State Pension had been uprated in April 1998 in line with the higher of prices or earnings movements since 1979, the net additional cost would have been £9.5 billion in 1998.

If the basic State Pension had been uprated in April 1998 in line with the higher of prices or earnings movements over the preceding year only, the net cost would have been £130 million.

Pensioners

27. **Mr. Gapes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a statement on his Department's assistance for pensioners. [53502]

Angela Eagle: The £2.5 billion package of measures we announced in July will help all pensioners, but particularly the poorest 1.5 million pensioners entitled to income support will benefit from an above-inflation increase next April and we will begin a programme of action to tackle the problem of pensioners' not claiming their income support entitlement. In addition, all pensioner households will receive an annual winter fuel payment of £20 and all pensioners will be eligible for free eye tests and concessionary travel.

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is his latest estimate of the number of *(a)* single male pensioners, *(b)* single female pensioners and *(c)* married pensioners who are aged (i) 60 to 64, (ii) 65 to 69, (iii) 70 to 74, (iv) 75 to 79 and (v) 80 or above, who are failing to take up the income support to which they are entitled; and what is the total amount unclaimed in each category. [55636]

Mr. Denham: The information is set out in the table. We recently announced a £2.5 billion package of help for pensioners. The package includes action to help pensioners get the Income Support to which they are entitled.

Number of pensioners not claiming income support

Category	*Number of non-recipients*	*Total unclaimed (£)*
Single men 60–64[1]	20,000	25,000,000
Single men 65–69[1]	10,000	5,000,000
Single men 70–74[1]	10,000	5,000,000
Single men 75–79[1]	20,000	5,000,000
Single men 80+	40,000	25,000,000
Single women 60–64[1]	30,000	25,000,000
Single women 65–69	50,000	25,000,000
Single women 70–74	110,000	65,000,000
Single women 75–79	150,000	90,000,000
Single women 80+	290,000	250,000,000
Couples 60–64[1]	50,000	95,000,000
Couples 65–69[1]	30,000	40,000,000
Couples 70–74[1]	20,000	15,000,000
Couples 75–79[1]	20,000	15,000,000
Couples 80+[1]	30,000	20,000,000
Total	880,000	705,000,000

[1] These figures are based on small samples and should be treated with particular caution

Notes:

1. The figures for the number of recipients rounded to the nearest 10,000. The figures for amounts not taken up are rounded to the nearest £5 million. These estimated figures are based on the 1996–97 Family Resources Survey and are subject to some degree of error
2. The age of the couple has been defined by the age of the oldest partner

Welfare Dependency

28. **Mr. Swayne:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans the Government have to reduce the number of families dependent upon welfare. [53503]

Angela Eagle: We are determined to do everything we can to help those who can work to do so. That is why we want to modernise the structure of working age tax and benefits to create the right incentives, to reward work while at the same time provide security for those who cannot.

The New Deal for Lone Parents offers a tailor-made service of help and advice for people who are bringing up children on their own to make the move from Income Support into employment. Around 4,000 lone parents have already used the New Deal for Lone Parents and gone on to get jobs. The final phase of the rollout of the service (to lone parents who were already on Income Support before April 1998) takes place on 26 October.

The New Deal for 18–24 year olds gives young unemployed people real help and choices to improve their employability and their chances of fully participating in the labour market. By the end of August over 23,000 young people had found jobs and over 8,900 are improving their job prospects in other New Deal options.

From June, we have introduced a New Deal for those aged 25 and over who have been unemployed for 2 years or more. This provides a £75 subsidy for employers who recruit people from this group and opportunities to undertake full-time education and training for up to a year while on benefit. From November, £129 million is being made available to pilot a further development of the New Deal approach over the next two years for people aged 25 and over, reaching the 12 and 18 month stages of unemployment and those unemployed for longer.

The Chancellor announced in the budget a New Deal for the partners of the unemployed. Partners of the unemployed who are themselves out of work (90 per cent. of them women) have not had access to employment programmes on the same basis as the claimant unemployed. To address this imbalance, the Chancellor has set aside £60 million from the Windfall Tax receipts to ensure that partners over 25 have the option to receive the help they need to get back to work. Childless partners aged under 25 will be included in the New Deal for Young People.

The Working Families Tax Credit will be introduced from October 1999 and will guarantee working families a minimum income, above and beyond the level of the minimum wage. The new childcare tax credit will increase substantially the support available for childcare.

From next April, the National Minimum Wage will begin to end the scandal of poverty wages without adversely affecting inflation or jobs.

Our objective is to help people prepare for and get work as well as making work pay.

Disablement Benefits

29. **Sir Teddy Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what progress has been made in the review of disablement benefits. [53504]

Mr. Timms: We continue to review benefits for sick and disabled people, in the context of our broader programme of welfare reform.

We will bring forward proposals for consultation in due course.

Benefits

30. **Mr. Rhodri Morgan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what arrangements he proposes to improve communication between his Department and local authorities in relation to the payment of *(a)* income support, *(b)* council tax benefit and *(c)* housing benefit when claimants move between welfare and work. [53505]

Angela Eagle: We recognise the need to modernise Housing Benefit and improve its delivery in ways which support the transition from welfare to work and transform the services provided to the public. We are testing ways in which staff from the Benefits Agency and local authorities can work across the boundaries of central and local government to deliver a more efficient customer focused service. We will make increasing use of new technology to help people through the system, including the move into work. We have already set up a project giving local authority staff on-line access to the Income Support and Jobseeker's Allowance data they require for their administration of Housing and Council Tax Benefits.

Scotland

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will assess the advantages of devolving responsibility for the administration of social security in Scotland to the Scottish Office. [53475]

Mr. Darling: It would be impracticable and inefficient to split responsibility for policy and administration of Social Security between Westminster and Holyrood. It is in Scotland's interest that the Social Security system covers the whole of the United Kingdom. Were Social Security spending to be devolved, the Scottish Parliament would have to find additional money to meet the substantial costs involved. These would have to be found from resources otherwise available for other priorities such as Health and Education.

Mrs. H. Nasrin

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security for what reasons he has not provided a substantive reply to the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton, following his holding answer of 30 July 1998 with regard to Mrs. H. Nasrin, 58 Clitheroe Road. [55392]

Mr. Darling: A substantive reply was sent to my right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) on 16 September.

I have written today to all right hon. and hon. Members setting out targets for improving the Department's service in relation to correspondence.

Pensioner Income Series

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when he expects to publish the next edition of the Pensioner Income Series. [55642]

Mr. Denham: We intend to publish the 1996–97 Pensioners' Incomes Series on 26 November 1998.

National Insurance

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) if he will meet *(a)* the CBI, *(b)* the Institute of Directors and *(c)* other representative bodies to discuss the practice of employers paying staff offshore in order to avoid making payments to the National Insurance Fund; [55610]

(2) what estimate he has made of the cost in each of the past 10 years to the National Insurance Fund of the practice of employers paying staff offshore; and what plans he has to limit this practice; [55612]

(3) when he plans to meet the Chairperson and other directors of *(a)* Cable and Wireless and *(b)* P and O to discuss the payment of staff offshore and its impact on the National Insurance Fund; [55609]

(4) what representations he has received from operators of services on the Channel Tunnel about competitors' practice of paying some employees offshore to avoid employees' contributions being paid to the National Insurance Fund. [55611]

Mr. Timms: We are aware of the increasing use being made of offshore employment contracts by British shipping operators as a means of avoiding employers' National Insurance contributions for British resident seafarers. The issue of seafarers National Insurance contributions is one of a number of matters being considered in the context of the Government's strategy for reviving the shipping industry as announced in the White paper on the Future of Transport.

We have not received any representations from the operators of Channel Tunnel services about the use of offshore employment contracts by shipping operators; nor are there any plans to meet the CBI, the Institute of Directors or the Chairperson and other directors of Cable & Wireless and P&O about this matter.

The information requested about the National Insurance Fund could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) what consideration his Department has given to taking the value of subsidised works canteens and refectories into account when assessing National Insurance contributions; [55604]

(2) what assessment he has made of the views contained in the First Report of the Low Pay Commission in relation to luncheon vouchers remaining free of National Insurance contributions; [55606]

(3) what safeguards are proposed to ensure that the impact of bringing luncheon vouchers and other non-cash vouchers into Class 1 National Insurance liability will not result in such benefits being consolidated into pay for those whose incomes are below the proposed national minimum wage; [55608]

(4) what assessment has been made of the impact on low-pay workers of the proposal to bring luncheon vouchers into Class 1 National Insurance liability; and if he will make a statement; [55614]

(5) if the consultation timetable and procedure embarked on on 13 August in relation to the draft regulations to bring non-cash vouchers and luncheon vouchers into Class 1 National Insurance liability, meets the requirements of the Better Regulation Guidance advice published on 10 August. [55607]

Mr. Timms: We announced on 22 July 1997, *Official Report*, columns 789–90, at second reading of the Social Security Bill our intention to bring non-cash vouchers into liability for Class 1 National Insurance in the same way as cash vouchers. The key principles of the proposals are to bring about greater alignment of tax and National Insurance and to bring greater fairness in the National Insurance treatment of earnings. We are currently considering our response to the points raised in the public consultation which ran from 14 August to 14 September.

We propose to continue to mirror the tax treatment of the value of subsidised works canteens and refectories.

The First Report of the Low Pay Commission suggested that the national minimum wage should not include non-cash vouchers. We are considering this point alongside other issues in the consultation exercise.

The vast majority of low paid workers do not receive luncheon vouchers and are therefore liable for National Insurance on all their earnings.

An explanatory and financial memorandum and a regulatory appraisal covering non-cash vouchers were published alongside the Bill in July 1997. A copy of that regulatory appraisal accompanied the consultation paper on the draft regulations issued in August. The four weeks consultation period should not be looked at in isolation as Ministers' intentions to introduce changes to the National Insurance Contributions liability on non-cash vouchers were clearly suggested in the passage of the Social Security Bill. We shall in due course present the draft regulations before the Social Security Advisory Committee as part of the Department's legislative consultation process.

Family Poverty

Mr. Goggins: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a statement on his Department's strategy for tackling family poverty. [53481]

Angela Eagle: We have already taken major steps towards tackling poverty amongst families. The best path out of poverty is work, where that is appropriate. Our initiatives such as the New Deal for Lone Parents, the working Family Tax Credit, the Childcare Tax Credit and National Childcare Strategy will help families into work and ensure that work pays. For those families who may be unable to work, or whose opportunity to maximise their income from work is limited, we are increasing the child personal allowance and family premium in the income related benefits. And, from April 1999, child benefit for the eldest child will be increased by £2.50 a week.

European Union (UK Presidency)

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a statement on his Department's work and achievements during the UK presidency of the European Union. [54281]

Angela Eagle: The Department's objective for Social Security business during the UK Presidency was to promote measures which facilitated legitimate social protection coverage for EU citizens living and working in another Member State. This supported the UK's overall Presidency objectives of promoting employment, completing the single market and making the EU more relevant to its citizens.

Three Social Security measures were adopted by the Council in June.

(1) The Supplementary Pensions Directive is a first step in protecting the occupational and personal pension rights of EU citizens living and working in another Member State. It requires: preservation of pension rights for people moving to another Member State; the cross-border payment of pensions to pensioners living in another Member State; and the facility for people to remain in their "home" scheme while working for the same employer on a short-term basis in another member State.

(2) The existing Community provisions which co-ordinate statutory social security rights for EU citizens across the Member States—Council Regulation 1408/71—were extended to civil servants in special social security schemes, thus resolving an issue that had been under discussion in the Council for 7 years.

(3) A package of miscellaneous amendments to Council Regulation 1408/71, designed to keep the regulations in good working order, was adopted.

At a meeting of the Social Affairs Council on 7 April, the UK Presidency adopted Conclusions on the importance of proceeding with a wide-ranging review of Council Regulation 1408/71, to ensure that the co-ordination mechanism continues to meet the needs of today's citizens.

Outside the Council, Departmental officials took the opportunity of the UK Presidency to launch initiatives to improve the effectiveness of EU-wide bodies in which the Department represents UK interests, including the Administrative Commission on Social Security (which oversees the operation of Council Regulation 1408/71) and the advisory board which supervises the Consensus programme of technical assistance to central and eastern European states. The Department also hosted the bi-annual MISSOC (Mutual Information System on Social Security) conference in York in May.

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list each Ministerial visit made outside Great Britain in connection with the UK presidency of the European Union. [54282]

Angela Eagle: Visits related to Social Security business are set out in the following table. My hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Withington (Mr. Bradley), the then Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Social Security, made the visits in his capacity as the Minister responsible for co-ordinating the Department's EU social security business.

Date	*Place visited*	*Purpose of visit*
23 September 1997	Brussels	Allan Larsson, Director-General of Directorate-General V of the European Commission (employment, training and social policy)
8 October 1997	Bonn	Horst Gunther, German Minister for Labour and Social Affairs
17 December 1997	Strasbourg	Padraig Flynn, European Commissioner for Social Affairs and MEPs on the European Parliament's Employment and Social Affairs Committee
24 February 1998	Vienna	Eleonora Hostasch, Austrian Minister for Labour, Health and Social Affairs
28 April 1998	Paris	Raoul Briet, Director of Social Security

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the estimated total additional cost to his Department arising from meetings and events specifically connected with the UK presidency of the European Union. [54283]

Angela Eagle: The total additional expenditure was approximately £29,000, excluding the activities of the Ministers for Women.

Government Purchase Card

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what use *(a)* his Department and *(b)* its agencies are currently making of the Government Purchase Card; what savings he estimates are being achieved as a result; what plans he has to expand use of the card by his Department and its agencies; and if he will make a statement. [55168]

Mr. Timms: Since 1995 this Department has obtained Corporate Purchasing Cards under an existing banking services contract. All DSS business units have now agreed to transfer to the Government Procurement Card (GPC). A business case for this was prepared in July 1998. Subject to business case approval it is planned to run a competition for the DSS requirement between banks in the Treasury's GPC Master Framework.

Based on past experience in DSS cards like the GPC can improve the conventional order process and allow staff to achieve efficiency savings of about £10 per transaction. About 33 per cent. of DSS purchase orders are expected to be suitable for GPCs. The business case indicates potential efficiency savings of about £1 million per year. The cards will save staff time and allow them to focus on higher value activity. The use of GPCs and related benefits and savings will be piloted in selected business areas. Subject to successful evaluation of these pilots general roll-out is planned for mid 1999.

Funeral Payments

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what changes have been made to the Social Fund in respect of the payment of costs for funerals by his Department since May 1995; and what plans he has to make further changes. [55044]

Angela Eagle: The Funeral Payment scheme has been amended four times since May 1995. Details of the main changes are set out.

In June 1995, a £500 cap was placed on specified funeral directors' services, and the payment of reasonable costs for other specified disbursements was introduced. A new priority order reflected that the responsible person would be the surviving partner or, where there was no partner, a close relative or close friend. A contact test was also introduced to help determine whether it was reasonable for the claimant to have taken responsibility for the funeral costs where there was no surviving partner.

In October 1996, a number of minor changes were introduced, including adding income-based Jobseeker's Allowance to the list of qualifying benefits; making provision for a fee or donation for a minister, but restricting the amount allowed to that laid down in the Parochial Fees Order.

In April 1997, the scheme was simplified to allow the cost of a small number of specified items or services, plus up to £600 for other funeral expenses. The specified items included the necessary costs of a burial or cremation. A new "immediate family member" contact test was introduced where there was no surviving partner, to help determine whether it was reasonable for the claimant to have taken responsibility for the funeral costs. This change prevented payment if there were other immediate family members (parent, son or daughter of the deceased), and neither they nor their partner had been awarded a qualifying benefit.

In November 1997, following a decision of the Social Security Commissioner, the provision was extended to allow a Funeral Payment where a funeral took place outside the United Kingdom (UK), provided it was within the European Economic Area. In such cases, the amount allowed would be limited to that which would have been awarded if the funeral had taken place in the area where the deceased lived in the UK.

As with all areas of Government policy, this area is kept under review, but we have no immediate plans to make further changes.

Housing and Council Tax Benefits

Mr. Hood: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list for each local authority in Scotland, for 1996–97, housing and council tax benefit expenditure relating to *(a)* good cause backdated awards, *(b)* exceptional circumstances awards and *(c)* exceptional payments, under Regulation 61(1),

indicating the percentage in each category as a proportion of overall housing and council tax benefit expenditure. [55035]

Angela Eagle: The information is in the tables. Regulation 61(1) does not relate to exceptional payments. Regulation 61(3) relates to Rent Allowance Exceptional Hardship payments. There is no equivalent Regulation for Rent Rebate or Council Tax Benefit.

(a) Good cause backdated awards

Authority	Benefit expenditure in category £ HB	CTB	As a proportion of overall benefit percentage HB	CTB
Aberdeen	18,370	24,524	0.49	0.33
Aberdeenshire	3,024	84,770	0.02	1.65
Angus	2,177	42,199	0.02	1.18
Argyll-Bute	100,057	3,137	0.76	0.10
Clackmannanshire	18,954	23,933	0.27	0.89
Comhairle Nan Eilean Siar	12,788	9,814	0.40	0.72
Dumfries and Galloway	11,984	95	0.06	0.00
Dundee	40,969	251,498	0.10	2.41
East Ayrshire	10,613	3,416	0.06	0.06
East Dunbartonshire	13,578	6,433	0.18	0.24
East Lothian	8,715	109,861	0.07	2.69
East Renfrewshire	4,852	950	0.08	0.04
Edinburgh	114,736	784,687	0.12	3.11
Falkirk	16,575	48,973	0.09	0.77
Fife	146,258	6,307	0.28	0.04
Glasgow	381,606	22,709	0.16	0.04
Highland	72,767	101,146	0.24	1.09
Inverclyde	30,551	6,256	0.17	0.12
Midlothian	5,707	83,911	0.06	2.28
Moray	9,078	4,743	0.10	0.18
North Ayrshire	40,818	10,245	0.18	0.15
North Lanarkshire	24,189	9,217	0.04	0.05
Orkney	10,578	3,035	0.54	0.67
Perth and Kinross	63,062	71,736	0.46	1.59
Renfrewshire	91,229	5,387	0.30	0.06
Scottish Borders	28,933	5,648	0.25	0.17
Shetland	1,288	191	0.07	0.05
South Ayrshire	4,459	27,366	0.02	0.51
South Lanarkshire	25,559	0	0.05	0.00
Stirling	18,712	27,938	0.15	0.82
West Dunbartonshire	42,373	0	0.21	0.00
West Lothian	25,965	147,194	0.13	2.25

Source:
1996/97 Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit Audited Subsidy Claims

(b) Exceptional circumstances awards

Authority	Benefit expenditure in category £ HB	CTB	As a proportion of overall benefit percentage HB	CTB
Aberdeen	80	0	0.00	0.00
Aberdeenshire	0	0	0.00	0.00
Angus	0	0	0.00	0.00
Argyll-Bute	0	0	0.00	0.00
Clackmannanshire	0	0	0.00	0.00
Comhairle Nan Eilean Siar	0	0	0.00	0.00
Dumfries and Galloway	1,561	0	0.01	0.00
Dundee	27,232	958	0.06	0.01
East Ayrshire	5,405	1,261	0.03	0.02
East Dunbartonshire	4,781	0	0.06	0.00
East Lothian	1,807	0	0.01	0.00
East Renfrewshire	0	16,823	0.00	0.76
Edinburgh	71,852	893	0.07	0.00
Falkirk	0	0	0.00	0.00
Fife	3,411	0	0.01	0.00
Glasgow	0	0	0.00	0.00
Highland	4,353	0	0.01	0.00

(b) Exceptional circumstances awards

Authority	Benefit expenditure in category £ HB	CTB	As a proportion of overall benefit percentage HB	CTB
Inverclyde	0	0	0.00	0.00
Midlothian	0	0	0.00	0.00
Moray	0	0	0.00	0.00
North Ayrshire	0	0	0.00	0.00
North Lanarkshire	3,343	0	0.01	0.00
Orkney	58	0	0.00	0.00
Perth and Kinross	0	814	0.00	0.02
Renfrewshire	2,072	0	0.01	0.00
Scottish Borders	0	0	0.00	0.00
Shetland	0	0	0.00	0.00
South Ayrshire	0	0	0.00	0.00
South Lanarkshire	27,478	0	0.06	0.00
Stirling	602	0	0.00	0.00
West Dunbartonshire	1,892	0	0.01	0.00
West Lothian	0	224	0.00	0.00

Source:
1996/97 Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit Audited Subsidy Claims

(c) Exceptional payments under Regulation 61(3)

Authority	Benefit expenditure in category £ HB	As a proportion of overall benefit Percentage HB
Aberdeen	3,401	0.01
Aberdeenshire	814	0.00
Angus	1,406	0.01
Argyll-Bute	0	0.00
Clackmannanshire	0	0.00
Comhairle Nan Eilean Siar	1,208	0.04
Dumfries and Galloway	2,128	0.01
Dundee	11,390	0.03
East Ayrshire	3,265	0.02
East Dunbartonshire	11,267	0.15
East Lothian	584	0.00
East Renfrewshire	6,360	0.10
Edinburgh	42,420	0.04
Falkirk	7,338	0.04
Fife	5,832	0.01
Glasgow	48,217	0.02
Highland	3,454	0.01
Inverclyde	213	0.00
Midlothian	2,304	0.03
Moray	1,135	0.01
North Ayrshire	4,985	0.02
North Lanarkshire	1,381	0.00
Orkney	211	0.01
Perth and Kinross	175	0.00
Renfrewshire	2,458	0.01
Scottish Borders	1,003	0.01
Shetland	0	0.00
South Ayrshire	8,175	0.04
South Lanarkshire	0	0.00
Stirling	4,748	0.04
West Dunbartonshire	675	0.00
West Lothian	426	0.00

Notes:

1. Expenditure in categories (a), (b) and (c) above expressed as a percentage of overall Housing and Council Tax expenditure for each authority

2. Expenditure under Regulation 61(3) is expressed as a proportion of total HB expenditure, although it only applies to Rent Allowance

Source:
1996/97 Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit Audited Subsidy Claims

Ms Oona King: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will give a breakdown of the reasons for refusal given to the applicants whose claim for housing benefit/council tax benefit extended payments were refused in the period January 1997 to December 1997. [55317]

Angela Eagle: The information is not available in the format requested. However, of the 163,000 claims for extended payments made between January 1997 and December 1997 140,000 (85 per cent.) were successful.

Notes

1. Caseload figures have been rounded to two significant figures, percentages to a whole per cent.

2. Figures refer to a benefit unit which may be a single person or a couple

3. All figures are provisional

Sources:

1. Local Authority Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit quarterly Administration data returns January 1997 to December 1997

2. Housing Benefit Administration returns 1997/98

Mr. Rendel: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will estimate the cost of raising the earnings disregard in housing benefit and council tax benefit for lone parents to *(a)* £30, *(b)* £35 and *(c)* £40. [55582]

Angela Eagle: The information is in the table.

Lone parent earnings disregard	*Housing benefit/council tax benefit cost (£ million)*
(a) £30	15
(b) £35	30
(c) £40	45

Notes:

1. Estimates based upon 1995/96 Family Resources Survey data uprated to 1998/99 prices

2. Estimates rounded to nearest £5 million

Motorcycle Parking

Mr. Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many motorcycle parking spaces exist at each office or site for which his Department is responsible; and how many are secure spaces. [55256]

Angela Eagle: The information is not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. Such information as is available suggests that there are very few parking spaces on the general estate that are specifically designated for motorcycles. Invariably, most motorcyclists make use of car parking facilities or sheds where bicycles are secured. However, at the Department's major sites at Newcastle, Washington, Lytham and Preston a total of 29 secure motorcycle parking spaces are provided and a further 80 bays, in a secure environment, can be utilised for either motorcycles or bicycles.

Jobseekers Allowance and Income Support

Ms Oona King: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many claims for income-based jobseekers allowance and income support were withdrawn in the period January 1997 to December 1997. [55316]

Angela Eagle: The information requested is not available.

Organophosphates

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what research his Department has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated on the impact of organophosphorous compounds since 1 May 1997; which organisations are carrying out the research; and what is the timetable for its completion. [55338]

Mr. Timms: The Department of Social Security has commissioned no research on the impact of organophosphorous compounds since 1 May 1997. To ensure that policy is medically sound and based on the latest research, the Department's medical advisers regularly monitor the scientific and medical literature, and liaise with colleagues in other government departments, and in universities and research institutions. In June 1998, the report of the Official Group on Organophosphates was published by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. This report contains a list of all research funded by Government Departments into organophosphates.

Childcare Disregard

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the cost to the Exchequer of the childcare disregard in family credit; and what proportion of that cost is in respect of childcare provided by grandparents or other relatives of the children concerned. [55388]

Angela Eagle: The annual expenditure in 1997–98 for extra awards made in Family Credit for formal childcare charges was £33.3 million.

Information on the proportion of that cost which is in respect of childcare provided by grandparents or other relatives is not available. However, for the purposes of the childcare disregard, Family Credit claimants can claim for help only with the cost of "formal" childcare. Formal childcare is classified as that provided by registered childminders and nurseries and by out-of-hours clubs on school premises, run by school or a Local Authority, and schemes run on Crown property. In most cases care provided by grandparents or other relatives is likely to be informal childcare and would not attract a disregard.

Notes:

1. Figures have been rounded to the nearest thousand.

2. Sample size 5 per cent.

3. Expenditure figure based on an average of four quarters

Source:

Family Credit 5 per cent. sample of awards.

Independent Tribunal Service

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what factors led to the decision by the Independent Tribunal Service to employ a customer services manager; and if he will make a statement on the nature of the customer relationship which applies in the case of a judicial body. [55402]

Angela Eagle: This is a matter for the Independent Tribunal Service (ITS). The President of ITS, His Honour Judge Michael Harris, will write to my right hon. Friend shortly.

War Pensions

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when the war pension disablement disregard was set at £10; and what it would be at current prices if it had been increased in line with inflation since then. [55488]

Mr. Timms: The war pension disregard was set at £10 in April 1990. It would now be worth £12.75 if it had been uprated by the RPI. However, as the war pension disregard is applied to earnings related benefits it would, therefore, have been updated by ROSSI and now be worth £13.15.

The £10 disregard is not the only disregard war pensioners may receive when claiming an income related benefit. There is also a total disregard of the whole of the supplementary pension of £54.70 per week awarded to "pre 1973" war widows (widows whose late husband's military service was completed before 31 March 1973 and who are not entitled to an attributable widow's pension from the Ministry of Defence), as well as a disregard of any mobility supplement and payment of war disablement pension based on the need for attendance.

Child Maintenance

Mr. Rendel: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will estimate the cost of disregarding child maintenance for all *(a)* lone parent family credit and *(b)* working families tax credit claimants. [55581]

Angela Eagle: The information is in the table.

	Cost (£ million per annum)
Family Credit	40
Working Families Tax Credit	40

Notes:

1. Figures are rounded to the nearest £5 million and are at 1998/99 prices, benefit levels and caseloads
2. Based on the May 1998 5 per cent. scan of the Family Credit Computer System
3. Figures do not take into account the effect of the minimum wage
4. Costs include a small element of spousal maintenance which it is not possible to identify separately on the Family Credit dataset
5. Figures do not include couples

Mr. Rendel: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will estimate the cost of a *(a)* £10, *(b)* £15 and *(c)* £20 child maintenance disregard in income support. [55580]

Angela Eagle: The information is set out in the table.

The estimated full year costs of child care disregard

Disregard (per week)	*Cost (per annum)*
£10	£100 million
£15	£140 million
£20	£170 million

Notes:

1. Figures are rounded to the nearest £5 million and are at estimated 1999–2000 caseloads.
2. There would be offsetting savings of around £20 million if the Child Maintenance Bonus were also to be abolished.

Luncheon Vouchers

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what proportion of those people in receipt of luncheon vouchers as part of their contract of employment *(a)* are categorised as being low paid and *(b)* have incomes below the level of the national minimum wage. [55605]

Mr. Timms: According to the latest Family Resources Survey (1996–97), less than 1 per cent. of all employees responding to the survey had received luncheon vouchers from their present employer in the last six months. Of these employees, in the region of 2 per cent. had calculated hourly earnings below levels consistent with the national minimum wage. This is based on an extremely small sample size and should therefore be treated with caution. The independent Low Pay Commission have concluded that there is no standard definition of low pay.

Pension Contributions

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what assessment he has made of the distribution of ages at which employees first make second tier pension contributions to schemes other than the state earnings-related pension scheme. [55635]

Mr. Denham: At present the information requested could be provided only at disproportionate cost. However, the Department has commissioned the Centre for Research in Social Policy, Loughborough University, to carry out an analysis, using data from the Survey of Family and Working Lives, of how people are building up pension rights over their lifetime. This analysis is looking at the age at which people join occupational and personal pensions. This work is expected to be completed by the end of this year, and the report will be published as soon as possible thereafter.

Households Below Average Incomes

Ms Bridget Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when he expects the latest figures on households below average incomes to be published; and if he will make a statement. [55664]

Angela Eagle: The latest figures in the Households Below Average Income series, covering the period from 1979 to 1996–97, were published on 15 October 1998, and copies have been placed in the Library.

The figures bear out our belief that there is a need to tackle poverty by helping people into work, and by getting help to the poorest pensioners. By introducing the New Deals, the Working Families Tax Credit and the Guaranteed Minimum Income for pensioners we are making real progress in addressing this situation.

The figures also show that the ever increasing Social Security Bill has had little impact on reducing inequality. This confirms our approach that welfare reform is required.

Correspondence

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when the hon. Member for Wakefield will receive a reply to his correspondence of 8 May 1998, on behalf of his constituent Mr. Wright, from *(a)* the Disability Living Allowance Unit and *(b)* the Benefit Agency Medical Service. [55032]

Mr. Timms: The administration of the Disability Living Allowance Unit and the Benefits Agency Medical Services is a matter for Peter Mathison, the Chief Executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to my hon. Friend.

Letter from Peter Mathison to Mr. David Hinchliffe, dated 19 October 1998:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question asking when you will receive a reply to your correspondence of 8 May, concerning your constituent Mr. Wright, from (a) the Disability Living Allowance Unit (DLA) and (b) the Benefits Agency Medical Service (BAMS).

The Benefits Agency Customer Charter sets out targets for response to complaints. They are an acknowledgement within two working days and a full response within seven working days (twenty working days for BAMS). I am sorry, on this occasion, you have failed to receive the standard of service which you are entitled to expect.

Repiles to your letter were issued from the BAMS on 7 August 1998 and from the DLA Unit on 11 August 1998.

Incapacity Benefit

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is his Department's policy on future levels of incapacity benefit. [55434]

Mr. Timms: We are committed to modernising benefits for incapacity and disability. The current system has failed to give severely disabled people the support they need, failed to encourage and help sick and disabled people to work, and failed to keep pace with social and economic change. We will announce our proposals for reforming Incapacity Benefit in due course.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will estimate the impact on public funds of reducing incapacity benefit by £15 per week on recipients. [55435]

Mr. Timms: We estimate that the impact on public funds of reducing all the rates of Incapacity Benefit by £15 a week in the current year would have been a reduction in the region of £950 million.

Source:

Based on the May 1998 caseload data from the DSS INCAP computer system.

HEALTH

Asbestos

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what sum from the money allocated to his Department following the Comprehensive Spending Review will be used to remove asbestos from buildings within the National Health Service. [51865]

Mr. Milburn: The National Health Service Estates Agency collects information on backlog maintenance which is recorded in three categories: physical condition, statutory and non-statutory standards, together with fire safety. The cost of removing asbestos is contained within the statutory and non-statutory standards element.

My right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer announced additional resources for the NHS totalling £17.7 billion over the years 1999–2000 to 2001–02 on 14 July 1998, *Official Report*, columns 187–211. Details on the allocation of these resources will be announced in due course. However, ultimately it will be for trusts to determine what proportion of their backlog maintenance capital allocation should be apportioned to asbestos removal, depending on local circumstances determined as part of their health and safety risk management strategies.

Mental Health Act Services

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what evidence he has assessed of the extent to which local authorities have been charging for section 117 Mental Health Act 1983 residential or domiciliary services; and if he will give guidance to those who have paid for such services. [54971]

Mr. Boateng: This information is not held centrally in the Department. Any individuals who think they have been wrongly charged for services provided under section 117 of the Mental Health Act 1983 can seek legal advice and take legal action if so advised.

Hospital Discharges

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what number and percentage of people admitted to hospital were readmitted within 28 days of being discharged *(a)* in total and *(b)* for those people aged (i) up to 64 and (ii) 65 years and over in the last year for which figures are available; [54972]

(2) what number and percentage of NHS trusts employ a hospital discharge co-ordinator or equivalent. [54975]

Mr. Boateng: The information requested is not collected centrally.

Hospital Aftercare

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many hospital aftercare schemes or hospital at home schemes exist within the NHS; and if he will provide a breakdown by NHS region; [54973]

(2) what number and percentage of hospital aftercare schemes or hospital at home schemes are run by *(a)* NHS trusts, *(b)* voluntary organisations and *(c)* others. [54974]

Mr. Boateng: The information requested is not collected centrally.

Vitamin B12

Mr. Ennis: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what research his Department has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated into the relationship between vitamin B12 and the control of fibroids and the consequences of hormone replacement therapy for fibroids. [54684]

Mr. Boateng: The Department has not centrally directly commissioned or undertaken any evaluation into the relationship between vitamin B12 and the control of fibroids and the consequences of hormone replacement therapy (HRT) on fibroids.

The Government fund health and medical research through the Medical Research Council (MRC), the Department of Health's Policy Research Programme (PRP), and the National Health Service Research and Development (R&D) Programme.

The MRC is not currently funding any research directly addressing the problems of fibroids. It is supporting a major, long-term trial on the effects of HRT: this will include particularly close monitoring by general practitioners of participants at risk from fibroids, but is not specifically looking into the links between HRT and fibroids. Additionally, the MRC funds research into female reproductive biology, including menstrual problems, which is generally relevant to fibroids.

The Department's PRP and centrally managed NHS R&D programmes are not currently directly commissioning any work in this area. Information is not currently available about other, devolved programmes, including whether any NHS providers are using service support costs funded from the R&D levy to support work in this area. Data are currently being collected and will be available during 1999.

Cervical Screening

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he proposes to increase the take-up of *(a)* breast screening and *(b)* cervical cancer testing amongst women with learning disabilities. [54908]

Mr. Boateng: We are aware of the need to increase the take-up of breast and cervical screening amongst women with learning disabilities. Work is due to proceed in consultation with the Advisory Committees on Breast Cancer and Cervical Screening to develop good practice frameworks in order to improve equity of access for people with learning difficulties.

Mr. Austin: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) when he expects to announce the findings of the Cervical Screening Action Team; [55300]

(2) if he will set out the terms of reference of the Cervical Screening Action Team; and if he intends to publish its report; [55299]

Dr. Starkey: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he expects to *(a)* receive and *(b)* publish the report of the action team convened by Sir Kenneth Calman on cytology services. [55140]

Mr. Boateng: The Cervical Screening Action Team (CSAT) was set up in December 1997 to monitor action to improve the quality of and public confidence in the National Health Service cervical screening programme; consider what action should be taken to address staff resource issues for the cervical screening programme nationally; and identify any particular areas of the cervical screening programme where further action is needed. Members of the team included representatives from the Women's Nationwide Cancer Control Campaign, the relevant professional bodies and the National Co-ordinating Office of the cervical screening programme.

The report of the Cervical Screening Action Team was published by the Chief Medical Officer on 24 August 1998. It noted the progress made so far, particularly in the areas of quality assurance and training. The team made a number of recommendations about further improvements in quality assurance; training of cytology and other staff; and information for women, the general public and health professionals.

Copies of the report are available in the Library.

Dr. Starkey: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of recruitment and retention problems in cytology services. [55142]

Mr. Milburn: A research programme to assess future service needs and issues surrounding recruitment to and retention within the workforce involved in the provision of cytology services is to be commissioned. This will report to the National Health Service Executive through the National Advisory Group for Scientists and Technicians.

Dr. Starkey: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what is the average time taken for a patient to receive the results of their cervical smear test; and what percentage take longer than the recommended four weeks; [55207]

(2) for each health authority in England, what is the average time taken for a patient to receive the results of their cervical smear test; and what percentage take longer than the recommended four weeks. [55212]

Mr. Boateng: This information is not available centrally. Officials are shortly to begin a formal review of the information available about the cervical screening programme and data collection will be included as part of this review.

Guidance issued by the national co-ordinating team for the National Health Service cervical screening programme state that at least 80 per cent. of women should receive their smear test results within four weeks of the smear being taken and 100 per cent. should receive their results within six weeks. As at 31 March 1997 (the latest information available), 77 per cent. of laboratories were reporting results within four weeks of the date of the smear test and 95 per cent. within six weeks.

Mr. Austin: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many cytology laboratories in England are sending their cervical smears to other laboratories for interpretation. [55301]

Mr. Boateng: The information requested is not available centrally.

However, the National Health Service cervical screening programme has recently conducted a survey of laboratories in England. Of 180 questionnaires sent out, 114 have been returned. Preliminary results show that 16 laboratories send cervical smear slides to other laboratories for assessment.

Pharmaceutical Wholesalers

Mrs. Irene Adams: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many pharmaceutical wholesalers ceased to operate in each year between 1990 and 1998. [55182]

Mr. Milburn: The numbers of wholesaler dealers whose licences ceased are not available for the years 1990–1994. For subsequent years the numbers are:

	Number
Year ending 31 March 1995	77
Year ending 31 March 1996	131
Year ending 31 March 1997	78
Year ending 31 March 1998	73

Mrs. Irene Adams: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many pharmaceutical wholesalers were established in the United Kingdom in each year between 1990 and 1998. [55162]

Mr. Milburn: The numbers of wholesaler dealers licensed are not available for the years 1990 and 1991. For subsequent years the number are:

	Number
Year ending 31 March 1992	109
Year ending 31 March 1993	125
Year ending 31 March 1994	123
Year ending 31 March 1995	161
Year ending 31 March 1996	146
Year ending 31 March 1997	135
Year ending 31 March 1998	94

Thalassaemia

Mr. Amess: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what support his Department has provided for research into thalassaemia. [55505]

Ms Jowell: Research may be ongoing in individual National Health Service units but there is currently no central funding for research into thalassaemia from either the Department's policy research programme or the central NHS research and development programmes. The Medical Research Council, which is funded by the Office of Science and Technology, commissions most of the Government's research into bio-chemical and clinical issues. The Council is not supporting any thalassaemia research at present but it is always willing to consider

sound scientific proposals, in competition with other applications.

Vaccinations

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to make public funding available to meet the costs incurred by parents choosing to travel to France to obtain the single measles vaccination for their children, following its withdrawal from the United Kingdom. [55503]

Ms Jowell: None. Single measles vaccine has not been recommended in the United Kingdom since 1988. Measles, Mumps and Rubella vaccine is recommended to protect against measles.

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if it is his Department's policy that parents who are concerned about the possible side effects of the MMR vaccination should have access to other forms of vaccination for their children. [55502]

Ms Jowell: The United Kingdom health departments are advised on immunisation policy by the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation, an independent expert statutory committee. The use of single vaccines in place of Measles, Mumps and Rubella is not recommended since there is no evidence that doing this has any benefit and it may even be harmful. This Department's policy is to ensure parents are provided with factual information about immunisation and that immunisation recommendations are backed up by sound scientific research. The administration of separate measles, mumps and rubella vaccines instead of MMR is not supported by any studies into its safety or efficacy.

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what discussions his Department has had with Pasteur Merieux MSD to discuss the withdrawal of the single measles vaccination from the United Kingdom *(a)* before and *(b)* since the withdrawal was announced. [55501]

Ms Jowell: On 20 August 1998, representatives of Pasteur Merieux informed Departmental officials that they had decided not to supply unlicensed measles vaccine to the United Kingdom. Single measles vaccine has not been recommended in the United Kingdom since 1988.

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what contact he has had with the Pasteur Merieux Company concerning the withdrawal of general availability of the single measles vaccine. [55481]

Ms Jowell: Ministers have had no contact with Pasteur Merieux about this issue. On 20 August 1998, representatives of Pasteur Merieux informed Departmental officials that they had decided not to supply unlicensed measles vaccine to the United Kingdom.

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the decision of some parents to take their children to other countries for the single measles vaccine. [55482]

Ms Jowell: Measles, Mumps and Rubella vaccine is readily available in the United Kingdom to protect children against not only measles, but also mumps and rubella, all of which are potentially serious diseases. Single measles vaccine has not been recommended in the United Kingdom since 1988.

Motorcycle Parking

Mr. Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many motorcycle parking spaces exist at each office or site for which his Department is responsible; and how many are secure spaces. [55264]

Ms Jowell: The majority of buildings and sites for which the Department has management responsibility have facilities for parking motorcycles either in the form of dedicated secure spaces (see table) or by other local arrangements such as use of space in car parks.

Building	*Dedicated secure motorcycle spaces*
Richmond House, London, W1A	8
Skipton House, London, SE1	10
Wellington House, London, SE1	0
Market Towers, London, SE8	4
Eileen House, London, SE1	10
Hannibal House, London, SE1	0 (but shares Skipton's facilities)
Trevelyan Square, Leeds	0
Capital Drive, Milton Keynes	0
Premier Buildings, Lancashire	0
Bartholomew House, Birmingham	0
John Snow House, Durham	1
Maid Marion House, Nottingham	0
Hesketh House, Lancashire	6 (covered spaces) + 30 open spaces
Westward House, Bristol	4
J. Rothschilde House, Nottingham	0
Glenthorne YTC, Birmingham	0
Berkely Square, Bristol	0

Government Purchase Card

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what use *(a)* his Department and *(b)* its agencies are currently making of the Government Purchase Card; what savings he estimates are being achieved as a result; what plans he has to expand use of the card by his Department and its agencies; and if he will make a statement. [55179]

Mr. Milburn: The Department is about to begin a study which will identify the scope for introducing the Government Procurement Card in the Department. A decision about the use of the card will be made in the light of this work.

Health Action Zone

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his announcement of a health action zone for Camden and Islington, how much money will be available for the project. [55520]

Mr. Milburn: Camden and Islington Health Authority has been invited to develop a full programme, with the expectation of being awarded second wave health action zone status from 1 April 1999, subject to a satisfactory programme being submitted. Second wave health action zones will receive a share of £15 million programme funding in 1999–2000. In 2000–2001, first and second wave health action zones will share £60 million programme funding.

Suicide

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many young people in care committed or attempted to commit suicide, broken down by social services authorities, in the last monitoring year; and what recording mechanisms are in place in the Social Services Inspectorate to monitor such data. [55362]

Mr. Boateng: Under paragraph 20 of Schedule 2 to the Children Act 1989, local authorities are required to notify the Secretary of State for Health of all deaths of children who are being looked after by the local authority.

Local authorities are also required under Regulation 19 (2) *(a)* and *(c)* of the Children's Home Regulations 1991 to notify the Department of the death of, or serious injury to, a child in a children's home.

There is no statutory requirement for the cause of death to be identified although local authorities generally do provide it. Information on the number of attempted suicides is not held centrally.

The Department's records show that two children committed suicide whilst being looked after by local authorities in 1997–98, the last monitoring year. One child was in the care of Somerset, the other in the care of the London Borough of Bromley.

These notifications, along with others relating to incidents of child deaths and serious harm where abuse is suspected, are recorded on the Department's Child Protection Database. This computer database links the Department's Social Care Regions and the Social Care Policy branches and has been operational since April 1998.

Spinal Treatment

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will fund the replacement of invasive procedures carried out in the course of spinal treatment with safer practices. [55041]

Mr. Boateng: Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI) is the methodology of choice in the investigation of spinal conditions; however, we have no plans to replace invasive procedures entirely. For some patients unsuitable for MRI invasive procedures may remain necessary. It is for clinicians to use their skill, knowledge and experience to weigh carefully the likely benefits of any treatment or procedure against the anticipated risk for the patient and, following discussion with the patient, to exercise their clinical judgment accordingly.

Adhesive Arachnoiditis

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will fund the greater use of chronic pain management programmes for sufferers of adhesive arachnoiditis. [55042]

Mr. Boateng: Multi-disciplinary pain management programmes have been shown to be effective. The funding of such services, including those for arachnoiditis sufferers, is the responsibility of health authorities in consultation with trusts and health professionals.

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will investigate the alleged link between adhesive arachnoiditis and the use of Myodil. [55040]

Mr. Boateng: Arachnoiditis can arise from a number of causes. There are no plans to investigate links between Myodil and arachnoiditis: the association between the use of Myodil and the occurrence of arachnoiditis is recognised. The product information for Myodil contained a warning about the possibility of post-myelography arachnoiditis for many years.

Social Services (Liverpool)

Mr. Hammond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he intends to take to ensure that the criticisms of Liverpool Social Services contained in the recent Social Services Inspectorate report are addressed. [55235]

Mr. Boateng: Ministers have agreed an action plan with Liverpool Social Services which addresses the main issues raised by the report of the Social Services Inspectorate/Audit commission Joint Review, published on 23 July 1998. Progress is being monitored by the Social Services Inspectorate (SSI) and will be formally evaluated by SSI and the local auditors after six months.

Cardiac Surgery (Bristol)

Mr. Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if the terms of reference of the inquiry into cardiac surgery at the Bristol Royal Infirmary include the role played by his Department. [55229]

Mr. Milburn: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State announced the terms of reference of the Public Inquiry into heart surgery in Bristol on 12 August 1998 as follows:

To inquire into the management of the care of children receiving complex cardiac surgical services at the Bristol Royal Infirmary between 1984 and 1995 and relevant related issues; to make findings as to the adequacy of the services provided; to establish what action was taken both within and outside the hospital to deal with concerns raised about the surgery and to identify any failure to take appropriate action promptly; to reach conclusions from these events and to make recommendations which could help to secure high quality care across the NHS.

It is for the Inquiry to determine how it meets the terms of reference. We have instructed the Department to cooperate fully with the Inquiry and to make available all relevant documents.

General Dental Council

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what criteria he takes into consideration to ensure that the composition of the General Dental Council represents and reflects the public interest; [55196]

(2) if he will increase the number of lay persons serving on the General Dental Council. [55197]

Mr. Milburn: In the consultation document *A First Class Service: Quality in the NHS* published in July we suggested that, for professional regulation to continue to enjoy public confidence, regulatory bodies must be open to public scrutiny and responsive to changing clinical practice and public needs. In this context we welcomed proposals from the General Dental Council to make a significant increase in their lay membership.

Taxol

Ann Keen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what advice is to be given to the National Health Service following the review by the Standing Medical Advisory Committee of the use of Taxol/cisplatin for ovarian cancer. [55347]

Mr. Boateng: An updated analysis of the survival benefit of using Taxol in combination as a first line treatment of advanced ovarian cancer was presented at the May 1998 meeting of the American Society of Clinical Oncology. This research indicates that Taxol given in combination with platinum increases life expectancy by around one year. In July 1998 the Standing Medical Advisory Committee considered guidelines prepared by the Joint Council for Clinical Oncology (JCCO) which take into account these latest research results. The JCCO guidelines were published in September and sent to Oncologists in the United Kingdom. A letter updating regional directors of Public Health in England on this issue was sent out by the National Health Service Executive on 18 August 1998.

Hidradenitis Suppurativa

Ms Kingham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what action his Department is taking to raise awareness and educate *(a)* the public and *(b)* general practitioners regarding the skin disease Hidradenitis Suppurativa; [55227]

(2) what action his Department *(a)* has undertaken and *(b)* is planning to take with regard to the skin disease Hidradenitis Suppurativa. [55226]

Mr. Boateng: The Department has not and is not planning to undertake action specifically relating to Hidradenitis Suppurativa. However, the National Health Service provides a wide range of services for people with skin diseases. It is for the clinician to decide exactly what treatments are appropriate for patients with these conditions and it is the responsibility of health authorities to assess the health care needs of their population and to commission services, including the provision of care for Hidradenitis Suppurativa.

The provision of general practitioners' education is the responsibility of the relevant professional statutory bodies, such as the Medical Royal Colleges.

Medicines (Children)

Mr. Love: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 20 July 1998, *Official Report*, columns *407–08*, what steps he is taking to monitor the way pharmaceutical companies comply with EU guidance on the licensing of medicines in children; which companies have so far complied with this guidance; which products are being developed in accordance with this guidance; and when the application of the guidance will be extended to products already on the market. [55199]

Ms Jowell: When an application for a new medicinal product is assessed by the Medicines Control Agency (MCA), the presence or absence of a paediatric section to the dossier is noted.

Some companies have already complied with the guideline but neither the MCA nor the European Medicines Evaluation Agency keeps a list of those who do.

The MCA does not hold information on those products which are being developed in accordance with the guidance. Companies are not obliged to reveal product development plans to regulatory agencies.

The scope of the guidance applies to marketed products as well as to products in development.

The guidance is not legally binding.

Ambulance Services

Mr. McLoughlin: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much money per head was allocated for ambulance services in each health region in England in each of the last three years. [55478]

Mr. Boateng: The information given in the table shows allocations in the form of ambulance trust income per head aggregated by National Health Service Region. Copies of the figures for 1997–98 will be placed in the Library when they become available.

Ambulance trust income per head of the population, by NHS region

Region	*Population (000s in 1996[1])*	*Aggregated ambulance trust income (£000) 1995–96*	*Aggregated ambulance trust income per head[2]*	*Aggregated ambulance trust income (£000) 1996–97*	*Aggregated ambulance trust income per head[2]*
Northern and Yorkshire	6,338	85,511	13.49	87,977	13.88
Trent	5,121	54,958	10.73	57,770	11.28
Anglia and Oxford	5,361	51,754	9.65	53,370	9.96
North Thames	6,934	31,528	[3]4.55	33,671	[3]4.86
South Thames	6,819	48,654	[3]7.14	51,825	[3]7.60
South and West	6,594	69,634	10.56	72,472	10.99
West Midlands	5,317	51,116	9.61	53,363	10.04
North West	6,605	65,163	9.87	67,041	10.15

[1] 1991 Census-based resident population estimates for mid 1996

[2] Cross-boundary ambulance working arrangements, where they occur, have not been taken into account apart from the parts of North and South Thames regions served by the London Ambulance Service

[3] Large parts of North and South Thames regions are both served by the London Ambulance Service, rendering these calculations extremely difficult to interpret reliably

Mr. McLoughlin: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the amounts of money allocated to each ambulance trust in England in each of the last three years. [55479]

Mr. Boateng: The information given in the table shows allocations in the form of ambulance trust income for the years 1995–96 and 1996–97. Copies of the figures for 1997–98 will be placed in the Library when they become available.

NHS Ambulance trust income (£000) in 1995–96 and 1996–97

Trust	*1995–96*	*1996–97*
Cleveland	6,297	6,409
Durham County	7,257	7,305
Cumbria	7,713	8,070
North Yorkshire	7,771	8,919
Humberside	13,106	12,353
Northumbria	18,317	18,620
West Yorkshire	25,050	26,301
Leicestershire	9,309	9,761
Lincolnshire	9,538	9,786
Derbyshire	10,746	11,533
Nottinghamshire	12,489	12,968
South Yorkshire Metropolitan	12,876	13,722
Oxfordshire	5,844	6,135
Royal Berkshire	8,690	9,295
Two Shires	11,222	11,799
East Anglian	25,998	26,141
Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire	14,407	15,271
Essex	17,121	18,400
Surrey	13,668	14,574
Kent	16,525	16,829
Sussex	18,461	20,422
London	n/a	103,189
Gloucestershire	6,606	6,805
Wiltshire	7,086	7,215
Dorset	7,974	8,159
Avon	10,041	10,338
Hampshire	12,702	13,143
West Country	25,225	26,812
Warwickshire	4,716	4,893
Hereford and Worcester	8,228	9,348
Staffordshire	12,119	12,605
West Midlands	26,053	26,517
Lancashire	16,087	17,001
Greater Manchester	24,589	24,955
Mersey Regional	24,487	25,085

n/a Not available

LAS became a Trust in 1996

Note:

Most ambulance trusts receive income from a number of health commissioners. These figures exclude income received for non-patient services (charitable income, income generating schemes, education, training and research, etc)

National Institute for Clinical Excellence

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how the National Institute for Clinical Excellence will judge the cost-effectiveness of new drugs and treatments. [55272]

Mr. Boateng: Our proposals for the appraisal process will shortly be published for discussion with interested parties. The National Institute for Clinical Excellence will itself be responsible for developing the precise criteria to be applied in judging clinical and cost effectiveness, drawing on international experience and methodology and guidance on the methods of appraising effectiveness in public expenditure.

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what account the National Institute for Clinical Excellence will take of royal colleges' recommendations in formulating best practices. [55271]

Mr. Milburn: The National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE) has yet to be established. However, the Government's reforms for health, including the establishment of NICE, are centred around a partnership between the health professions (including professional bodies like the Royal Colleges), the public, the National Health Service and the Government themselves.

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans the National Institute for Clinical Excellence has to ensure consistency in the response it receives on developing best clinical practices. [55274]

Mr. Milburn: The public and Government expect to see health services that are consistent with our research knowledge and best professional practice. The Government's proposals introduce a comprehensive National Health Service agenda for quality, with local duties to ensure quality, backed up by a new Commission for Health Improvement which will monitor clinical standards set by NICE.

National Performance Framework

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if NHS staff satisfaction surveys will be incorporated into the National Performance Framework. [55247]

Mr. Milburn: The National Framework for Assessing Performance focuses on outcomes for patients. The management and welfare of National Health Service staff is a direct responsibility of their employers at a local level. The results of staff satisfaction surveys will be used locally to provide benchmarks against which to measure and report local improvements in the quality of working life.

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what account he will take of existing customer satisfaction programmes in NHS trusts in drawing up the National Performance Framework. [55245]

Mr. Milburn: The national framework for assessing performance provides a basis for assessing National Health Service performance over six areas: health improvement, fair access, effective delivery of appropriate healthcare, efficiency, patient/carer experience and health outcomes of NHS care. Over time, the framework will be supplemented by a range of high level indicators over all the dimensions to support benchmarking and performance improvement. Results from the first national survey of NHS patients will be used to develop comparative indicators of patient/carer experience. These high level indicators can be supplemented locally, for example by indicators from health authorities or NHS trust surveys of patient/carer experience.

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if additional funding incentives will be given to the best-performing health authorities based on the standards achieved in the National Performance Framework. [55251]

Mr. Milburn: The White Paper "The New NHS: Modern and Dependable" stated that:

"... Health Authorities which demonstrate most progress against the targets and objectives agreed with the NHS Executive will be eligible for modest extra non-recurrent funding for local projects which support their Health Improvement Programme".

Progress in implementing the local improvement programme will be considered across the six areas of the national performance assessment framework.

Laura Moffatt: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if the new national performance framework to tackle inconsistencies in health services will include abortion services. [55366]

Mr. Milburn: The national framework for assessing performance provides a basis for assessing the performance of the National Health Service across six dimensions: Health Improvement, Fair Access, Effective Delivery of Appropriate Healthcare, Efficiency, Patient/Carer Experience and Health Outcomes of NHS Care. The framework can be used to assess NHS performance at a number of levels—for example, by health authority or NHS trust, by client group (eg services for elderly people), or by disease area (eg cancer services). In reviewing local abortion services, health authorities, primary care groups and NHS trusts should seek to assess performance across all the dimensions of the framework to assess areas for improvement.

NHS Staff (Rewards)

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what financial rewards will be given to NHS staff who exceed quality standards set by NHS trusts. [55249]

Mr. Milburn: This is a matter for individual National Health Service trusts ensuring that any incentives for staff are based on efficiency and health gains as outlined in the Health Improvement Programme.

National Survey of NHS Patients

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to break down the results of the National Survey of Patient and User Experience into individual health trusts. [55304]

Mr. Milburn: As stated in the White Paper "The New NHS: Modern and Dependable", the Government will be publishing the results of the survey at national and health authority level. In addition, consideration is currently being given to how information from the survey relating to individual NHS trusts can best be made available.

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health who will undertake the National Patient and User Experience Survey; and what was the selection procedure. [55273]

Mr. Milburn: As announced on 12 August, a consortium led by Social and Community Planning Research, with Imperial College and Picker Europe Ltd. has been selected to undertake the National Survey of NHS Patients.

The Department's requirement for this work was advertised in the European Journal of the European Communities in accordance with European Commission and General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade rules on public procurement on this scale. The contract award was based on the most economically advantageous bid in terms of technical quality, service delivery and experience.

NHS Trusts (Clinical Governance)

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he will take to ensure NHS staff are consulted on the implementation of clinical governance for each NHS trust. [55250]

Mr. Milburn: The White Paper "The New NHS: Modern and Dependable" stated that local clinical governance arrangements should engage professionals at ward and clinical level. The consultation document "A First Class Service: Quality in the new NHS" (copies of which are available in the Library) set out in more detail our proposals on clinical governance. Further guidance on clinical governance will be issued later in the year.

Consultants

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 30 July 1998, *Official Report*, columns 506–07, regarding consultants, if he will list the number of consultants by specialty and for each specialty their ratio to population in each shire county health authority. [55302]

Mr. Milburn: The information requested will be placed in the Library. The data have been calculated by aggregating the annual census figures collected from trusts within the geographical area covered by the respective health authorities. The tables will need to be interpreted with care as some trusts provide services to residents of other health authorities.

NHS Staff (Process Management)

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what training is planned to be given to NHS staff on process management and process improvement. [55246]

Mr. Milburn: Training on process management and process improvements is a matter for local employers and can have a role in the continuous professional development of health professionals.

Professional Self-regulation

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he will take to ensure that professional self-regulation will be subject to public scrutiny under the proposals in the White Paper "A First Class Service". [55270]

Mr. Milburn: The Government are committed to working in partnership with the health care professions, the National Health Service and patient interest groups to modernise the systems of professional self-regulation. We have already opened the dialogue with the regulatory bodies to find the best way to ensure that the legal framework is responsive to changing public expectations of greater openness and accountability.

Hospital Admissions

Mr. Pollard: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will list the numbers of *(a)* day cases and

(b) in-patient admissions indicating the average lengths of stay of residents of (1) St. Albans, (2) Dacorum, (3) Watford, (4) Hertsmere and (5) Three Rivers local authority districts in acute, geriatric and maternity departments in (i) St. Albans and Hemel Hempstead hospitals, (ii) Watford and Mount Vernon hospitals, (iii) the West Hertfordshire Community Trust, (iv) East Hertfordshire/Queen Elizabeth II Hospital, Welwyn Garden City, (v) North Hertfordshire/The Lister Hospital, Hitchin, (vi) the Luton and Dunstable Hospital, (vii) Stoke Mandeville Hospital, (viii) Barnet Healthcare Trust, (ix) Chase Farm, (x) Wellhouse Trust, (xi) Northwick Park Hospital, (xii) The Royal Free Hospital, (xiii) other NHS hospitals and (xiv) private hospitals for each of the past five years for which data are available; [55325]

(2) if he will list the numbers of in-patient episodes of length *(a)* less than one, *(b)* 1, *(c)* 2 to 3, *(d)* 4 to 7, *(e)* 8 to 14, *(f)* 15 to 21, *(g)* 22 to 30, *(h)* 31 to 60 and *(i)* 61 days and over in (i) acute, (ii) geriatric and (iii) maternity departments in (1) St. Albans and Hemel Hempstead hospitals, (2) Watford and Mount Vernon hospitals and (3) West Herts Community Trust, for each of the past five years for which data are available; [55375]

(3) if he will list the numbers of *(a)* day cases and *(b)* in-patient admissions and the average lengths of stay of (x) residents of (1) Hertfordshire local government districts other than St. Albans, Dacorum, Watford, Hertsmere and Three Rivers, (2) Greater London, (3) Bedfordshire, (4) Buckinghamshire, (5) Berkshire and (y) those resident elsewhere in acute, geriatric and maternity departments in (i) St Albans and Hemel Hempstead hospitals, (ii) Watford and Mount Vernon hospitals and (iii) West Herts Community Trust for each of the past five years for which data are available; [55374]

(4) if he will list the numbers of *(a)* day cases and *(b)* in-patient admissions indicating the average lengths of stay for (1) acute, (2) geriatric, (3) mental illness, (4) people with learning disabilities and (5) maternity in (i) St. Albans and Hemel Hempstead hospitals, (ii) Watford and Mount Vernon hospitals, (iii) the West Hertfordshire Community Trust, (iv) the Horizon Trust, (v) East Hertfordshire/Queen Elizabeth II Hospital, Welwyn Garden City, (vi) North Hertfordshire/The Lister Hospital, Hitchin, (vii) the Luton and Dunstable Hospital, (viii) Stoke Mandeville Hospital, (ix) Barnet Healthcare Trust, (x) Chase Farm, (xi) Wellhouse Trust, (xii) Northwick Park Hospital and (xiii) The Royal Free Hospital for each of the past five years for which data are available. [55324]

Mr. Milburn: The available information requested has been placed in the Library. However, the Department does not collect information on activity in private hospitals.

NHS Trust Chairmen

Mr. Rowe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many chairmen of NHS trusts appointed since 1 May 1997 are retired *(a)* civil servants and *(b)* local government officers; and what has been the percentage change in the figures for *(a)* and *(b)* relative to the previous year. [55358]

Mr. Milburn: The information requested could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Former British Child Migrants

Ms Squire: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he plans to respond to the third report from the Health Committee of session 1997–98 on the Welfare of Former British Child Migrants (HC 755); and what discussions he has held on this matter with *(a)* the Australian and *(b)* the New Zealand Government. [55165]

Mr. Boateng: Officials in the Department have approached officials in the Governments of Australia and New Zealand through our High Commissions in Canberra and Wellington. The discussions are ongoing.

The Department is considering the report of the Health Select Committee on the Welfare of Former British Child Migrants carefully. The Government will publish their response shortly.

Infertility Services

Dr. Starkey: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of access to investigation for infertility in health authorities. [55141]

Ms Jowell: No formal assessment has been made but we are aware of the annual surveys of the funding and provision of infertility services commissioned by the National Infertility Awareness Campaign. Like most National Health Service treatments, infertility treatment is funded through the general funding of health authorities, and decisions about the allocation of resources and about who should be eligible for treatment are the responsibility of individual authorities.

The Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists (RCOG) is shortly to issue the first two (of three) sets of clinical guidelines on the management of infertility. The guidelines will assist clinicians and health authorities in providing clinically effective infertility treatment. The Department will be issuing advice to the NHS to accompany the publication of the RCOG's guidelines.

CABINET OFFICE

Information Technology

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Minister without Portfolio how much his Department spent on IT itemising *(a)* personal computers, *(b)* main-frame, *(c)* mini-computers and *(d)* file servers in the last year for which figures are available. [52893]

Mr. Mandelson: I refer my right hon. Friend to the reply given to him by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster on 30 July 1998, *Official Report*, column *502*.

This answer is in respect of my duties when Minister Without Portfolio.

2 Marsham Street

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will make a statement on the future of the former Department of the Environment building at 2 Marsham Street. [55201]

Mr. Kilfoyle: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated under the terms of the Framework Document to the Property Advisers to the Civil Estate. I have asked its Chief Executive, Mr. John Locke, to write to my hon. Friend.

Letter from John C. Locke to Mr. Harry Cohen, dated October 1998:

The Parliamentary Secretary for the Cabinet Office, Peter Kilfoyle, has asked me as Chief Executive of PACE with management responsibilities for 2 Marsham Street, to respond to your Parliamentary Question about the future of this building.

2 Marsham Street is a Government freehold property which until April this year was occupied by the Department of Environment, Transport and the Regions (DETR). While it remains vacant, this Agency is responsible for its general upkeep to ensure it remains wind and watertight and is not subjected to vandalism of any kind.

There is a possibility that Marsham Street will be used as temporary decant accommodation for another Government Department while its premises are refurbished. A decision on this is expected early in the New Year. If reuse of the building cannot be justified in Exchequer terms, the building will be demolished. This is expected to take some eighteen months following the letting of a contract.

Motorcycle Parking

Mr. Brake: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster how many motorcycle parking spaces exist at each office or site for which his Department is responsible; and how many are secure spaces. [55266]

Mr. Kilfoyle: The Cabinet Office, its Agencies and the Central Office of Information, for which my right hon. Friend the Minister for the Cabinet Office has Ministerial responsibility, have a total of 65 motorcycle parking spaces in their buildings, of which 61 are secure.

Government Purchase Card

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what use *(a)* his Department and *(b)* its agencies are currently making of the Government Purchase Card; what savings he estimates are being achieved as a result; what plans he has to expand use of the card by his Department and its agencies; and if he will make a statement. [55172]

Mr. Kilfoyle: The information is as follows:

(a) Cabinet Office has completed an assessment of the potential for using the Government Procurement Card (GPC) in the Department. It will be commissioning shortly a detailed study to determine the arrangements for the introduction of the card.

(b) i. CCTA introduced the card on 1 October.

The Buying Agency has no immediate plans to use the card for the small number of domestic purchases.

It has actively encouraged acceptance of the card by the suppliers with whom it contracts on behalf of all government purchasers.

The other Cabinet Office Agencies are at various stages of the implementation process for the GPC. The extent of GPC usage will depend upon the outcome of the trials and reviews being undertaken by each Agency.

ii. The Central Office of Information will be introducing the GPC into an area this year on a trial basis. Further introductions will depend on the result of this trial.

Government Policies

Mr. Luff: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will list those policies in which he has played a co-ordinating role; and if he will make a statement. [54685]

Dr. Jack Cunningham: My role is to assist the Prime Minister and Ministerial colleagues in the implementation and co-ordination of Government policy and its effective presentation. In accordance with the House's resolution on Ministerial Accountability of 19 March 1997, it is for individual Ministers to account for the policies, decisions and actions of their departments and Next Step Agencies. I shall, of course, answer questions on my own responsibilities for the work of the Cabinet Office, including the Better Government agenda.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Non-departmental Public Bodies

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the non-departmental public bodies in existence on 1 May 1997 that *(a)* have been disbanded, *(b)* will be disbanded in the next 12 months, *(c)* have had their functions transferred to (i) another non-departmental public body and (ii) a democratically elected body, *(d)* have been renamed but continue to perform a similar role and *(e)* have been unchanged; if he will indicate in (c) (ii) the relevant successor body; what new non-departmental public bodies have been established since 1 May 1997; and how many non-departmental public bodies his Department currentiy is responsible for. [53867]

Mr. Tony Lloyd *[holding answer 30 July 1998]:* The answers are as follows.

a) None

b) None

c) i) None

ii) None

d) None

e) The FCO is responsible for twelve non-departmental public bodies. These are:

Britain-Russia Centre

British Association for Central and Eastern Europe

British Council

Commonwealth Institute

The Great Britain-China Centre

Marshall Aid Commemoration Commission

Westminster Foundation for Democracy

Diplomatic Service Appeal Board

Government Hospitality Fund Advisory Committee for the Purchase of Wine

Wilton Park Academic Council

Foreign Compensation Commission

Intelligence Services Tribunal.

The Government are committed to keeping the number of NDPBs to a minimum and to ensuring that those which remain are open, accountable and effective.

Lockerbie

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the proposals which the United Kingdom and United States of America have made for the trial of the Lockerbie suspects in The Hague; and if procedures have been introduced to enable the Libyan Government to clarify the issues involved. [55309]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: The Governments of the United Kingdom, the United States and the Netherlands continue to do all they can to take forward the initiative for trial of the two accused in the Netherlands, as announced on 24 August. United Nations Security Council Resolution 1192 has been adopted unanimously, the UK Order in Council made, the UK/Dutch treaty signed, and the site for the trial designated.

The Libyan Government have sought and are obtaining clarification on a number of issues through the UN Secretary-General's Office—the channel specified in UNSCR 1192.

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs where it is intended that persons found guilty in the proposed trial of the Lockerbie suspects at The Hague will be imprisoned.

Mr. Tony Lloyd: In the event of the Libyans accused of the Lockerbie crime being convicted by the Scottish court in the Netherlands, they would continue to be held at the Scottish facility pending any appeal; subject to which they would serve the remainder of their sentences in Scotland. [55310]

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if witnesses participating in the proposed trial of the Lockerbie suspects at The Hague will be protected during travel to The Hague from arrest in respect of other alleged crimes; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Tony Lloyd: The Agreement between the United Kingdom and the Netherlands, signed on 18 September, makes clear that any witnesses attending the trial of the two Libyans accused at the Scottish court, in the Netherlands would be immune from arrest in respect of any offence committed prior to their arrival in the Netherlands. [55312]

Sudan

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has received on the welfare of British nationals resident in Sudan. [55437]

Mr. Fatchett: Due to the withdrawal of UK staff from the British Embassy in Khartoum we are no longer able to provide consular assistance to British nationals in Sudan. All British nationals currently in Sudan were advised on 27 August to leave unless they have a compelling reason to remain. We are also still advising against all travel to the Sudan.

Some British Nationals have chosen to stay in the Sudan. We are not aware of any who are in distress.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what support the United Kingdom representative at the United Nations gave to the Sudanese request for an early site inspection of the Sudanese pharmaceutical factory. [55439]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: This issue has only been raised during informal consultations of Security Council members. The United Kingdom did not contribute to the consultations and no consensus was reached. We continue to encourage the Sudanese to sign up to the Chemical Weapons Convention, which requires members to be open to international inspections by the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons.

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when Her Majesty's Government first had evidence that chemical weapons were being manufactured in Sudan. [55484]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: We are aware of a number of reports, mainly from opposition groups, of Sudanese involvement in chemical weapons. We are concerned about these reports and will continue to monitor them.

Amsterdam Treaty

Sir Richard Body: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what EU funding has been provided for the *(a)* yes and *(b)* no vote campaign in the Danish Referendum on the Amsterdam Treaty; through which bodies such funding has been issued and according to what criteria; what proportion of the cost has been borne by the United Kingdom; and what has been the cost to United Kingdom public funds to date. [55376]

Ms Quin: No EU funding was provided for political campaigning in the Danish referendum on the Amsterdam Treaty. There was therefore no cost to UK public funds.

European Community Legislation

Sir Richard Body: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 12 March 1998, *Official Report*, column 277, what proportion of European Community legislative acts which do not pass before the Council of Ministers do not fall into the category of detailed market management measures; and if he will list the categories they fall into. [55389]

Ms Quin: The majority of Commission legislation is made under specific implementing powers delegated to the Commission by the Council. In certain circumstances, proposed implementing measures can be referred back to the Council. The majority of Commission implementing legislation is concerned with detailed market management measures, in particularly in implementing the Common Agricultural Policy. Implementing measures which do not fall into the category of detailed market management measures cover a broad range of policies. Policy areas covered by implementing legislation are listed in the General Budget of the European Union (pp.500–517 of the 1998 Budget). This is published in the Official Journal of the European Communities (No. L44, 16 February 1998).

Sir Richard Body: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 12 March 1998, *Official Report*, columns 277–

78, on how many occasions since 1 May 1997 a Minister of his Department has intervened in the negotiations on Community legislative Acts being agreed outside of the Council of Ministers before that Act received final ministerial approval; on what proportion of occasions a Minister has rejected an agreement reached in this manner when presented with the final agreement; and what form of scrutiny by Ministers takes place during the course of the negotiations. [55398]

Ms Quin: Most Commission implementing measures are introduced under specific powers delegated by the Council of Ministers under primary legislation. Much of this legislation is of a technical and routine nature and does not involve Ministerial consideration.

Motorcycle Parking

Mr. Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many motorcycle parking spaces exist at each office or site for which his Department is responsible; and how many are secure spaces. [55263]

Mr. Fatchett: This Department has 25 motorcycle spaces at our offices in London and 17 at Hanslope Park (near Milton Keynes). The spaces are within either security controlled parking areas or security controlled grounds.

Government Purchase Card

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what use *(a)* his Department and *(b)* its agencies are currently making of the Government Purchase Card; what savings he estimates are being achieved as a result; what plans he has to expand use of the card by his Department and its agencies; and if he will make a statement. [55178]

Mr. Fatchett: We plan to pilot use of the Government Procurement Card within the London-based procurement group of our overseas estate department in January 1999. Discussions have been held with several banks concerned with the scheme. Internal management information on volume and pattern of transactions with a value of up to £500 is being collated prior to an agreement with one of the banks being finalised. Guidelines to ensure satisfactory internal controls are also being developed.

Once agreement is finalised the successful bank will need to ensure that the suppliers we use have the equipment necessary to handle the more sophisticated management information requirements of the Procurement Card compared with those needed for a personal use credit/charge card.

Plans to roll out use of the card more fully and savings accruing from them will depend on our assessment of the results of the pilot.

Malaysia

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to the Government of Malaysia concerning the arrest and imprisonment of the Deputy Prime Minister. [55522]

Mr. Fatchett: My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary raised the case with the Malaysian Prime Minister on 21 September and the Malaysian Foreign Minister on 24 September. We have also consulted our EU partners, and the Austrians, as Presidency, issued a declaration on 2 October expressing deep concern about reports of physical mistreatment of Anwar and calling upon the Malaysian authorities to guarantee the rule of law and to respect the human rights of Anwar Ibrahim.

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what *(a)* contacts have been made and *(b)* meetings have been held by the High Commissioner and High Commission staff with human rights groups in Malaysia. [55521]

Mr. Fatchett: The High Commission has regular and close contact with a wide range of human rights groups in Malaysia.

Malawi

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has to encourage independent international monitoring of next year's presidential and parliamentary elections in Malawi. [55198]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: The success of next year's elections will be important in consolidating multi-party democracy in Malawi.

We have been monitoring developments in the run up to the elections, working closely with the Electoral Commission, and will continue to do so. We will encourage independent international monitoring should the Electoral Commission, and all political parties involved, agree that it is desirable.

In the meantime, we shall be funding an adviser to the Chief Elections Officer.

UNITA

Ms Kingham: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what actions his Department has taken to close the UNITA London office and ensure the removal from the United Kingdom of the UNITA representative Mr. Kandeya. [55228]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: Officials have visited Mr. Kandeya's commercial premises and satisfied themselves that there was no sign of any continuing association with UNITA. The situation is being kept under review. As far as we are aware, there are no offices or premises being maintained in the United Kingdom under the name of UNITA.

The Home Office have refused Mr. Kandeya's application for further leave to remain. Notice has been given that the Home Secretary intends to commence deportation proceedings against him. He has the right of appeal against this decision.

EU Enlargement

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the progress made by Austria's presidency of the EU on enlargement. [54858]

Ms Quin: EU enlargement remains a key priority for the UK, and the EU. We welcome progress already made during the Austrian Presidency. The General Affairs Council agreed on 5 October to open substantive negotiations with Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic, Slovenia, Estonia and Cyprus on 10 November. Initially negotiations will focus on seven chapters of the acquis. We will continue to support the Presidency in its efforts to make further progress before the Vienna European Council.

Meanwhile, the analytical examination of the acquis with those countries not yet in negotiations (Latvia, Lithuania, Bulgaria, Romania and Slovakia) continues. All the applicants are receiving pre-accession assistance within the targeted framework of the Accession Partnerships.

The Austrian Presidency also organised a meeting of the European Conference at Foreign Minister level (for the EU, the 10 Central Europeans and Cyprus) on 6 October which agreed a number of actions in the fight against organised crime (especially child pornography) and regional cooperation on the environment.

Israel

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations Her Majesty's Government have made to Israel concerning nuclear disarmament. [55414]

Mr. Fatchett: We continue to urge Israel to accede to the Non-Proliferation Treaty, and to place all its unsafeguarded nuclear facilities under IAEA safeguards, in order to allay international suspicions about her nuclear activities.

Iraq

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to the answer to the right hon. and learned Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Mr. Howard) of 16 July 1998, *Official Report*, columns *248–49*, if he is able to provide details of the assessment of samples taken from Iraqi warheads undertaken in France and Switzerland. [55452]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: The UN Special Commission has now received the final reports on the analyses of the Iraqi missile warhead fragments carried out in France and Switzerland. The results will be reviewed at a seminar of international experts in New York on 22 and 23 October, after which UNSCOM will report to the Security Council.

Pakistan (Climbers)

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when his Department was first aware that two climbers were missing in North East Pakistan; what steps were taken to alert the Pakistan authorities and organise a search; on what date such a search began; when the first helicopter search was made; and for what reasons a helicopter search was not made earlier. [55483]

Mr. Fatchett: We first heard of the disappearance of the two climbers on 14 August, when Mrs. Lisette Rendle told the Department and the High Commission in Islamabad that Ian Rendle and Gordon Campbell had failed to catch their flight home. On 15 August the High Commission alerted local police who agreed to check all hotels and police posts on the climbers' itinerary.

On 20 August the British Mountaineering Council confirmed that the two men were insured for any necessary searches and requested a helicopter search. The Pakistani Ministry of Tourism told the High Commission that the Ministry's helicopter was for rescue only, and not searches.

The Ministry advised the High Commission to ask the Pakistani Army to search with one of their helicopters but warned that permission could take 15–20 days. The Defence Section of the High Commission submitted a request the same day.

The Deputy High Commissioner called on the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on 22 August to reinforce the request for military help. The High Commission sent a further written request on 27 August.

The High Commission made simultaneous inquiries with a private company about chartering a helicopter. This proved impossible as the company's helicopters were not equipped to fly at an altitude high enough to enable the search to be carried out.

On 31 August the Government of Pakistan gave the Army authority to conduct a helicopter search. Bad weather and use of the helicopters for military purposes delayed the search until 8 September, and it then had to be abandoned because of low cloud. Bad weather again set in but the search was resumed and completed on 16 September. No trace of the two men was found. Two foot searches were also conducted, one from 22 August to 1 September and the other from 14 to 28 September. The High Commission acted with the families and tour companies to get these searches organised. Neither found any trace of the missing men. A third foot search is being organised at the families' request.

Diplomatic Service

Mr. Syms: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many of the successful candidates for the recent recruitment of middle managers for the Diplomatic Service were *(a)* men, *(b)* women and *(c)* over the age of 40 years. [55001]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: Of the 13 candidates successful at the Middle Managers Recruitment Board, 69 per cent. (9) were men, 31 per cent. (4) were women and 31 per cent. (4) were over the age of forty.

President Hegdar Aliev

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the visit to the UK of President Hegdar Aliev of Azerbaijan. [55022]

Ms Quin: President Aliev visited the United Kingdom from 19 to 24 July 1998. The visit helped to strengthen the commercial and political relationship between the United Kingdom and Azerbaijan. President Aliev was granted an audience of HM The Queen, and paid calls on my right hon. Friends the Prime Minister, the Foreign Secretary, the Secretary of State for Defence, and the President of the Board of Trade; three major oil contracts were signed with British companies, as well as other agreements.

Discussions with President Aliev also focused on the conflict in Nagorny-Karabakh, democratic reform and human rights in Azerbaijan.

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

Secondary and Further Education (West Midlands)

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what was the average size of A-level classes in *(a)* secondary schools and *(b)* further education colleges in (i) the West Midlands and (ii) Staffordshire in each of the last five years. [46304]

Dr. Howells: The average sizes of classes of pupils aged 16 and over taught by one teacher in maintained secondary schools in the West Midlands and Staffordshire Local Education Authority (LEA) area are shown in the table. Information on the size of classes in further education colleges is not collected centrally.

Average size of classes of pupils aged 16 and over taught by one teacher in maintained secondary schools

Position in January each year	*West Midlands LEA area*	*Staffordshire LEA area*
1994	10.5	9.9
1995	10.3	9.6
1996	10.3	10.6
1997	10.7	10.6
1998 (provisional)	10.5	[1] 11.4

[1] Stoke became a unitary authority separate from Staffordshire in April 1997; the provisional figure for the Stoke LEA area in January 1998 was 9.0

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what was the average amount spent per pupil studying A-levels in *(a)* secondary schools and *(b)* further education colleges in (i) the West Midlands and (ii) Staffordshire in each of the last five years. [46305]

Dr. Howells: The information is not collected in the form requested.

Higher Education Funding Council

Ms Dari Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will undertake a Quinquennial Review of the Higher Education Funding Council for England. [43631]

Dr. Howells: In accordance with the Government's policy of quinquennial reviews of non-departmental public bodies, the Department will conduct a review of the Higher Education Funding Council for England in 1998. The first stage of the review will take the form of a 'prior options' study with the following terms of reference:

- to review the Higher Education Funding Council's functions and the likely need in future for those functions;
- to consider the powers, terms of reference, constitutional status, membership and activities of the Higher Education Funding Council for England; and
- to consider whether some or all of the functions of the Higher Education Funding Council for England can be performed through other means.

The second stage, depending upon conclusions from the prior options study, will involve a review of the system of financial management and control within the Higher Education Funding Council for England.

The review will take account of recent relevant studies, including the report of the Dearing Inquiry.

Anti-discrimination Legislation

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment, pursuant to his answer of 18 November 1997, *Official Report*, column *164*, what assessment his Department has made of the anti-discrimination legislation relating to disabled people in *(a)* Australia, *(b)* New Zealand and *(c)* Canada; and what visits officials from his Department have made to these countries to study the impact of such legislation there. [46405]

Mr. Alan Howarth: The Department has not made a comprehensive assessment of the Australian Disability Discrimination Act, or of those parts of the New Zealand Human Rights Act and the Canadian Human Rights Act which cover disability discrimination.

The Disability Rights Task Force, which I chair, is considering how best to secure comprehensive, enforceable civil rights for disabled people within the context of our wider society. A recent discussion paper presented to the Task Force drew heavily on the approach to the definitions of disability and discrimination in other countries, in particular the Australian Disability Discrimination Act which was cited as an example in each part of the paper. This paper also included summaries of the relevant parts of the New Zealand and Canadian Human Rights Act. The paper is available on the Internet on www.disability.gov.uk.

Officials have not visited these countries. The Australian Human Rights and Disability Rights Commissioner recently visited the UK to present a seminar on disability rights in Australia which was attended by officials and by several members of the Task Force. I myself met the Commissioner who also met senior officials working on disability policy.

EU Social Fund

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what plans he has for the transfer of responsibility for the European Social Fund to the Welsh Office; what are the proposed financial arrangements for the transfer; and if he will make a statement. [45457]

Mr. Andrew Smith: Following the announcement made by the former Secretary of State for Wales on 29 February 1996, *Official Report*, columns 1035–37, officials have been discussing the arrangements for transfer of the administration of Welsh European Social Fund programmes to the Welsh Office. Some functions have already been transferred and as soon as the financial arrangements have been agreed the rest will follow. We aim to have these arrangements completed as soon as possible.

Sir Richard Body: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what projects have received funds from the EU Social Fund in the Lincolnshire County Council area. [55342]

Mr. Andrew Smith: Projects that have received funding from the European Social Fund in 1998 are shown in the table. This shows that the amount of ESF funding allocated to projects in the Lincolnshire County Council area so far this year is £2,241,746.80. This total excludes Objective 4 funding as the results of the 1998 application round will not be known until later in the year.

1998 Applications—list of open projects with ESF approved amount for Lincolnshire

Dossier	*Organisation*	*Project*	*Project reference*	*Amount approved*
985211UK8	Act	Act/Centre Stage Rural Arts Outreach Worker	A	16,987.00
980408UK5	Boston College	Developing Communications and Information Technology	A	21,937.00
984253UK3	Boston College	Small Business Start-up Training for Ex-offenders	A	3,168.00
984269UK3	Boston College	Vocational Training for Ex-offenders	A	3,168.00
984303UK3	Boston College	Small Business Start-up Training for Young Ex-offenders	A	3,168.00
984318UK3	Boston College	Vocational Training for Young Ex-offenders	A	3,168.00
980411UK5	East Lindsey District Council	East Lindsey Environmental Study Centre	A	16,165.00
985215UK8	GFS Platform for Young Women	GFS Platform Skegness	A	10,676.00
984322UK3	Grantham College	Engineering (Modular Career Dev Prog)	A	14,450.00
981289UK2	Grimsby College	Training for Hotel and Catering	A	83,725.00
981290UK2	Grimsby College	Engineering Employment for the Unemployed	A	52,252.00
981315UK2	Grimsby College	Training for Media, Entertainment & Music Tech	A	37,194.00
981316UK2	Grimsby College	I want to Care	A	108,948.00
981317UK2	Grimsby College	Hotel and Catering/Travel and Tourism	A	51,480.00
981318UK2	Grimsby College	Media and Entertainment for Cultural Industries	A	97,466.00
981324UK2	Grimsby College	Advanced Manufacturing Development	A	46,384.00
981325UK2	Grimsby College	Tomorrows Manager	A	64,819.00
981326UK2	Grimsby College	High Technology Training	A	16,899.00
981327UK2	Grimsby College	Better Informed	A	13,299.00
981328UK2	Grimsby College	Engineering Success	A	42,839.00
984346UK3	L.A.P.D.	Moving Ahead	A	36,000.00
984257UK3	Lincoln City Council	Access Programme for Unemployed People	A	34,873.00
984348UK3	Lincoln Self Build Project	Lincoln Community Self Build:Training, Housing	A	14,586.80
984351UK3	Lincoln Voluntary Centre	Lincoln Vol Centre Training and Access Network	A	85,773.00
984260UK3	Lincolnshire County Council	Dual Initiative in Childcare & Employment (Dice) P	A	81,478.00
980424UK5	Lincolnshire Regional Access Centres	Lincolnshire Access Network—Development & Delive	A	57,004.00
985227UK8	Lincolnshire Tec	Business and Community Skills for Rural Areas	A	10,493.00
981415UK8	Lincolnshire Tec Ltd.	Nu-form	A	38,817.00
984363UK3	Lincolnshire Tec Ltd.	Lincolnshire Capacity Building Training Programme	A	12,000.00
987106UK8	Lincolnshire Tec Ltd.	Respond	A	104,216.00
987362UK8	Lincolnshire Tec Ltd.	Food Partnership	A	117,270.00
987363UK8	Lincolnshire Tec Ltd.	Manufacturing Challenge II	A	72,090.00
984357UK3	Lincolnshire Training & Enterprise Council	Lincolnshire Small Grant Scheme	A	35,500.00
985222UK8	Lincolnshire Training & Enterprise Council	Countryside Job Bus	A	71,748.00
982156UK8	Lincolnshire Training & Enterprise Council	Armed Forces Resettlement	A	20,587.00
984225UK3	Lincolnshire Training & Enterprise Council	Lincoln Industrial Workshop	A	20,722.00
984233UK3	Lincolnshire Training & Enterprise Council	Shaw Start 2 (Hartsholme Park)	A	18,900.00
984234UK3	Lincolnshire Training & Enterprise Council	Urban Challenge	A	45,000.00
984291UK3	Lincolnshire Training & Enterprise Council	Princes Trust Volunteers	A	23,400.00
984310UK3	Lincolnshire Training & Enterprise Council	Engineering Training Centre	A	96,473.00
980418UK5	North Lincolnshire College	Reskill	A	161,797.00
980419UK5	North Lincolnshire College	Powerstart	A	199,109.00
980420UK5	North Lincolnshire College	Teestart	A	37,680.00
980421UK5	North Lincolnshire College	Commcomm	A	38,847.00
984356UK3	South Holland Volunteer Bureau	Voluntary Research Centre	A	12,255.00
987249UK8	The Growing Place Project	Formulae	A	86,936.00
				2,241,746.80

National Curriculum

Mr. McCabe: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will publish the 1997 National Curriculum assessment results in English, mathematics and science for seven, 11 and 14-year-olds aggregated at LEA level; and if he will make a statement. [27373]

Ms Estelle Morris: The 1997 National Curriculum assessment results in English, mathematics and science for 7, 11 and 14-year-olds, aggregated at local education authority level, are contained in a number of tables, copies of which have been placed in the Library.

We have set challenging targets for 11-year-olds' attainment in literacy and numeracy by 2002. We have recently agreed local literacy targets with each LEA, and we will be agreeing later this year similar targets for numeracy. We want to share and maximise the use of National Curriculum assessment data. These data reflect the key role local education authorities have in supporting schools to raise standards.

Departmental Vehicles

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how much his Department expects to spend in each year from 1998–99 to 2000–01 on vehicle replacements. [54986]

Mr. Mudie: The Department, together with the Employment Service (ES), is constantly looking at the efficiency and effectiveness of the vehicle fleet and replace vehicles only where there is a clear business need to do so. Following reviews of officially provided vehicles in both DfEE and ES earlier this year, more stringent requirements have been introduced for the use of vehicles. These are likely to result in a significant reduction in the need to purchase replacement vehicles.

In DfEE we now expect to spend less than £250,000 during 1998–99 while ES will spend about £1m during the same period. The budget for future years has yet to be agreed and will be based on operational needs of both DfEE and ES. Early indications are that the allocations will continue to decline.

EU Projects

Sir Richard Body: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will make a statement on his Department's policy on the merging of Youth for Europe and the European Voluntary Service after 1999, with reference to the continuation of projects designed to foster European identity. [55343]

Mr. Mudie: The Youth for Europe and European Voluntary Service programmes provide opportunities for young people to forge links with others in the Community who share their interests and concerns and thereby to gain greater understanding of other cultures and ways of life. Such activities contribute to the personal and social education of young people and to the development of responsible citizenship. The programmes are scheduled to conclude at the end of 1999. The Commission has published proposals for a successor youth programme which would incorporate youth exchange and voluntary service activities and other measures. The Government are participating positively in negotiations with other Member States on the terms of the new programme which is intended to come into force in the year 2000.

Sir Richard Body: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will make a statement on the introduction of the Europass to record work-related training; and if the Europass will contain *(a)* a microchip and *(b)* a photograph. [55404]

Mr. Mudie: The Europass will be a voluntary community-wide document, recording periods of work-linked training undertaken in a Member State other than the one in which the training is based. It comes into effect on 1 January 2000. The period of training will count towards a course of training being undertaken in the home Member State. It will complement at European level national systems for recording vocational training.

It falls to each Member State to implement the Europass. My officials are currently considering which agency is best placed to manage this process over the next 15 months.

There is no requirement for the Europass to contain a microchip or a photograph when it comes into effect.

Sir Richard Body: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will make a statement on the function and purpose of *(a)* the Eurodesk and *(b)* the youth card network of the Youth for Europe programme. [55379]

Mr. Mudie: These are matters for the European Commission.

Music Services

Mr. Woodward: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what is his Department's current policy towards safeguarding local education authority music services; and what changes his Department proposes to make. [55018]

Mr. Charles Clarke: The Government recognise the important contribution made by LEA music services; that is why we proposed new arrangements to safeguard them in our "Fair Funding" consultation document.

We are considering the responses to this consultation and we will be making an announcement on the future funding of LEA music services in the near future.

Schools (Gravesham)

Mr. Pond: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will list, for each of the schools in Gravesham, the amount of funding received in 1997–98 and for 1998–99 to improve security. [55322]

Mr. Charles Clarke: Kent Local Education Authority received £535,700 in 1997–98 and £445,458 in 1998–99 to improve school security. Information on amounts allocated to individual schools is not collected centrally.

Primary Classes

Shona McIsaac: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will list the primary schools in Cleethorpes constituency which have benefited from extra money to reduce class sizes. [55145]

Ms Estelle Morris: Schools in the Cleethorpes constituency benefiting from capital allocations to reduce infant class sizes are:

Coomb Briggs Primary: £55,178

Elliston Infants: £70,682

Healing Primary: £81,367

Humberston CE Primary: £56,410

Humberston Cloverfields Primary: £65,222

Reynolds Infants: £65,222

Stanford Infant and Junior: £65,222.

Education Budgets

Dr. Starkey: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will list for *(a)* Buckinghamshire County Council and *(b)* Milton Keynes Unitary Council since 1 May 1997, (i) the increase in money provided for non-HE and FE education under the SSA, (ii) the additional funding for non-HE and FE education provided in specific grants and (iii) the additional spending on non-HE and FE education allocated by each local authority. [55144]

Ms Estelle Morris: The information requested is set out in the table.

£ million

	LEA	
	Buckinghamshire	*Milton Keynes*
Year-on-year education SSA change	+7.8	+3.2
Year-on-year specific grant change	+1.9	+0.6
Year-on-year education spending change	−2.1	+8.3

Notes:

1. All the figures show the year-on-year changes between 1997–98 and 1998–99.
2. The education SSA figures take account of income from nursery vouchers in 1997–98.
3. The specific grant figures show the year-on-year change in the total amount allocated through the Grants for Education Support and Training (GEST) programme in 1997–98 and through the Standards Fund in 1998–99. The figures therefore include the LEA contribution as well as the grant.
4. The spending figures represent the year-on-year change in budgeted net revenue expenditure on education, adjusted for income from nursery vouchers. The figures have been derived from each authority's General Fund Revenue Account (RA) returns. They exclude expenditure financed by specific grants but include the LEA contribution towards such expenditure. The figures also include a pro rata share of certain heads of expenditure, notably capital expenditure charged to the revenue account, which cannot be attributed to individual services.

Maintained Schools

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will list each LEA area in order of the performance of its maintained schools at *(a)* A Level and *(b)* GCSE. [55476]

Mr. Charles Clarke: The GCE A level and GCSE information requested in respect of LEA areas is shown in the table. The results relate to 1997 exams. The results for the 1998 exams will be published later this year.

LEA area		*Ranking*
(a) GCE A level		
GCE A/AS point score per entry for pupils aged 16–18 entered for at least 1 GCE A/AS in 1996–97		
Buckinghamshire	6.0	1
Camden	5.9	2
Kingston upon Thames	5.9	2
Somerset	5.9	2
York, City of	5.9	2
Bournemouth	5.8	6
Kensington and Chelsea	5.8	6
Poole	5.8	6
Sheffield	5.8	6
Barnet	5.7	10
Southampton	5.7	10
Gloucestershire	5.6	12
Hammersmith and Fulham	5.6	12
Havering	5.6	12
Manchester	5.6	12
North Somerset	5.6	12
North Yorkshire	5.6	12
Stockton on Tees	5.6	12
Sutton	5.6	12
Wiltshire	5.6	12
Trafford	5.6	14
Berkshire	5.5	22
Hertfordshire	5.5	22
Lincolnshire	5.5	22
Surrey	5.5	22
Essex	5.4	26
Kent	5.4	26
Lancashire	5.4	26
Swindon	5.4	26
Bolton	5.3	32
Brighton and Hove	5.3	32
Bromley	5.3	32
Durham	5.3	32
Northumberland	5.3	32
Oxfordshire	5.3	32
Westminster	5.3	32
Wirral	5.3	32
Bath and North East Somerset	5.2	40
Bexley	5.2	40
Darlington	5.2	40
Devon	5.2	40
Dorset	5.2	40
Gateshead	5.2	40
Isle of Wight	5.2	40
Redbridge	5.2	40
Shropshire	5.2	40
West Sussex	5.2	40
Bedfordshire	5.1	50
Birmingham	5.1	50
Cornwall	5.1	50
Croydon	5.1	50
Derbyshire	5.1	50
East Sussex	5.1	50
Hampshire	5.1	50
Hillingdon	5.1	50
Hounslow	5.1	50
Norfolk	5.1	50
South Gloucestershire	5.1	50
Warwickshire	5.1	50
Cambridgeshire	5.0	62
Cumbria	5.0	62
Ealing	5.0	62
Enfield	5.0	62
Hereford and Worcester	5.0	62
Kingston upon Hull	5.0	62

LEA area		Ranking
Leicestershire	5.0	62
Newham	5.0	62
Oldham	5.0	62
Staffordshire	5.0	62
Suffolk	5.0	62
Walsall	5.0	62
Waltham Forest	5.0	62
Barnsley	4.9	75
Bristol, City of	4.9	75
Coventry	4.9	75
Greenwich	4.9	75
Leeds	4.9	75
Newcastle upon Tyne	4.9	75
Rotherham	4.9	75
Wandsworth	4.9	75
Wigan	4.9	75
East Riding of Yorkshire	4.8	86
Liverpool	4.8	86
Northamptonshire	4.8	86
Nottinghamshire	4.8	86
Solihull	4.8	86
Brent	4.7	91
Calderdale	4.7	91
Kirklees	4.7	91
Leicester City	4.7	91
Milton Keynes	4.7	91
North Tyneside	4.7	91
Rochdale	4.7	91
Sefton	4.7	91
South Tyneside	4.7	91
St. Helens	4.7	91
Merton	4.6	101
Stoke on Trent	4.6	101
Wolverhampton	4.6	101
Bradford	4.5	104
Derby City	4.5	104
North East Lincolnshire	4.5	104
Sunderland	4.5	104
Doncaster	4.4	108
Southwark	4.4	108
Portsmouth	4.3	110
Wakefield	4.3	110
Lambeth	4.2	112
Barking and Dagenham	4.1	113
Middlesbrough	4.1	113
North Lincolnshire	4.1	113
Hackney	4.0	116
Lewisham	3.7	117
Tower Hamlets	3.6	118
Islington	3.4	119
Sandwell	3.4	119
Luton	3.3	121
Knowsley	3.1	122
Tameside	2.8	123

(b) GCSE

Percentage of 15 year olds achieving 5 or more GCSE/GNVQ grades A-C 1996–97

Isles of Scilly	61.1	1
Buckinghamshire	59.7	2
Kingston upon Thames	57.5	3
Sutton	54.7	4
North Yorkshire	54.0	5
Harrow	53.4	6
Bromley	52.7	7
Redbridge	52.5	8
Barnet	52.0	9
Gloucestershire	51.6	10
Trafford	51.6	10
York	51.4	12
Bath and North East Somerset	51.3	13
Solihull	51.2	14
Surrey	51.0	15
North Somerset	50.9	16
Hertfordshire	50.7	17
Poole	50.7	17
Wiltshire	50.5	19
West Sussex	50.3	20
Stockport	50.2	21
Dorset	49.8	22
Hampshire	49.4	23
Shropshire	49.3	24
Rutland	49.0	25
Cornwall	48.8	28
Cheshire	48.5	29
Havering	48.1	30
Bury	47.8	31
Camden	47.8	31
Bournemouth	47.6	33
Suffolk	47.4	34
Oxfordshire	47.2	35
Lincolnshire	46.7	36
Richmond upon Thames	46.5	37
Kent	45.7	38
Cambridgeshire	45.6	39
East Sussex	45.5	40
Sefton	45.0	41
Staffordshire	45.0	41
Wigan	44.8	43
Leicestershire	44.7	44
Essex	44.6	45
Norfolk	44.6	45
South Gloucestershire	44.6	45
Bexley	44.5	48
Warwickshire	44.5	48
Wirral	44.5	48
Bedfordshire	44.3	51
East Riding of Yorkshire	44.3	51
Hereford and Worcester	44.1	53
Hounslow	44.1	53
Devon	44.0	55
Isle of Wight	43.9	56
Kensington and Chelsea	43.9	56
Lancashire	43.8	58
Cumbria	43.5	59
Derbyshire	43.5	59
Northumberland	43.2	61
Swindon	43.0	62
North Tyneside	42.7	63
Dudley	42.5	64
Enfield	42.3	65
Northamptonshire	42.2	66
Southampton	40.9	67
Croydon	40.4	68
Hillingdon	40.4	68
St. Helens	40.2	70
Brighton and Hove	40.1	71
Hammersmith and Fulham	40.1	71
Bolton	40.0	73
North Lincolnshire	39.7	74
Kirklees	39.5	75
Gateshead	39.2	76
Stockton on Tees	39.1	77
Redcar and Cleveland	38.4	78
Calderdale	38.2	81
Derby City	38.2	81
Ealing	37.9	83
Wakefield	37.9	83
Tameside	37.7	85
Nottinghamshire	37.6	86
Darlington	37.5	87
Merton	37.5	87
Leeds	37.4	89
Rotherham	37.4	89
Coventry	36.9	91
Durham	36.3	92
Oldham	35.8	93
South Tyneside	35.7	94

LEA area		Ranking
Rochdale	35.5	95
Waltham Forest	35.5	95
Birmingham	35.3	97
Milton Keynes	35.0	98
Wandsworth	35.0	98
Sunderland	34.4	100
Luton	34.3	101
Westminster	34.1	102
Doncaster	33.8	103
Walsall	33.8	103
Newham	33.4	105
Wolverhampton	33.1	106
Leicester City	32.8	107
Bristol, City of	32.1	108
Newcastle upon Tyne	31.6	109
Portsmouth	31.6	109
Barking and Dagenham	30.9	111
Greenwich	30.8	112
North East Lincolnshire	30.7	113
Salford	30.7	113
Stoke on Trent	30.5	115
Hackney	30.4	116
Liverpool	30.1	117
Lewisham	29.4	118
Hartlepool	29.1	119
Bradford	28.9	120
Barnsley	28.6	121
Lambeth	28.6	121
Middlesbrough	28.5	123
Southwark	27.2	124
Sandwell	26.9	125
Haringey	26.7	126
Manchester	26.3	127
Tower Hamlets	25.7	128
Islington	24.9	129
Knowsley	23.4	130
Kingston upon Hull	21.4	131

Motorcycle Parking

Mr. Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many motorcycle parking spaces exist at each office or site for which his Department is responsible; and how many are secure spaces. [55259]

Mr. Mudie: The number of motorcycle parking spaces in DfEE HQ sites is 30.

	Number
Darlington	6
London	13
Runcorn	3
Sheffield	8
Total	30

The spaces at the London HQ offices can be designated as secure as these are in an underground car park. Other HQ parking facilities are monitored by CCTV.

The Employment Service (ES) does not keep records of motorcycle parking spaces at its 1,200 properties which cover a wide range of locations. Where a need is identified, and it is feasible, spaces are made available for staff use.

New Deal

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will make a statement on the delivery of the New Deal Programme by *(a)* the Employment Service and *(b)* TECs. [54864]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The Employment Service is responsible for the delivery of the New Deal across Great Britain with a distinct lead role for specific private sector providers in some areas. In every area partnerships of key local bodies play a vital part in the development of delivery of New Deal. TECs play a role to varying extents in each of those partnerships in England and Wales.

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will make a statement on the contracting procedure in the voluntary sector option of the New Deal. [54854]

Mr. Andrew Smith: Voluntary Sector Option contracts are for three years with an annual break clause. Contracts for this sector may guarantee a minimum volume of participants. 158 main contracts have been signed with the Voluntary sector. We are working closely with the sector continuously to improve the contracting procedures.

Training Courses

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will assess the advantage of introducing shorter, employment-specific, training courses in the New Deal. [54853]

Mr. Andrew Smith: New Deal is designed to meet individual need, and to contain the widest possible range of help to enhance employability. Employment specific training is available through each of the New Deals, which are all being rigorously evaluated.

Transport Costs

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if *(a)* grant-maintained and *(b)* locally managed schools are permitted to use money from their school budget to provide transport for children to school. [55281]

Ms Estelle Morris: Yes, in both cases.

Cambridge University

Mr. Rammell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what consultations he has held with the Vice-Chancellor of Cambridge University about measures to widen access in respect of undergraduate admissions. [55527]

Mr. Mudie: The issue of access has been raised alongside discussions about future funding. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has welcomed initiatives being taken by the University to attract applications from a wider range of potential students.

TECs and Chambers of Commerce

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what guidance he has issued

to TECs and chambers of commerce about future applications for mergers; and if he will make a statement. [55151]

Mr. Mudie: The Government have announced that they will not be taking any further decisions on applications to merge from the TECs and Chambers of Commerce, until they have completed their consultation on the future rule of Training and Enterprise Councils and had time to consider the outcome. The only exceptions were those applications that had been formally received by Government for approval at the time this moratorium was announced.

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will list the number of applications for mergers by TECs and chambers of commerce *(a)* received, *(b)* approved, *(c)* rejected and *(d)* awaiting ministerial approval to date. [55152]

Mr. Mudie: The Government have received a total of 18 applications to merge from TECs and Chambers of Commerce of which two have been withdrawn by the merger partners; 16 merger applications have been approved; no merger applications have been rejected; and no merger applications are currently awaiting ministerial approval.

Prince's Trust (Exhibition)

Mr. Rowe: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if his Department has considered making an application for an Exhibition relating to the Prince's Trust to be displayed in the Upper Waiting Hall. [55543]

Mr. Mudie: I understand that the hon. Member is sponsoring a parliamentary exhibition on the Prince's Trust next week. I recommend that hon. Members visit the exhibition to learn about the excellent work of the Trust, which works with the Department in a variety of areas ranging from study support to secondment of officials.

Eleven Plus

Mr. Wyatt: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will make secondary schools responsible for the payment and administration of the eleven plus examination; and if he will make a statement. [55021]

Ms Estelle Morris: LEAs and schools which test pupils for selective admission by ability will continue to make their own arrangements for administration and payment of costs.

Child Care

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what estimate he has made of the number of children aged *(a)* 0 to 4, *(b)* 5 to 10, *(c)* 11 to 12 and *(d)* 13 years or above whose child care during the hours of parental employment is provided primarily by a grandparent or other non-parental family member. [55387]

Ms Hodge: Estimates of the number of children in the relevant age bands whose child care during the hours of parental employment is provided primarily by a grandparent or other non-parental family member are not available. The British Social Attitudes Survey conducted in 1994 by independent researchers at Social and Community Planning Research asked working parents about their child care arrangements. The survey found that, in families where the youngest child was aged less than 5, 21 per cent. of children were cared for by relatives other than parents. Where the youngest child was between 5 and 12 years old, 18 per cent. were cared for in this way.

We know that many parents prefer their children to be cared for by relatives whilst they are at work. This is why our National Childcare Strategy seeks to improve support for such carers.

Mr. Alan W. Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will make a statement on his Department's plans to improve child care. [53474]

Ms Hodge: The Green Paper "Meeting the Childcare Challenge", which was published in May, sets out the Government's plans for a National Childcare Strategy to raise the quality of care, to make child care more affordable, and to make it more accessible.

The range of tasks envisaged in the National Childcare Strategy can be achieved only by drawing on the commitment and expertise of a wide range of partners with local knowledge and experience. We are therefore setting up in each English local authority area an Early Years Development and Childcare Partnership to take forward the local planning to implement the strategy.

Last week I announced the launch of the 1999–2000 planning guidance for the partnerships and informed each about the funding available to them from the Department for child care development next year. The partnerships are currently assessing the local demand for child care and the supply of places available to meet it and will be going on to produce plans to begin filling the gap between the two. These plans will be sent to the Department by 1 February 1999, for approval prior to delivery from 1999 onwards.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales has parallel plans for Wales.

Supported Placement Scheme

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will list for each year since 1993–94 *(a)* the number of places supported by his Department in the supported placement scheme, *(b)* the cost per place to the Department, *(c)* the annual percentage increase in funding to placement sponsors and *(d)* the annual percentage increase in annual earnings of those supported by the scheme. [55572]

Mr. Andrew Smith: I have set out the answers to the hon. and learned Member's questions in the table.

Year	*(a)* Number of SPS places	*(b)* Cost per place (£)	*(c)* Annual % increase in funding
1993–94	7,461	3,480	6.4
		4,310	4.1
1994–95	7,748	4,420	2.7
			4.1
1995–96	8,036	4,530	2.5

Year	(a) Number of SPS places	(b) Cost per place (£)	(c) Annual % increase in funding
1996–97	8,191	4,610	1.8
1997–98	8,448	4,680	1.5

[1] Local Authorities
[2] Voluntary Bodies

Information on the annual earnings of supported employees and the annual percentage increase is not collected from supported employment contractors and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost to the Department and to its contractors. However, it is one of the fundamental conditions of the Supported Employment Programme that sponsors will, in placing disabled people with host employers, ensure that disabled people are paid the same wages as non disabled colleagues doing the same work.

Inner London Education

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what representations he has received concerning the funding for colleges of further education in Inner London; and if he will make a statement. [55517]

Mr. Mudie: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has received a number of representations about funding. The further education sector, including Inner London colleges, will benefit from the additional £255 million for 1999–2000, announced as part of the Comprehensive Spending Review.

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what representations he has received concerning the ethnicity factor in the school funding formula for Inner London; and if he will make a statement. [55518]

Ms Estelle Morris: The Government have received a number of conflicting representations regarding the ethnicity factor in the education Standard Spending Assessment formula. Decisions as to the formula for 1999–2000 will be announced later this year.

Government Purchase Card

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what use *(a)* his Department and *(b)* its agencies are currently making of the Government Purchase Card; what savings he estimates are being achieved as a result; what plans he has to expand use of the card by his Department and its agencies; and if he will make a statement. [55176]

Mr. Mudie: The Department for Education and Employment plans to implement the Government Procurement Card (GPC) on a pilot basis before the end of 1998. As the Department and its next steps agency, the Employment Service, already make extensive use of national contracts and electronic invoicing, DfEE will want to evaluate the pilot before considering full roll out of the GPC.

Age Discrimination

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what plans he has to prevent age discrimination in the workplace. [55154]

Mr. Andrew Smith: Our plans are given in the report of the consultation we carried out earlier this year on age discrimination and employment. The report, "Action on Age", was published on 13 August and a copy has been placed in the Library. We are developing a draft code of good practice with key partners, including the TUC, Age Concern, Institute of Personnel and Development and the CBI. It will cover recruitment, selection, promotion, training, redundancy and retirement. It will be issued shortly for wider consultation and a final version published early next year.

PE Teachers

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will list the sports which trainee physical education teachers specialised in to gain their qualifications in the last year for which figures are available. [55403]

Mr. Charles Clarke: This information is not available in the form requested. 1,644 students entered physical education Initial Teacher Training in England in 1997/98; however, the Department does not collect information on the sport in which these students specialised.

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many qualified physical education teachers there are in English schools. [55377]

Mr. Charles Clarke: There were some 26,000 full and part-time teachers in maintained secondary schools in 1996/97 who had a post A level qualification in physical education. Similar information for primary schools is not available. However, primary teachers are trained to deliver the whole primary curriculum including physical education.

Primary Schools

Shona McIsaac: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what plans he has to assist small rural primary schools. [55146]

Mr. Charles Clarke: We fully recognise the important contribution made by rural schools and have made it clear that under both the existing arrangements for deciding statutory proposals and those coming into force in September 1999 there will be a presumption against the closure of rural schools. Our educational policies are designed to assist all schools in raising standards, including small rural primary schools. Smaller infant class sizes will mean that all children get the best start at school, and the new information and communications technology we are supporting will be of particular help to rural schools in opening up new possibilities for enriching children's learning and overcoming rural isolation. The National Literacy Strategy, which began in schools this term, and the National Numeracy Strategy, to be implemented from 1999, are designed to raise standards in all primary schools.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Kakadu National Park

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what representations she has received from the Mirrar peoples of Australia in respect of the proposed development of the Jabiluka uranium mine in the Kakadu National Park. [55413]

Clare Short: I have received no such representations.

Government Purchase Card

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what use her Department is currently making of the Government Purchase Card; what savings she estimates are being achieved as a result; what plans she has to expand use of the card by her Department and its agencies; and if she will make a statement. [55216]

Clare Short: We do not use the card at present but my Department is looking into introducing the Government Purchasing Card later this year for purchases in the UK. We are also considering a pilot operation of the Card overseas.

It is not yet possible to say what savings would result from use of the Card.

Motorcycle Parking

Mr. Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how many motorcycle parking spaces exist at each office or site for which her Department is responsible; and how many are secure spaces. [55262]

Clare Short: The Department for International Development has six dedicated motor-cycle spaces at its 94 Victoria Street headquarters all of which are in a garage block under the scrutiny of cameras and custody guards. The Department also has three dedicated spaces at its East Kilbride Headquarters which are relatively less secure.

UNESCO

Mr. Gapes: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development (1) what progress has been made on the setting up of a UK National Commission for UNESCO; and what role the *(a)* Department for Education and Employment, *(b)* Department of Trade and Industry, Office of Science and Technology and *(c)* Department for Culture, Media and Sport will have in selecting appropriate non-Governmental members of the Commission; [55231]

(2) if she will list the Government departments which participate in UNESCO's activities and on what matters; [55230]

(3) how many *(a)* officials, and *(b)* NGOs have attended UNESCO-related conferences on the United Kingdom's behalf since the UK rejoined UNESCO; and what encouragement she has given to groups outside Government to participate in these conferences. [55232]

Clare Short: I refer my hon. Friend to my letters of 7 August 1998.

Mr. Gapes: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assessment she has made of the *(a)* contribution made by and *(b)* benefits obtained by each Department which has participated in UNESCO's activities since the UK's resumption of UNESCO membership on 1 July. [55292]

Clare Short: Since the resumption of UK membership of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), the financial costs of which are borne by my Department, a range of Government departments have contributed to activities of specific interest to them. We will be publishing a strategy paper in 1999 outlining our priorities for our work with UNESCO.

Indonesia

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, pursuant to the answer of 15 June 1998, *Official Report*, column 98, in relation to the Cikampek to Padalarang toll road project in Indonesia, what expenditure has been *(a)* allocated and *(b)* incurred by her Department to date; what impact the delay to the project will have on the effectiveness of her Department's support for the project; and if she will place in the Library copies of the project appraisal, monitoring and evaluation reports completed to date. [55225]

Clare Short: I refer my hon. Friend to my letter of 16 August 1998.

China and Vietnam

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on her visits to China and Vietnam. [55030]

Clare Short: I refer my hon. Friend to my letter of 7 August 1998.

Sudan

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assessment she has made of the welfare of British aid workers engaged in relief work in Sudan. [55436]

Clare Short: The Security Unit of the UN Operation Lifeline Sudan is responsible for co-ordinating security procedures for all relief workers operating in southern Sudan. British NGOs active in Sudan are content with the support provided. Since February we have contributed £300,000 to the Unit.

Britain has also contributed to the drawing up of a code of best practice in the management and support of aid personnel. This includes a commitment to the protection and well-being of aid personnel working in difficult and dangerous operations. Agencies seeking emergency funds for Sudan (or elsewhere) are asked to stipulate how they apply Code standards. Many of the NGOs offer advice and counselling as necessary to staff working in difficult circumstances such as those in southern Sudan.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Millennium Compliance

Mr. Evans: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how much money has been spent to date on advertising relating to the millennium bug problem. [46146]

Mrs. Roche *[holding answer 25 June 1998]:* The total media spend by Action 2000 from launch of its advertising and publicity campaign in mid July to end of September has been £3.76 million.

Mr. David Atkinson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if she will take steps to require listed companies to disclose their plans for the millennium compliance of their computer systems and associated contingency plans; and if she will make a statement. [50049]

Mrs. Roche: I have no plans to do so.

In March, the Urgent Issues Task Force, a subcommittee of the Accounting Standards Board, published an abstract on accounting and disclosures in relation to Year 2000. The abstract (UITF abstract 20) explains that entities should disclose *(a)* the risks and uncertainties associated with the Year 2000 problem; if no such assessment has been made it should be stated, and *(b)* general plans to address Year 2000 issues relating to business and operations, and if material, their relationships with customers, suppliers, and other relevant parties.

Although no legally binding abstracts issued by the UITF are authoritative. Abstract 20 has been endorsed by the Stock Exchange who have drawn it to the attention of all listed companies.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations he has received from the Software Reliability Unit at City University, London, about computers at nuclear power plants failing to recognise the year 2000. [54682]

Mr. Battle: The Government have received no such representations. I understand, however, that Professor Bev Littlewood of the Software Reliability Unit at City University, London, and a member of the Health and Safety Commission's independent expert advisory body on nuclear safety matters, the Nuclear Safety Advisory Committee (NuSAC), has suggested that NuSAC consider the implications of the century date change for nuclear safety at a forthcoming meeting of the committee. This is, of course, a matter for NuSAC to consider.

All UK nuclear operators have initiated major programmes of work to address the century date change problem. These programmes are being closely monitored by the UK's independent nuclear safety regulator, the Health and Safety Executive (HSE), which has made it clear that it is satisfied with the actions being taken by operators. Operators anticipate that all essential work to address the problem will be completed by the end of April 1999.

Mr. David Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what is the extent and cost of the current Get Your Business Ready for the Bug awareness campaign; if he will include a leaflet in telephone bills to businesses; and if he will make a statement on progress on awareness. [55148]

Mrs. Roche: The cost of the current Action 2000 advertising and publicity campaign to end of September was £3.76 million, made up as follows:

	£000
Outdoor posters	720
National press	1,220
Regional press	120
TV	1,700

The reach and frequency achieved were:

Outdoor Posters: seen by 51.5% of ABC1 adults on average 27 times.

National Press: seen by 96% of businesspeople with responsibility for 10–300 employees on average 13 times.

Regional Press: seen by 6.4% of ABC1 adults on average 2.6 times across UK.

TV: seen by 84.2% of ABC1 adults on average 4.5 times.

A number of free channels of communication to businesses via key influences have been used by Action 2000 with the following results:

Barclays Bank has included Action 2000 leaflets with bank statements to reach over 400,000 business customers.

NatWest Bank sent a message on all statements to 300,000 business customers highlighting the Millennium Bug and Action Line number. This was followed by a special letter about Action 2000 and giving Year 2000 advice to 500,000 business customers.

BT published an article in its business customer magazine 'Talking Business' with a circulation of 160,000 copies.

West of Scotland Water will include an Action 2000 leaflet with the water bills of all 27,000 business customers.

Thames Water will send a letter to 170,000 commercial customers signposting Action 2000.

Cable and Wireless will include leaflets in a mailing to 170,000 business customers.

British Midland are distributing flyers in Business Lounges and check-in desks at UK airports on an on-going basis.

The third phase, its 'state of the nation' survey is presently being completed, and the results will be announced by Action 2000 on 22 October.

Oil Exploration (Sudan)

Dr. Tonge: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if she will list the United Kingdom companies involved in the exploration for oil in Southern Sudan. [51773]

Mr. Battle: *[holding answer 21 July 1998]:* To the best of our knowledge there are no British companies exploring for oil in Southern Sudan although we understand that two companies, Weir Pumps and Allen Power, supply equipment to the major exploration consortium in Sudan headed by CNPC of China.

Textile Industry

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many people were employed in textile finishing *(a)* in 1979, *(b)* in 1989, *(c)* in 1995 and *(d)* at the latest available date. [49622]

Mr. Battle: The number of people employed in the textile finishing industry were 23,500 in 1989, 18,800 in 1995 and 19,900 in 1996. Data for 1979 are not available on the same basis.

Source:

Office for National Statistics, Annual Production and Construction Inquiries (PACSTAT).

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what was the total output of grey unfinished cloth in Britain for each of the last 10 years for which figure are available. [49616]

Mr. Battle: This information is not available from official statistics.

Foresight Panels

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what changes have been made to the remit of Foresight panels since 1 May 1997. [50018]

Mr. Battle *[holding answer 20 July 1998]:* None. Panel activities are currently based on action plans developed in the early part of last year and for the most part published before 1 May 1997. These focus in particular on action to engage business at all levels, including SMEs, and to promote cross working between Panels. This, in turn, is one of a range of initiatives designed to raise the profile of the Foresight Programme, both generally and within Government under the overall direction of the Ministerial Foresight Group. The progress report published in June describes the advances which have been made since the Foresight Audit was carried out last summer. Copies of the progress report are available in the Library of the House.

Decisions on the scope and structure of the next round of Foresight will be taken shortly. The proposals currently out to consultation suggest, however, that there should be a new focus on themes relevant to quality of life as well as wealth creation and that issues such as education skills and training and sustainable development should be on the agenda of all Panels. The proposals also underline our intention to broaden the basis of participation in Foresight, in particular by encouraging contributions from young people and from individuals, SMEs and organisations with specialist expertise to offer.

Civil Servants

Dr. Gibson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many civil servants in her Department *(a)* have a degree in science and *(b)* have held a position using that expertise. [50895]

Mr. Battle: Systematic and reliable data in the form requested are not available for the Department as a whole.

However, there are currently 27 staff within the Department's Fast Stream grades who have science degrees, of whom 23 have held positions where this expertise is likely to have been relevant to the content of the post.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry has asked the Chief Executives of the Agencies of the Department to reply to my hon. Friend direct.

Letter from Peter Joyce to Dr. Ian Gibson, dated 19 October 1998:

The President of the Board of Trade has asked me to reply to your question about the number of staff in the Insolvency Service who (a) have a degree in science and (b) have held a position using that expertise.

I regret that the information held centrally by the Service on its staff is not maintained in a form which would provide details of those who have a science degree except at disproportionate cost.

Letter from David Hendon to Dr. Ian Gibson, dated 16 July 1998:

You asked the President of the Board of Trade, how many civil servants in her Department (a) have a degree in science and (b) have held a position using that expertise. I have been asked to answer that question in respect of the Radiocommunications Agency.

I am afraid that the Agency does not have available comprehensive data that would allow me to identify which of its staff have science degrees. I can inform you, however, that the Agency has 45 engineering staff with engineering degrees of various types. In addition, there is a small number of generalist administrators with a science or engineering degree who may find their specialist expertise relevant to some extent to the particular work the Agency does.

I hope this is helpful.

Letter from Ian Jones to Dr. Ian Gibson, dated July 1998:

I have been asked to reply in respect of the Employment Tribunals Service to your question of 15 July 1998 to the President of the Board of Trade concerning civil servants who hold a science degree.

We have no information readily available about the numbers of staff in the ETS with science degrees.

Letter from P. R. S. Hartnack to Dr. Ian Gibson, dated July 1998:

I am replying for the Patent Office to your Parliamentary Question to the President of the Board of Trade about civil servants in her Department who have a degree in science and have held a position using that expertise.

A total of 217 of the 750 Patent Office permanent staff have degrees in science—ie in science, engineering or mathematics. Of these 207 are professional patent examiners who make use of their expertise on a day to day basis either in examining patent applications or in a supervisory capacity. Most of the remaining 10 staff with science degrees have at one time or another been patent examiners and are now in supervisory positions elsewhere in the Patent Office dealing, for example, with procurement contracts. For completeness I should add that we also have a small number of graduates in science-related subjects such as geography, botany and environmental studies who do not make use of their expertise on a day-to-day basis.

Letter from Dr. Seton Bennett to Dr. Ian Gibson, dated July 1998:

The President of the Board of Trade has asked me to reply on behalf of the National Weights and Measures Laboratory to your question about the number of civil servants with science degrees.

More than half of the staff in this Agency hold technical qualifications of one sort or another, but we have no readily accessible reliable data on the number with science degrees.

Letter from John Holden to Dr. Ian Gibson, dated July 1998:

I have been asked to reply to your question to the President of the Board of Trade regarding the number of civil servants with a degree in science and would respond as follows:

(a) 15 employees have a science degree.

(b) One who has previously held a position using that expertise.

United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority

Ms Roseanna Cunningham: To ask the President of the Board of Trade in what capacity Dr. Douglas Graham is employed by UKAEA; and what is the nature of his duties. [50255]

Mr. Battle *[holding answer 14 July 1998]:* Dr. Douglas Graham is employed by the UKAEA at Dounreay as the Waste Strategy and Studies Department Manager in the Waste Studies Group. He is responsible for waste strategy and studies for the waste management group, including studies of technologies and waste treatment, and managing the investigation of records.

Encryption

Mr. Cohen: To ask the President of the Board of Trade, pursuant to her answer of 27 April 1998, *Official Report*, column 26, if it is her intention, as part of her proposals to regulate the use of encryption on public networks, to impose the escrow of encryption keys for data which comprises patients' personal medical information. [51793]

Mrs. Roche: No. The proposals we hope to bring forward in relation to secure electronic commerce will set up a voluntary licensing regime for organisations offering cryptography services to the public. It would be only those organisations seeking licences to provide confidentiality services that would be required to keep copies of the encryption keys of clients.

Departmental Vehicles

Mr. Burstow: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if she will list for *(a)* her Department and *(b)* bodies listed in the National Asset Register, how many vehicles are currently (i) owned and (ii) leased; if he will indicate their (A) fuel types and (B) engine cubic capacities; and how many vehicles are expected to fall due for replacement in each of the years (1) 1998–99, (2) 1999–2000 and (3) 2000–01. [49230]

Mr. Mandelson *[holding answer 6 July 1998]:* Disaggregated information in the form requested is not available for the core Department and the other bodies listed in the National Asset Register, and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

I have asked the Agency Chief Executives to reply to the hon. Member, as they have their own management responsibility for assets.

Letter from P. R. S. Hartnack to Mr. Paul Burstow, dated July 1998:

I am replying for the Patent Office to your question to the President of the Board of Trade about vehicles that are owned or leased.

The Patent Office does not own any vehicles. We lease one 2500cc diesel-engined van which is due for replacement in the period 1999–2000 and, as yet, have made no decisions on whether it will in fact be replaced or by what type of vehicle.

Letter from Ian Jones to Mr. Paul Burstow, dated 19 October 1998:

I have been asked to reply in respect of the Employment Tribunals Service to your question of 23 July 1998 to the President of the Board of Trade asking how many vehicles owned or leased will be replaced by vehicles using petrol, diesel, gas, electric batteries or other.

The vehicles which are due for replacement in 1999–2000 will be considered for replacement only if replacement provides the most cost effective means of travel for the Employment Tribunals Service. At the present time the vehicles are not expected to be replaced.

Letter from Dr. Seton Bennett to Mr. Paul Burstow, dated July 1998:

The President of the Board of Trade has asked me to reply on behalf of the National Weights and Measures Laboratory to your questions about: i) vehicles owned or leased by the Agency and, ii) what type of vehicle will be any replacement.

The information you requested on vehicles owned or leased is set out in the following table:

Engine cc	*Fuel type*	*Owned*	*Leased*	*Replacement* 1998/99	1999/2000	2000/01
1994	Diesel	—	1	—	—	1
2500	Diesel	1	—	—	—	—

As regards the type of replacement vehicle: it is envisaged at this stage that the vehicle due for replacement in 2000/01 will be of similar type. At the time of replacement, reliable alternative technology would be considered.

Letter from John Holden to Mr. Paul Burstow, dated 19 October 1998:

In response to your Parliamentary Questions concerning vehicles owned or leased within the Department of Trade and Industry, I can confirm that in the Companies House Agency:

1 We own a solitary 2 litre diesel Ford Transit panel van in Companies House colours and bearing the CH logo.

2 There are no plans to replace this vehicle in the period 1998–2001.

Letter from Peter Joyce to Mr. Paul Burstow, dated 19 October 1998:

The Secretary of State for Trade and Industry has asked me to reply to your question about vehicles due for replacement by The Insolvency Service.

The Service has no vehicles and no plans to acquire any so that the issue of replacement does not arise.

Letter from David Hendon to Mr. Paul Burstow, dated 19 October 1998:

The President of the Board of Trade has asked me in my capacity at Chief Executive of the Radiocommunications Agency to reply to your two Parliamentary Questions 97/4281 and 97/4630 about the number of vehicles owned and leased by this Agency, and the Agency's vehicle replacement programme.

The Agency is responsible for the management and enforcement of the radio spectrum. Vehicles carry large amounts of specialist equipment; most are saloon cars but there are also mobile laboratories and off road vehicles.

The information you requested is set out in the following table:

Engine cc	Fuel type	Owned	Leased	Replacement due 1998/99	1999/2000	2000/01
1700	Diesel	15	—	2	5	7
1800	Diesel	42	—	7	2	—
1900	Diesel	33	—	10	11	7
2000	Diesel	7	—	5	3	—
2300	Diesel	1	—	—	—	—
2500	Diesel	16	—	1	3	1
4000	Diesel	3	—	—	—	1
3500	Petrol	2	—	—	—	1
		119	0	25	24	17

Notes:
1. All 66 vehicles being replaced between 1998/99 and 2000/01 will be with diesel models
2. Not all the Agency's vehicles will be replaced during the three years in question

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many of the vehicles due for replacement by *(a)* his Department and *(b)* bodies listed in the National Asset Register in (i) 1998–99, (ii) 1999–2000 and (iii) 2000–01 will be replaced by vehicles using (1) petrol, (2) diesel, (3) natural gas, (4) electric batteries and (5) other. [52614]

Dr. Howells *[holding answer 28 July 1998]:* Disaggregated information in the form requested is not available for the core Department and the other bodies listed in the National Asset Register and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

I have asked Agency Chief Executives to reply to the hon. Member as they have their own management responsibility for assets.

Letter from P. R. S. Hartnack to Mr. Paul Burstow, dated July 1998:

I am replying for the Patent Office to your questions to the President of the Board of Trade about vehicles that are owned or leased.

The Patent Office does not own any vehicles. We lease one 2500cc diesel-engined van which is due for replacement in the period 1999–2000 and, as yet, have made no decisions on whether it will in fact be replaced or by what type of vehicle.

Letter from Ian Jones to Mr. Paul Burstow, dated 19 October 1998:

I have been asked to reply in respect of the Employment Tribunals Service to your question of 23 July 1998 to the President of the Board of Trade asking how many vehicles owned or leased will be replaced by vehicles using petrol, diesel, gas, electric batteries or other.

The vehicles which are due for replacement in 1999–2000 will be considered for replacement only if replacement provides the most cost effective means of travel for the Employment Tribunals Service. At the present time the vehicles are not expected to be replaced.

Letter from Dr. Seton Bennett to Mr. Paul Burstow, dated 19 October 1998:

The President of the Board of Trade has asked me to reply on behalf of the National Weights and Measures Laboratory to your questions about; i) vehicles owned or leased by the Agency and, ii) what type of vehicle will be any replacement.

The information you requested on vehicles owned or leased is set out in the following table:

Engine cc	Fuel type	Owned	Leased	Replacement 1998/99	1999/2000	2000/01
1994	Diesel	—	1	—	—	1
2500	Diesel	1	—	—	—	—

As regards the type of replacement vehicle; it is envisaged at this stage that the vehicle due for replacement in 2000/01 will be of similar type. At the time of replacement, reliable alternative technology would be considered.

Letter from John Holden to Mr. Paul Burstow, dated 19 October 1998:

In response to your Parliamentary Questions concerning vehicles owned or leased within the Department of Trade and Industry, I can confirm that in the Companies House Agency:

1 We own a solitary 2 litre diesel Ford Transit panel van in Companies House colours and bearing the CH logo.

2 There are no plans to replace this vehicle in the period 1998–2001.

Letter from Peter Joyce to Mr. Paul Burstow, dated 19 October 1998:

The Secretary of State for Trade and Industry has asked me to reply to your question about vehicles due for replacement by The Insolvency Service.

The Service has no vehicles and no plans to acquire any so that the issue of replacement does not arise.

Letter from David Hendon to Mr. Paul Burstow, dated 19 October 1998:

The President of the Board of Trade has asked me in my capacity as Chief Executive of the Radiocommunications Agency to reply to your two Parliamentary Questions 97/4281 and 97/4630 about the number of vehicles owned and leased by this Agency, and the Agency's vehicle replacement programme.

The Agency is responsible for the management and enforcement of the radio spectrum. Vehicles carry large amounts of specialist equipment; most are saloon cars but there are also mobile laboratories and off road vehicles.

The information you requested is set out in the following table:

Engine cc	Fuel type	Owned	Leased	Replacement due 1998/99	1999/2000	2000/01
1700	Diesel	15	—	2	5	7
1800	Diesel	42	—	7	2	—
1900	Diesel	33	—	10	11	7
2000	Diesel	7	—	5	3	—
2300	Diesel	1	—	—	—	—
2500	Diesel	16	—	1	3	1
4000	Diesel	3	—	—	—	1
3500	Petrol	2	—	—	—	1
		119	0	25	24	17

Notes:
1. All 66 vehicles being replaced between 1998/99 and 2000/01 will be with diesel models
2. Not all the Agency's vehicles will be replaced during the three years in question

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how much his Department expects to spend in each year from 1998–99 to 2000–01 on vehicle replacements. [54987]

Mr. Mandelson: Information in the form requested, which is not held centrally within the Department, could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

I have asked Agency Chief Executives to reply to the hon. Member as they have their own financial responsibility for vehicles.

Letter from P. R. S. Hartnack to Mr. Paul Burstow, dated 19 October 1998:

I am replying for the Patent Office to your question to the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry on expected spend on vehicle replacements.

During 1998–99 the Patent Office expects to spend £3840 on the lease of the diesel-engine van which it uses. It is possible that the Office will incur similar costs in following years but, as yet, it has taken no decision on whether to replace the van in 1999.

Letter from John Holden to Mr. Paul Burstow, dated 19 October 1998:

In response to your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry concerning how much his Department expects to spend on vehicle replacements, I can confirm that in the Companies House Agency there are no plans to replace vehicles in the period 1998–2001.

Letter from Ian Jones to Mr. Paul Burstow, dated 19 October 1998:

I have been asked to reply in respect of the Employment Tribunals Service to your question of 31 July 1998 to the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry requesting how much the Agency expects to spend in each year from 1998–99 to 2000–01 on vehicle replacements.

We will review whether there is a continued need for the use of the three vehicles leased by the ETS before they are due for replacement in 1999–2000. No decision has yet been taken on this matter.

Letter from Peter Joyce to Mr. Paul Burstow, dated 19 October 1998:

The Secretary of State for Trade and Industry has asked me to reply to your question about expected spend on vehicle replacements by The Insolvency Service.

The Service has no vehicles and no plans to acquire any, so that the issue of replacement does not arise.

Letter from B. A. Maxwell to Mr. Paul Burstow, dated 12 October 1998:

The Secretary of State for Trade and Industry has asked me in my capacity as Director of the Radiocommunications Agency, an Executive Agency 3, to reply to your Parliamentary Question 97/4916 about expenditure on Agency vehicle replacements in each year from 1998/99 to 2000/01.

The information you requested is as follows:

Year	£
1998–1999	402,000
1999–2000	455,000
2000–2001	342,000

Most of the above vehicles will be saloon cars but there will also be two mobile laboratories and five off road vehicles.

In order to set this answer in context, I thought you might welcome a copy of the answer to your previous questions and it is attached.

Letter from David Hendon to Mr. Paul Burstow:

The President of the Board of Trade has asked me in my capacity at Chief Executive of the Radiocommunications Agency to reply to your two Parliamentary Questions 97/4281 and 97/4630 about the number of vehicles owned and leased by this Agency, and the Agency's vehicle replacement programme.

The Agency is responsible for the management and enforcement of the radio spectrum. Vehicles carry large amounts of specialist equipment; most are saloon cars but there are also mobile laboratories and off road vehicles.

The information you requested is set out in the following table:

Engine cc	Fuel type	Owned	Leased	Replacement due 1998/99	1999/2000	2000/01
1700	Diesel	15	—	2	5	7
1800	Diesel	42	—	7	2	—
1900	Diesel	33	—	10	11	7
2000	Diesel	7	—	5	3	—
2300	Diesel	1	—	—	—	—

Engine cc	Fuel type	Owned	Leased	Replacement due 1998/99	1999/2000	2000/01
2500	Diesel	16	—	1	3	1
4000	Diesel	3	—	—	—	1
3500	Petrol	2	—	—	—	1
		119	0	25	24	17

Notes:
1. All 66 vehicles being replaced between 1998–99 and 2000–01 will be with diesel models
2. Not all the Agency's vehicles will be replaced during the three years in question

Letter from Dr. Seton Bennett to Mr. Paul Burstow, dated 19 October 1998:

The Secretary of State for Trade and Industry has asked me to reply on behalf of the National Weights and Measures Laboratory to your question about our expected spend on vehicle replacements.

I expect NWML to be replacing its car under the present leasing agreement in March 2001. Under the present leasing agreement the payments are set at £2,588.00 plus VAT per annum and every effort will be made to obtain the best possible rate of renewal.

Investors in People

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if she will make a statement on the current status of *(a)* Companies House, *(b)* the Employment Tribunals Service, *(c)* the Insolvency Service, *(d)* the National Weights and Measures Laboratory, *(e)* the Patent Office and *(f)* the Radiocommunications Agency in respect of Investors in People. [49968]

Mr. Mandelson *[holding answer 17 July 1998]:* Responsibility for Investors in People in the Department's Agencies lies with the chief executives. I have asked the chief executives to write to the hon. Member in respect of Investors in people in their respective agencies. This will also update the answer given by the then Minister for Competition and Consumer Affairs, my hon. Friend the Minister for Edinburgh, South (Mr. Griffiths), on 15 June 1998, *Official Report*, columns 97–98.

Letter from Ian Jones to Mr. David Chidgey, dated 19 October 1998:

I have been asked by the President of the Board of Trade to reply, in respect of the Employment Tribunals Service (ETS), to your question on the current status in respect of Investors in People.

The Employment Tribunal Service is committed to training and developing all staff and has made a written commitment to meeting the Investors in People standard and will be seeking formal assessment in October 1998.

Letter from David Hendon to Mr. David Chidgey, dated 17 July 1998:

To ask the President of the Board of Trade, if she will make a statement on the current status of (a) Companies House, (b) the Employment Tribunals Service, (c) the Insolvency Service, (d) the National Weights and Measures Laboratory, (e) the Patent Office and (f) the Radiocommunications Agency in respect of Investors in People. 49968

1. I have been asked by the President of the Board of Trade to respond to the above Parliamentary Question.
2. The Agency made a formal commitment to achieve IiP in August 1996. It has just had its trial assessment and is on course for its target of full assessment in January 1999.

Letter from John Holden to Mr. David Chidgey, dated July 1998:

I have been asked to reply to your question to the President of the Board of Trade regarding the current status of Investors in People.

Companies House committed itself to progress towards IiP accreditation some 18 months ago. An initial diagnostic survey was undertaken at the start of our programme and steps taken to address issues which this raised.

Companies House has subsequently had several reviews to measure our progress towards the IiP National Standard and will have a full pre-assessment in the Autumn of this year. If this shows that the Agency is close to meeting necessary standards, the intention would be to undertake a full assessment later in the year.

Letter from Peter Joyce to Mr. David Chidgey, dated July 1998:

The President of the Board of Trade has asked me as Inspector General and Chief Executive to reply to your question about the current status of The Insolvency Service in respect of Investors in People (IiP).

The Insolvency Service formally committed to work towards accreditation in June 1996 and is looking to assessment and recognition by December 1998, within the timescales set out by the Government's Development & Training White Paper.

Letter from Dr. Seton Bennett to Mr. David Chidgey, dated July 1998:

The President of the Board of Trade has asked me to reply on behalf of the National Weights and Measures Laboratory to your question about the status of IIP at NWML.

NWML was assessed in March 1998, but recognition was deferred. The proposal is to apply for re-assessment towards the end of the year.

Letter from P. R. S. Hartnack to Mr. David Chidgey, dated July 1998:

I am replying for the Patent Office to your question to the President of the Board of Trade about the current status of Department of Trade and Industry agencies in relation to Investors in People. The position is that the Patent Office is currently being assessed for Investors in People status and I hope that we will shortly be accredited as an Investor in People.

Internet

Mr. Cotter: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what role her Department is playing in the development of Internet technologies for small and medium-sized businesses. [52907]

Mrs. Roche: Many recent studies have emphasised the crucial importance of new technologies to the competitiveness of smaller firms. Within DTI, we have a comprehensive package of programmes to encourage greater awareness and use of information and communication technologies (ICTs), including the Internet, by both business and individuals in the UK. The ISI Programme for Business places particular emphasis on offering access and awareness opportunities for SMEs at locations throughout the UK, and on fostering the development of innovative multimedia products and services, frequently involving Internet technologies,

through award schemes such as the Multimedia Demonstrator Programme and Information Society Creativity Awards.

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment she has made of the impact of charges for local telephone calls on the development and use of internet services. [54643]

Mrs. Roche: Competition is already delivering lower call charges in the UK and, with liberalisation across the European Union, this is spreading across Europe too. The charging of services should not necessarily be regarded as a disincentive to access the Internet. It is not unusual in countries where there is no usage charge for people to be unable to access the Internet because some users remain permanently connected. Internet Service Providers have only a finite number of modems to which customers may connect, so customers who remain permanently connected can block access by others. Having a modest charge for the local telephone call required to connect to the Internet should therefore inconvenience only those who remain connected for long periods even when not actively using the Internet. In turn, this should help ensure that the majority are not prevented from accessing the Internet for extended periods of time.

Cycling

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what parking facilities for cycles exist at each office or site for which his Department is responsible and for each agency for which he is responsible. [52666]

Mr. Mandelson *[holding answer 28 July 1998]:* Full parking facilities for cycles are available for the Department and each Agency as shown in the table.

Location	*Parking facilities*
Departmental HQ buildings	All offices
Departmental buildings outside London	All offices
Employment Service Agency	11 out of 29 offices
Insolvency Service	14 out of 33 offices
NMWL	Yes (one office)
The Patent Office	All offices
Radio Communications Agency	6 out of 22 offices (but all could provide storage if required)
Companies House	All offices

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what proportion of the employees of his Department and of the employees of each agency for which he is responsible cycle to work; and what measures he plans to increase that proportion. [52667]

Dr. Howells *[holding answer 28 July 1998]:* The proportion of staff cycling to work is set out in the table. Measures to increase that proportion are being developed in the context of the preparation of the Department's green Transport policy.

Location	*Percentage*
Departmental HQ buildings	4
Departmental buildings outside London	4
Employment Service Agency	3
The Insolvency Service	3
NWML	19
The Patent Office	1
Radiocommunications Agency	2
Companies House	2

Mr. Robathan: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, pursuant to his answer of 27 July 1998, *Official Report*, column *55*, if he will make a statement on the security reasons prohibiting the leaving of bicycles around his Department's offices. [53903]

Mr. Mandelson: The proximity of my Department's offices to the Palace of Westminster and to other sensitive locations requires us to take a number of precautions such as this.

Diesel

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what incentives he is providing for United Kingdom companies to produce ultra-low sulphur diesel. [53561]

Mr. Battle: At the last Budget, the Government increased the duty differential between ULSD and conventional diesel from one to two pence per litre.

Post Office

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) when he expects to implement the EU Postal Liberalisation Directive; [53983]

(2) what plans he has to lower the £1 threshold for the postal monopoly. [53975]

Mr. Ian Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on the effect of the EU postal liberalisation directive on the position of the UK Post Office. [54469]

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans he has to lower the Post Office's current £1 monopoly threshold. [54244]

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) what plans he has to reduce the Post Office's current monopoly threshold; [54210]

(2) if he will make a statement on the EU's postal liberalisation directive. [54452]

Mr. Mandelson *(holding answer 31 July 1998):* EU Directive 97/67/EC, the "Postal Services Directive", set out a common framework for postal services in the countries of the European Union.

The Directive will not require major changes in the UK but the Government will need to modify the Post Office monopoly and introduce some other amendments. Officials in my Department are discussing with the Post Office the precise arrangements which will be necessary. The final proposals will be announced later this year.

The Government must transpose the directive into UK law by February 1999. We expect to do this through secondary legislation using the European Communities Act 1972.

Mr. Ian Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he will announce his policy for the future of the Post Office. [54852]

Mr. Ian McCartney: Work on the Government's review of the Post Office is proceeding apace, and we will announce our plans as soon as we are ready to do so.

Competitiveness

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on the Governments' policy on business competitiveness. [54070]

Mr. Mandelson: The issue of business competitiveness is being considered within the context of the Competitiveness White Paper which I intend to publish later this year.

Mr. C' ope: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what is the current membership of the competitiveness working party for encouraging innovation; when it last met; what matters were discussed; and when it will next meet. [54505]

Mr. Mandelson *[holding answer 31 July 1998]:* The Competitiveness Working Party for Encouraging Innovation is chaired by my hon. Friend the Minister for Energy and Industry and has the following members.

Bevan Braithwaite OBE, Chairman, TWI

Dr. Peter Doyle CBE, FRSE, Director, Zeneca Group plc.

John Golding, Chairman, Hewlett-Packard Ltd

Anthony Greener, Joint Chairman, Diageo plc

Jan Hall, Partner, Spencer Stuart and Associates Ltd

Dr. Sue Ion, Director, Technology and Operations, BNFL

Stephen Lusty, Managing Director, Airmaster Engineering Ltd

Sir Roy McNulty, Chairman, Short Brothers plc

Dr. George Poste, Chief Scientific and Technology Officer, SmithKline Beecham plc

Professor Sir Gareth Roberts, Vice Chancellor, Sheffield University

Jonathan Sands, Managing Director, Elmwood Design Ltd

Dan Sequerra, Chief Executive, Kirklees Metropolitan Borough Council

John Sorrell, Chairman, Interbrand Newell and Sorrell, and Chairman, Design Council.

The Working Party last met on 13 July to discuss improving the competitiveness of UK industry through innovation. Discussion focused on the importance of the exchange of best practice.

No date has been arranged for any further meetings of the Working Party.

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what recent representations she has received on the impact of legislation on competition in the media. [54857]

Dr. Howells: During the passage of the Competition Bill, the Department has received a number of representations concerning the Bill and pricing practices in the newspaper industry. These representations have been from members of the public, newspaper companies and members of both Houses. The Department has also received a small number of representations regarding the newspaper merger provisions of the Fair Trading Act 1973 and also general representations on individual merger cases involving the media.

Employees Over 60

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many *(a)* men and *(b)* women employed by (1) his Department and (2) his Department's agencies have contracts of employment which permit them to retire after their 60th birthday. [53056]

Dr. Howells *[holding answer 30 July 1998]:* The normal retirement age of staff in the Senior Civil Service is 60, as it is for staff in Pay Band C (senior managers) and Pay Band B (junior and middle managers). Staff in Pay Band A (administrative and support staff) have a normal retirement age of 65. The headquarters of the Department currently has 445 men and 694 women in this Pay Band.

I have asked Chief Executives of the Department's Agencies to reply to the hon. Member separately.

Letter from David Hendon to Mr. Christopher Chope, dated 19 October 1998:

I have been asked by the President of the Board of Trade to reply to the above Parliamentary Question with information about the Radiocommunications Agency.

The Radiocommunications Agency currently employs 50 men and 72 women whose Terms and Conditions of Employment permit them to retire after their 60th Birthday.

Letter from Ian Jones to Mr. Christopher Chope, dated 19 October 1998:

I have been asked to reply in respect of the Employment Tribunals Service (ETS) to your question of 24 July 1998 to the President of the Board of Trade asking how many staff were employed on contracts which permit them to retire after their 60th birthday and how many staff aged over 60 were employed within the ETS.

On the 1st January 1998 the ETS employed 161 men and 372 women whose contracts permit them to retire after their 60th birthday. Of these nine men and nine women were aged over 60.

Letter from John Holden to Mr. Christopher Chope, dated July 1998:

In response to your Parliamentary Question concerning contracts of employment permitting staff to retire after their 60th birthday, I can confirm that in the Companies House Agency we have:

A) 249 men

B) 581 women.

Letter from Dr. Seton Bennett to Mr. Christopher Chope, dated July 1998:

The President of the Board of Trade has asked me to reply on behalf of the National Weights and Measures Laboratory to your questions about the number of men and women employed by the Agency who have contracts of employment which permit them to retire after their 60th birthday, and the number of men and women employed by the Agency who were over 60 on 1st January 1998.

Consistent with the Departmental policy, the right to retire in NWML after 60 is linked to grade/range. Staff in Band A (ranges 1–4) have a reserved right to be retained after their 60th birthday on the condition that their performance has been satisfactory. We currently employ 3 men and 12 women in ranges 1–4.

One female member of staff over 60 years was employed by this Agency on 1st January 1998 on the basis of the reserved right for her grade/range.

Letter from Peter Lawrence to Mr. Christopher Chope, dated 27 July 1998:

In the absence of the Chief Executive, I am replying for the Patent Office to your Parliamentary Question which asked to provide (1) the number of (a) men and (b) women employed by the Patent Office who have contracts of employment which permit them to retire after their 60th birthday and (2) the number of (a) men and (b) women aged over 60 years who were employed by the Patent Office on 1 January 1998. The information is in the table attached which relates purely to the Patent Office.

Patent Office staff who have contracts of employment which permit them to retire after their 60th birthday

Serving grade	Female	Male	Total
A1	33	25	58
A2	50	39	89
A3	100	62	162
Total	183	126	309

Staff aged over 60 years employed by the Patent Office on 1 January 1998

Serving grade	Female	Male	Total
A1	1	2	3
A2	0	2	2
A3	0	1	1
C2	0	1	1
Total	1	6	7

Letter from Peter Joyce to Mr. Christopher Chope, dated July 1998:

The President of the Board of Trade has asked me to reply to your questions about 1) how many people within The Insolvency Service have contracts of employment which permit them to retire after their 60th birthday and 2) how many people aged over 60 years were employed by The Insolvency Service on 1 January.

The Insolvency Service currently employs 447 women and 244 men whose contracts of employment permit them to retire after their 60th birthday.

On 1st January 1998, 8 women and 22 men aged over 60 years were employed by The Insolvency Service.

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many *(a)* men and *(b)* women aged over 60 years were employed by (i) his Department and (ii) his Department's agencies on 1 January. [53061]

Dr. Howells *[holding answer 30 July 1998]:* On 1 January 1998, there were 42 men and 27 women aged over 60 years, employed in the headquarters area of the Department.

I have asked Chief Executives of the Department's Agencies to reply separately to the hon. Member.

Letter from David Hendon to Mr. Christopher Chope, dated 19 October 1998:

I have been asked by the President of the Board of Trade to reply to the above Parliamentary Question with information about the Radiocommunications Agency.

The Radiocommunications Agency currently employ 8 men and 5 women who at 1 January 1998 were aged over 60 years.

Letter from Ian Jones to Mr. Christopher Chope, dated 19 October 1998:

I have been asked to reply in respect of the Employment Tribunals Service (ETS) to your question of 24 July 1998 to the President of the Board of Trade asking how many staff were employed on contracts which permit them to retire after their 60th birthday and how many staff aged over 60 were employed within the ETS.

On the 1st January 1998 the ETS employed 161 men and 372 women whose contracts permit them to retire after their 60th birthday. Of these nine men and nine women were aged over 60.

Letter from Dr. Seton Bennett to Mr. Christopher Chope, dated July 1998:

The President of the Board of Trade has asked me to reply on behalf of the National Weights and Measures Laboratory to your questions about the number of men and women employed by the Agency who have contracts of employment which permit them to retire after their 60th birthday, and the number of men and women employed by the Agency who were over 60 on 1st January 1998.

Consistent with the Departmental policy, the right to retire in NWML after 60 is linked to grade/range. Staff in Band A (ranges 1–4) have a reserved right to be retained after their 60th birthday on the condition that their performance has been satisfactory. We currently employ 3 men, and 12 women in ranges 1–4.

One female member of staff over 60 years was employed by this Agency on 1st January 1998 on the basis of the reserved right for her grade/range.

Letter from Peter Lawrence to Mr. Christopher Chope, dated 27 July 1998:

In the absence of the Chief Executive, I am replying for the Patent Office to your Parliamentary Question which asked to provide (1) the number of (a) men and (b) women employed by the Patent Office who have contracts of employment which permit them to retire after their 60th birthday and (2) the number of (a) men and (b) women aged over 60 years who were employed by the Patent Office on 1 January 1998. The information is in the table attached which relates purely to the Patent Office.

Patent Office staff who have contracts of employment which permit them to retire after their 60th birthday

Serving grade	Female	Male	Total
A1	33	25	58
A2	50	39	89
A3	100	62	162
Total	183	126	309

Staff aged over 60 years employed by the Patent Office on 1st January 1998

Serving grade	Female	Male	Total
A1	1	2	3
A2	0	2	2
A3	0	1	1
C2	0	1	1
Total	1	6	7

Letter from Peter Joyce to Mr. Christopher Chope, dated July 1998:

The President of the Board of Trade has asked me to reply to your questions about 1) how many people within The Insolvency Service have contracts of employment which permit them to retire after their 60th birthday and 2) how many people aged over 60 years were employed by The Insolvency Service on 1 January.

The Insolvency Service currently employs 447 women and 244 men whose contracts of employment permit them to retire after their 60th birthday.

On 1st January 1998, 8 women and 22 men aged over 60 years were employed by The Insolvency Service.

Letter from John Holden to Mr. Christopher Chope, dated July 1998:

In response to your Parliamentary Question concerning the number of staff employed aged over 60 on 1 January, I can confirm that in the Companies House Agency there were:

A) 12 men

B) 33 women.

CD Piracy

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans he has to introduce measures for the protection of the British music industry against CD piracy over the Internet. [53595]

Dr. Howells *[holding answer 30 July 1998]:* United Kingdom copyright law already protects music and other material which is transmitted over the internet, and the UK is supporting work at EU and international level to ensure comparable levels of protection elsewhere. The Government are working closely with the music industry on this issue and on action against CD piracy more generally. The Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport is responsible for wider issues concerning the music industry, whilst my Department is responsible for copyright legislation.

Trade Fair Support Scheme

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will list the funds extended by his Department under the Trade Fair Support Scheme in each year since 1990. [54163]

Mr. Wilson: The total amounts spent by my Department on support for UK firms at trade fairs abroad in each of the years were:

Year	*£ million*
1990–91	15.9
1991–92	12.6
1992–93	13.2
1993–94	14.0
1994–95	17.1
1995–96	19.9
1996–97	19.4
1997–98	15.5

Joint Venture Funding

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if non-defence companies are eligible for Joint Venture Funding. [54407]

Mr. Wilson: Yes. In principle any firm involved in exporting for the UK can apply to be part of a supported group at a trade fair abroad.

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will list the value of the joint venture funding support provided in each of the last two years to United Kingdom companies attending overseas trade fairs exhibiting military, security, police and paramilitary services or products. [54406]

Mr. Wilson: The value of the grants paid by my Department under the terms of the Trade Fair Support Scheme to UK firms exhibiting at trade fairs in the Safety, defence, fire and security and associated equipment, including civil defence, sector is as follows:

Expenditure in year	*£ million*
1996–97	1.4
1997–98	1.2

My Department does not maintain records of grants paid towards the cost of exhibiting particular products or services.

Non-departmental Public Bodies

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will list the non-departmental public bodies in existence on 1 May 1997 that *(a)* have been disbanded, *(b)* will be disbanded in the next 12 months, *(c)* have had their functions transferred to (i) another non-departmental public body and (ii) a democratically elected body, *(d)* have been renamed but continue to perform a similar role and *(e)* have been unchanged; if he will indicate in (c) (ii) the relevant successor body; what new non-departmental public bodies have been established since 1 May 1997; and how many non-departmental public bodies his Department currently is responsible for. [53852]

Mr. Mandelson *[holding answer 30 July 1998]:* My Department is currently responsible for 40 non-departmental public bodies and 7 tribunals, all of which are listed in the Cabinet Office publication "Public Bodies 1997". Since 1 May 1997, my Department has abolished one non-departmental public body—the Advisory Committee for the Joint Environmental Markets Unit—and established one new non-departmental public body—the Spectrum Management Advisory Group. Approval has also been given for the merger of the LINK Board and the Teaching Company Scheme Board. Responsibility for one executive body, the Policyholders' Protection Board, has been transferred to HM Treasury.

Privatisation (Advertising)

Mr. Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what was the advertising budget for each of the privatisations since 1979. [54542]

Mr. Byers: I have been asked to reply.

The table shows the cost to the Government of advertising in each privatisation or secondary sale since British Telecom in 1984. Information on advertising budgets and advertising costs of earlier sales is not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Advertising costs in privatisations

Share offer	*Year*	*Costs (excl. VAT) £ million*
BT1	1985	9.7
Britoil	1985	3.0
Cable & Wireless	1985	2.2

Advertising costs in privatisations

Share offer	*Year*	*Costs (excl. VAT) £ million*
British Aerospace	1985	1.7
British Gas	1986	21.4
British Airways	1987	2.8
Rolls Royce	1987	1.6
BAA	1987	4.9
BP	1987	18.3
British Steel	1988	4.9
Water	1989	17.3
Regional Electricity Companies	1990	20.6
Generating Companies 1	1991	8.1
Scottish Electricity Companies	1991	5.3
BT2	1991	14.7
Northern Ireland Electricity	1993	1.1
BT3	1993	11.9
Generating Companies 2	1995	8.0
Railtrack	1996	4.4
British Energy	1996	4.1

Companies (Trademark Names)

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what is the procedure to be followed by a foreign company applying to register a trademark name currently used by a British company. [54709]

Dr. Howells: The procedure for registering a trade mark in the UK is defined by the Trade Marks Act 1994. Anyone can apply for registration, but any applicant must be using or intend to use the mark in the United Kingdom. However, a mark is registered only when the Trade Marks Registry has established that there is not a conflict with earlier marks. Where conflicts with earlier marks are identified it may be possible for the application to proceed to registrations by use of the provisions in Article 37 of the Trade Marks Act 1994. These provisions include restricting the goods and/or services for the mark applied for, or demonstrating honest concurrent use of the mark applied for with the earlier mark.

Further information on the trade mark application process is available from the Trade Mark Registry[1] at the Patent Office.

[1] Contact: Raol Colombo, The Patent Office, Concept House, Cardiff Road, Newport, NP9 1RH Telephone+44(0)1633 811001 Fax+44(0)1633 811405 e-mail: trademarks@patent.gov.uk

Insider Trading

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what powers he has to order *(a)* BT and *(b)* other phone companies to disclose records of telephone calls made by an individual under investigation by his inspectors for alleged insider trading. [54440]

Dr. Howells *[holding answer 31 July 1998]:* Under section 177(3) of the Financial Services Act 1986 inspectors appointed to investigate insider dealing can require information, including documents, from any person they consider may be able to assist their investigation. This will include information from telephone companies.

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if inspectors' reports of alleged insider dealing carried out under the Financial Services Act 1986 are passed to the Public Record Office; and when they can be released for public scrutiny. [54439]

Dr. Howells *[holding answer 31 July 1998]:* Reports of insider dealing inspections are not passed to the Public Record Office and are not published. There are strict legal restrictions on disclosure of all information obtained in such inspections.

EU Directives (Costs)

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment his Department has made of the cost to United Kingdom businesses which will arise from *(a)* the Parental Leave Directive, *(b)* the Works Councils Directive and *(c)* the Part Time Work Directive. [54246]

Mr. Ian McCartney *[holding answer 31 July 1998]:* Compliance Cost Assessments were attached to the Explanatory Memoranda submitted to this House and another place on 28 October 1997 (in relation to the Parental Leave and European Works Councils Directives) and 17 March 1998 (in relation to the Part Time Work Directive).

We shall be carrying out further analysis to refine these estimates. The Government consider that these measures will benefit employers and employees alike, and will not impose under costs or burdens upon business.

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what estimate he has made of the costs of the *(a)* Parental Leave Directive, *(b)* Works Council Directive and *(c)* Part Time Work Directive to British business. [53974]

Mr. Mandelson *(holding answer 31 July 1998):* I refer the right hon. Gentleman to the reply given today to Question 54246 from his hon. Friend the Member for Altrincham and Sale, West (Mr. Brady).

Manufacturing Industry

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans he has to assist manufacturing industry. [54658]

Mr. Mandelson: The best way that Government can assist industry as a whole, including manufacturing, is by providing macroeconomic stability. This Government have put in place a credible framework for macroeconomic policy to deliver low inflation and sound public finances which are the necessary basis for high and sustainable levels of growth and employment. In addition, my Department is working in partnership with industry, including manufacturing companies, to improve the competitiveness of our firms in domestic and overseas markets.

Aerospace Industry (Gloucestershire)

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many people within Gloucestershire were employed by the United Kingdom aerospace industry in each of the last five years. [54641]

Mr. Battle: This information is not available. Although the Office for National Statistics collects data on employment in aerospace businesses in Gloucestershire as part of the Annual Employment Survey and Annual Census of Production, the figures cannot be released because they would identify particulars of an individual undertaking, which are confidential under section 9 of the Statistics of Trade Act 1947.

Manpower

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many meetings Ministers in his Department have had with Manpower since 1 February; and on what matters. [54395]

Mr. Ian McCartney *[holding answer 31 July 1998]:* Ministers, their Special Advisers and other civil servants meet many people in the course of their work. This properly includes meetings with interest groups outside Government. This liaison is intended to help Ministers draw upon outside contributions—from academics, think-tanks, trade and industry associations, private sector organisations, trade unions and others, as well as relevant experience from other countries—during the process of policy analysis and development. But they must observe the requirements of propriety: for instance, they must not provide confidential information without authorisation, or allow improper influence on policy. It is not our policy to make information on meetings or their content public.

New Millennium Experience Company

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what action he will take in respect of his possible involvement in a regulatory role in respect of corporate sponsors of the New Millennium Experience Company Limited. [54397]

Mr. Mandelson *[holding answer 31 July 1998]:* As the hon. Member will be aware I wrote to him on 6 August enclosing a copy of the Press Notice regarding the BA/AA Alliance and my responsibilities for the New Millennium Experience Company. I have placed a copy in the Library of the House.

Action 2000

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what estimate Action 2000 has made of the number of businesses in *(a)* each region and *(b)* in total, which have yet to take action against the millennium bug. [54125]

Mrs. Roche *[holding answer 31 July 1998]:* Action 2000 do not undertake monitoring on a regional basis. The research is aimed at providing a picture of the current state of UK preparedness by relevant sectors, size of business and other factors.

The results of the second wave of monitoring carried out on a national basis under Action 2000's quarterly 'State of the Nation' research programme, primarily targeted at businesses with 1–500 employees, were announced by Action 2000 on 21 July.

The findings showed that 29% of the total had yet to implement a formal Year 2000 programme.

Awareness of the Millennium Bug is 100% but the Action 2000 research shows that there is a 'reality gap' between being aware and comprehension of the potential impact.

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what budget Action 2000 has allocated for poster board advertising in *(a)* 1998–99 and *(b)* 1999–2000. [54124]

Mrs. Roche *[holding answer 31 July 1998]:* Poster advertising to date has incurred a total spend of £670,000 net media cost.

The business packages for poster advertising purchased with the contracting companies have been targeted at industrial parts/sites and important commuting routes in order to maximise coverage against a key target audience identified by Action 2000.

At present no further activity utilising poster sites is planned for this or the next financial year until a full evaluation of the impact and response has been carried out.

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what budget Action 2000 has allocated for poster board advertising *(a)* in each region and *(b)* in total. [54126]

Mrs. Roche *[holding answer 31 July 1998]:* The poster packages purchased by Action 2000 were targeted at business areas and key commuting routes. The total allocation of spend to date on this activity is £670,000 net media cost.

Regional breakdown of that spend is:

	Percentage
London	47
Midlands	10.5
North West	10.5
Yorkshire	7.5
Scotland	7.5
Wales and The West	4.5
Southern	4.5
East of England	3
North East	3
Northern Ireland	1
South West	0.9
Border	0.1

Export Forum

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what discussions he has had with (1) the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and (2) the Department for International Development about the impact of the Export Forum's recommended target markets on their policies with regard to (i) development and (ii) democratisation in *(a)* Eastern Europe, *(b)* Africa and *(c)* South America. [53463]

Mr. Wilson *[holding answer 31 July 1998]:* Although the Department works closely with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the Department for International Development it has had no discussions with either on these issues. The Export Forum's recommendations for target markets related solely to their

potential for the promotion of exports and had no bearing on the Government's policies on development and democratisation.

Nuclear Reactors

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans he has *(a)* to close the nuclear reactors at Chapelcross and Calder Hall and *(b)* to replace them with new reactors. [53756]

Mr. Battle *[holding answer 31 July 1998]:* The future operation of the Chapelcross and Calder Hall nuclear power stations is a matter for their owner, British Nuclear Fuels plc, subject to meeting the relevant regulatory requirements. I understand from BNFL that they intend to operate these stations for the 50 year lifetimes approved by the regulator, subject to it being safe and economic to do so, and that BNFL currently have no plans to build any new nuclear power stations.

Wind Turbines

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans he has to support the development of the British manufacture of wind turbines. [54848]

Mr. Battle: Under the Non-Fossil Fuel Obligation (NFFO) the Government are supporting the commercial development of wind energy in the UK. At 30 June 1998, there were 55 wind projects operational, comprising 132 MW Declared Net Capacity. In addition a further 69 wind projects, comprising 368 MW of contracted capacity will be developed in England and Wales under the NFFO-5 Order which I announced recently.

As part of my current New and Renewable Energy Policy Review, I am considering both the status of the UK wind industry including its prospects in both the home and export markets and its potential contribution to meeting industrial and employment goals, and the need for further research and development. I expect to make an announcement later this year.

Departmental Publications

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many of his Department's publications have been made available in *(a)* Braille, *(b)* audio tape and *(c)* large print in 1997–98; and what percentage of the total number of publications this represents. [54272]

Mr. Mandelson *[holding answer 31 July 1998]:* Comprehensive information on the number of documents published in alternative formats is not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

However, the Department of Trade and Industry has produced a publication entitled "Read Me" to provide guidance to staff about making publications available to the general public in alternative formats.

The Department also has a range of information about its policies, programmes and publications on the Internet (www.dti.gov.uk). It is possible to print all DTI pages from the Internet in large print. The pages are also available in audio to those who have access to a Talking Computer.

Electricity Industry

Mrs. Brinton: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many section 36 planning applications for clean coal technology power stations in England are under consideration. [53669]

Mr. Battle *[holding answer 31 July 1998]:* None has been submitted by any power generators.

Mrs. Brinton: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment he has made of the impact on *(a)* gas-fired electricity generators and *(b)* the offshore gas supply industry if the present policy on new consents for gas-fired power stations continue beyond the electricity regulator's target date of April 2000 for the completion of market reforms; and if he will make a statement. [55238]

Mr. Battle: On 8 October, the Government published their White Paper Conclusions of The Review of Energy Sources for Power Generation (Cm 4071), which sets out the Government's broad energy policy, including radical reforms to the electricity market and, in the interim, a new stricter policy on consents for power stations. These reforms will bring greater competition to electricity generation and lower prices for consumers. Paragraphs 8.8–8.11 and 10.30 of the White Paper refer respectively to the possible impact on the offshore industry of the policy and to the fact that the interests of the promoters of particular new power generation projects will be one of the factors to be taken into account when applying the new consents policy.

Mrs. Brinton: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry by what date he estimates that emissions from clean coal technology in power stations will be reduced to the level of gas-fired power stations. [53319]

Mr. Battle *[holding answer 31 July 1998]:* Although commercial clean coal plant can be made to operate to a very high environmental standard, as shown by a number of advanced supercritical plants now in operation around the world, as well as a number of gasification plants at the demonstration scale, for reasons of basic chemistry and economics, it is not practicable to match all the emissions to the levels of natural gas-fired plant.

The table illustrates the differences in emissions between a commercially available combined cycle gas turbine plant with 55% thermal efficiency and those of a potential commercial clean coal plant with an assumed efficiency of 42%.

Emissions	*Clean coal plant with 42% efficiency*	*Combined cycle gas plant with efficiency of 55%*
CO_2	800g kWh^{-1}	360g kWh^{-1}
SO_2	600mg kWh^{-1}	0
NO_x	600mg kWh^{-1}	less than 300mg kWh^{-1}

Note:
Lower levels of emissions of SO_2 and NO_x are possible with more advanced coal plant now at the demonstration stage and which are expected to become commercially available over the next few years.
Source:
PowerGen plc.

Mrs. Brinton: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what estimates he has evaluated of the cost of fitting FGD technology to all existing United Kingdom coal-fired power stations currently without FGD. [53310]

Mr. Battle *[holding answer 31 July 1998]:* The cost of fitting Flue Gas Desulphurisation equipment (FGD) to coal fired power stations is very site specific, but approximates to around 10% the cost of new plant. There is also a number of different technologies that could be used depending on the level of sulphur removal required. If a limestone-gypsum process was used the estimated costs would probably lie within a range of £80-£100 per kw. Assuming an average cost of £90 per kw, it would cost some £1.8 billion to fit FGD to the remaining 20GW of UK coal fired capacity. These costs exclude the additional running costs associated with coal fired plant subsequently fitted with FGD.

Mrs. Brinton: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what reports he has received about the progress of the complaint to the European Commission against discrimination in favour of coal-fired generation in Spain and Germany. [53668]

Mr. Battle *[holding answer 31 July 1998]:* The UK Government formally complained to the European Commission in September 1997 that state aid paid to the Spanish coal industry is distorting, or is likely to distort, competition between producers in the single market. We argued that a subsidy of 1 peseta per kilowatt-hour for Spanish electricity plants using Spanish coal should also be available for the use of UK coal if discrimination between ECSC coal producers was to be avoided. We understand the European Commission broadly share this view, and we are pressing the Spanish Government for confirmation that the subsidy will be available on a non-discriminatory basis in respect of all ECSC coals.

In the case of Germany, we drew the Commission's attention in September 1997 to the possibility of distortion against UK anthracite in the German power station market. Formal complaints against German state aid for power station anthracite were subsequently submitted by Consolidated Coal and Evans and Reid (the agents for Tower Colliery) and by RJB Mining in respect of state aids for German coal production more generally. In June 1998 the Commission approved state aid of DM 10.4 billion for German coal production. I understand that RJB Mining is lodging an appeal to the European Court against this Decision.

Boardroom Pay

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if his proposals for the public utilities to link boardroom pay to consumer performance standards will include linkage with the protection of vulnerable consumers; and if he will make a statement. [54057]

Mr. Mandelson *[holding answer 31 July 1998]:* The Government's proposals for encouraging a direct link between boardroom pay and consumer standards (set out in their response to the consultation on the Green Paper, A Fair Deal for Consumers: Modernising the Framework for Utility Regulation) will require price-regulated utility companies to disclose the nature of any links between the pay of the directors of the regulated business, and the service standards attained by that business, and if there is no such link, that fact. The proposals do not involve Government determining the nature of these links, which will be for individual regulated companies to decide.

Minimum consumer performance standards are set for utility companies by the regulators following public consultation. These standards are concerned mainly with standards of service to all consumers, although a small number relate to the disadvantaged. Obligations to provide special services to the disadvantaged are generally imposed by the regulator through licence conditions, enhanced in some areas with voluntary industry initiatives. Licence conditions can be enforced in the event of a breach.

European Health and Safety Reports

Sir Richard Body: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what response his Department has made to the reports of *(a)* the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions (Dublin) 1997 and *(b)* the Bilbao European Agency for Health and Safety at Work 1997; and if he will deposit in the Library a list of all programmes initiated as a result of *(a)* and (b). [55345]

Mr. Ian McCartney: The various reports of the Dublin Foundation do not require a formal Government response, but are used by the Department to inform its policies. Details of the Foundation's activities are provided on its internet website at http://www.eurofound.ie. Matters concerning the European Agency for Safety and Health at Work are largely a matter for the Health and Safety Executive, which is sponsored by the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions.

Renewable Energy

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he expects to receive the conclusions of his review of renewable energy. [54030]

Mr. Battle *[holding answer 31 July 1998]:* I am currently considering options for the future development of renewables alongside other ongoing reviews. I expect to make an announcement later this year. In the meantime I announced the fifth Non-Fossil Fuel Obligation (NFFO-5) Renewables Order in England and Wales on 24 September 1998. 261 projects comprising 1,177 MW of capacity have been contracted under NFFO-5.

At 30 June 1998, 235 projects, comprising 570 MW (declared net capacity) of renewables generating capacity had been commissioned under the four Non-Fossil Fuel Obligation (NFFO) Orders for England and Wales, two Scottish Renewables Obligation (SRO) Orders and two Northern Ireland NFFO (NI-NFFO) Orders.

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how much was spent on research into renewable energy technologies in each of the last five years. [55282]

Mr. Battle: Spend under the DTI New and Renewable Energy Programme, including research, development,

dissemination and demonstration in each of the last five years (covering expenditure agreed before 1 May 1997) is shown in the table.

£ million

Year	
1993–94	25.2
1994–95	19.1
1995–96	18.1
1996–97	[1]14.8
1997–98	[1]10.9

[1] These figures allow for the payment and recovery of VAT

Since coming into office, I have reversed the planned cuts in the overall programme budget set by the previous Government, increasing provision for 1998–99 by £2 million to £11.1 million (net). Beyond 1998–99 expenditure will depend on the outcome of the current policy review.

EPSRC commitment, through the General Engineering and Engineering for Infrastructure, the Environment and Healthcare Programmes, by financial year, for research into renewable and clean electricity generation is shown in the table.

£ million

Year	
1993–94	1.576
1994–95	0.506
1995–96	1.935
1996–97	2.338
1997–98	3.114

The figures for both the DTI New and Renewable Energy Programme and EPSRC include research into fuel cells—considered to be a clean generation technology.

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans he has to commission research into renewable energy technologies using the extra funding announced for the research councils in the Comprehensive Spending Review. [55283]

Mr. Battle: The current New and Renewable Energy Policy Review, which is considering the need for further research into renewable energy technologies, is taking account of the outcome of the Comprehensive Spending Review.

The Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council (EPSRC) is currently developing a new managed programme in "Renewables and New Energy Technologies". The programme is taking account of the progress of the Government's current New and Renewable Energy Policy Review. It is likely to cover fuel cells, photovoltaics, energy storage and recovery, and research into other renewable energy sources. The programme is due to be launched in 1999.

EU Auto Oil Programme

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on progress in adoption of the EU Auto Oil Programme. [54671]

Mr. Battle: The Directives on passenger car emissions, light commercial vehicle emissions and fuel quality, all of which are part of the EU Auto Oil programme, were agreed and adopted on 17 September 1998 and will be published in the *Official Journal* in due course.

The Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions is responsible for implementing these directives in UK law.

National Minimum Wage

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) what arrangements will be put in place to monitor *(a)* how long individuals remain on the national minimum wage and *(b)* the average annual wage increment for people previously receiving minimum rates; [54899]

(2) what arrangements will be put in place to monitor the numbers of employees receiving the minimum rate of pay set out in the national minimum wage. [54898]

Mr. Ian McCartney: In her statement of 18 June 1998, *Official Report*, columns 507–19, announcing the Government's response to the Low Pay Commission's recommendations, the then President of the Board of Trade announced that the Government will be asking the Low Pay Commission to monitor and evaluate the introduction and impact of the minimum wage.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment he has made of the statements by the Bank of England about the inflationary implications of the minimum wage. [54455]

Mr. Ian McCartney *[holding answer 31 July 1998]*: The Bank of England is fully aware of the Government's labour market policies, including the National Minimum Wage. Any statements by the Bank on those policies are a matter for them. The Government do not believe that the decisions they have taken on the National Minimum Wage will have an adverse effect on inflation.

Green Transport

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, pursuant to his answer of 6 April 1998, *Official Report*, column 59, on departmental transport arrangements, what further changes he has made. [54018]

Mr. Battle *[holding answer 31 July 1998]*: My Department is working towards the target announced in the White Paper 'A New Deal for Transport', that all headquarters buildings and main buildings occupied by Executive Agencies and Government Offices for the Regions should have green transport plans by March 1999 and all other key buildings by March 2000.

Recent activities have included the drafting of a Green Transport Plan, the undertaking of a Travel to Work survey, arrangements for provision of a DETR speaker to all Property Centres on Green Transport Plans, registering with the Cyclists' Touring Club's "Post a Pot-Hole Campaign" and carrying out a traffic survey in the main car park in 1 Victoria Street building.

Henly and Dennis Groups (Merger)

Mr. Canavan: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will refer to the Office of Fair Trading the proposed merger between the Henly Group and the Dennis Group. [55313]

Dr. Howells: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry announced on 13 October 1998 that he had decided, in accordance with the advice given by the Director General of Fair Trading, not to refer the proposed acquisition of Dennis Group plc by Henlys Group plc to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission.

National Broadband Strategy

Mr. Wyatt: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans he has to introduce a national broadband strategy. [55275]

Mrs. Roche: The Government set out their strategy in this area in the policy statements 'Our Information Age' and 'Broadband Britain' which were published in April. The latter dealt specifically with the issue of lifting the broadcast restrictions from BT and other Public Telecommunications Operators. On this issue and in our Information Age strategy, more generally, we are committed to encouraging investment in both advanced communications infrastructure and new services, and ensuring widespread access to services at affordable prices. To ensure that we keep pace with these issues we have also launched a Green Paper reviewing the regulatory framework for telecommunications and broadcasting in response to digital convergence. I also expect, later this year, to launch a consultation on the use of significant additional radio spectrum for the delivery of broadband services which will help address those areas of the country currently with limited competitive provision. Just as important as provision of broadband is uptake and use. We promote this through our Information Society Initiative Programme for Business which now has 60 regional and local Support Centres. I have also relaunched the IT for All programme with £2.75 million of additional money, and now 2,700 access sites across the country.

Vibration White Finger

Mr. Tipping: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he expects to have a handling arrangement in place to deal with claims for compensation against British Coal with regard to vibration white finger. [55487]

Mr. Battle: Following the Court of Appeal judgment handed down at the end of July, my officials, in conjunction with external advisers, have been considering how best to effect the court's findings in the comprehensive draft handling arrangements for the more than 25,000 claims involved. Our proposals on one of the most critical issues have been sent to the solicitors representing the mass of claimants and early discussions are expected to follow.

We are keen to reach agreement as rapidly as possible on handling arrangements which are fair to all concerned and sufficiently robust to be able to process such a large group of claims.

Multilateral Agreement on Investment

Mr. Todd: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what progress has been made in consultation and negotiation on the Multilateral Agreement on Investment; and if he will make a statement. [53902]

Mr. Wilson: At the recent OECD Ministerial meeting (27–28 April 1998), it was agreed that negotiations should continue, seeking a successful and timely conclusion; no deadline was set but I foresee work continuing until the next Ministerial in May 1999, including a period for assessment and further consultation.

My hon. Friend the Minister for Small Firms, Trade and Industry reported to the Commons Select Committee on European Legislation on the negotiations on the Multilateral Agreement on Investment (MAI) on 8 July and undertook to keep the Committee informed of further developments in negotiations.

Nuclear Material

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, pursuant to his answer of 29 July 1998, *Official Report*, columns *357–58*, if he will indicate the exact *(a)* quantities, *(b)* origins and *(c)* types of nuclear materials withdrawn permanently from safeguards; and if he will list those occasions when nuclear materials were put directly to military uses. [55444]

Mr. Battle: As part of the outcome of the Strategic Defence Review (SDR) the Government initiated a process of declassification and historical accounting for defence fissile material production. Linked to this will be a study of data on past withdrawals from safeguards to determine what additional information on these withdrawals can be made public. In addition, as indicated in the announcement of the SDR, information on future withdrawals of nuclear material from safeguards will be published from time to time.

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, pursuant to the answer to my hon. Friend the hon. Member for Bury, North (Mr. Chaytor) of 16 July 1998, *Official Report*, column *282*, what research his Department has carried out into the ways of safeguarding vitrified plutonium; and what assessment he has made of safeguards applied by *(a)* the International Atomic Energy Agency and *(b)* Euratom. [55451]

Mr. Battle: My Department has not undertaken detailed examination of the safeguards aspects of vitrification as an option for disposal of separated plutonium (UK experience has, to date, been in respect of using separated plutonium in the manufacture of MOX fuel and the measures necessary to safeguard the kind of facilities which are involved). We have, however, contributed to more general international studies, involving both the IAEA and Euratom, of safeguards issues associated with the disposal of irradiated fuel in geological repositories; i.e. issues not dissimilar to those raised by the vitrification option for disposal of separated plutonium. The output from these studies is being assessed by the international safeguards inspectorates.

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what quantities of uranium the Energy Resources of Australia company proposes to import into

the United Kingdom; how much has been imported to date; and what is the role of Euratom in respect of such imports. [55418]

Mr. Battle: The companies concerned regard information on the quantities imported as commercially confidential. I am satisfied that there is a reasonable expectation that disclosure of this information would harm their competitive position and that, in accordance with the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information, the information requested should be protected from disclosure.

The role of Euratom is set out in the Agreement between the European Atomic Energy Community and the Government of Australia concerning transfers of nuclear material from Australia to the European Atomic Energy Community which was signed in 1981 (Cmnd. 8799). Under the terms of the 1957 Euratom Treaty the uranium imported, like all civil nuclear material in the UK, is subject to Euratom Safeguards. In addition the imports are notified to the Euratom Supply Agency which monitors the supply of nuclear material to the Community.

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when the United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority changed the name of its decommissioning and radioactive waste management programme from Drawmops to Safer; and when he expects to respond to the report by Arthur D. Little consultants on the programme, published on 19 August. [55419]

Mr. Battle: The UKAEA announced the change in name of its decommissioning and radioactive waste management programme from DRAWMOPS (Decommissioning and Radioactive Waste Management Operations) to SAFER (Safe Environmental Remediation) in December 1997 via its staff newspaper "Nucleus". The change of name is for UKAEA internal purposes; the DTI and other government Departments refer to this programme as the UKAEA Nuclear Decommissioning programme.

The response, in the form of an implementation plan, of the DTI and the UKAEA to the report by Arthur D. Little consultants on the programme was included with the full evaluation report, released on 19 August 1998. Publication arrangements were set out in the DTI press releases P/98/646 and copies of both the summary and full reports are available in the House library.

Ms Roseanna Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether there is currently any Japanese highly enriched uranium spent fuel on site at BNFL's Sellafield plant which is due to be transferred to the United States of America; whether any further Japanese highly enriched uranium spent fuel is due to arrive at Sellafield on its way to the United States of America; and under what agreement this temporary storage of Japanese spent fuel at Sellafield takes place. [55491]

Mr. Battle: For many years it has been US policy that high enriched uranium fuel supplied by the US for research reactors in Japan and other countries should, when spent, be repatriated for safe management. BNFL have had contracts to ship the spent fuel from Japan (and elsewhere) to the US. This reactor fuel forms part of larger shipments of other material destined for Sellafield and for operational reasons has been taken there in preparation for transhipment to the US. There is at present no fuel of this sort at Sellafield nor are any shipments scheduled (though they may take place in future). This and all other activities at Sellafield are regulated under the Nuclear Site Licence granted by the Nuclear Installations Inspectorate.

Ms Roseanna Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how much highly enriched uranium spent fuel owned by foreign customers remains on site at Dounreay; how much is due to be transferred to the United States of America; and what is the condition of this spent fuel. [55490]

Mr. Battle: I have asked the Chairman of the UKAEA for this information and his reply will be placed in the Library of the House.

Working Time Directive

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will extend the date of implementation for the Working Time Directive to 1 January 1999 to allow employers more time to implement the framework for compliance. [55370]

Mr. Ian McCartney: The Regulation implementing the Working Time Directive came into force on 1 October in line with the Government's timetable announced in February.

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans he has to assist employers with the additional costs incurred as a direct result of the Working Time Directive. [55369]

Mr. Ian McCartney: The Government are adopting a broad range of policies with the central aim of boosting the competitiveness of UK industry. Implementation of the Working Time Directive should help competitiveness through combating stress and absenteeism by ensuring that workers receive proper rest, and so reducing costs to industry. The CBI estimate that £25 billion was lost in 1996 due to absenteeism. The London School of Economics also suggest that current staff turnover levels cost employers up to £1,800 million per year. The Working Time Regulations should assist in reducing such figures.

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on the definition of the term continuous employment under the Working Time Directive. [55340]

Mr. Ian McCartney: Any worker who has worked continuously with their employer for 13 weeks will be entitled to 3 weeks' annual leave. Continuous employment is considered to be a period of time in which a worker has a contractual relationship with the employer.

Silver (Lion Mark)

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations he has made to the EC Commission on the use of the lion mark for British silver; and what proposals he has in respect of the future use of the lion mark for British silver. [55548]

Dr. Howells: During negotiations on a Commission proposal for a directive on the approximation of the laws, regulations and administrative provisions of Member States relating to articles of precious metal, my Department has consistently sought to ensure that the lion mark can continue to be struck on Sterling silver. Because single market rules now require the United Kingdom to accept a wider range of standards of finenesses for silver, I am, however, proposing to amend the Hallmarking Act to require that the fineness of silver articles be shown millesimally (as is already the case for gold) to aid consumer understanding. However, where requested, the UK assay offices would continue to strike the lion on Sterling silver alongside the figures "925".

Regional Selective Assistance

Mr. Lansley: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the maximum cost-per-job offered in grant under regional selective assistance was in 1997–98 in England. [55425]

Mrs. Roche: The maximum cost per job offered was £15,000.

Assisted Areas

Mr. Love: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will list the criteria to be used in the review of assisted area status; how the review will be conducted; who will be consulted; and if he will make a statement. [55288]

Mrs. Roche: On 30 July I launched a 3 month period of public consultation on the criteria and the geographical units which should be used in drawing up the new Assisted Areas map. In making a decision on both the geographical units and the criteria to be used, we shall be looking particularly at ways in which we can best target areas where regional industrial assistance is both needed and is an effective policy response. The consultation period finishes on 30 October and we shall listen carefully to views expressed. No decisions have yet been taken on the criteria to be used.

4,800 copies of the public consultation document were produced. The document has been given a wide circulation to local authorities, business support organisations, Regional Development Agencies, rural development bodies, employers' and employees' organisations, academics, research bodies, members of the public and other interested parties. The document is also available on internet and, to date, 145 people have accessed the site.

The review will be conducted in accordance with the Commission guidelines.

Agenda 2000

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on Agenda 2000 reforms to EU structural funds. [54855]

Mrs. Roche: Discussions are continuing between Member States and the Commission on the reform of the Structural and Cohesion Funds.

The Cardiff Council at the end of the UK Presidency set a deadline of March 1999 for agreement on the Agenda 2000 package. The UK will make every effort to ensure that this deadline is met.

Under the UK Presidency, we reached agreement on a number of principles for making the administration of the Funds simpler and more effective.

In the discussions starting again this autumn, the UK will continue to seek an outcome that is fair and affordable to all future and existing Member States, but particularly the UK.

Lord Sainsbury of Turville

Mr. Forth: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) when Lord Sainsbury of Turville *(a)* took up his duties as Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State at his Department, *(b)* relinquished his business responsibilities and *(c)* divested himself of his beneficial shareholdings; [55280]

(2) what arrangements he has made to ensure that there can be no conflict of interest between the ministerial duties of Lord Sainsbury of Turville and his business connections and shareholdings; and if he will make a statement. [55279]

Mr. Mandelson: Lord Sainsbury issued the following statement on 31 July that answered these questions:

"When I was appointed as a Minister in the DTI on 28 July, I was still Chairman of J. Sainsbury plc and the owner of a major shareholding in the company together with a variety of lesser financial interests.

In order to avoid any actual or potential conflict of interests with my Ministerial responsibilities I have arranged my private interests, in consultations with the Permanent Secretary.

I resigned as Chairman of Sainsbury's yesterday, and prior to that date saw no official papers. I now hold no other company directorships.

I have today created a blind trust into which I am placing all my shareholdings, including my shares in Sainsbury's. Overseas trusts, the income of which I am a beneficiary, are being treated similarly. I have today exercised my options over shares in Sainsbury's which have been sold.

The size of my shareholding in Sainsbury's means that I shall retain, and know that I retain, a beneficial interest in that company via the blind trust. I shall therefore stand aside from decisions or discussions having any specific effect on the company, including eg competition decisions concerning the company or questions of planning policy, and my officials have been instructed to keep issues giving rise to potential conflicts away from me. On generic issues such as competition policy or corporate governance, I shall have to use my judgment, as have Ministers in the past, to decide whether the issues at stake involve the possibility of particular advantage for Sainsbury's, and whether I therefore need to stand aside.

Ministers are not involved in decisions on individual science projects in accordance with the long established Haldane principle, such matters being for decision by the Research Councils; and Research Councils funding goes to universities and scientific institutes rather than firms. The wider science issues with which I shall be dealing are generic, and I am advised are unlikely to lead to potential conflicts of interest. In the event of such a potential conflict, decisions would be taken by the Secretary of State or another DTI Minister."

Animal Experiments

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, pursuant to his answer of 29 July 1998,

Official Report, column *355*, if he will list the scientific and industrial organisations consulted by his Department about the impact on the United Kingdom science base and the competitiveness of the United Kingdom's science-based industries of the increasing burden of regulation on applications for research and development projects involving animals. [55380]

Mr. Battle: The Department of Trade and Industry has not consulted any organisation specifically about the changes to the regulations in the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986 and its impact on the UK science base and industry.

The Home Office, who lead on this regulation, has received a number of representations on this subject. Both Ministers and Civil Servants have been in discussion with individual companies and representative associations on this matter and will continue to do so.

Indonesia

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, pursuant to the answer of 23 July 1998, *Official Report*, column *610*, on the export of Hawk aircraft to Indonesia, how many export licences were granted for each of the ancillary equipment controlled under each type of the entries; and when each type of those licences was granted. [55224]

Mrs. Roche: In my answer to my hon. Friend on 23 July 1998, *Official Report*, column *610*, I stated that a number of licences were issued on 2 January 1996 and on 22 November 1996 covering the export to Indonesia of Hawk aircraft and ancillary equipment, and that the export of that ancillary equipment was controlled under entries ML4, ML5, ML10, ML15, ML16, ML18, ML22 and PL5017 of the Export of Goods (Control) Order 1994, as amended.

Seven licences were issued on each date, covering Hawk aircraft, weapons systems and spares: four covered equipment controlled under entries ML10, ML15, ML16, ML18, ML22 or PL5017; two covered ancillary equipment controlled under entries ML4, ML5 or ML10; and one covered Hawk aircraft and ancillary equipment controlled under entry ML10.

Export Licences

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on the application of the Export of Goods (Control) Order 1989 to the issuing of licences by United Kingdom companies for production overseas. [55217]

Mrs. Roche: A UK company does not require a licence under the Export of Goods (Control) Order to allow production of its products in another country. If, however, in order to enable the production to go ahead the company needed to supply controlled technology from the UK, it would need a licence. The export of most specialised components of controlled goods is also controlled.

Government Purchase Cards

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what use *(a)* his Department and *(b)* its agencies are currently making of the Government Purchase Card; what savings he estimates are being achieved as a result; what plans he has to expand use of the card by his Department and its agencies; and if he will make a statement. [55170]

Mr. Mandelson: My Department plans to introduce the Government Procurement Card through Company Barclaycard November 1998—initially in four pilot areas. Assuming a successful pilot, full roll out throughout the Department is planned from February 1999 onwards. Consultants undertook a study in the Department in the summer of 1998 that indicated that process savings of up to 53 per cent. could be made by adopting the card for minor purchases.

Of the Department's agencies, the Radiocommunications Agency will introduce the GPC if the planned pilot demonstrates the value of doing so. The other agencies are awaiting the results of the central Department's adoption of the Card to assess its potential use in their areas.

Trade (China)

Mr. Ben Chapman: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on the implementation of the recommendations of the Davies report on China trade promotion. [55474]

Mr. Wilson: Implementation of the main recommendations of the report on China trade promotion is now well underway:

from 1 September the renamed China British Business Council (CBBC), under its new President Sir Charles Powell, began the task of identifying key sectors of business on which to focus the main thrust of our trade promotion effort;

the CBBC is in the process of identifying a new Chief Executive, with the aim of appointing a suitable applicant before the end of the year;

a major conference will take place on 8 December to assess the results of the recent visit by the Prime Minister to China, and how these can most effectively be followed up;

during his visit the Prime Minister announced the appointment of Michael Heseltine to head the British side of the new China Britain forum;

the Prime Minister secured the agreement in principle of the Chinese Government, to the opening of a new British Consulate in Chongqing which will further enhance our commercial and diplomatic efforts in inland China.

These steps, and others currently being considered by the Government and other interested parties, are aimed at helping more capable British companies, in particular SMEs, to benefit from the continuing opportunities in the Chinese market along the lines recommended in the Davies report.

Redundancies

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will list the number of notified redundancies in each of the last three years among *(a)* 18 to 24, *(b)* 25 to 35, *(c)* 36 to 54 and *(d)* over 54 year olds. [55153]

Mr. Ian McCartney: This information is not available as employers notifying of prospective redundancies under the statutory duty are not required to specify the ages of those employees who may be affected.

Motorcycle Parking

Mr. Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many motorcycle parking spaces exist at each office or site for which his Department is responsible; and how many are secure spaces. [55267]

Mr. Mandelson: Dedicated spaces which can accommodate a flexible number of motorcycles are provided in two locations on the Departmental estate where car parks are small. In all other locations there is ample space within car parks to meet demand on the Departmental estate without dedicating spaces for the purpose of motorcycle parking. All of the Department's car parks are secure.

Arbitration

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on the role of *(a)* trade associations and *(b)* the Office of Fair Trading in respect of the referral of disputes to arbitration. [55586]

Mr. Ian McCartney: A number of trade associations offer consumers who have unresolved complaints with their members the option of using arbitration to settle the matter.

The Director General of Fair Trading encourages trade associations and others operating voluntary regulatory systems to adopt independent dispute resolution mechanisms to deal with such complaints and advises consumers of the existence of such schemes. He has no formal role in the referral of specific individual disputes to such arbitration or Ombudsmen schemes.

Use by consumers of arbitration schemes is optional. The consumer may decide to litigate. There are advantages of both arbitration and litigation and it is for consumers to decide which option suits them best.

Business Links

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what plans she has to disseminate best practice amongst Business Links. [47143]

Mr. Battle *[holding answer 25 June 1998]:* The Business Link Network Company Ltd., together with the Business Links and National Partners, has developed a Good Practice Campaign to build upon the activity already taking place. The campaign is expected to be launched in the summer.

The methods for dissemination of the resulting best practice include Best Practice Champions, workshops, case studies and the BLNC's Intranet site.

British Coal

Caroline Flint: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is her Department's policy on the use of the proceeds from the sale of British Coal land and assets. [52448]

Mr. Battle: The net proceeds generated from the sale of British Coal's land and subsidiary undertakings were retained to help meet the Corporation's liabilities. The disposal programme was effectively completed by March 1998.

Millennium Dome (Sponsors)

Mr. Spring: To ask the Minister without Portfolio what is the total level of sponsorship funding for the Dome's contents which has been contractually agreed; and if he will list the sponsors and the sums involved. [50736]

Mr. Mandelson *[holding answer 16 July 1998]:* The New Millennium Experience Company (NMEC) have identified over £100m of sponsorship, from companies such as BT, BSkyB, Manpower, Tesco, Marks and Spencer, BA and BAA. Negotiations on the detailed contracts between these companies and the NMEC are at an advanced stage. The unique scale of this project, including the sponsorship target, inevitably means that both sponsors and the NMEC are breaking new ground and careful and detailed work is therefore required before contracts can be confirmed.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Cattle Cull

Mr. Jack: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the progress of the cattle cohort cull, indicating *(a)* his original estimate of the number of animals to be slaughtered, *(b)* the number slaughtered to date and *(c)* the number remaining to be slaughtered; and if all of (c) have been identified. [51927]

Mr. Rooker: With regard to the estimate of the total number of animals to be slaughtered under the cull, I refer the right hon. Member to the reply given to my hon. Friend the Member for High Peak (Mr. Levitt) on 19 March 1998, *Official Report*, columns *727–28*, when a forecast of 80,000 to 85,000 animals was provided.

The selective cull is progressing very well, with well over 74,000 animals slaughtered in the UK. The cull of animals in Northern Ireland is already complete.

The number of animals which will ultimately be slaughtered under the cull depends on a variety of factors, including: the proportion of animals in the voluntary cohort year which are offered up for slaughter, and the number of animals sold out of their original herd which, when traced, are found to be already dead. Accordingly, while it is difficult to estimate the number of animals still to be slaughtered under the cull, it will be considerably less than the remaining 12,000 animals identified as being eligible for slaughter.

Cereal Seeds

Mr. Öpik: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many tonnes of British cereal seed were used in the United Kingdom in each of the last five years; and if he will make a statement. [52773]

Mr. Rooker: The Ministry does not collect statistics on the tonnage of cereal seed used in the United Kingdom but the majority used for sowing is produced in this country.

Mr. Öpik: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what percentage of imports to the United Kingdom of cereal seed comes from the USA; and if he will make a statement. [52771]

Mr. Rooker: In 1997, only 0.027 per cent. of cereal seed imported into the United Kingdom came from the USA. This figure, which is calculated on the basis of volume, includes imports of common wheat, meslin, barley, maize and sorghum seeds. The import of cereal seed into the United Kingdom from the USA is an extremely small proportion of total imports of cereal seed and has not fluctuated significantly in recent years.

Mr. Öpik: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on his policy regarding the use of British cereal seed in the United Kingdom. [52772]

Mr. Rooker: The use of British or imported cereal seed is a matter for individual growers. I welcome the fact that the majority of cereal seed for sowing used in the United Kingdom is produced in this country.

Growth Promoters

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what percentage of carcases in abattoirs are checked to ensure that antibiotics, coccidiostats, medical substances and growth promoters are not present in quantities above the maximum permitted levels. [54664]

Mr. Rooker: The Veterinary Medicines Directorate (VMD) is responsible for the surveillance of veterinary residues under Council Directive 96/23/EC. This requires Member States to carry out large scale sampling, on-farm and at slaughterhouses, to look for a wide range of veterinary medicinal products including antibiotics, coccidiostats, medicinal substances and growth promoters. Member states are required to take samples amounting to fixed percentages of animals (0.275% of cattle, 0.05% of pigs, 0.05% sheep, and for poultry 1 sample per 200 tonnes of dead-weight production, of which 90% are taken from abattoirs). The actual number of samples to be taken in a given year is determined by the number of animals slaughtered in the previous year, or which the Competent Authority forecasts will be slaughtered during the year, so that, within prescribed confidence limits, Member States can be satisfied that the results obtained are representative of what is happening nationally.

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will ensure that meat from animals reared on growth promoters is labelled as such. [54666]

Mr. Rooker: The use of hormone growth promoters in food producing animals has been banned in the European Community since 1988. Any third country which permits the use of growth promoting hormones is required to guarantee that no animals to which they have been administered and no meat from such animals will be exported to the Community. Imports must be certified accordingly and Commission inspectors verify compliance with all the requirements.

Antibiotic growth promoters used in animal feed act in the gut of animals and are not absorbed. Residues would not therefore be expected in meat. Antibiotics used in veterinary medicine are all subject to a period of withdrawal before treated animals may be slaughtered for human consumption, or their products are marketed, to ensure no residues are present.

Given the above information, I do not believe it necessary to consider labelling.

Pigs (Artificial Insemination)

Mr. Jack: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what amendments to Schedule 6 of the Domestic Pig AI Regulations he is proposing to control the use of on-farm AI to reduce the risk of disease spreading through the movement of unlicensed semen. [54827]

Mr. Rooker: Schedule 6 of the draft Pig Artificial Insemination Regulations sets out revised controls on the unlicensed supply of porcine semen. The proposed controls would be more stringent than those currently in place. The Schedule received mixed reactions from the Industry at consultation and will be considered further when work on the draft Regulations is resumed.

Mr. Jack: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food for what reasons the review of the Domestic Pig AI Regulations has not been completed. [54826]

Mr. Rooker: The review of the Artificial Insemination of Pigs Regulations was suspended on 14 April in order to allow the temporary re-deployment of staff to work on the lifting of the EC beef export ban. The work has not yet been resumed.

Alternative Crops

Mr. Jack: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what programmes of support his Ministry is currently making available for the development of alternative crops. [54828]

Mr. Rooker: This year, we have increased grants for the establishment of short rotation coppice near the UK's first biomass-fuelled power station. The Ministry has promoted alternative crops at agricultural shows, seminars, workshops and through a dedicated Website. Expenditure on strategic research and development totals £1.1 million annually.

Mr. Jack: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food for what reasons he has not requested that alternative crops are afforded the same treatment under the IACS payment scheme as existing comparable crops under Agenda 2000. [54830]

Mr. Rooker: The European Commission has undertaken to produce a report on non-food and energy crops within the context of Agenda 2000. The Government are considering their approach towards this.

Departmental Vehicles

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how much his Department expects to spend in each year from 1998–99 to 2000–01 on vehicle replacements. [54988]

Mr. Morley: The Ministry expects to spend just under £1.5 million in 1998–99 on vehicle replacements. Following the outcome of the Comprehensive Spending Review, plans for future years have yet to be finalised.

Organophosphates

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the use of humans in trials involving organophosphates. [55029]

Mr. Rooker: The Government do not require data from trials carried out on human volunteers to be submitted by applicants for pesticides approvals or veterinary medicines licences.

Applications for marketing authorisations for human medicines require data from trials in human volunteers; however regulatory approval is not required prior to undertaking such studies.

Any trials that are carried out in the UK are subject to two levels of control. First, the Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations 1988 (made under the Health and Safety at Work, etc. Act 1974) apply as they would to any workplace activity. Second, good practice in respect of ethical standards is set down by the Helsinki Declaration and guidance from the Royal College of Physicians. Under these guidelines, studies require the approval of an ethics committee which takes full account of the rights of the volunteers.

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is his Department's current evaluation of the extent to which *(a)* short-term and *(b)* long-term exposure to organophosphorus compounds produces chronic illnesses. [55336]

Mr. Rooker: The Government are advised by the Advisory Committee on Pesticides (ACP) in relation to pesticides, and by the Veterinary Products Committee (VPC) in relation to veterinary medicines. On current available evidence it seems very likely that exposure to high doses of organophosphorus compounds can result in long term ill health (in addition to acute toxic effects). The range of effects is described in paragraphs 2.4 to 2.6 of the Official Group on OPs Report to Ministers (copies of which are in the Library of the House). What is more open to question and now being reassessed by our advisory committees is the long term effect of low level exposure.

As part of this reassessment the Government have invited a specialist sub-group of the Committee on Toxicity of Chemicals in Food, Consumer Products and the Environment (COT) to consider a range of issues surrounding short term and long term exposure to OP compounds in general, including what evidence exists that chronic illness arises from long term exposure to OPs. The sub-committee has already begun its task.

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the reviews and research into the effect of organophosphorus compounds on human health which his Department has initiated since 1 May 1997, indicating who is carrying out the research and when it is expected to be completed. [55337]

Mr. Rooker: Since 1 May 1997, we have commissioned a study at the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency on the dose effect profiles for OP sheep dips on brain electrical activity and cognitive performance in non-human primates. This is due to be completed in May 1999.

As part of the national arrangements for the review of existing approved pesticides, the regulatory Departments responsible for pesticides announced on 13 May 1998 the start of a review of those organophosphorus and carbamate pesticides approved for agricultural use. The first stage of this review is expected to be completed by January 1999.

The use of OP sheep dips was last reviewed by the Veterinary Products Committee (VPC) in February 1997. The VPC confirmed earlier advice that, provided they are used safely and in accordance with manufacturers' instructions, there is no scientific justification for withdrawing them from the market.

Loan Guarantee Scheme

Mr. Harvey: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what action he is taking to expedite the proposal for the establishment of a loan guarantee scheme under EAGGF Measure 3.1; what obstacles regarding the state aid criterion in this matter have been raised; and if he will make a statement. [55222]

Mr. Rooker: We have recently received a draft outline proposal detailing how the proposed loan guarantee scheme under the Objective 5b Programme for the South West region would operate. This is currently being considered by officials. If it is decided to proceed with the Loan Guarantee Fund Parliamentary approval will be required, as will the formal clearance of the Fund as a State Aid from the European Commission. The agreement of the Commission will also be required to amend the Single Programme Document (SPD) for the South West to enable the Loan Guarantee Fund to be included within the Objective 5b Programme.

Rural Communities (Job Losses)

Mr. Hood: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what estimate he has made of the net job losses in rural communities resulting from the BSE crisis. [55036]

Mr. Rooker: In March 1997, UK Agriculture Departments and HM Treasury commissioned an independent study from DTZ Pieda Consulting to assess the economic impact of BSE on the UK economy. The study was completed in March of this year and a copy of the published report has been placed in the Library of the House.

The report did not separately identify rural employment impacts, but concluded that, whilst the potential for job losses across the economy was high, actual job losses as a result of BSE were limited. Some 1,000 net job losses (less than 0.5% of the jobs involved in the meat production process) were identified in the 12 months following the outbreak of the crisis. The shift in demand to substitute meats, and the provision of subsidies and compensation payments, both helped to retain jobs. However the report drew attention to the likelihood of future adjustments as the crisis support measures are gradually withdrawn.

Milk Quotas

Mr. Hood: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the European Commission's progress on the pooling of milk quotas. [55033]

Mr. Rooker: Pooling of milk quotas would presumably involve over-production of milk by some member states being netted-off by the under-production of others. This is not provided for in the European Commission's Agenda 2000 proposals on the reform of the CAP dairy regime and there is little evidence of any enthusiasm for such a measure amongst member states.

BSE

Mr. Hood: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is his most recent estimate of the total cost to public funds of the BSE crisis. [55017]

Mr. Rooker: The current estimated cost of the BSE crisis is £4.6 billion over the period 1996/97 to 2001/2002. About 45 per cent. of this sum will be reimbursed by the European Community.

Farmers (Compensatory Payments)

Mr. Hood: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make an application to the EU for compensatory payments to farmers for the effects of the current value of sterling. [55223]

Mr. Rooker: The Government fully recognise the effect that the recent strength of sterling is having on the agricultural industry. The EU agrimonetary rules permit the UK to pay compensatory aid within a maximum ceiling to offset the income effects of revaluations of the sterling "green" rate. Following sterling revaluations in 1997 and 1998 about £165 million of aid is currently available to the UK, most of which is payable only to the cereal and beef sectors. The operation of the UK's EU budget abatement means that even paying the EU-reimbursed element of this aid carries significant public expenditure implications for the UK exchequer. Broadly speaking, the UK exchequer would bear around 71 per cent. of the costs of the £118 million EU-reimbursed element of this aid, and 100 per cent. of the costs of the £47 million national element making up this package.

It is against this background—and a tight position on public spending—that we have to take decisions about agrimonetary compensation. In recognition of the special circumstances facing the livestock sector, we announced on 18 December 1997 a one year, one-off package of aid to the beef and sheep sectors worth £85 million. This aid has provided substantial additional assistance to this sector.

My colleagues and I continue to keep the situation under review and are listening to the representations being made by the farming unions.

Cyber Fish

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what research he has conducted on the *(a)* ethics and *(b)* economics of the cyber fish developed by a Norwegian scientist to lead fish into stationary nets. [55242]

Mr. Morley: MAFF has not undertaken any research into the ethics or economics of cyber fish, nor has it plans of doing so.

Fisheries

Sir Richard Body: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, pursuant to his answer to my hon. Friend the Member for East Yorkshire (Mr. Townend) of 17 March 1998, *Official Report*, column *539*, for what reasons the derogation in respect of the 6 and 12 miles limits will continue after 2002; and if he will list those Governments who have indicated they do not support extension. [55401]

Mr. Morley: It is clear that other Member States share our interest in protecting inshore fleets and therefore value the restrictions on access within 6 and 12 mile limits. None has indicated that it will not support the continuation of these provisions beyond 2002 and the European Commission has confirmed that it expects them to be maintained. There was unanimous agreement the last time they were renewed in 1992.

Green CAP

Sir Richard Body: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the expansion of co-financible activities for a green common agricultural policy in accordance with Com (97) 620. [55327]

Mr. Rooker: The European Commission's report of December 1997 on the implementation of agri-environment schemes within the European Union (Com (97) 620) made a number of suggestions for the strengthening of agri-environment programmes both in financial terms and in terms of quality. It notes that these should be considered in the context of the proposals arising from Agenda 2000.

Under the UK Presidency, Member States agreed that agri-environment measures should remain an important part of the CAP reform process, and also began detailed consideration, as part of the Agenda 2000 process, of the Commission's proposal for the future development of agri-environmental and rural development policy. This has brought together amended measures from nine existing Council regulations and aims to be the second pillar of the Common Agricultural Policy. The proposed rural development regulation will allow Member States to prioritise their requirements for environmental action, structural adjustment, diversification and other measures in support of rural communities. The Commission propose the allocation of an extra 180 million ecu (£124.2 million) for agri-environmental measures. Such measures will be a compulsory element of development plans drawn up under the regulation.

In England, the results of the Comprehensive Spending Review for MAFF, which were announced by my right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food on 29 July 1998, *Official Report*, columns *341–45*, established measures to sustain and enhance an attractive and accessible countryside as a key priority for MAFF. We will continue to expand the areas under agreement under the major agri-environment schemes.

In the long term, we would like to see the Common Agricultural Policy reformed to phase out production linked support, allowing European farming to develop into a competitive industry that can survive and prosper in increasingly open markets. We would wish to see part

of the savings from a reduction in production support diverted to measures which will protect and enhance the environment and help the rural economy adjust, particularly in more fragile rural areas.

Pigs

Mr. Peter Atkinson: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what steps he is taking to press the European Commission to introduce measures to limit the growth in pig numbers in the European Union. [55489]

Mr. Rooker: None, as I do not believe that it would be in the United Kingdom pigmeat industry's best interests to do so. However, in response to representations from the UK and other Member States the Commission have extended and increased export refunds for pigmeat, and introduced a private storage aid scheme.

Quarantine

Mr. Key: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many *(a)* private pet owners and *(b)* commercial dog and cat breeders were prosecuted, and on what charges, under anti-rabies quarantine legislation in each of the last five years. [55470]

Mr. Rooker: Information on the breakdown of prosecutions between those of private pet owners and those of commercial dog and cat breeders is not held centrally. The number of prosecutions under the Rabies (Importation of Dogs, Cats and Other Mammals) Order 1974 reported to this Department by local authorities in each of the last five years is:

1993: 53
1994: 71
1995: 64
1996: 66
1997: 50.

Genetically Modified Crops

Mr. Steen: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, pursuant to his oral statement of 30 July 1998, *Official Report*, columns 621–30, if he will make a further statement about progress on genetically modified crops. [55675]

Mr. Rooker: In my statement on 30 July I reported fully on the background to MAFF's non-enforcement of regulation 11(3) of the Seeds (National Lists of Varieties) Regulations 1982. I stated then that I intended to put in hand immediate action to remove the requirement in regulation 11(3) to provide replicated trials data which is redundant and serves no useful purpose. I also indicated that we were considering urgently how the position of varieties already added to the National List or currently in tests and trials without replicated trials data should be regularised.

A formal consultation on the revocation of regulation 11(3) was launched on 6 August, and a further consultation was launched on 17 September setting out proposals for the regularisation of varieties already added to the National List or currently in tests and trials. The proposals contained in the 17 September consultation would have regularised the position of varieties already added to the National List, but would have continued to require replicated trials data, albeit submitted after applications had been received, from tests and trials carried out prior to the date of application.

However, in the light of representations received during the consultation process we concluded that there are no good reasons for differentiating between the treatment of varieties already on the National List, and those that are only part way through statutory tests and trials. Accordingly, we therefore issued revised proposals on 8 October which would revoke the requirement to submit replicated trials results (as already proposed in the 6 August consultation), and permit Ministers to determine all applications not yet determined by the date the regulations come into force, notwithstanding the absence of replicated trials data. These proposals are fully in line with the comments of the Court of Appeal that the position ought now to be resolved speedily and decisively across the board. The Court of Appeal also said that it would seem surprising if at least the possibility of retrospective amendment were not to be considered.

This latest consultation will end on 30 October, following which Ministers will give careful consideration to the views expressed by respondents before deciding on the final form of the amending Statutory Instrument. In the meantime the data requirements of regulation 11(3) are being operated. (Copies of all three consultation documents have been placed in the Library of the House).

So far as genetically modified varieties are concerned controls are addressed under separate legislation, the Environmental Protection Act 1990 and the regulations made under it. Genetically modified varieties are not accepted into National List tests unless they have been given the appropriate consents under this legislation.

In my statement I also spoke of the need to ensure that organic farmers are not adversely affected by the introduction of GMO crops. I said that MAFF and DETR would be working with the farming community and representatives of organic farming to ensure that the expansion of organic farming was not compromised by the introduction of genetically modified crops. The Government's aim is to promote dialogue between the organic and GM sectors so that practical steps can be taken to avoid problems.

This commitment is being taken forward in a number of ways. MAFF is commissioning research on the factors affecting the likelihood and consequences of gene transfer between genetically modified and organically produced crops and factors influencing the probability of such transfer. This research is being commissioned so that those concerned with defining and regulating organic crop production are able to draw on relevant data and information.

Cattle Tracing System

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what progress has been made at the British Cattle Movement Service since the launch of the computerised Cattle Tracing System for Great Britain on 28 September. [55676]

Mr. Rooker: The British Cattle Movement Service (BCMS) launched the new Cattle Tracing System for Great Britain on 28 September 1998. As of 14 October, the BCMS has issued 120,666 passports and processed

26,520 notifications of cattle movements. The BCMS has also dealt with over 50,000 calls to the local call rate Helpline since it opened on 1 July 1998.

Passport production peaked on 10 October when 23,747 passports were issued. The busiest day for the Helpline was 29 September when 1,914 calls were received.

Genetically Modified Organisms

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what are the objectives of the forthcoming consultation exercise on genetically-modified organisms; and if it will include consultation about *(a)* genetically modified organisms in human food products, *(b)* genetically modified organisms in animal foodstuffs and *(c)* labelling of products derived from genetically modified organisms. [53386]

Mr. Battle: I have been asked to reply.

The public consultation exercise will seek the views of the general public on advances in the biosciences, including genetic modification. It will not initially focus on any specific area such as health or food, but will ask for views on the information available on genetics and its applications. We will seek to explore the way that people use this information to inform their judgments relating to risk and trust. For example, we expect to explore the role of Government, industry and others in the public perception of the biosciences and seek views on how effective current mechanisms are.

Written Answers to Questions

Tuesday 20 October 1998

DEFENCE

Sexual and Ethnic Discrimination

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to reduce sexual and ethnic discrimination within the armed forces. [55360]

Mr. Doug Henderson: The Government are committed to eliminating all forms of ethnic and unlawful sexual discrimination within the Armed Forces. Together with the Chiefs of Staff, we are determined to provide a working environment that is free from any form of racial or unlawful sexual discrimination. We will be unremitting in our efforts to remove any racist or sexist attitudes, racially and sexually discriminatory practice, behaviour and language—and this has been made absolutely clear to all Service personnel.

All three Services are implementing Equal Opportunities Directives and Action Plans to put our commitment into practice.

We consider that robust equal opportunities training is an important component of our determination to challenge prejudice. To this end, I opened a tri-Service Equal Opportunities Training Centre at the Royal Military College of Science, Shrivenham on 25 September 1998. The centre provides equal opportunities training for dedicated equal opportunities advisers, and all senior personnel—both Service and civilian. The Centre will complement the wide range of equal opportunities training and initiatives already undertaken by my Department.

The Naval Service has produced a video on sexual and racial harassment, and bullying. It will be distributed to all ships and establishments this month. The video will be accompanied by a supporting letter and feedback questionnaires.

The Army is introducing mandatory Individual Training Directives (ITDs) for all its personnel. All personnel will be required to undertake a minimum of two 40-minute training sessions on equal opportunities each year.

The RAF is currently reviewing how it may better convey its policy of 'Zero Tolerance' of harassment and discrimination.

In addition, personal guides and leaflets on equal opportunities are distributed throughout the Armed Forces and confidential telephone support lines for Service personnel have been introduced.

RAF Northolt

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to consult local authorities on the future of RAF Northolt. [51863]

Mr. Doug Henderson: Any proposals emerging from work currently under way which may affect the future of RAF Northolt will be subject to maximum consultation, which will include local authorities and other interested parties.

Cyprus

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what discussions his Department has had with President Clerides on the subject of a demilitarisation of the Island of Cyprus; and if he will make a statement. [55615]

Mr. Doug Henderson: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence met President Clerides in Nicosia on 5 October. They had a wide-ranging discussion covering a number of subjects of mutual interest. My right hon. Friend took the opportunity to reassure President Clerides of the UK's continuing and steadfast commitment to supporting UN efforts to bring about a settlement.

CBDE Technical Papers

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment Technical Notes series of documents *(a)* started and *(b)* finished; how many documents were produced in this series; and how many of the documents are currently unclassified. [55328]

Mr. Spellar: This is a matter for the Chief Executive of the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency. I have asked the Chief Executive to write to my hon. Friend.

Letter from John Chisholm to Mr. Ken Livingstone, dated 20 October 1998:

I have been asked to reply to your question about the series of Technical Notes produced by DERA's Chemical and Biological Defence sector (CBD).

The series of internal reports known as the CBD Technical Notes started in 1969 and finished in 1997. The reports were numbered sequentially from 1 to 1629 although not all numbers were used. There are some 440 unclassified reports in the series, 6 of which are in the Public Record Office in the WO 189 class list.

I hope this is helpful.

Strategic Defence Review

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence following the Strategic Defence Review, the withdrawal of troops from Germany and the creation of a sixth new AS 90 regiment, what options for new facilities in Wiltshire *(a)* he and *(b)* his Department have assessed; and when he expects to make a decision. [54916]

Mr. Doug Henderson *[holding answer 19 October 1998]*: My Department is in the process of assessing a range of options for the basing of newly created units, and units which will be relocated from Germany following the Strategic Defence Review. Decisions will be announced as soon as possible.

Sixth AS 90 Regiment

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence where the new sixth AS 90 regiment will be based; and if he will make a statement. [54917]

Mr. Doug Henderson *[holding answer 19 October 1998]:* The Strategic Defence Review identified the requirement to create a sixth AS90 regiment to support the new UK based Mechanised Brigade. No decisions have yet been taken on where the new regiment will be based. An announcement will be made as soon as possible.

Mine Action Technologies Centre

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence in what areas the British Government are *(a)* contributing to and *(b)* participating in, the creation of a centre for mine action technologies at the Defence Research Establishment in Suffield, Canada; and if he will make a statement. [55468]

Mr. Spellar *[holding answer 19 October 1998]:* The recently opened Centre for Mine Action Technologies at the Defence Research Establishment in Suffield, Canada, is a national initiative in which the British Government have not been involved. The Defence Evaluation and Research Agency (DERA) conducts research into counter mine warfare on behalf of the British Government, and makes publicly available any results relevant to humanitarian de-mining. The Ministry of Defence and the Department for International Development are also actively involved in the international exchange of information and co-operation on mine clearance technologies and will continue to contribute to international work on humanitarian mine clearance.

Logistic Information Systems Agency

Mr. Olner: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what key targets have been set for the Chief Executive of the Logistic Information Systems Agency 1998–99. [55735]

Mr. Doug Henderson: The Chief Executive of the Logistic Information Systems Agency has been set the following Key Targets for 1998–99:

Key Target 1—To deliver the agreed levels of service within budget levels defined by the customer.

Key Target 2—To achieve a reduction in unit costs of 3.0% by April 1999.

Key Target 3—To improve delivery performance to customer requirements such that:

95% of Requests for Change are assessed within 7 days.

The average period required for Request for Change Authorisation is reduced by 10%.

85% of Requests for Change are moved from the Tasking Phase to the Implementation Phase within 90 days.

TREASURY

Economic and Finance Council

Mr. Derek Twigg: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the Council meeting of the Economic and Finance Ministers of the European Union held on 12 October. [55671]

Mr. Gordon Brown: I attended the Economic and Finance Council—ECOFIN—of the European Union in Luxembourg on 12 October.

The Council started in restricted session with a discussion of the Finnish Stability programme and the Greek Convergence programme which are part of the implementation of the stability and growth pact. These programmes are important to ensure that the launch of the euro is successful. There was agreement to Council opinions for Greece and Finland.

On preparation of stage 3 of EMU, three items designed to improve multilateral surveillance were approved. The first was a letter by the chairmen of the Monetary Committee and the Economic Policy Committee on the broad economic policy guidelines. The Commission expressed support for a debate in Council in February. The second item was an opinion of the Monetary Committee on the content and format of stability and convergence programmes. The third item on multilateral surveillance was an opinion of the Economic Policy Committee on the content and format of reports on structural reform. The Presidency reminded member states that commitment to reform was essential at the highest levels and that the Economic Policy Committee would report again to ECOFIN on 15 March.

The Commission presented a report on the Community's Own Resources. There followed a discussion where interest was expressed by some member states in the concept of co-financing the Common Agricultural Policy. In response to criticism by some member states of the UK rebate, I emphasised that, even after the rebate, the UK remains a larger net contributor to the EU budget than Member States with a greater capacity to pay. The UK rebate remains fully justified.

The Presidency presented a paper on the future financial framework. There was significant support for real terms stabilisation of the financial perspective by 2006 at around current real-terms levels and for this to be reflected in the ECOFIN report to Vienna.

The chairman of the Economic Policy Committee summarised a statement from the Committee on some key employment policy issues. This statement was accepted by the Council.

The Finance Ministers of the EFTA member states joined ECOFIN Ministers for lunch. A range of topics were discussed including international economic issues.

Customs Information System

Mr. Caplin: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if the Government have, in addition to Her Majesty's Customs and Excise, designated additional competent authorities with direct access to the Customs Information System (C.I.S.) as referred to in Article 29(2) of EC Regulation 515/97 on mutual administrative assistance. [55776]

Dawn Primarolo: In addition to Her Majesty's Customs and Excise, I have designated the Intervention Board Executive Agency, the Home Office, and the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, as competent authorities to have direct access to the Customs Information System (C.I.S.).

The Data Protection Agency has agreed to be designated as the national supervisory authority responsible for carrying out independent supervision of personal data included in the C.I.S., and it has access to the system for this purpose. (Article 37).

Pension Mis-selling

Ms Lawrence: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on progress in the review of personal pensions mis-selling. [55930]

Ms Hewitt: Further advances have been made towards completion of the first phase of the review.

Of the 29 firms whose results are set out in the table only four have resolved less than 75 per cent. of their cases. All firms have now resolved over 60 per cent. of their cases.

However, the completion of cases, as measured in the table, is not the end of the process. With many firms close to their targets, it is now time for them to turn their attention from review to redress. The Government want to see the redress agreed between firms and customers delivered as a matter of priority.

The PIA is monitoring firms' follow up action to deliver redress, and will take action against laggards where this is warranted.

The time limit, set by the Personal Investment Authority (PIA), has expired for a further seven firms: Albany Life, Allied Dunbar, Canada Life, Gan, National Westminster, Royal London and Wesleyan. Consistent with the treatment of the twelve firms already removed from the Treasury's monthly list, the PIA will make its assessment of whether they have in fact met their targets. If they have, they will be removed from the list next month. They must continue to update the Treasury on their progress.

Progress by pensions firms in resolving cases of personal pensions mis-selling in the period to the end of September 1998

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
50–75% of cases resolved								
Countrywide	5,020	2,727	322	191	131	106	2	60
DBS	2,410	845	837	201	605	439	18	62
Financial Options	554	294	74	26	48	35	6	64
Burns Anderson	1,267	420	512	219	293	230	18	69
Over 75% of cases resolved								
IFA Network	378	120	166	111	55	54	14	75
Windsor Life	9,645	3,971	4,080	320	3,760	3,147	33	77
Abbey Life	17,733	6,106	8,680	1,251	7,429	6,573	37	79
Sun Life of Canada	28,848	10,276	13,887	2,572	11,315	10,046	35	79
Lincoln National	13,533	2,178	9,909	1,377	8,532	7,206	53	80
London and Manchester	8,568	1,519	5,922	677	5,245	4,674	55	80
Gan	12,235	2,090	8,615	912	7,703	6,881	56	81
Hill Samuel	6,199	918	4,582	700	3,882	3,483	56	82
Standard Life	7,435	889	5,663	1,267	4,396	4,052	54	83
Colonial	8,732	3,119	4,952	587	4,365	3,652	42	84
Sedgwick	16,835	9,504	5,281	1,821	3,460	2,981	18	85
CIS	44,681	7,365	35,191	14,003	21,188	16,947	38	86
Friends Provident	7,101	1,281	5,204	814	4,390	3,997	56	86
Berkeley Independent	185	122	42	29	13	11	6	88
Hogg Robinson	2,299	832	1,293	444	849	758	33	88
NatWest	15,396	4,852	9,727	1,266	8,461	7,575	49	89
Canada Life	5,622	499	5,048	661	4,387	3,958	70	91
Pearl	47,541	4,303	41,247	5,856	35,391	33,273	70	91
M and E Network	319	179	115	29	86	84	26	92
Equitable Life	7,629	1,964	5,274	1,804	3,470	3,240	42	92
Legal and General	36,961	15,235	20,676	1,944	18,732	17,086	46	93
Allied Dunbar	19,654	4,286	14,531	3,850	10,681	10,146	52	93
Albany Life	3,108	713	2,268	216	2,052	1,963	63	93
Wesleyan	4,180	315	3,769	960	2,809	2,747	66	96
Royal London	13,532	1,167	12,363	1,546	10,816	10,791	80	100

Notes:
A: cases identified as requiring review
B: of A, cases where investor was informed that information gained during assessment excluded cases from review
C: number of assessments completed
D: cases where the investor has been informed that no redress is due
E: cases where redress has been offered
F: cases where redress has been accepted
G: cases where redress has been accepted as a percentage of cases identified for review ((F/A)x100)
H: cases completed, including exclusions, as a percentage of cases identified for review (((B+D+F)/A)x100)

Petrol and Diesel Fuel Imports

Mr. Thompson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what measures are being taken to combat the illegal importation of petrol and diesel fuel from the Republic of Ireland. [55659]

Ms Hewitt: The Government recognise that the illegal importation of petrol and diesel across the border into Northern Ireland for resale is a serious problem which disadvantages legitimate traders. HM Customs are taking the lead, acting in conjunction with other authorities, including the Royal Ulster Constabulary, in deploying resources and actively mounting investigations against those involved to counter the threat posed to the revenue and to the Northern Ireland business community. Wherever possible, cases are progressed with a view to criminal prosecution of the individual concerned.

HEALTH

Commission for Health Improvement

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if NHS trusts and primary care trusts will be able to purchase the services of the Commission for Health Improvement on a consultancy basis. [55244]

Mr. Milburn: Initially, we do not see the Commission charging individual National Health Service organisations directly for work undertaken with them. However, we believe that in the longer term, as the Commission's role develops more fully, there is merit in a move to a system where more of its work is funded locally, as this would encourage greater local involvement in the Commission's work and greater ownership of the results.

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health over what timescale the Commission for Health Improvement plans to visit each NHS trust and primary care trust. [55248]

Mr. Milburn: It is proposed that the Commission for Health Improvement conduct a rolling programme of visits, over a period of about 3 to 4 years, to every National Health Service trust and primary care trust.

Departmental Vehicles

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list for *(a)* his Department and *(b)* bodies listed in the National Asset Register, how many vehicles are currently (i) owned and (ii) leased; if he will indicate their (A) fuel types and (B) engine cubic capacities; and how many vehicles are expected to fall due for replacement in each of the years (1) 1998–99, (2) 1999–2000 and (3) 2000–01. [49227]

Ms Jowell *[holding answer 6 July 1998]:* The Department owns 129 vehicles and leases 244 of which 162 are diesel and 211 petrol. The engine cubic capacities are:

900 c.c: 1
1.2: 3
1.4: 9
1.5: 5
1.6: 33
1.7: 51
1.8: 76
1.9: 70
2.0: 88
2.1: 22
2.3: 3
2.5: 11
2.9: 1.

The vehicles are expected to fall due for replacement in each of the years as follows:

1998–99: 167
1999–2000: 87
2000–01: 102.

To provide this information in relation to those bodies other than the Department included in the National Asset Register would involve disproportionate cost.

SCOTLAND

Lockerbie

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if the Lord Advocate will make a statement on his contracts *(a)* directly and *(b)* through the UN with (i) the Libyan authorities and (ii) the lawyers representing the Libyans accused of the Lockerbie bombing. [55454]

Mr. McLeish: My noble and learned Friend the Lord Advocate and my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary set out the Government's position on 24 August when they announced the initiative for a Scottish trial in the Netherlands. The Libyan authorities were invited to seek any clarification of the terms of the initiative through the Secretary General of the United Nations. One such set of questions has been addressed through the Legal Counsel to the Secretary General and a comprehensive response has been given.

Temazepam

Mrs. Irene Adams: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many amputations in Strathclyde resulted from the misuse of the injected drug Temazepam in each year between 1990 and 1998. [55158]

Mr. Galbraith: The information is not available centrally.

Cervical Smear Tests

Dr. Starkey: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland for each health authority in Scotland, what is the average time taken for a patient to receive the results of their cervical smear test; and what percentage take longer than the recommended four weeks. [55211]

Mr. Galbraith: The average reporting time for the results of cervical smear tests for each Health Board laboratory for the year ending 31 March 1998 was:

	Number of days
Argyll and Clyde	9
Ayrshire and Arran	17
Dumfries and Galloway	9
Fife	11
Forth Valley	26
Grampian	21
Greater Glasgow	13
Highland	13
Lanarkshire	11
Lothian	32
Tayside	14

For the year ended 31 March 1998 the average reporting time for the results of the cervical smear tests in Scotland was 17 days. The laboratory that serves Lothian and Borders Health Boards experienced major staffing problems during 1997 but the Health Boards have now taken action to address this problem.

The figure for Lothian includes Borders cases, Grampian includes Orkney and Shetland cases and Highland includes Western Isles cases. Figures are collected only for the time from the date a smear test is received by the laboratory to the date the report is issued by the laboratory and do not therefore include the time it

takes GPs, family planning clinics, etc. to issue the results to patients once they receive them from the laboratory. For this reason, no information is available on the percentage of patients who take longer than 4 weeks to receive their result.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Civil Justice

Ms Beverley Hughes: To ask the Minister of State, Lord Chancellor's Department if a date has been set for the introduction of the first phase of the civil justice reforms. [55732]

Mr. Hoon: The first phase of the Civil Justice Reforms will be introduced on Monday, 26 April 1999, when the new Civil Procedure Rules and supporting materials will come into effect.

WALES

New Deal

Mr. Öpik: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the progress of the New Deal for the young unemployed in Wales; and if he will make a statement. [55156]

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: The *New Deal for 18–24s* is making excellent progress in Wales. By the end of July, more than 1,600 jobless young people had secured employment and, at the latest count, over 2,000 employers had committed more than 3,800 job opportunities.

A further 600 young people have either entered full-time education and training or are developing skills that will enable them to secure employment through work that benefits their community or their environment.

This is a tremendous achievement in just a few months and is a great credit to the Employment Service, its many partner organisations and the employers of Wales. However, we must not be complacent. Further hard work lies ahead to ensure that we continue to develop the high quality opportunities that our young unemployed people deserve.

A449

Mr. Öpik: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales for how long there have been roadworks on the A449 between Monmouth and Newport; when they are planning to be completed; at what total cost; and for what reason information on the duration of the roadworks has not been provided. [55027]

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: 1. The A449/A40 between Monmouth and Newport was completed in 1972 with a design life of 20 years. By 1984, it had carried in excess of its design traffic and a programme of repair and reconstruction commenced. The three major contracts commenced in 1994, 1995 and 1997.

2. Expenditure to date has been £9 million on interim repairs and £24 million on reconstruction, including the current works.

3. The current contract, between Coldra and Usk, is scheduled for completion in February 1999. Reconstruction of the carriageway between Raglan and Monmouth will also be required and is currently programmed, subject to available resources, to commence in 2001–02.

4. Information on the duration of the roadworks contracts has been extensively circulated by information leaflets distributed to interested parties and left at many locations in the area and also by press notices.

Motorcyclists

Mr. Öpik: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales for what reasons motorcyclists are not represented on the Welsh Transport Advisory Group; and if he will make a statement. [55372]

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: My right hon. Friend has received a number of requests from motorcycling organisations for representation on the Welsh Transport Advisory Group. He has told them he is satisfied that the current membership of the Group already adequately covers the interests of two wheeled transport. He has also offered them the opportunity to submit written representations to the Group. In addition, a separate advisory group is currently being established to bring together motorcycle interests and other interested parties for Great Britain as a whole.

Radioactive Materials

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what information has been provided to his Department by the Environment Agency concerning plans by Nycomed Amersham to store radioactive materials in Wales. [55423]

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: The Environment Agency provided my right hon. Friend with information concerning the Company's application to transfer low and intermediate level radioactive waste for storage at their Cardiff site.

He was furnished with copies of the draft certificates of authorisation, background explanatory note, explanatory note to assist the public consultation, and information provided by the Company to support the application. Copies of all these documents have been placed on the relevant public registers.

HOME DEPARTMENT

EU Justice and Home Affairs Council

Ms Stuart: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the outcome of the Justice and Home Affairs Council held in Brussels on 24 September. [55923]

Mr. Straw: The Under-Secretary, my hon. Friend the Member for Vauxhall (Kate Hoey), and I represented the United Kingdom at the Council. The main matters dealt with were as follows:

The Council agreed as 'A' points, among other things, Europol's budget for 1999, the half-yearly report on the activities of the Europol Drugs Unit, decisions concerning

the role of the Director of Europol after entry into force of the Europol Convention and the transfer of the strategic direction of the TECS project to Europol, and the regular Europol information system report.

The Council reached political agreement on the text of the draft Joint Action on the identification, tracing, freezing, seizing and confiscation of instrumentalities and the proceeds from crime.

The Presidency informed the Council that the explanatory report on the Convention on the fight against corruption would be adopted at a later Council meeting after passing through jurist-linguists.

A useful discussion was held on new technical developments in the interception of telecommunications and their implications for the draft Convention on Mutual Legal Assistance, agreement to which is an important priority in the fight against organised crime.

The Council noted a progress report on preparations for the entry into force of the Europol Convention and discussed the rules and procedure to be employed by Europol's Joint Supervisory Body. This matter will be discussed further at the informal meeting of Justice and Home Affairs Ministers in Vienna at the end of October.

The Presidency gave an oral progress report on negotiation of the draft Eurodac Convention, which is concerned with the fingerprinting of asylum applicants. Ministers will discuss the matter again at the Vienna informal Ministerial meeting.

The Council received from the Presidency an oral report on the implementation of the Action Plan on the influx of migrants from Iraq and on migration from Kosovo and the neighbouring region.

The Council discussed the need for urgent measures to tackle abuse of the Internet and other forms of sexual exploitation of children. The Presidency's draft Joint Action on child pornography on the Internet will be discussed at the December Justice and Home Affairs Council (JHA). The Council also discussed Europol's role in this area and the importance of early implementation of the Joint Action of February 1997 concerning action to combat trafficking in human beings and sexual exploitation of children.

In the afternoon, European Union Justice and Home Affairs Ministers held a joint meeting with their counterparts from the associated Central and Eastern European countries (CEEs) and Cyprus. The meeting began with an exchange of views on implementation of the JHA acquis in the field of immigration and asylum, with discussion introduced by Germany.

The United Kingdom introduced discussion on judicial co-operation. A number of applicant states outlined the progress they had made towards meeting the JHA acquis in this area, the importance of which, in both practical and legal terms, they fully recognised. The applicant states were encouraged to consider accession to the Lugano Convention.

On organised crime, the Commission gave an overview of recent work together with an analysis of the linkages of this work to the wider accession process. A number of CEEs and Cyprus described recent developments in their domestic legislation and policies to combat organised crime. Common themes highlighted included the development of domestic legislation; the creation of multi-disciplinary task forces to co-ordinate action; and the development of practical operational co-operation between police forces in different states.

Outside the formal Council meetings, a number of discussions were held with other Interior Ministers and officials on the need for better co-ordination and action to stem the flow of economic migrants claiming asylum.

Prisons

Mr. Stringer: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the outcome of his review of the powers of controllers at contracted out prisons which he announced on 19 June 1997. [55924]

Mr. Straw: I have carefully reviewed the existing powers of controllers at privately managed prisons and have decided that, broadly, the current arrangements should be retained. Increasing the powers of controllers would reduce the contractors' operational responsibility for managing the prisons. The essence of contracting out is that optimum risk should be transferred to the private sector; efficient contract enforcement would seem to be the best way to ensure value for money from these contracts.

Forensic Science Service

Miss Melanie Johnson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he will publish the results of his consultation exercise about the Government's proposal to establish the Forensic Science Service as a trading fund; and what conclusions he has come to about the future financial regime for the operations of the service. [55925]

Mr. Straw: I have today reported the outcome of the consultation exercise to establish the Forensic Science Service as a trading fund. Copies of my report are being placed in the Library. I have concluded, and my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary has agreed, that it would be in the interests of the improved efficiency and effectiveness of the management of the Forensic Science Service if its operations were financed by means of a trading fund. Important benefits will arise from this proposal: in particular the Forensic Science Service will be able to plan and manage its investment and business needs with a long term view. A draft Order under the Government Trading Funds Act 1973 (as amended) will shortly be brought before the House to secure approval for the establishment of the Forensic Science service Trading Fund.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Libya

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on allegations by a former employee of the security agencies that public funds were used to seek to assassinate the leader of Libya and that public funds were directed to an organisation based in London to facilitate such a project. [55311]

Mr. Robin Cook: I have nothing to add to what I have already stated publicly: there was no Government-inspired plan or proposal to assassinate Colonel Qadhaffi, or to assist others in doing so.

Indonesia

Ms Corston: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if, during recent meetings with the Indonesian President, he has been able to raise the Balibo incident of October 1975; and if he will make a statement. [55674]

Mr. Fatchett: I raised our concerns about the Balibo incident with President Habibie during a visit to Indonesia on 8 October. The President undertook to investigate the matter.

European Community Legislation

Sir Richard Body: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 12 March 1998, *Official Report*, columns 277–78, how many Community legislative acts for 1997 *(a)* were and *(b)* were not delegated to committees of member state representatives. [55397]

Ms Quin: Most Commission legislation is made under implementing powers delegated to the Commission by the Council. The Commission is normally assisted in enacting implementing measures by committees made up of Member State and Commission representatives. The Commission Annual Report for 1997 lists the Commission as having enacted 1,430 regulations, directives and decisions over the year, the Council, either alone or acting jointly with the European Parliament, having enacted 407. However, in contrast to previous years, these figures exclude instruments not published in the *Official Journal* and routine management instruments valid for a limited period.

Sir Richard Body: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 12 March 1998, *Official Report*, columns 277–78, what estimate he has made of the proportion and quantity of European Community legislation that neither passes before the Council of Ministers nor is discussed in Parliament; and if he will make a statement on his Department's policy on this procedure. [55395]

Ms Quin: The Commission makes legislation under powers which are delegated in specific cases under primary legislation approved by the Council of Ministers. Proposals for such measures may in some cases be referred to the Council of Ministers. In addition to implementing legislation, the Commission is also given specific legislative powers under Articles 48.3.d and 90.3 of the Treaty establishing the European Community.

The Commission's Annual Report gives totals of 7,068 Commission regulations, directives and decisions for 1993 and 6,732 Commission regulations, directives and decisions for 1994. The 1995 Report gives no figures. In these years, Commission legislation made up over 90% of total Community legislation.

Proposals for Commission implementing measures are not currently subject to Parliamentary scrutiny. However, the House of Commons Modernisation Committee propose changing the terms of reference of the European Legislation Committee to include such legislation. The Government support this. Because of the volume and nature of this legislation, it is proposed that the Committee scrutinise these measures 2–3 times per year for trends.

SOCIAL SECURITY

War Pensions

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many service personnel who served in the 1991 Gulf War have been awarded war pensions for illness attributed to their service in the war. [55321]

Mr. Timms: The administration of the War Pensions Agency is a matter for its Chief Executive, Mr. Gordon Hextall. I have asked him to write to my hon. Friend.

Letter from Gordon Hextall to Mr. Ken Livingstone, dated 19 October 1998:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question about the number of War Pensions awarded for illness attributed to service in the Gulf Conflict.

My letter of 30 July 1998, in response to your previous Parliamentary Question (Official Report 31 July 1998 Column 760/761) is still relevant to the current question. This explained that, although our statistics record claims from service personnel whose service included the Gulf Conflict, such claims may not be confined solely to injuries/etc. sustained in the Gulf Conflict and could include any injuries etc. received in service.

I am however, able to update the figures that I gave in my earlier reply. At the end of September 1998, a total of 2,474 claims had been identified for medical conditions relating to ex-servicemen whose service included the Gulf Conflict. So far, 1,815 awards of War Pension have been made. Of the 2,474 claims, 599 have been received where a Gulf Veteran had made reference to a "Gulf War related illness". Of these so far, 345 have been awarded a pension, 46 have been rejected and 24 claims were withdrawn or lapsed.

I regret that the precise information you requested is not available but to identify claims relating only to the Gulf conflict would require a manual examination of all 2,474 case files which would incur disproportionate cost. However, if you would find it helpful, I could provide a regular update on the figures available. If you would like me to arrange this, please let me know.

Correspondence

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when the hon. Member for Wakefield will receive a reply to his correspondence of 8 May, on behalf of his constituent Mr. Wright, from *(a)* the Disability Living Allowance Unit and *(b)* the Benefit Agency Medical Service. [55032]

Mr. Timms: The administration of the Disability Living Allowance Unit and the Benefits Agency Medical Services is a matter for Peter Mathison, the Chief Executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to my hon. Friend.

Letter from Peter Mathison to Mr. David Hinchliffe, dated 19 October 1998:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question asking when you will receive a reply to your correspondence of 8 May, concerning your constituent Mr. Write, from *(a)* the Disability Living Allowance Unit (DLA) and *(b)* the Benefits Agency Medical Service (BAMS).

The Benefits Agency Customer Charter sets out targets for response to complaints. They are an acknowledgement within two working days and a full response within seven working days (twenty working days for BAMS). I am sorry, on this occasion, you have failed to receive the standard of service which you are entitled to expect.

Replies to your letter were issued from the BAMS on 7 August 1998 and from the DLA Unit on 11 August 1998.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

English Tourist Board

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if he will make a statement on the abolition of the English Tourist Board; what body or bodies will replace the English Tourist Board; what assessment he has made of the ability of English tourism to compete against Welsh and Scottish tourism following the abolition of the English Tourist Board; and what grants will be made available for the promotion of tourism in the English regions. [55500]

Janet Anderson: On 24 July 1998, *Official Report*, columns *699–700*, we announced our consultation into the Department's activities following the Comprehensive Spending Review. This included a review of the support we currently give to English tourism. While recognising the need for a national co-ordinating role, the consultation set out four possible options for alternative structures that might deliver a greater proportion of the available funds more directly in support of tourism in the regions.

We are currently considering the responses we have received. No decisions have yet been made on whether to abolish the English Tourist Board and, if so, which structure should replace it. We will decide in the light of the consultation which support structure for English tourism can best implement our new tourism strategy, which will be published in the next few months.

All the money that is currently provided for the support of English tourism will be ring-fenced for that purpose. It is our intention to seek to deploy those resources more effectively in order to release more money for regional support of tourism.

Royal Parks Agency

Mr. Pickthall: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what targets he has set for the Royal Parks Agency. [55775]

Mr. Chris Smith: The following targets have been set for the Royal Parks Agency for 1998–99:

Financial and Efficiency

To increase receipts by 16 per cent. to £3.3 million from £2.84 million in 1997–98 from permits, fees, licences, events, concessions and car parking.

Achieve a 1.5 per cent. reduction in running costs.

Reduce Royal Parks Constabulary hourly costs of a police constable on duty from £22.90 per hour in 1997–98 by 2.5 per cent. to £22.35 in 1998–99.

Visitor satisfaction

Maintain an overall quality rating of 86 per cent. from visitors to the parks.

Fabric

Review contract documents and specifications and competitively re-tender the grounds maintenance contracts for Regent's Park, St. James's Park, Kensington Gardens and Greenwich Park and award new contracts by December 1998.

Maintain an average rating from visitors of at least 85 per cent. on cleanliness in the parks, compared with a target of 82 per cent. in 1997–98.

Maintain an average score of 83 per cent. for soft landscape presentation.

PRIME MINISTER

Government Annual Report

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Prime Minister who was the freelance photographer who took the photographs and did the interviews for the Government's Annual report 1997–98. [55240]

The Prime Minister: Mr. Richard Baker.

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Prime Minister for what reasons the name, age and occupation of one of the members of the public quoted in the Government's Annual report 1997–98 are given. [55241]

The Prime Minister: This information was included in error and should have been removed at the proof reading stage.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Ministerial Meetings (Transport Policy)

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry which bodies or individuals outside Government his predecessor met to talk about transport policy and the Transport White Paper over the three months before publication of the White Paper; and how many of these meetings were attended by employees of professional lobby consultants. [54132]

Mr. Battle: The former President of the Board of Trade and I regularly discussed industry, transport and environmental matters and the links between them, with bodies and individuals outside Government, both formally and informally.

Nuclear Reprocessing

Mr. Forth: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations he has received from EU environment ministers with regard to the future of the nuclear reprocessing industry. [54334]

Mr. Battle: My right hon. Friend has received no such representations.

Export Credits Guarantee Department

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on the extension of ECGD's Amber Zone Budget beyond 31 March 1999. [55992]

Mr. Mandelson: I have decided to extend the Amber Zone Budget (AZB), which controls the level of new commitments on markets where ECGD exposure is

already concentrated or the risks are high, by a further two years, until 31 March 2001. In view of the ample headroom against the current AZB of £3.8 billion, the AZB for 1999–2000 and 2000–2001 will be maintained at this level, but the position will be kept under review to ensure that ECGD can continue to support worthwhile export business. In line with good practice followed by commercial banks ECGD will continue to set exposure against the AZB on a weighted basis according to its susceptibility to political risks. In the meantime, a review is being undertaken on how to improve ECGD's exposure management regime, with the objective of providing Ministers with a clearer and better framework for striking a balance between supporting worthwhile exports and the financial risks to the taxpayer.

EU Research Council

Mr. Plaskitt: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on the outcome of the EU Research Council on 13 October. [55993]

Mr. Mandelson: Lord Sainsbury, Under-Secretary of State and Minister for Science, represented the UK at the meeting of the EU Research Council on 13 October. The Council made further useful progress in the legislative process for the Fifth Framework Programme for Research and Technological Development (FP5), maintaining momentum in the tight timetable for introducing FP5 at the beginning of 1999. Though formal agreement was not possible at this stage, informal agreement was reached on the scientific and technological content of three of the specific programmes which set out FP5's research priorities in detail. The Council also agreed Decisions on the mandate for negotiating terms of association with FP5 with the countries seeking accession to the EU, on the conclusion of an agreement for scientific and technological co-operation between the European Community and the United States, and on amendments to the statutes of the Joint European Torus Joint Undertaking (JET), through which the EU pursues nuclear fusion research.

Director General of Gas Supply

Mr. Stephen Twigg: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement about the appointment of the next Director General of Gas Supply. [55990]

Mr. Mandelson: I have appointed Callum McCarthy as Director General of Gas Supply (DGGS) from 1 November 1998, and as Director General of Electricity Supply (DGES) from 1 January 1999. Both appointments will run until 31 October 2003.

The appointment of a single individual as DGGS and DGES reflects the convergence of the gas and electricity markets, and the Government's confirmation, in July, that they proposed to amalgamate the regulatory regimes for gas and electricity. Subject to parliamentary approval of legislation to create the post, Mr. McCarthy will in due course be appointed as the first Energy Regulator for Great Britain, chairing a new full-time board that will replace the present DGGS and DGES.

I am placing in the Library of the House a copy of my Department's Press Notice of 24 September, with further details of the appointment.

The Council also discussed the issue of parallel imports and trade-mark rights, following the European Court of Justice's recent Judgment in case 355/96 (Silhouette).

The Commission made presentations of its Green Paper on patent protection within the EU; on its communication on statutory audit in the EU, addressing the supervision of auditing and auditing standards within a Single Market context; and on its progress towards development of an action plan to follow up the Report of the Business Environment Simplification Task Force (BEST).

Internal Market Council

Mr. Sawford: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what topics were discussed at the EU Ministerial Council on the Internal Market on 24 September; and what matters were voted upon. [55991]

Mr. Mandelson: My noble Friend the Minister for Trade and Competitiveness in Europe represented the UK at the Internal Market Council in Brussels on 24 September.

The Commission reported to the Council on Member States' progress towards implementation of the Single Market Action Plan, which aims to improve the operation of the Single Market. The Commission reported that the number of directives not yet implemented in all Member States had been cut from 35.5 per cent. in June 1997 to 15.4 per cent. currently. The Council adopted conclusions which re-affirmed its commitment to the implementation of the Action Plan, noted the importance of making the Single Market rules more effective and welcomed the Commission's communication "Making the Single Market rules more effective", which set out some ideas for achieving this.

The Council had an initial orientation discussion on a proposal for a directive on the protection of invention by "utility model". This is a form of intellectual property protection right, which does not currently exist in the UK, for technical innovation, which is aimed, in particular, at ephemeral products with a short shelf life, and for the use by small businesses.

Dounreay

Sir Robert Smith: To ask the President of the Board of Trade, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Kirkaldy (Dr. Moonie), 5 June 1998, *Official Report*, column *385*, if the Dounreay Nuclear Establishment will receive further shipments of unused plutonium fuel from the German Hanau nuclear facility. [48028]

Mr. Battle: UKAEA has a committed contract to deal with this material and so would expect to receive it at Dounreay in due course. However, at present UKAEA are not accepting any new nuclear material onto the Dounreay site, and they will not do so until after they have satisfied their regulators.

Electromagnetic Fields

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what research he has evaluated into low energy electromagnetic fields associated with cellular telephones and telecommunication masts; and if he will make a statement. [53960]

Mrs. Roche: Advice on exposure to electromagnetic fields is given by the National Radiological Protection Board (NRPB). It evaluates published and peer reviewed sound scientific evidence on which its Guidelines for exposure are based. The exposure guidelines at mobile communications frequencies are based on well established thermal effects. Whilst it has been suggested by a small number of studies that there are potential effects associated with weak electromagnetic fields, such studies are inconsistent, and have proved difficult to replicate. They do not provide a basis for altering the advice provided. The NRPB Advisory Group on Non-ionising Radiation continues to review the published literature.

A European Expert Group under the chairmanship of the Head of Non-ionising Radiation of the NRPB has reviewed the published literature and examined research needs. The research recommendations, which could be implemented under Framework V, included areas for further work and identified key research to be replicated. We welcome research that is systematic and undertaken by laboratories with proven skills in this subject. Support for such research does not imply that the Government believe there are harmful effects or that members of the public are subject to harmful electromagnetic fields generated by mobile communications equipment.

Interest Rates

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment he has made of the impact of interest rates on the competitiveness of small and medium-sized enterprises in the UK. [54856]

Mr. Mandelson: The Government have established a new framework for monetary policy, with the Bank of England setting interest rates to meet the Government's inflation target, so ensuring that decisions are taken on the basis of the long-term needs of the economy, not short-term political considerations. By delivering low and stable inflation, and avoiding a return to the damaging cycle of boom and bust, this new framework for monetary policy will produce a more stable economic environment which in turn will enhance the competitiveness of small and medium-sized enterprises.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Intervention Board

Mr. Drew: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if the Intervention Board intends to publish a revised corporate plan, as set out in its Policy and Resources Framework Document. [56009]

Mr. Nick Brown: The Intervention Board published a new Corporate Plan in September 1998, to cover the years 1998–1999 to 2002–03. Copies are held in the Library of the House.

Agriculture Council

Mr. Drew: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what was the outcome of the Agriculture Council held in Brussels on 28 September. [55927]

Mr. Nick Brown: I represented the United Kingdom at a meeting of the European Union Agriculture Council in Brussels on 28 September.

The Council held a first debate on a Commission proposal to reform the EU wine regime. I welcomed many elements in the proposal, in particular measures to redirect EU production away from its traditional reliance on market intervention and towards improved quality and competitiveness. However, I questioned the need to increase the budgetary cost of the wine regime in order to achieve those ends.

The Council also debated the impact of the crisis in Russia on EU agricultural markets, and invited the Commission to keep the position under constant scrutiny in view of the importance of the Russian market for EU agricultural exports. More generally, the Commission circulated updated market forecasts for the principal EU agricultural commodities in the period up to 2005, forecasts which will form part of the Council's consideration of proposals to reform the Common Agricultural Policy within the framework of Agenda 2000.

In the context of CAP reform, I introduced in the Council a paper prepared jointly with Italian, Swedish and Danish colleagues which proposes a mechanism and a timetable for the removal of milk quotas by 2006. We collectively called for the paper to be examined in detail as part of the on-going Agenda 2000 negotiations.

Discussion of the proposal to improve the welfare of laying hens revealed continuing differences amongst member states over the desirability of the measure, and the economic effect of the proposal if implemented. In common with several other member states, I stressed the UK view that the EU should commit itself to an eventual phasing out of the battery cage system.

The Council also took stock of the difficult economic conditions prevailing on the pigmeat market and invited the Commission to keep the situation under review. There was also an exchange of views on the incidence of BSE in Portugal in which the Commission reported that its own inspection team was currently examining the measures taken by the Portuguese administration to protect human health and combat the disease in animals.

Government Purchase Card

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what use *(a)* his Department and *(b)* its agencies are currently making of the Government Purchase Card; what savings he estimates are being achieved as a result; what plans he has to expand use of the card by his Department and its agencies; and if he will make a statement. [55169]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 19 October 1998]:* Of MAFF and its Agencies, only the Central Science Laboratory (CSL) and the Veterinary Laboratory Agency (VLA) are using the Government Purchase Card (GPC), introduced on 1 August 1998.

The core-Ministry and the VLA introduced their own pilot procurement card schemes in advance of the GPC. The VLA's was introduced in September 1996 and the

Ministry's in August 1997. The VLA migrated to the GPC in May 1998. Details of the card numbers and usage are in the table.

	MAFF	VLA	CSL
Numbers of cards	72	130	2
Numbers of transactions	3,227	8,000	17
Value of transactions	£103,000	£600,000	£18,000
Savings	£33,580	£160,000	£340

The savings figures given above are based on an estimated average savings per transaction. The figure differs from scheme to scheme, but the administrative savings, which arise from the operational benefits procurement card provides, are estimated currently to be between £10 and £20 per transaction.The use of procurement cards for low value transactions is a primary means of reducing the costs of administrative procurement and improving response times for obtaining goods and services.

Having successfully completed a year's trial the core-Ministry now plans a phased roll out of its own card subject to the completion of a full economic appraisal. The other Agencies and one or two of the Non-Departmental Public Bodies (NDPBs) were awaiting the results of the pilot schemes before deciding whether to take up the use of procurement cards. The Centre for Environment, Fisheries and Aquacultural Sciences (CEFAS) is now planning to introduce a card at the end of this financial year. On the basis of the success so far, I expect the other Agencies and the NDPBs who have approached us to be among the first new users set up as part of the phased roll out.

Civil Servants

Sir Richard Body: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what representations he has made on the representation of British nationals in senior Civil Service grades in Directorate General XIV (fisheries); and if he will make a statement. [55318]

Mr. Morley: None.

Public Bodies (Reports)

Ms Roseanna Cunningham: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the bodies within the responsibility of his Department currently required by legislation to lay a report before Parliament. [33555]

Mr. Morley *[pursuant to his reply, 12 March 1998, c. 299]:* The following bodies, for which my right hon. Friend has responsibility, are currently required by legislation to lay a report before Parliament:

Department and Executive Agency

Intervention Board

Executive Agencies

Central Science Laboratory

Centre for Environment, Fisheries and Aquaculture Science

Farming and Rural Conservation Agency

Meat Hygiene Service

Pesticides Safety Directorate

Veterinary Laboratory Agency

Veterinary Medicines Directorate

Executive Non-Departmental Public Bodies

Agricultural Wages Board

Agricultural Wages Committees

Apple and Pear Research Council

Food from Britain

Home-Grown Cereals Authority

Horticultural Development Council

Meat and Livestock Commission

Milk Development Council

Potato Industry Development Council

Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew

Sea Fish Industry Authority

Public Corporation

Covent Garden Market Authority.

Previously, the Department has advised that the Veterinary Products Committee had a statutory requirement to publish an annual report and to lay the report before Parliament. It has now been established that this is not the case.

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

Remploy

Dr. Iddon: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will make a statement on Remploy's achievements against the targets set in their 1997–98 Annual Performance Agreement. [55737]

Ms Hodge: Now that Remploy has published its Report and Accounts for 1998 and audited figures are available, I am delighted to confirm that Remploy has exceeded its 1997–98 APA targets. The targets and achievements were:

	Target	Achievement
The average number of disabled people employed by Remploy	at least 9,800	10,021
Average number of disabled people employed under the Interwork Scheme	at least 3,000	3,123
The number of disabled employees to move from Remploy factories to Interwork having been employed there for at least 1 year, or from Interwork or factories to open employment	200	225
Remploy will keep within a unit cost target (operating deficit per disabled worker) of:	£10,000	£9,726
The unit cost of Interwork to be no more than:	£4,400	£4,226
Remploy to keep within an operating deficit (including reorganisation costs) of:	£99m	£99m

Copies of Remploy's 1998 Annual Report and Accounts have been placed in the Library.

ENVIRONMENT, TRANSPORT AND THE REGIONS

Fishermen (Occupational Safety)

7. **Dr. Godman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Transport and the Regions when he last met his colleagues from other member states of the European Union, to discuss matters relating to the occupational safety of fishermen. [54331]

Ms Glenda Jackson: There has been no recent discussion with EU colleagues on the occupational safety of fishermen. A number of regulations which implement EC health and safety directives, including the Merchant and Fishing Vessel; (Health and Safety at Work) Regulations 1997, are already in force. Further regulations will be introduced later this year.

Area Cost Adjustment

12. **Mr. David Heath:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has to reform the area cost adjustment. [54337]

Ms Armstrong: We are considering a range of options for changing the area cost adjustment. We expect to announce our conclusion at the usual time around the beginning of December.

Non-departmental Public Bodies

13. **Jackie Ballard:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has to give local authorities the power and responsibility to scrutinise non-departmental public bodies. [54338]

Mr. Raynsford: On 30 July, my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister published a White Paper "Modern Local Government: In Touch with the People" which welcomed the steps taken by some councils to convene public forums to enable issues of particular local concern or interest to be aired and considered. We are keen to encourage all councils to take on this local scrutiny role but do not wish to be prescriptive about the way in which they go about doing so.

Social Housing (Tenure)

14. **Mr. Soley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has to increase flexibility of tenure in the housing association and council housing sectors. [54339]

Ms Armstrong: On 30 July 1998, *Official Report*, columns *417–18*, I announced plans to encourage more Registered Social Landlords to develop "flexible tenure" schemes which will help shared owners facing mortgage difficulties and repossession because of a change in their financial circumstances.

My Department is considering the discussion paper recently published by the Chartered Institute of Housing on a single form of tenancy for social housing.

We are also planning to simplify schemes by which tenants of local authorities and RSLs are helped into home ownership.

Estates Renewal Challenge Fund

15. **Maria Eagle:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has to replace the estates renewal challenge fund with funding mechanisms which will facilitate the transfer of housing from local authority control. [54340]

Mr. Raynsford: My right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister announced in his statement on 22 July that there would be no further rounds of the Estates Renewal Challenge Fund. Allocations already approved will, however, remain in place to enable all planned transfers to be completed.

We want authorities to take a more strategic look at how to meet the investment needs of all their housing. Where stock has a negative value and transfer is the best option, I would expect authorities to use their capital resources under the Housing Investment Programme to pay for it. Some negative value transfers may also form part of packages under the New Deal for Communities.

Sustainable Development

16. **Miss McIntosh:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Transport and the Regions what representations he has received from representatives of the business community over his Department's plans to encourage sustainable development; and if he will make a statement. [54341]

Mr. Meale: As part of the Government's "Opportunities for Change" consultation on sustainable development, my Department has also consulted separately with the business community about "Sustainable Business". We have received a great many responses from individual businesses offering constructive reactions about the many ways in which business can be encouraged to improve its performance. These have come from the different business sectors and included representations from Trade Associations who also expressed interest in collective action to improve sectoral performance and sustainability.

Rural Buffer Zones

17. **Mr. Gray:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Transport and the Regions what is his policy on the future of rural buffer zones. [54342]

Mr. Raynsford: Planning Policy Guidance note 7—"The Countryside", advises (para 4.16) that local countryside designations such as rural buffer zones should be maintained or extended only where there is good reason to believe that normal planning policies cannot provide the necessary protection. Such local designations carry less weight than national designations and development plan policies and development control policies should reflect this.

Second Homes

18. **Mr. Andrew George:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Transport and the Regions what representations he has received about the appropriate level of council tax for second homes. [54343]

Mr. Raynsford: In response to the consultation paper on local government finance, we received 40 representations on second homes. Since the election, we have also received an additional 112 representations on second homes. Of the representations received, 113 were in favour of abolition of the 50 per cent. discount and 39 were against abolition of the discount.

Buenos Aires Conference

19. **Mr. Dalyell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement on his preparations for the Buenos Aires conference on climate change. [54344]

Mr. Meacher: The Protocol we agreed in Kyoto last December was an historic turning point with developed countries taking on legally binding greenhouse gas emission reduction targets. But many issues, for example rules for the operation of flexibility mechanisms such as emissions trading, remain to be resolved. We must maintain the momentum of Kyoto in Buenos Aires by: making progress on as many issues as possible; avoiding sterile confrontation on issues not ripe for resolution; putting in place a work-plan to resolve these issues; and by involving *all* stakeholders—including business and non-governmental organisations—in delivering implementation of the Protocol.

Rent Levels

20. **Ms Moran:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Transport and the Regions what measures he intends to take to equalise rent levels between housing association and local authority housing. [54346]

Mr. Raynsford: In his statement on Housing and Regeneration Policy on 22 July, my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister said that

"no decision has yet been reached on rent policy in the longer term".

That remains the position.

Energy Efficiency

21. **Mr. Stunell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Transport and the Regions what measures he plans to encourage energy efficiency in Government Departments. [54347]

Mr. Meale: The Government are committed to an improvement in the energy efficiency of departments of 20 per cent. over 1990–91 levels by 2000, and progress will be reviewed regularly by Green Ministers under the chairmanship of my right hon. Friend the Minister for the Environment. New benchmark indicators for different building types, based on good practice in other sectors of the economy, are being developed as a further tool to help departments assess the energy efficiency of different parts of their estates and concentrate efforts where there is most scope for improvement. My Department will continue to ensure that relevant written and practical guidance is available to energy managers in the Government estate.

Local Government Finance

22. **Mr. Rammell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement on discussions he has had with the Local Government Association about local government finance. [54348]

Ms Armstrong: We are maintaining a close and effective working relationship with the Local Government Association. The Deputy Prime Minister and I, along with other Cabinet colleagues, last met them to discuss local government finance at the Central Local Partnership meeting on 21 September. I also met groupings of authorities suggested by the Association to discuss the report by the SSA sub-group on possible changes in Standard Spending Assessments. A wide range of differing interests were covered and in the light of all the evidence we will decide the way forward. We will announce our proposals, as usual, later this year.

Best-value Regimes

23. **Mr. McNulty:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Transport and the Regions when he expects a best-value regime to be implemented by local authorities. [54349]

Ms Armstrong: Primary legislation will be required to introduce the best value regime and abolish CCT for all local authorities. We have set up pilot projects to take forward best value principles prior to legislation and we have relaxed existing CCT regulations to encourage all authorities to adopt best value practices. I cannot comment on the contents of the Queen's Speech; however, the Government remain committed to introducing best value in local authorities.

"Access to the Open Countryside"

24. **Mr. Tipping:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Transport and the Regions when he expects to respond to the consultation exercise on his document "Access to the Open Countryside". [54350]

Mr. Meacher: The Government are considering carefully responses to the consultation paper, "Access to the Open Countryside in England and Wales". We shall announce our conclusions as soon as possible.

Local Government White Paper

25. **Mr. Hope:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Transport and the Regions how many responses he has received to the local government White Paper; and if he will make a statement. [54351]

Ms Armstrong: The White Paper 'Modern Local Government: In Touch with the People' was born out of a wide-ranging consultation exercise—centred on 6 papers, which prompted some 2,500 responses. As a statement of our firm plans, the White Paper does not invite specific responses but has been widely welcomed, by the Local Government Association amongst others, as an agenda for radical reform bringing councils closer to the people.

Wind Turbines

26. **Mr. Evans:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Transport and the Regions what representations he has received on the siting of wind turbines in the countryside. [54352]

Mr. Raynsford: The Department receives a small number of letters each month about the planning policy guidance on wind turbines contained in Planning Policy Guidance note 22, "Renewable Energy". Any representations on specific projects would be referred to the appropriate Government Office for the Region and the information is not held centrally.

East-west Rail Link

32. **Dr. Starkey:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what discussion his Department has had with the local consortium promoting an east-west rail link. [54362]

Mr. Prescott: The Government welcome any proposals that might contribute towards a better, more integrated transport system. Our policy of encouraging use of rail is already bearing fruit in terms of a 7 per cent. increase in passenger rail travel and a 5 per cent. increase in freight tonne kilometres last financial year. But it is important that a large, expensive proposal such as this is supported by a clear business case. My hon. Friend the Minister for Transport in London met representatives of the East-West Rail Consortium and Railtrack in February, to be briefed on their proposals. Since then, officials from my Department and OPRAF, have had several meetings with representatives of the Consortium, and discussions on the detailed business case for the project are continuing.

Cycling

33. **Mr. Mitchell:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what financial help his Department makes available to local authorities to encourage the use of cycles. [54363]

Ms Glenda Jackson: My Department works closely with local authorities in this field. In addition to co-operating with them on the development of new approaches to providing for cycling, we allocate substantial funding for cycling infrastructure improvements. £85 million were allocated to transport packages in 1998–99. Authorities are free to use on cycling as much of their package allocation as they choose. Next year we hope to be able to increase support for packages and to restore funding for minor works outside the areas covered by transport packages, thereby making available additional resources for cycling.

National Air Traffic Services

34. **Mr. Brady:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement on the future of the NATS pension scheme. [54364]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The detailed arrangements for future NATS pension arrangements are being considered urgently, as they form an important part of the development of a Public Private Partnership for the business. The Secretary of State hopes to make a statement in due course.

Ms Squire: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when he expects to announce his proposals for a public/private partnership for National Air Traffic Services Ltd; and if he will make a statement. [55988]

Dr. Reid: I have today published a consultation paper on the Government's preferred option for a public/private partnership (PPP) for National Air Traffic Services Ltd.

The safe and efficient provision of air traffic control services is rightly a matter of great public interest and, since the PPP was announced, a debate has begun on key issues such as safety, the national interest and public accountability. The Government now want to launch a structured, full and open consultation on these issues. The consultation document which I am publishing today therefore sets out a wide range of matters on which we are looking for views. Safety remains our top priority and we believe that the proposed PPP offers the opportunity to establish a structure which will strengthen safety, satisfy the public interest and the needs of aviation users while providing for the sound future of National Air Traffic Services Ltd and its employees.

I hope that all those with an interest in this subject, whatever their views on the Government's preferred option, will take the opportunity to respond to the consultation document.

Birmingham Northern Relief Road

35. **Mr. John M. Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement on progress on the Birmingham Northern Relief Road. [54365]

Dr. Reid: I am very pleased with today's High Court judgment which clears the way for implementation of the Orders for construction that were made in February. It vindicates the Government's position, showing that they acted with probity and integrity.

This new road is vital as a much needed alternative to the very heavily congested M6 and as a strategic national route.

The process of getting this road authorised under the statutory provisions has taken over 5 years. The inquiry itself took over 15 months. It is time for us to get on with the job and start construction of this much needed scheme.

Railfreight

36. **Mr. Baker:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many miles of railway track are presently in use for freight purposes only. [54366]

Ms Glenda Jackson: I am advised by Railtrack that there are currently 1,632 kilometres of freight-only track in use.

Rainworth Bypass

37. **Mr. Tipping:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when he expects construction of the Rainworth bypass, Nottinghamshire, to commence. [54367]

Dr. Reid: The Orders for the proposed bypass have yet to complete their statutory procedures. Should they be confirmed, the start of works date will be a matter for Nottinghamshire County Council.

A31

38. **Mr. Ian Bruce:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what factors led his Department to detrunk the A31-A35 trunk road in Dorset. [54368]

Dr. Reid: Factors considered in defining the core trunk road network were set out in the White Paper *A New Deal for Transport: Better for Everyone*. The proposed detrunking of non-core routes is subject to consultation with local highway authorities.

Kingskerswell Bypass

39. **Mr. Sanders:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement about the funding of the Kingskerswell bypass. [54369]

Dr. Reid: Devon County Council and Torbay Borough Council are considering the feasibility of taking forward the Kingskerswell Bypass as a local road scheme with private finance.

If a PFI proposal comes forward seeking financial support, my Department will assess the project under established arrangements for considering such proposals from local authorities.

Road Pricing

40. **Mrs. Spelman:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement on his plans for road pricing. [54370]

Dr. Reid: The Transport White Paper stated the Government's intention to introduce legislation to enable local authorities to introduce road user charges in their area to help meet their transport and other objectives. We will consult on the details shortly.

45. **Dr. Cable:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how he proposes to implement his proposals on road user pricing schemes. [54375]

Dr. Reid: We shall issue a consultation paper shortly to invite views on the detail of how schemes will be implemented and operated. Thereafter, we will work with interested local authorities to introduce pilot schemes, once the necessary enabling legislation is in place.

Transport White Paper

41. **Miss McIntosh:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when he last met representatives from motoring organisations to discuss the integrated transport White Paper. [54371]

Ms Glenda Jackson: DETR Ministers have had frequent contact with representatives from AA and RAC during the integrated transport consultation exercise and in the lead up to the publication of the Transport White Paper. The Deputy Prime Minister last met John Dawson, the Group Public Affairs Director of the Automobile Association, on 12 May 1998.

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions which organisations and individuals outside Government he met to talk about transport policy and the Transport White Paper during the three months before publication of the White Paper; and how many of these meetings were attended by employees of professional lobby consultants. [54131]

Mr. Prescott: In the three months prior to the publication of the Transport White Paper, I met with representatives of the Passenger Transport Executives, rail, bus, road and shipping interests as well as users and Non-Governmental Organisations. In addition, I had several meetings with the specially constituted White Paper Advisory Panel which I had set up to assist with the fundamental review of transport policy. The discussions and the written representations we received played an important role in informing the development of our integrated transport policy.

Channel Tunnel Rail Link

42. **Mr. Rowe:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what is his estimate of the cost per projected passenger journey of the channel tunnel rail link. [54372]

Ms Glenda Jackson: My Department has estimated that, in overall terms, taking account of travel and regeneration benefits, the new Channel Tunnel Rail Link deal provides good value for the taxpayer.

School Transport

43. **Mr. Bennett:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what progress is being made in encouraging children to walk to school. [54373]

Ms Glenda Jackson: Guidance for schools and local authorities on greener travel to school, including walking, is in preparation and we expect that the forthcoming national strategy on walking will promote walking to school. We will shortly establish the School Travel Advisory Group to oversee further work.

46. **Mr. Amess:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what recent representations he has received on the provisions in the White Paper on Integrated Transport relating to school transport. [54376]

Ms Glenda Jackson: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has received over 100 letters from members of the public on the White Paper provisions for school transport. We fully understand people's concerns. Our aim is to encourage realistic alternatives to the car for the journey to school while improving the safety and quality of life for children and for everyone.

Stations (Disabled Access)

47. **Mr. Pike:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will estimate the percentage of railway stations which have adequate disabled access. [54377]

Ms Glenda Jackson: Railtrack are currently conducting a survey of all stations which will include a review of access arrangements.

Access requirements cover many different facilities including toilets, visual and audible information and the use of colour contrast and tactile platform edging. There

are no comprehensive statistics available currently covering all these features but Railtrack estimate that some 40 per cent. of stations can currently be classified as having unassisted wheelchair access.

Railtrack will be identifying the priorities and timescales for providing adequate access at all stations. Access to stations will also be covered by Part III of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 the provisions of which will start to come into force in October next year.

Kyoto Targets

48. **Mr. Chaytor:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has to ensure that the transport sector contributes to achieving the Kyoto targets. [54378]

Ms Glenda Jackson: We are shortly to produce a consultation paper, seeking views on policy options to meet our climate change commitments. Our aim is to develop a climate change programme where all sectors, including transport, play a balanced part.

Moreover, we are already committed to a number of measures that should reduce greenhouse gas emissions from the transport sector. These include the Chancellor's announcement that fuel duty will rise by 6 per cent. a year in real terms, a new graduated system of vehicle excise duty to encourage more fuel efficient cars, setting up the Cleaner Vehicles Task Force, and supporting the European Commission's strategy for reducing CO_2 emissions from new cars. The measures contained in the Transport White Paper will also play an important role by delivering a properly integrated transport system for the UK and reducing dependence on the car.

Public Transport

49. **Mr. Canavan:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what specific measures he intends to introduce to encourage people to travel by public transport. [54379]

Ms Glenda Jackson: Our recently published White Paper on the future of transport sets a framework for truly integrated public transport systems. Our programme of carefully targeted, proper funding, better interchange facilities, reliable services, simplified fares and increased access for all, aims to win more passengers onto public transport.

Methyl Bromide

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, pursuant to his letter of 4 September to the hon. Member for Linlithgow (EE/PSO/14592/98), what consultation he has had on the effects of methyl bromide on the ozone layer, with whom, and with what results. [55540]

Mr. Meale: On 8 September 1998 we began a consultation on the European Commission's proposed new Regulation on ozone depleting substances, which includes a proposal to phase out the use of methyl bromide by 2001. The consultation ended on 1 October 1998. In total, 307 parties were consulted, including the National Farmers Union, the British Pest Control Association, flour millers and importers of commodities, all of whom expressed a particular interest in the methyl bromide proposals. To date, sixty-five responses have been received, and these are currently being analysed. Some concern has been expressed about the implications of the proposed phase out of methyl bromide and these will be taken into account as we formulate the UK's negotiating position on the new Regulation.

Traffic Growth

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, pursuant to the recent White Paper on integrated transport and roads, if it is the policy of the Government to *(a)* reduce road congestion and *(b)* to curb traffic growth; and if he will revise his Department's traffic growth forecasts. [55287]

Ms Glenda Jackson *[holding answer 19 October 1998]:* As we made clear in the White Paper, in order to tackle the congestion and pollution that are caused by road traffic we need to reduce the rate of road traffic growth. We also want to see an absolute reduction in traffic in those places and streets where the greatest environmental damage is done. The New Deal for Transport: Better for Everyone sets out how we plan to achieve these objectives through integrated transport policies acting at the national, regional and local level.

The White Paper explains that, with assistance from the Commission for Integrated Transport, we will be revising the 1997 National Road Traffic forecasts to reflect the new direction for transport provided by the New Deal.

Roads (Wiltshire)

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will list the authors of representations he has received since his announcement in July concerning his plans for *(a)* the A303(T) and *(b)* the A36(T) in Wiltshire, indicating whether the representations are for or against his proposals. [54914]

Ms Glenda Jackson *[holding answer 19 October 1998]:* Since July, we have received two representations in support of the A303 Chicklade Bottom to Mere scheme and five representations against the A303 Stonehenge cut-and-cover tunnel scheme; one other asked for technical details about the proposed tunnel construction alongside Stonehenge. There have been no representations about the A36(T). It would not be appropriate to publish the names of the authors of these representations as they have not given their permission for that.

A14

Mr. Lansley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what are his latest estimates of the degree of over-capacity usage of the A14 between Huntingdon and Cambridge. [55429]

Ms Glenda Jackson *[holding answer 19 October 1998]:* A number of factors govern the absolute capacity of a road, including the spread of peak hour usage throughout the day and the proportion of the traffic flow that is composed of heavy commercial vehicles. A measure of capacity has been produced which is called the congestion reference flow (CRF). The CRF of a section of road is estimated of the 24 hour Annual Average Daily Traffic flow (AADT = total annual traffic divided by 365) at which the carriageway is likely to be "congested" in

the peak periods of the average day. The CRF for the dual-two lane section of the A14 between Huntingdon and Cambridge has been calculated as 78,371 vehicles per day (vpd). Current average traffic flows on this section of road are up to 68,000 vpd (87% of the CRF). Traffic flows on this section of A14 are high, therefore, but not beyond its capacity in terms of the road's calculated CRF.

Catalytic Converters

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what studies his Department has initiated into the consequences of catalytic converters operating at below optimal temperatures; and if he will make a statement. [55571]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The Department's research programme has produced Transport Research Laboratory Report 270 "Environment Traffic Management: A Review of factors affecting cold start emissions". The objectives of the review were to investigate the factors affecting the definition and measurement of cold start emissions and to suggest how emissions models might better account for them. With a view to helping local authorities develop plans for local Air Quality Management Areas, where these are required under the Environment Act 1995, the Department also plans to let a two year research contract, starting early next year, aimed at assessing the effects of cold starts on parking control strategies.

Road Congestion

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has to reduce road congestion; and if he will make a statement. [54355]

Mr. Prescott: The policies I announced in my recent Integrated Transport White Paper will play a major part in reducing congestion. They will encourage the transfer of freight from road to rail, reduce the need for people to travel, offer them better transport choices and encourage more people to undertake short journeys by cycle or on foot.

Basel Convention

Helen Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement on the application of the amendment to the Basel Convention as laid down in Decision IV/9 of the Parties to the Convention. [55733]

Mr. Meale: Command Paper 4061 which sets out details of the Decision IV/9 amendment has been laid before the House.

This amendment helps to clarify which wastes will be subject to the ban on the exports of hazardous wastes to developing countries. Rules to implement the amendment within the EC have been agreed by Member States.

The amendment will enter into force for all Parties to the Basel Convention on 6 November 1998, except for those who notify the Depositary, in writing by 6 November 1998, that they are unable to accept it.

The Basel amendment represents yet another milestone in securing an environmentally sound regime for the movement of hazardous wastes. I am pleased to announce therefore that the Decision IV/9 Basel Amendment will enter into force for the UK on 6 November 1998.

Flooding (Midlands)

Ms Keeble: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will provide financial assistance to Warwickshire County Council, Stratford on Avon District Council, Worcester City Council and Northampton Borough Council under the Bellwin scheme for costs incurred following the severe flooding on the weekend of 9 to 12 April. [55736]

Ms Armstrong: Warwickshire, Worcester, Northampton and Stratford upon Avon councils are all to be given cash under the Bellwin scheme after successful applications to my Department.

I am satisfied financial assistance under the Bellwin scheme is justified in these cases given the exceptional nature of the floods and the damage they caused. Schemes will, therefore, be established under section 155 of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989. Grant will be paid to each authority to cover 85 per cent. of eligible costs above a threshold which have been incurred by the authority in dealing with the flooding.

Director of Transport Security

Mr. Pond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when he plans to publish the 1997–98 Annual Report of the Director of Transport Security. [55738]

Mr. Prescott: Copies of the report have been placed in the Library of the House.

Town and City Policies

Shona McIsaac: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how the Government intend to take forward their policies for towns and cities. [55739]

Mr. Prescott: The Environment Transport and Regional Affairs Select Committee Report on Housing (Tenth Report Session 1997–98) recommended that there should be an Urban White Paper.

I announced today that I intend to produce a White Paper on Urban Policy next year, which will be the first such paper in 20 years. This will describe the Government's policies to improve the quality of life in our towns and cities. We will look at the combined effect of a wide range of issues, with the aim of enabling communities in our towns and cities to prosper, and to tackle problems such as social exclusion. We will consider policies on, for example, housing, competitiveness, delivery of public services, regional development, planning, transport, community involvement and sustainable development. We will also link in with work being taken forward by other Departments on issues such as education, training and crime reduction—all of which are essential to enabling communities to achieve their full potential.

The Government's proposals to reform local government and to establish Regional Development Agencies will create the framework to implement our policies and achieve prosperity for our communities.

The Urban Task Force, led by Lord Rodgers, and the work undertaken by the Coalfields task force has already started the debate on urban issues. I now intend to broaden it further and engage more groups and organisations.

Of course, vibrant and attractive towns and cities complement thriving rural areas. We will separately be paying special attention to the specific issues affecting rural areas and will be making an announcement on this shortly.

Heavy Goods Vehicles

Mr. Gapes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what was the outcome of the recent consultation on a scheme for the impounding of illegally operated heavy goods vehicles. [55774]

Dr. Reid: The consultation period ended on 29 May. There were 36 responses. These showed overwhelming support for our proposals. We are now working up a comprehensive detention scheme with the aim of bringing it into effect at the earliest available opportunity. This will require primary legislation.

Transport Council

Mr. Alan Keen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement on the outcome of the Transport Council held in Luxembourg on 1 October. [55926]

Dr. Reid: The Transport Council met in Luxembourg on 1 October. I represented the United Kingdom.

The Council agreed common positions on two legislative proposals, and held useful discussions on some other important areas of transport policy.

In land transport, the Council reached a common position on a directive which will facilitate the free movement of transportable pressure equipment within the Community. The text which was agreed met a UK concern that the industry itself should be able to continue to carry out inspections of this type of equipment, under the necessary supervision.

The Commission reported on the recent Swiss referendum on lorry charges. The referendum approved a law allowing the Swiss Government to impose Alpine transit charges, which would be higher than those foreseen by the draft EC/Switzerland transport agreement. The Commission now hoped that agreement could be reached on the EC/Switzerland agreement at the next Transport Council.

There was also discussion of the directive on charging of heavy goods vehicles for the use of certain infrastructures (the Eurovignette).

The Council debated the directive amending Community rules on the promotion of combined transport. This would require reduced taxes for lorries engaged in combined transport and would permit lorries above current Community weight limits to carry out such operations. There was discussion of the need for careful definition of combined transport, if the proposal were to lead to a real incentive to reduce road mileage. The proposal will continue to be examined with a view to reaching agreement at the next Transport Council.

The Commission reported that, following the break-down of negotiations between employers and employees on working time in road transport, it would propose the extension of the working time Directive to non-mobile workers. The latter would cover own-account operators and self-employed drivers.

The Commission presented its new proposals on rail access and charging rules. Member States generally welcomed the proposals, which aim to contribute to the revitalisation of the Community's railways by clarifying the regulatory framework for the provision of rail services. The Presidency concluded that the Council would look again at these proposals at its next meeting.

In air transport, the Council reached a common position on a regulation to restrict the use of older aircraft which have been modified ("hush-kitted") to meet the latest noise regulations, but which produce more noise than newer aircraft. The United Kingdom expressed its disappointment at the suspension of Gibraltar from the scope of this regulation, especially as Gibraltar is covered by existing EU legislation on aircraft noise. The UK reluctantly agreed to suspension on this occasion, to allow progress on this measure, which is important to all Member States.

The Council noted progress on a Commission proposal to amend the rules on compensation for passengers denied boarding on overbooked flights. The UK made it clear that it supports this proposal and that it would oppose the inclusion of clauses suspending application to Gibraltar. The Presidency said that it would attempt to secure agreement on the regulation at the next Transport Council and urged rapid progress.

Following further discussion of civil aviation relations between the EC and the US, the Presidency said that the proposal to give the Commission a mandate to negotiate market access would continue to be examined, in the hope of reaching a conclusion at the next Council.

The Italian Minister requested a discussion of the Commission's Decision that the decree requiring movement of airlines' operations to the new Milan Malpensa airport was discriminatory and illegal. Minister agreed that the matter should be resolved bilaterally between the Commission and Italy.

Road Traffic Reduction Act 1997

Mrs. Gilroy: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has to implement the Road Traffic Reduction Act 1997; and if he will make a statement. [55928]

Dr. Reid: It is clear that the setting of road traffic reduction targets will be an integral part of the process of drawing up local transport strategies. Local transport plans are a centrepiece of the Government's transport proposals and it is vital that we get implementation right. We have listened to the Local Government Association and local authority concerns about the difficulty of producing robust local transport plans by July 1999. We

will therefore invite local highway authorities to produce 'provisional' 5-year plans by July 1999, covering the period 2000/01–2004/05. These would be the basis for allocating resources for 2000/01 only. Authorities would then roll their plans on by one year and submit 'full' plans for 2001/02–2005/06 in July 2000, when resources would be allocated across the plan period.

Statutory reports produced under the provisions of the Road Traffic Reduction Act 1997 will therefore be submitted in July 2000, as part of the first round of full local transport plans. We will expect authorities to submit non-statutory 'interim' road traffic reduction reports in July 1999, as part of the provisional plans.

The London Boroughs are not covered by the White Paper requirement to produce local transport plans, but will be separately required to produce local implementation plans which are in keeping with the Mayor's integrated transport strategy for London. We are taking this forward separately.

The Road Traffic Reduction (National Targets) Act 1998 requires the Government to consider the setting of national targets. We will therefore require a greater degree of standardisation from local authorities in the measurement of existing traffic levels and forecasts—in order that we can assess the national implications. We believe this can be done by building on the data already collected for national surveys. It will take some time to get an assessment framework in place. This is something we would like to take forward jointly with local authorities under the auspices of the Transport Statistics Liaison Group. The existing draft guidance on the Road Traffic Reduction Act 1997 will be revised in the light of this work. The Government have also undertaken that they will produce a first report to Parliament on the issue of national traffic targets by the end of 1999 (which will also need to reflect the views of the Commission for Integrated Transport, when appointed). To achieve this, they will need to draw on existing sources of information together with any useful inputs from local authorities from their 1999 plans, accepting that at this stage the material will not be in a standardised format.

National Air Quality Strategy

Mr. Leslie: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when the current review of the National Air Quality Strategy will be completed. [56010]

Mr. Meacher: My hon. Friend the then Under-Secretary of State announced on 23 June 1998, *Official Report*, columns *431–32*, that the review of the National Air Quality Strategy, originally planned for 1999, would now be completed by the end of this year, to look at the prospects of delivering cleaner air more quickly. I can confirm that we are on course to meet this and we aim to publish our proposals to amend the Strategy for consultation in the New Year.

Environment Council

Mr. Singh: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement on the outcome of the Environment Council on 6 October. [56011]

Mr. Meacher: I represented the United Kingdom at the Environment Council which took place in Luxembourg on 6 October.

The Council agreed Conclusions which prepare the Community's negotiating position for the Fourth Conference of the Parties to the UN Framework on Convention on Climate Change taking place in Buenos Aires on 2–13 November. Through Conclusions, the Council also endorsed the commitment by the European Car Makers Association (ACEA) to reduce carbon dioxide emissions from new cars. This agreement between the Commission and ACEA will cut carbon dioxide emissions from new cars by 25 per cent. by 2008 and play a considerable role in reducing greenhouse gas emission in the European Union. Ministers also discussed for the first time two proposals which complement that agreement. These will require the monitoring of carbon dioxide emissions from new cars and similarly provide a scheme for labelling the fuel economy performance.

First ministerial discussions were held on a number of other important dossiers. I gave general support to the directive concerning end of life vehicles whilst stressing that Member States should be given reasonable flexibility in implementation. A brief initial discussion was also held on the Commission proposal for a new Regulation introducing stricter controls on substances that deplete the ozone layer, which the UK supports in broad terms. The Council also reached agreement on a Resolution on Environment and Employment.

The Council noted the progress of discussions in a working group on directive proposals to reduce emissions from heavy goods vehicles and to revise the proposal controlling the deliberate release of genetically modified organisms. These will return to the Council in December. Informal discussions were held over lunch on the environmental implications of Community enlargement and on the integration of environmental objectives into other policy areas.

East Midlands National Forest

Mr. Reed: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when he will report on the National Forest Company's progress in creating the National Forest in the East Midlands. [55734]

Mr. Meale: I have arranged for copies of the National Forest Company's Annual Report and Accounts for 1997–98 to be placed in the House Libraries.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Equal Rights

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) if equality is one of the rights issues which will be subject to continuing consultations between the Irish Government and Her Majesty's Government under the proposed British Irish Governmental Council; [55524]

(2) if the proposed Northern Ireland Assembly and the United Kingdom Parliament will have concurrent responsibility for legislating on equality issues following the enactment of the Northern Ireland Bill; [55526]

(3) if equality is *(a)* transferred, *(b)* reserved or *(c)* excepted matter under the proposals contained in the Northern Ireland Bill; [55523]

(4) in what areas concerning equality the proposed Northern Ireland Assembly will be able to legislate. [55525]

Mr. McFall *[holding answer 19 October 1998]:* Current legislation on fair employment, sex discrimination, race relations and disability discrimination in Northern Ireland is a transferred matter within the responsibility of Northern Ireland Departments and will remain so in accordance with paragraph 3 of the Strand One section of the Good Friday Agreement. The Government intend that the provisions in the Northern Ireland Bill establishing a unified Quality Commission and a statutory obligation to have due regard to the promotion of equality of opportunity will be reserved matters on which the Assembly will be able to legislate only with the consent of the Secretary of State, and subject to Parliamentary control. The Government propose to bring forward amendments in the course of the Parliamentary passage of the Bill to this effect. Equality issues may be discussed in the British Irish Intergovernmental Conference insofar as they remain within the responsibility of Her Majesty's Government, but it is preferable that developments in policy on equality should arise from agreement between elected representatives in Northern Ireland to the extent that this can be achieved.

Anti-terrorist Legislation

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what consultations she has held with *(a)* the RUC, *(b)* the police in Great Britain, *(c)* civil liberties organisations, *(d)* the Irish Government, *(e)* members of the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee, *(f)* other hon. Members and *(g)* the United States Government, concerning the new anti-terrorist legislation. [55350]

Mr. Ingram: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply given to him on 19 October 1998, *Official Report*, column *934*, by my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary.

School Applications

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many new applications there were for places at *(a)* Comber High School, *(b)* Movilla High School, *(c)* Regent House Grammar School and *(d)* Saintfield High School in the academic year beginning September 1998; and how many were unsuccessful. [55355]

Mr. McFall: The information requested is set out in the table:

1998–99 school year

	Number of applications received	*Number of applications refused*
Comber High School	76	—
Movilla High School	193	13
Regent House School	293	67
Saintfield High School	121	56

Written Answers to Questions

Wednesday 21 October 1998

ENVIRONMENT, TRANSPORT AND THE REGIONS

Detrunking Roads

44. **Mr. Chope:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what representations he has received in response to his proposals for detrunking trunk roads. [54374]

Dr. Reid: We have received representations seeking clarification of the detrunking proposals, in particular resource transfers and timing. Concern has been expressed about detrunking certain routes, but we have also had some informal indications from local highway authorities of a willingness to take over routes proposed for detrunking. Officials have recently held constructive discussions with the Local Government Association about the proposals and there will be further consultations with the Association and individual local highway authorities.

Communication Masts

Jane Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has to ensure that planning permission is required from a local authority to erect *(a)* a radio and *(b)* a mobile phone mast under 15 metres high. [55657]

Mr. Raynsford: The Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) Order 1995 grants a general planning permission for certain telecommunications masts providing that

- the mast is erected by a telecommunications code system operator licensed by the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry under the Telecommunications Act 1984;
- the mast does not exceed 15m in height;
- the mast is not erected in a National Park, Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, conservation area, or the Broads; and
- the mast is not refused prior approval by the local planning authority within the period allowed under the Order. The authority must be given the opportunity to say whether they wish to approve, within 28 days, details of the mast's siting and appearance. The authority may refuse approval if they consider there to be a serious threat to amenity.

A full application for planning permission is normally required for any mast which does not meet these criteria. We have recently consulted on a proposal to make masts erected within a site of special scientific interest subject to a full planning application and are currently considering the responses received. Apart from this proposal, we have no plans to extend the current requirements for full applications for planning permission for telecommunications masts.

Country Landowners Association

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will request the Countryside Commission to make it a condition of future grant aid to the CLA in respect of access to the countryside that the new access land is posted on the CLA's website. [55412]

Mr. Meacher: Publicity for new access opportunities is an essential element in opening up the countryside for public enjoyment. The Countryside Commission recognises the importance of publicity—through a range of media—and I am asking them to take this into account when setting grant conditions. Access land identified through the Country Landowners Association (CLA) Access 2000 scheme is already being posted on to the CLA's website.

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what steps he has taken to verify independently the nature and extent of the new public access to the countryside offered by the CLA under its Access 2000 scheme. [55417]

Mr. Meacher: None. The register on the CLA's website contains many details of the access involved and the CLA is responsible for the accuracy. We would expect it to verify information before it is made public on a website.

House Repossessions

Mr. Wyatt: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions in how many cases where income support was paid on interest payments on mortgages houses were repossessed by the mortgage lender in the last year for which figures are available. [55662]

Mr. Raynsford: This information is not available.

Rail Freight

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what proposals he has to promote piggy-back rail freight services in the West Midlands; and if he will make a statement. [55600]

Ms Glenda Jackson: Railtrack has for some time been considering an upgrade of the west coast main line to accommodate "piggyback" rail freight. The project would be likely to require substantial Government grant. Railtrack has not yet made an application.

Greater London Authority

Mr. Fitzpatrick: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he has decided which of the seven locations currently being considered will provide accommodation for the Greater London Authority; and if he will make a statement. [56048]

Mr. Raynsford: Following a detailed assessment of the initial proposals for our seven short-listed buildings and sites we have selected two first-class options to study further. These are:

- London Bridge City, SE1—a new building to be constructed on the site between Tower Bridge and London Bridge on the South Bank of the River Thames; and
- Victoria House in Bloomsbury Square, WC1—a major refurbishment of an existing building first constructed in the 1920s.

There was keen competition among all the short-listed teams to produce high quality ideas for housing the Mayor and Assembly in London. The architects associated with the two chosen projects—Will Alsop of Alsop and Stormer for Victoria House and Sir Norman Foster of Foster Associates for London Bridge City—are leading British architects with international reputations for innovation and excellence. I am confident that, with the teams associated with these two options, we will be able to ensure that the proposed new Greater London Authority is housed in a landmark building worthy of its status and one of which Londoners can be proud.

I would like to thank all those Londoners who took the time to visit the exhibition at Oxo Tower Wharf where the ideas for the seven short-listed locations were on display. Nearly 1,000 people called in and the views expressed were carefully considered before coming to a decision. In fact, the two options I have chosen to take forward were the people's choice as well. Other factors such as finance, design, location and technical feasibility were also taken into account.

The next step will be to work with the teams from the two selected options and with our expert advisers to explore the ideas in greater detail and see how well they will meet the needs of the new Greater London Authority. We also want these buildings to contribute to their local area and intend to work closely with the local authorities to ensure that this happens. I expect to announce a final decision in the new year.

WALES

Drug and Alcohol Rehabilitation

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the drug and alcohol rehabilitation services in Gwynedd which are funded in *(a)* part and *(b)* whole by his Department. [55597]

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: In the current financial year the Department is providing funding, under the Department's grant scheme for residential services providing care for drug and alcohol misusers, to Cyngor Alcohol Information Services (CAIS) towards the core costs of the Ty'n Rodyn residential unit at Lower Penrallt, Glanrafon Hill, Bangor, Gwynedd.

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what steps his Department is taking to improve drug and alcohol rehabilitation services in Wales. [55599]

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: One of the aims of the Welsh drug and alcohol strategy "Forward Together" is to improve the effectiveness of treatment and rehabilitation services for those who misuse. The Welsh Drug and Alcohol Unit (WDAU), which works to and is funded by the Department, provides technical advice and support to those in the field including drug and alcohol rehabilitation services in Wales.

As part of their contract the WDAU has produced a Directory of Service Providers in Wales to ensure that commissioners are aware of the range of services available within localities. Guidance has also been produced for health and social service commissioners on the purchasing of drug and alcohol treatment services. The Directory and the Guidance have been given a wide distribution in Wales.

Earlier this year the Department commissioned a review of the purchasing requirements for, and the provision of, residential and community services in Wales for people with drug and alcohol problems. The final report has recently been produced and the Department is considering how its grant scheme for residential services providing care for drug and alcohol misusers can best be utilised to support residential treatment and rehabilitation units.

Waiting Lists

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many people in Wales had been on hospital waiting lists for over one year at the latest available date. [55619]

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: At 31 August 1998, some 9,573 residents in Wales had been on hospital waiting lists for over 1 year for treatment as an in-patient or daycase.

Hill Farming

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what recent assessment he has made of the effect of current hill farming incomes on the rural Welsh economy. [55595]

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: Welsh Office officials are currently preparing income forecasts for hill farming as part of the annual review of economic conditions in the hills and uplands. This is an exercise to which we attach great importance. An assessment of the impact of recent trends in farm income on rural employment will also be made.

Agriculture is estimated to contribute directly about 8 per cent. to total employment in the Less Favoured Areas (LFA). Agriculture also indirectly supports jobs in other industries; and published studies suggest that in the LFA every 10 full-time jobs in agriculture support approximately a further four jobs in related industries.

Homelessness

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what steps the Welsh Office has undertaken in the past year to reduce homelessness in Wales. [55594]

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: We have made regulations giving local authorities powers to allocate permanent accommodation to homeless people; we have assisted various voluntary bodies concerned with preventing and alleviating homelessness and rough sleeping; we have seconded an officer from the voluntary sector to advise local authorities on measures to deal with rough sleeping.

Our other housing programmes are designed to increase the supply and quality of accommodation which will help reduce homelessness pressure.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Refreshment Prices

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Chairman of the Catering Committee by what formula, and to what extent, the

notional costs of *(a)* services, *(b)* rents and *(c)* rates are reflected in the prices of restaurants, cafés, bars and banqueting suites in the House of Commons. [55613]

Mr. Dennis Turner *[holding answer 19 October 1998]:* The House of Commons votes do not presently allocate costs to individual Departments of the House, although the introduction of Resource Accounting and Budgeting in 1999 will lead to a greater degree of transparency of such costs in the future. Under the present arrangements, the Refreshment Department has a target to achieve an overall operating surplus of 5 per cent. on its trading account, but there is no direct linkage between the prices charged to customers using the Department's facilities and the costs (notional or actual) of common services, rents or rates.

I shall ensure that a copy of the published Refreshment Department Trading Account for 1997–98 is sent to my hon. Friend. He will wish to note that the Department made an operating surplus of £445,476 (10.6 per cent. of turnover). Consequently, a sum of £462.429 will be transferred from the Refreshment Department trading account to the House of Commons Administration Vote in the present financial year for ultimate return to HM Treasury.

PRESIDENT OF THE COUNCIL

Millennium Compliance

Maria Eagle: To ask the President of the Council what progress has been made in ensuring millennium compliance in central Government's systems and equipment and in its suppliers. [54713]

Mrs. Beckett: The results of the last quarterly review, which I announced on 9 September 1998, showed that good progress is being made by Departments and agencies in tackling the year 2000 problem. Work on correcting priority, business-critical, systems is particularly well advanced. Over half of the returns reported that 50 per cent. or more of the correction work has been completed and in a fifth of cases this figure was as high as 90 per cent. Departments and agencies are also seeking assurances from suppliers that they will be able to continue to provide key products and services into the next century.

The individual returns from the last quarterly review are available in the Library of the House together with my statement, a copy of which I sent to all hon. Members on 9 September.

DEFENCE

Trainer Aircraft

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 3 July 1998, *Official Report*, column *310*, what options his Department has to extend the contract for the Grob 115D aircraft at the end of the contract period. [50432]

Mr. Doug Henderson: Negotiations continue with the preferred bidder for the Royal Air Forces Light Aircraft Flying Task. The intention is to recompete the requirement at the end of the ten-year contract and there are consequently no plans to include options for extending the contract.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 3 July 1998, *Official Report*, column *310*, what assessment he has made of the effective working life of the Grob 115D aircraft. [50433]

Mr. Doug Henderson: The Grob 115D is certified for 15,000 flying hours for the type of flying operations the RAF plans to undertake, subject to normal maintenance inspections. Based on these criteria, and assuming a constant usage rate, the RAF assesses the working life of the aircraft to be around 30 years.

Commercial Exploitation Levies

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 31 July 1998, *Official Report*, column *720*, to the hon. Member for Cynon Valley (Ann Clwyd), for what products his Department received commercial exploitation levies in each of the last three years; and what were the values of the levies. [55643]

Mr. Spellar *[holding answer 19 October 1998]:* This information is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Chlorine

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what research has been carried out by the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment (Porton Down) to investigate whether short-term exposure to chlorine can cause long-term illnesses; when this research was carried out; and what were the results. [55331]

Mr. Doug Henderson: This is a matter for the Chief Executive of the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency. I have asked the Chief Executive to write to my hon. Friend.

Letter from John Chisholm to Mr. Ken Livingstone, dated 21 October 1998:

I have been asked to reply to your question about research into possible long term health effects from short term exposure to chlorine.

I informed you in my letter of 21 July, printed in the Official Report Col 469 dated 21 July, that DERA's Chemical and Biological Defence sector (CBD) had not carried out any research into possible long term effects of chlorine. This is still the case.

My earlier letter also explained that CBD is aware of the general toxicology and health effects of chlorine gas, as reported in the open literature, particularly in relation to exposure occurring through industrial accidents.

I hope this is helpful.

CBDE Technical Papers

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many series of technical papers have been produced by the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment (Porton Down) since 1990; and what are the titles of each series. [55319]

Mr. Spellar: This is a matter for the Chief Executive of the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency. I have asked the Chief Executive to write to my hon. Friend.

Letter from Mr. John Chisholm to Mr. Ken Livingstone, dated 21 October 1998:

I have been asked to reply to your question about the number and titles of series of technical papers produced by DERA's Chemical and Biological Defence sector (CBD) since 1990.

Since 1990 CBD has produced 8 series of internal reports, the titles of which are as follows:

Field Trial Reports
Field Trial Programmes
Operational Granby Reports
CBD Reports
Technical Papers
Technical Notes
Technical Memoranda
DERA Reports

I hope this is helpful.

Royal Tournament

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what compensation payments have been made as a result of injuries incurred by military personnel participating in the Royal Tournament in each of the last five years. [55695]

Mr. George Robertson: Only one compensation payment has been made by my Department to military personnel as a result of injuries sustained while participating in the Royal Tournament in the last five years.

TREASURY

Monetary Union

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer which current powers of the Bank of England to make regulations, inspect or supervise, control credit limits and permit companies to operate as banks in the United Kingdom would, in the event of full adherence to monetary union, be within the authority of or subject to limits set by the European Central Bank. [55691]

Ms Hewitt: The responsibilities of central banks in Stage Three of economic and monetary union are described in Articles 107 and 108 of the Treaty and in the ESCB Statute (Protocol No. 3 to the Treaty). If the UK joined EMU, national legislation, including the statutes of the Bank of England, would have to be made compatible with the Treaty and the Statute.

In the UK, responsibility for the authorisation and supervision of banks was transferred from the Bank of England to the Financial Services Authority by the Bank of England Act 1998. The Treaty does not assign to the ECB a direct role in the prudential supervision of credit institutions which remains primarily the responsibility of individual Member States. Any extension of the ECB's role in this area would require the unanimous approval of all Member States under Article 105(6) of the Treaty.

Were the UK to join the single currency, UK banks' holdings of minimum reserves with the Bank of England would need to be compatible with the requirements imposed by the ECB under Article 19 of the ESCB Statute at that time.

European Community Budgets

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer in respect of the Transfer of Appropriations No. 16/98 Non Compulsory Expenditure (SEC 1998) 1062 final concerning Section III (Commission Parts A and B), agreed by the Council of Finance Ministers, what are the sums transferred in sterling, the former purpose of those sums and the purposes to which those sums will now be devoted; at which meeting of the ECOFIN Council such transfers were agreed, and which Treasury Minister was present; and if the Government will request the President of the Council when conveying such approval in future to include the original purpose and new purpose to which sums are being devoted in all public documents related thereto. [55694]

Ms Hewitt: This transfers concerns 450,000 ecus (£300,040 at the rate of £1 = 1.4998 ecu which is set for UK VAT and Fourth Resource contributions to the 1998 European Community Budget). This sum is to be transferred from the reserve budget to the Translation Centre for the Bodies of the European Union. Further details will be found in an explanatory memorandum which is being submitted by HM Treasury to the Select Committee on European Legislation. As a rule, the Council adopts its position on transfer proposals at the first convenient Council meeting following consideration in the Council's Committee of Permanent Representatives. This may not necessarily be a meeting of ECOFIN. Generally speaking, the President of the Council, in conveying approval to a transfer, refers to the original and new purpose to which sums are being devoted.

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer by what means transfers of appropriation from one purpose to another within the budget of the European Community are authorised and published; where the public may obtain information concerning such changes and the amounts involved; and if he will list those approved so far in the current financial year, together with details for each. [55692]

Ms Hewitt: The European Commission may make proposals to the budgetary authority (the Council of Ministers and the European Parliament) for the transfer of appropriations between chapters of each EC budget section. In the case of transfers relating to expenditure resulting from Treaties (compulsory expenditure), it is the Council, after consulting the European Parliament, which decides whether or not to approve the Commission's proposal. In the case of transfers relating to other expenditure (non-compulsory expenditure) the roles of the Council and the European Parliament are reversed. The full procedure is set out in Article 26 of the EC's Financial Regulation of 21 December 1977, a copy of which will be placed in the Commons Library. The following list details of transfers that have been proposed so far this year. All transfer proposals are subject to Parliamentary scrutiny, however, and further details may be found in the relevant explanatory memorandum or FCO cover note submitted on each transfer proposal to the Select Committee on European Legislation by the Treasury.

Members of the public may obtain information on transfers from the published reports of the Select Committee on the European Legislation or directly from the offices of the European Commission.

EC Budget 1998: Transfers

Transfer no.	Date of proposal	Document no.	Amount (million ecu) Commitments	Payments	Subject	Transfer from
1	29 January 1998	SEC(1998)153	23.1	17.1	Information and communication	Reserve
2	20 May 1998	SEC(1998)888	8	7	Information and communication	Reserve
3	25 February 1998	SEC(1998)347	0.171		Economic and Social Committee/Committee of the Regions	Reserve
4	1 April 1998	SEC(1998)560	45	38	Assistance to economic reform and recovery in the New Independent States and Mongolia	Reserve
5	2 April 1998	SEC(1998)572	94	0	Measures to accompany the reforms to the economic and social structures in the Mediterranean non-member countries	Reserve
6	29 May 1998	SEC(1998)923	30	24	Yugoslavia	Reserve
7	20 May 1998	SEC(1998)908	10.1	6.55	EU co-operation with the countries of Central and Eastern Europe and the New Independent States	Reserve
8	14 May 1998	SEC(1998)811	245.5		Loan Guarantee Fund	Loan Guarantee Reserve
9	13 May 1998	SEC(1998)809	0.7 2	0.5	European Agency for Safety and Health at Work Drugs Agency	Reserve
10	19 June 1998	SEC(1998)883	2		Administration	Reserve
11	3 June 1998	SEC(1998)948	4.4		Economic and Social Committee/Committee of the Regions	Reserve
12	4 June 1998	SEC(1998)947	2.195		European Court of Justice	Reserve
13	11 June 1998	SEC(1998)1022	4	3	Justice & Home affairs	Reserve
14	10 June 1998	SEC(1998)1023	15	15	Korean Peninsula Energy Development Organisation	Reserve
15	19 June 1998	SEC(1998)1056	0	3.25	International Fisheries Agreements	Reserve
16	19 June 1998	SEC(1998)1962	0.45		Management of resources	Reserve
17	19 June 1998	SEC(1998)1063	1	0.5	Safety at work	Reserve
18	26 June 1998	SEC(1998)1101	5.59	13.58	Staff and administrative expenditure of EC delegations	
19	5 August 1998	SEC(1998)1363		3.8	Disarmament and prevention of conflicts	Financial protocols with Malta and Cyprus
20	23 June 1998	SEC(1998)1229	50	50	Contribution to European Bank for Reconstruction and Development for Chernobyl Shelter fund	Reserve
21	25 June 1998	SEC(1998)1230	11	0	Energy policy	Reserve
22	16 September 1998	SEC(1998)1407	2.4 (non-difference)		Postal charges and telecommunications	Reserve
23	10 July 1998	SEC(1998)1231		0.26	Interinstitutional co-operation	Staff in active employment
24	15 July 1998	SEC(1998)1262	150	100	Humanitarian aid	Emergency aid reserve
25	9 September 1998	SEC(1998)1525	3	2	New Transatlantic agenda	Reserve
26	9 September 1998	SEC(1998)1498	1.1 (non-difference)		Operation of radio and television studios and audiovisual equipment	Reserve

EC Budget 1998: Transfers

Transfer no.	Date of proposal	Document no.	Amount (million ecu) Commitments	Payments	Subject	Transfer from
27	9 September 1998	SEC(1998)1513	0	8	Support for democracy in central and eastern Europe	Co-operation with the republics formerly part of Yugoslavia
28	16 September 1998	SEC(1998)1544	0	810	European Agricultural Guidance and Guarantee Fund (EAGGF) Guarantee Section (Arable crops, sugar, sheepmeat and goatmeat, refunds on certain goods obtained by processing agricultural products)	EAGGF Guarantee Section (Fruit and vegetables vine products, milk and milk products, beef/veal, pigmeat, other measures)
29	11 September 1998	SEC(1998)1528	0.95 (non-difference)		Court of Justice—movable property and associated costs	Provisional appropriations
30	28 September 1998	SEC(1998)1616	5 (non-difference)		Publishing	Reserve
31	18 September 1998	SEC(1998)1552	0.4 (non-difference)		Meetings of the Committee of the Regions (COR)	COR joint interpreting service, publications, basic salaries, family and expatriation allowances

Euro

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if euro notes and coinage, irrespective of the issuing national central bank, will be legal tender in all member states of the European Union. [55680]

Ms Hewitt: In EMU, all euro bank notes issued by the European Central Bank (ECB) and the national central banks of participating member states will be legal tender in all member states which participate in EMU. Similarly, all euro coins issued by participating member states and complying with the denominations and technical specifications adopted by the Council in accordance with Article 105a(2) of the Treaty, will be legal tender in the participating member states.

Registration Records

Mr. Stunell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what steps he plans to take to improve access to registration records; [55666]

(2) what plans he has to reform the system of access to civil registration records; and if he will make a statement. [55667]

Ms Hewitt: The Registration Acts are quite specific as to the means of access to all the records of births, deaths and marriages. The Acts allow members of the public to search the indexes in order to identify the entries they are looking for and to obtain certified copies (certificates) on payment of the appropriate statutory fees. The Registrar General has no powers to make available or disclose registration information in any other way,

It is widely acknowledged that the present arrangements, whereby there is no right to browse through individual records and extract information, are unnecessarily restrictive. The Registrar General is reconsidering the proposals in the 1990 White Paper "Registration: proposals for change" (Cm 939) about access to registration records. He is preparing an options paper for the Government to consider. This should be ready by the end of the year.

Pre-Budget Report

Mr. Caplin: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he proposes to publish the pre-Budget report. [56231]

Mr. Gordon Brown: On 3 November.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Coal

Mr. Brake: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if she will make a statement on the extent of blending of deep-mined and open-cast coal at power stations. [49261]

Mr. Battle: The mix of deep-mined and open-cast used in power stations is a commercial matter for each private sector generator.

The open-cast mining of coal itself is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions.

Oil and Gas Industry

Mr. Dafis: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if she will place in the Library copies of correspondence her Department has received in the last six months from the European Commission concerning the implementation of the Environmental Impact Assessment Directive as it affects the offshore oil and gas industry. [50633]

Mr. Battle: The correspondence referred to is regarded as confidential by both the Commission and the Department. It forms part of a negotiation over complex

issues, and it may harm the chances of reaching a satisfactory outcome to the negotiations if the position of either party is made public.

Inward Investment

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will list inward investments in the UK manufacturing sector over £1 million in each of the last three years, indicating the nation from which the investment came, the area of the United Kingdom in which it was made, and the grants made by the Government in respect of each investment; and if he will list those investments which have fallen short of the amount indicated to the Government by 30 September or as much of such information as is readily available to him. [55497]

Mrs. Roche: Comprehensive information on all the financial packages available to inward investors is not held centrally and to provide a detailed list would involve disproportionate costs. However, a list of internationally mobile inward investors in the manufacturing sector whose investment was greater than £1 million and who were offered regional selective assistance, or in Northern Ireland selective financial assistance, and where some payment of grant has been made, is as follows. There will, of course, have been many other inward investment projects in the manufacturing sector which did not receive regional selective assistance.

Projects may be revised for a variety of reasons and the amount of grant, which is paid in stages against progress on capital investment and jobs, may be varied accordingly. The majority of projects receiving offers over the last three years are still in progress. Details of any changes are commercially confidential unless they involve public announcements of complete closure.

Company	*Country of Origin*	*Grant Offered (£000)*	*Area*
1995–96			
Bi-Link Metal Specialities (UK) Ltd.	USA	1,500	Scotland
Motorola Ltd.	USA	7,000	Scotland
Delta Textiles (London) Ltd.	Israel	350	Scotland
Barr & Stroud Ltd.	France	2,795	Scotland
Forbo-Nairn Ltd.	Switzerland	2,700	Scotland
Lexmark International Inc.	USA	8,500	Scotland
Shin-Etsu Handotai Europe Ltd.	Japan	4,000	Scotland
Bray Valves & Controls (UK) Ltd.	USA	550	Scotland
H. J. Heinz Co. Ltd.	USA	990	London
Chartex International PLC	USA	480	London
Printpack Europe Ltd.	USA	400	Merseyside
Mackie Automotive Systems (UK) Ltd.	Canada	750	Merseyside
Freudenberg Technical Products LP	Germany	940	North East
Neyr Plastiques	France	950	North East
Procter & Gamble (Health & Beauty)	USA	415	North East
Valeo Security Systems Ltd.	France	600	North East
Schur Flexible UK Ltd.	Denmark	400	North East
TRW Automotive Systems Ltd.	USA	2,100	North East
Siemens PLC	Germany	24,985	North East
Edbro PLC	France	225	North West
Bayex Ltd.	France	500	North West
Photronics (UK) Ltd.	USA	1,800	North West
Cohnen GBR	Germany	245	South East
Nortel Ltd.	Canada	5,000	South West
AVX Ltd.	Japan	825	South West
Pall Europe Ltd.	USA	950	South West
Rotometrics International Ltd.	USA	500	West Midlands
Callow & Maddox Bros. Ltd.	USA	900	West Midlands
Magneti Marelli UK Ltd.	Italy	3,500	West Midlands
Metabrasive Ltd.	France	700	West Midlands
Ishida (Europe) Ltd.	Japan	950	West Midlands
Coveton (Manuf) Ltd.	Germany	65	West Midlands
Rockwell Light Vehicle Sysm (UK) Ltd.	USA	740	West Midlands
GE Aircraft Engine Services Ltd.	USA	7,000	Wales
Nippon Electric Glass (UK) Ltd.	Japan	4,500	Wales
Flextronics International Ltd.	Singapore	1,000	Wales
Nimbus Manuf (UK) Ltd.	USA	590	Wales
ITT Automotive UK Ltd.	USA	3,100	Wales
Owens Corning Fiberglas (GB) Ltd.	USA	800	Wales
Lemforder Nacam Ltd.	Germany	500	Wales
Big Batteries Ltd.	USA	1,700	Wales
BP Oil Llandarcy Refinery Ltd.	Belgium	1,000	Wales
Speywood Biopharm Ltd.	France	260	Wales
Diaplastics (UK) Ltd.	Japan	1,000	Wales
NMC (UK) Ltd.	Belgium	120	Wales
Ford Motor Co. Ltd.	USA	354	Wales
Hoya Lens UK Ltd.	Japan	1,800	Wales
Tap Manuf Ltd.	Japan	1,500	Wales
Hitachi Home Electronics Europe Ltd.	Japan	2,000	Wales

Company	Country of Origin	Grant Offered (£000)	Area
Renner Powder Metallurgy Ltd.	Germany	340	York/Humb
Polycarb Ltd.	Israel	960	York/Humb
Short Brothers PLC	Canada	5,000	Northern Ireland
Short Brothers PLC	Canada	1,295	Northern Ireland
Delwyn Enterprises Ltd.	France	282	Northern Ireland
Fujitsu Telecom Europe Ltd.	Japan	2,950	Northern Ireland
Coca-Cola Brothers (Ulster) Ltd.	Luxembourg	400	Northern Ireland
Aldiscon (NI) Ltd.	Republic of Ireland	678	Northern Ireland
Burnside Hydraulic Cylinders Ltd.	Republic of Ireland	1,033	Northern Ireland
Webtech (NI) Ltd.	Republic of Ireland	480	Northern Ireland
Europa Tool Co. Ltd.	South Korea	3,210	Northern Ireland
Baker Hughes Ltd.	USA	1,841	Northern Ireland
BCO Technologies (NI) Ltd.	USA	7,307	Northern Ireland
Copeland Ltd.	USA	11,111	Northern Ireland
Nacco Materials Handling (NI) Ltd.	USA	3,300	Northern Ireland
Plastofilm Ltd.	USA	948	Northern Ireland
Regal Processors Ltd.	USA	962	Northern Ireland
Seagate Technology (Ireland)	USA	10,407	Northern Ireland
Stream International (NI) Ltd.	USA	5,375	Northern Ireland
1996–97			
Wedco Technology UK Ltd.	USA	100	East Midlands
Organon Laboratories Ltd.	Netherlands	2,500	Scotland
Chunghwa Picture Tubes (UK) Ltd.	Taiwan	55,000	Scotland
Alcan Aluminium UK Ltd.	Canada	550	Scotland
Simple Technology Inc.	USA	1,700	Scotland
Tenma (UK) Ltd.	Japan	1,000	Scotland
Monsanto PLC	USA	1,428	Scotland
SCI Holdings Inc.	USA	4,800	Scotland
Nikon Precision Europe GMBH	Japan	250	Scotland
Award PLC	USA	2,000	Scotland
Lite-on Technology (UK) Ltd.	Taiwan	5,500	Scotland
Smart Modular Technologies	USA	3,000	Scotland
Roche Products Ltd.	Switzerland	6,000	Scotland
Instrument Specialties Europe Ltd.	USA	600	Scotland
ABB Vetco Gray UK Ltd.	Switzerland	700	Scotland
ABB Wylex Production & Development	Switzerland	630	Scotland
Polaroid (UK) Ltd.	USA	2,000	Scotland
IBM UK Ltd.	USA	200	Scotland
Norton Healthcare Ltd.	USA	990	London
Dong Jin Precision UK Ltd.	South Korea	950	North East
Simula Automotive Safety Devices Ltd.	USA	890	North East
TSL Group PLC	France	125	North East
Mono Containers Ltd.	Kuwait	500	North East
Hydro Aluminium Century Ltd.	Norway	950	North East
Merck Sharp & Dohme Ltd.	USA	500	North East
Elring Klinger GB Ltd.	Germany	350	North East
Dresser UK Ltd.	USA	2,500	North East
Du Pont (UK) Ltd.	USA	2,000	North East
Bristol-Myers Squibb	USA	750	North West
Stralfors PLC	Sweden	750	South West
Toshiba Consumer Products (UK) Ltd.	Japan	240	South West
Harman International Industries Ltd.	USA	950	South West
Gleason Works Ltd.	USA	950	South West
Rittal-CSM Ltd.	Germany	500	South West
Lucas Control Systems Products	USA	200	South West
Jaguar Cars Ltd.	USA	40,000	West Midlands
Huf UK Ltd.	Germany	150	West Midlands
Mann & Hummel (UK) Ltd.	Germany	1,700	West Midlands
Webasto Holdings Ltd.	Germany	500	West Midlands
Denso Sales (UK) Ltd.	Japan	80	West Midlands
Ford Motor Co. Ltd.	USA	10,000	Wales
Newport Waferfab Ltd.	Hong Kong	7,000	Wales
Northern Automotive Systems Ltd.	USA	1,500	Wales
JCB Transmissions Ltd.	Netherlands	3,150	Wales
Halla Euro Enterprise Ltd.	South Korea	5,000	Wales
Bos Automotive Products UK	Germany	500	Wales
3M UK PLC	USA	1,750	Wales
Punch Precision Ltd.	Belgium	180	Wales
Showa (UK) Ltd.	Japan	3,000	Wales
Kyushu Matshushita Electric (UK) Ltd.	Japan	1,000	Wales
Hoover Ltd.	Italy	800	Wales
Alberto-Culver Co. (UK) Ltd.	USA	600	Wales

Company	Country of Origin	Grant Offered (£000)	Area
Fiamm UK Ltd.	Italy	3,000	Wales
Brite Sparks Ltd.	Switzerland	850	Wales
Walbro Automotive Ltd.	USA	850	Wales
Sony UK Ltd.	Japan	7,000	Wales
Aero-Motive (UK) Ltd.	USA	400	Wales
R-Tek Ltd.	Japan	500	Wales
Toyo Seal Industrial Co. Ltd.	Japan	240	Wales
Bertrand Faure Seating Ltd.	France	4,500	Wales
Align-Rite Ltd.	USA	1,680	Wales
Viskase UK Ltd.	USA	250	Wales
Faun Municipal Vehicles Ltd.	Germany	950	Wales
Sei Interconneet Products (UK) Ltd.	Japan	450	Wales
Bericap UK Ltd.	Germany	450	York/Humb
Luk (UK) Ltd.	Germany	940	York/Humb
Koyo Bearings (Europe) Ltd.	Japan	900	York/Humb
K & L Microwave	USA	200	York/Humb
Portola Packaging Ltd.	USA	900	York/Humb
Thrige Scott Ltd.	Denmark	460	Northern Ireland
Glen Electric Ltd.	Republic of Ireland	1,380	Northern Ireland
Irish Fertiliser Industries Ltd.	Republic of Ireland	4,400	Northern Ireland
Octopus Sportswear Manufacturing Ltd.	Republic of Ireland	975	Northern Ireland
Pharmaflex Ltd.	Republic of Ireland	370	Northern Ireland
Colorite Europe Ltd.	USA	1,146	Northern Ireland
Cynamid of GB Ltd.	USA	3,526	Northern Ireland
FG Wilson (Engineering) Ltd.	USA	36,405	Northern Ireland
Ford Motor Co. Ltd.	USA	4,571	Northern Ireland
Gallaher Ltd.	USA	9,957	Northern Ireland
Liberty Information Technology	USA	837	Northern Ireland
Moy Park Ltd.	USA	8,112	Northern Ireland
Seagate Media Technology	USA	24,245	Northern Ireland
AVX Ltd.	USA/Japan	8,000	Northern Ireland
1997–98			
Alcan Aluminium UK Ltd.	Canada	6,000	Scotland
Avex Electronics Ltd.	USA	990	Scotland
Eaton Shared Services Ltd.	USA	900	Scotland
Honeywell Control Systems Ltd.	USA	250	Scotland
Carron Phoenix Ltd.	Switzerland	250	Scotland
Primaflex Ltd.	Germany	300	Scotland
Knowsley Plastics Ltd.	Republic of Ireland	600	Merseyside
MTK Holdings SA	Switzerland	750	North East
Vauxhall Motors Ltd.	USA	10,000	North West
Bott Ltd.	Germany	350	South West
Rover Group Ltd.	Germany	22,500	West Midlands
Nordam Europe Ltd.	USA	2,350	Wales
Alert Packaging Ltd.	Republic of Ireland	210	Wales
LG Group Ltd.	Korea	69,500	Wales
Yajima (UK) Ltd.	Japan	1,000	Wales
Tomoe Tritec Ltd.	Japan	600	Wales
Friction Dynamics Ltd.	USA	1,410	Wales
Triten International Ltd.	USA	300	York/Humb
Sematic UK Ltd.	Italy	400	York/Humb
Nortel PLC	Canada	3,500	Northern Ireland
Nortel PLC	Canada	600	Northern Ireland
Short Brothers PLC	Canada	19,507	Northern Ireland
Michelin Tyre PLC	France	2,500	Northern Ireland
Huco Lightronic NI Ltd.	Germany	229	Northern Ireland
Ryobi Aluminium Casting (UK) Ltd.	Japan	2,803	Northern Ireland
Webtech (NI) Ltd.	Republic of Ireland	615	Northern Ireland
Humax Electronics Ltd.	South Korea	1,226	Northern Ireland
Du Pont (UK) Ltd.	USA	12,300	Northern Ireland
Information Management Resources Ltd.	USA	1,944	Northern Ireland
Seagate Technology (Ireland)	USA	39,375	Northern Ireland

Euro

Mr. Paul Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what action the Government are taking to help companies to redenominate share capital to prepare for the euro. [55989]

Mr. Mandelson: I am very keen to play a full part in helping UK business prepare for the euro. The DTI's consultation "The Euro: Redenomination of Share Capital" showed that companies are starting to consider whether to redenominate their share capital as the euro

becomes widely-used in Europe. Existing Companies Act 1985 procedures for the reorganisation of share capital are not specifically designed for redenomination of shares, and can place an unnecessary burden on companies in terms of cost, and the requirement for formal court approval to any reduction in share capital.

I propose to seek amendments to the Companies Act 1985 to provide a specific mechanism for companies to use in redenominating their share capital. The new mechanism would permit companies to resolve that references in any document to share capital denominated in one currency would be to the equivalent amount in euro (or another currency). A resolution of each class of shareholders would be required (although a resolution of the board would suffice where the company was redenominating into euro during any transitional period to membership of the single currency).

The new mechanism would also permit companies to adjust the resulting nominal or par values of the shares to a more convenient figure in euro (or other currency), subject to shareholder approval and without the need for court approval. There would be no requirement for companies to issue new share certificates following redenomination.

The second part of my proposal relates to the requirement in section 118 of the Companies Act 1985 that public companies should have a minimum amount of authorised and issued share capital of £50,000. Currently the Act requires this amount to be denominated in sterling, although companies can and do issue share capital in other currencies, over and above the minimum amount. Companies have told this Department that they favour having the flexibility to denominate the whole of their share capital—including the minimum amount—in a foreign currency; and I propose to seek an amendment to the Companies Act 1985 to allow them to do so.

In preparing the new legislation the DTI will issue a further consultation document in the new year with the detailed proposals for change.

PRIME MINISTER

Cabinet Committees

Mr. Eric Clarke: To ask the Prime Minister if he will publish an updated list of Ministerial Committees of the Cabinet. [55929]

The Prime Minister: An updated list of the names and membership of the Ministerial Committees which I have established to date is as follows. In addition to the members listed, other Members are invited to attend meetings as and when business requires:

Ministerial Committee on Economic Affairs (EA)

Composition

Chancellor of the Exchequer (Chair)

Deputy Prime Minister and Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions

Secretary of State for the Home Department

Secretary of State for Education and Employment

President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons

Minister for the Cabinet Office

Secretary of State for Scotland

Secretary of State for Health

Parliamentary Secretary, Treasury and Chief Whip

Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport

Secretary of State for Northern Ireland

Secretary of State for Wales

Secretary of State for Social Security

Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food

Secretary of State for Trade and Industry

Chief Secretary, Treasury

Minister of State, Cabinet Office

Other Ministers are invited to attend for items in which they have a departmental interest. The Chief Scientific Adviser attends for issues relating to science and technology.

Terms of Reference

"To consider issues relating to the Government's economic policies".

Ministerial Sub-Committee on Energy Policy (EA(N))

Composition

Chancellor of the Exchequer (Chair)

Deputy Prime Minister and Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions

Secretary of State for Trade and Industry

Paymaster General, Treasury

Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office

Minister of State, Cabinet Office

Minister of State, Scottish Office

Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office

Minister of State, Department of Trade and Industry

Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Welsh Office

Terms of Reference

"To consider the principles and objectives which should underlie the United Kingdom's energy strategy; and make recommendations for an energy strategy to the Ministerial Committee on Economic Affairs".

Ministerial Sub-Committee on Welfare to Work (EA(WW))

Composition

Chancellor of the Exchequer (Chair)

Secretary of State for Education and Employment

Secretary of State for Scotland

Secretary of State for Northern Ireland

Secretary of State for Wales

Secretary of State for Social Security

Chief Secretary, Treasury

Minister of State, Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions

Paymaster General, Treasury

Minister of State, Home Office

Minister of State, Department for Education and Employment

Minister of State, Cabinet Office

Other Ministers are invited to attend for items in which they have a departmental interest.

Terms of Reference

"To develop polices to get people from welfare to work and to report as necessary to the Ministerial Committee on Economic Affairs (EA)".

Ministerial Committee on Public Services and Public Expenditure (PSX)

Composition

Chancellor of the Exchequer (Chair)

Lord Chancellor

President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons

Minister for the Cabinet Office

Parliamentary Secretary, Treasury and Chief Whip

Leader of the House of Lords and Minister for Women (appointed as Lord Privy Seal)

Chief Secretary, Treasury

Minister of State, Cabinet Office

Other Ministers are invited to attend for matters in which they have a departmental interest.

Terms of Reference

"To monitor progress against public service agreements, to review public expenditure allocations and make recommendations to the Cabinet."

Deputy Prime Minister and Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (Chair)

Chancellor of the Exchequer

Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs

President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons

Minister for the Cabinet Office

Secretary of State for Scotland

Secretary of State for Health

Parliamentary Secretary, Treasury and Chief Whip

Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport

Secretary of State for Northern Ireland

Secretary of State for Wales

Secretary of State for International Development

Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food

Secretary of State for Trade and Industry

Chief Secretary, Treasury

Minister of Transport

Minister of State, Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions

The Secretary of State for Social Security and the Secretary of State for Education and Employment also receive papers. They and other Ministers are invited to attend as necessary. The Chief Scientific Adviser attends for issues relating to science and technology.

Terms of Reference

"To consider environmental policies and to co-ordinate those on sustainable development".

Ministerial Committee on Local Government (GL)

Composition

Deputy Prime Minister and Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (Chair)

Chancellor of the Exchequer

Lord Chancellor

Secretary of State for the Home Department

Secretary of State for Education and Employment

President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons

Minister for the Cabinet Office

Secretary of State for Scotland

Secretary of State for Health

Parliamentary Secretary, Treasury and Chief Whip

Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport

Secretary of State for Northern Ireland

Secretary of State for Wales

Secretary of State for Social Security

Secretary of State for Trade and Industry

Chief Secretary, Treasury

Minister of Transport

Minister of State, Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions

Minister of State, Cabinet Office

Other Ministers are invited to attend for items in which they have a departmental interest.

Terms of Reference

"To consider issues affecting local government, including the annual allocation of resources".

Ministerial Sub-Committee on London (GL(L))

Composition

Deputy Prime Minister and Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (Chair)

Paymaster General, Treasury

Minister of State, Department for Education and Employment

Minister of State, Cabinet Office

Minister of State, Department of Health

Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions

Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions

Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Home Office

Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office

Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department of Culture, Media and Sport

Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department of Trade and Industry

Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department of Social Security

Terms of Reference

"To co-ordinate the Government's polices on London, and report as necessary to the Ministerial Committee on Local Government (GL) and the Ministerial Committee on Devolution Policy (DP)".

Ministerial Committee on Home and Social Affairs (HS)

Composition

Deputy Prime Minister and Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (Chair)

Chancellor of the Exchequer

Lord Chancellor

Secretary of State for the Home Department

Secretary of State for Education and Employment

President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons

Minister for the Cabinet Office

Secretary of State for Scotland

Secretary of State for Health

Parliamentary Secretary, Treasury and Chief Whip

Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport

Secretary of State for Northern Ireland

Secretary of State for Wales

Secretary of State for Social Security

Leader of the House of Lords and Minister for Women (appointed as Lord Privy Seal)

Secretary of State for Trade and Industry

Chief Secretary, Treasury

Minister of Transport

Minister of State, Cabinet Office

The Attorney-General, the Lord Advocate and the Captain of the Gentlemen-at-Arms also receive papers. They and others are invited to attend as necessary.

Terms of Reference

"To consider issues of home and social policy".

Ministerial Sub-Committee on Health Strategy (HS(H))

Composition

President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Chair)

Secretary of State for Health

Secretary of State for International Development

Minister of State, Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions

Minister of State, Department of Health

Minister of State, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food

Economic Secretary, Treasury

Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions

Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Home Office

Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department for Education and Employment

Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Scottish Office

Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Northern Ireland Office

Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Welsh Office

Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department of Social Security

Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department of Trade and Industry

The Chief Medical Officer is in attendance.

Other Ministers are invited to attend for items in which they have a departmental interest.

Terms of Reference

"To oversee the development, implementation and monitoring of the Government's health strategy; to co-ordinate the Government's policies on United Kingdom-wide issues affecting health; and to report as necessary to the Ministerial Committee on Home and Social Affairs (HS)".

Ministerial Sub-Committee on Drug Misuse (HS(D))

Composition

Minister for the Cabinet Office (Chair)

Secretary of State for International Development

Solicitor-General

Financial Secretary, Treasury

Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office

Minister of State, Ministry of Defence

Minister of State, Department of Health

Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office

Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Home Office

Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department for Education and Employment

Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office

Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Scottish Office

Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department for Culture, Media and Sport

Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Welsh Office

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions also receives papers and may be invited to attend as appropriate.

Terms of Reference

"To co-ordinate the Government's national and international policies for tackling drugs misuse, and report as necessary to the Ministerial Committee on Home and Social Affairs (HS)".

Ministerial Sub-Committee on Women's Issues (HS(W))

Composition

Leader of the House of Lords and Minister for Women (appointed as Lord Privy Seal) (Chair)

Secretary of State for Northern Ireland

Secretary of State for International Development

Minister of State, Scottish Office

Minister of State, Department of Health

Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions

Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions

Economic Secretary, Treasury

Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Home Office

Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department for Education and Employment

Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office

Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Welsh Office

Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department of Social Security

Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department of Trade and Industry

Terms of Reference

"To review and develop the Government's policy and strategy on issues of special concern to women; to oversee their implementation; and to report as necessary to the Ministerial Committee on Home and Social Affairs (HS)".

Ministerial Committee on The Queen's Speeches and Future Legislation (QFL)

Composition

President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Chair)

Deputy Prime Minister and Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions

Lord Chancellor

Minister for the Cabinet Office

Parliamentary Secretary, Treasury and Chief Whip

Leader of the House of Lords and Minister for Women (appointed by Lord Privy Seal)

Chief Secretary, Treasury

Attorney-General

Lord Advocate

Minister of State, Cabinet Office

Captain of the Gentlemen-at-Arms

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs is invited to attend for discussions of The Queen's Speeches

Terms of Reference

"To prepare and submit to the Cabinet drafts of The Queen's Speeches to Parliament and proposals for the Government's legislative programme".

Ministerial Committee on Legislation (LEG)

Composition

President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Chair)

Lord Chancellor

Secretary of State for Scotland

Parliamentary Secretary, Treasury and Chief Whip

Secretary of State for Wales

Leader of the House of Lords and Minister for Women (appointed as Lord Privy Seal)

Attorney-General

Lord Advocate

Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office

Minister of State, Home Office

Financial Secretary, Treasury

Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office

Captain of the Gentlemen-at-Arms

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland also receives papers and is invited to attend as necessary.

Terms of Reference

"To examine all draft Bills; to consider the parliamentary handling of Government Bills, European Community documents and Private Members' business, and such other related matters as may be necessary; and to keep under review the Government's policy in relation to issues of Parliamentary procedures".

Ministerial Committee on Constitutional Reform Policy (CRP)

Composition

Prime Minister (Chair)

Deputy Prime Minister and Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions

Chancellor of the Exchequer

Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs

Lord Chancellor

Secretary of State for the Home Department

President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons

Minister for the Cabinet Office

Secretary of State for Scotland

Parliamentary Secretary, Treasury and Chief Whip

Secretary of State for Northern Ireland

Secretary of State for Wales

Leader of the House of Lords and Minister for Women (appointed as Lord Privy Seal)

Other Ministers may be invited to attend as necessary.

Terms of Reference

"To consider strategic issues relating to the Government's constitutional reform policies".

Ministerial Sub-Committee on Incorporation of the European Convention of Human Rights (CRP(EC))

Composition

Lord Chancellor (Chair)

Deputy Prime Minister and Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions

Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs

Secretary of State for the Home Department

Secretary of State for Education and Employment

President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons

Secretary of State for Scotland

Secretary of State for Defence

Secretary of State for Health

Parliamentary Secretary, Treasury and Chief Whip

Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport

Secretary of State for Northern Ireland

Secretary of State for Wales

Secretary of State for Social Security

Leader of the House of Lords and Minister for Women (appointed as Lord Privy Seal)

Chief Secretary, Treasury

Attorney-General

Lord Advocate

Other Ministers are invited to attend for items in which they have a departmental interest. The Minister of State, Cabinet Office receives papers.

Terms of Reference

"To consider policy and other issues arising from the Government's decision to legislate for the incorporation of ECHR in UK law and to promote and oversee progress of the relevant legislation through Parliament and its subsequent implementation, reporting as necessary to the Ministerial Committee on Constitutional Reform Policy".

Ministerial Sub-Committee on Freedom of Information (CRP(FOI))

Composition

Lord Chancellor (Chair)

Chancellor of the Exchequer

Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs

Secretary of State for the Home Department

Secretary of State for Education and Employment

President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons

Minister for the Cabinet Office

Secretary of State for Scotland

Secretary of State for Defence

Secretary of State for Health

Parliamentary Secretary, Treasury and Chief Whip

Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport

Secretary of State for Northern Ireland

Secretary of State for Wales

Secretary of State for International Development

Secretary of State for Social Security

Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food

Leader of the House of Lords and Minister for Women (appointed as Lord Privy Seal)

Secretary of State for Trade and Industry

Attorney-General

Lord Advocate

Minister of Transport

Minister of State, Cabinet Office

Other Ministers are invited to attend for items in which they have a departmental interest.

Terms of Reference

"To consider policy and other issues arising from the Government's decision to legislate on freedom of information; to promote and oversee progress of the relevant legislation through Parliament and its subsequent implementation; and to report as necessary to the Ministerial Committee on Constitutional Reform Policy".

Ministerial Sub-committee on House of Lords Reform (CRP(HL))

Composition

Lord Chancellor (Chair)

Secretary of State for the Home Department

President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons

Minister for the Cabinet Office

Parliamentary Secretary, Treasury and Chief Whip

Leader of the House of Lords and Minister for Women (appointed as Lord Privy Seal)

Captain of the Gentlemen at Arms

Minister of State, Cabinet Office

Other Ministers are invited to attend as necessary.

Terms of Reference

"To consider policy and other issues arising from the Government's plans for reform of the House of Lords and to make recommendations to the Ministerial Committee on Constitutional Reform Policy".

Ministerial Committee on Devolution Policy (DP)

Composition

Lord Chancellor (Chair)

Deputy Prime Minister and Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions

Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs

Secretary of State for the Home Department

Secretary of State for Education and Employment

President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons

Secretary of State for Scotland

Secretary of State for Health

Parliamentary Secretary, Treasury and Chief Whip

Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport

Secretary of State for Northern Ireland

Secretary of State for Wales

Secretary of State for Social Security

Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food

Leader of the House of Lords and Minister for Women (appointed as Lord Privy Seal)

Secretary of State for Trade and Industry

Chief Secretary, Treasury

Captain of the Gentlemen-at-Arms

Attorney-General

Lord Advocate

Minister of State, Cabinet Office

Other Ministers are invited for items in which they have departmental interest.

Terms of Reference

"To consider policy and other issues arising from the Government's policies for devolution to Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland and the regions of England and to promote and oversee progress of the relevant legislation through Parliament and its subsequent implementation".

Joint Consultative Committee with the Liberal Democratic Party (JCC)

Composition

The Committee will be chaired by the Prime Minister. Other Ministers and Liberal Democratic spokesmen will be invited to attend as necessary.

Terms of Reference

"To consider policy issues of joint interest to the Government and the Liberal Democratic Party".

Ministerial Committee on Defence and Overseas Policy (DOP)

Composition

Prime Minister (Chair)

Deputy Prime Minister and Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions

Chancellor of the Exchequer

Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs

Secretary of State for Defence

Secretary of State for Trade and Industry

The Chief of the Defence Staff attends as required, as do the Chiefs of Staff when necessary. Others are invited to attend as necessary.

Terms of Reference

"To keep under review the Government's defence and overseas policy".

Ministerial Sub-Committee on European Issues ((E)DOP)

Composition

Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Chair)

Deputy Prime Minister and Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions

Chancellor of the Exchequer

Secretary of State for the Home Department

Secretary of State for Education and Employment

President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons

Minister for the Cabinet Office

Secretary of State for Scotland

Secretary of State for Defence

Parliamentary Secretary, Treasury and Chief Whip

Secretary of State for Northern Ireland

Secretary of State for Wales

Secretary of State for International Development

Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food

Secretary of State for Trade and Industry

Attorney-General

Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office

Minister for Trade and Competitiveness in Europe

The Minister of State, Cabinet Office reviews papers

Other Ministers are invited to attend as the nature of the business requires.

The United Kingdom's Permanent Representative to the European Union is also in attendance.

Terms of Reference

"To consider questions relating to the United Kingdom's membership of the European Union and to report as necessary to the Ministerial Committee on Defence and Overseas Policy (DOP)".

Ministerial Committee on Northern Ireland (IN)

Composition

Prime Minister (Chair)

Chancellor of the Exchequer

Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs

Secretary of State for the Home Department

Secretary of State for Defence

Secretary of State for Northern Ireland

Terms of Reference

"To oversee the Government's policy on Northern Ireland issues and relations with the Republic of Ireland on these matters".

Ministerial Committee on the Intelligence Services (CSI)

Composition

Prime Minister (Chair)

Deputy Prime Minister and Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions

Chancellor of the Exchequer

Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs

Secretary of State for the Home Department

Secretary of State for Defence

Terms of Reference

"To keep under review policy on the security and intelligence services".

Ministerial Group on Food Safety (MISC 1)

Composition

President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Chair)

Secretary of State for Education and Employment

Minister for the Cabinet Office

Secretary of State for Scotland

Secretary of State for Health

Secretary of State for Northern Ireland

Secretary of State for Wales

Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food

Chief Secretary, Treasury

Minister of State, Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions

Minister of State, Department of Trade and Industry

The Parliamentary Secretary, Treasury and Chief Whip will also receive papers and may attend as necessary.

Terms of Reference

"To co-ordinate Departmental consideration of issues arising from the establishment of a Food Standards Agency and other aspects of food safety, and to make recommendations to the Ministerial Committee on Home and Social Affairs".

Ministerial Group on Crime Reduction and Youth Justice (MISC 2)

Composition

Secretary of State for the Home Department (Chair)

Leader of the House of Lords and Minister for Women (appointed as Lord Privy Seal)

Chief Secretary, Treasury

Solicitor-General

Minister of State, Home Office

Minister of State, Lord Chancellor's Department

Minister of State, Cabinet Office

Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions

Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department for Education and Employment

Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office

Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Scottish Office

Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department of Health

Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department for Culture, Media and Sport

Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Welsh Office

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland also receives papers, and may attend or be represented as necessary.

Terms of Reference

"To oversee the Government's programme to reduce crime and the reform of youth justice and to make recommendations to the Ministerial Committee on Home and Social Affairs".

Ministerial Group on Utility Regulation (MISC 3)

Composition

Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Chair)

Minister of Transport

Minister of State, Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions

Paymaster General, Treasury

Minister of State, Scottish Office

Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office

Minister of State, Department of Trade and Industry

Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office

Other Ministers are invited to attend for items in which they have a departmental interest.

Terms of Reference

"To oversee an inter-departmental review of regulation of the utility industries, to consider issues arising from the review and to report to the Ministerial Committee on Economic Affairs (EA)".

Ministerial Group On The Millennium Date Change (MISC 4)

Composition

President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Chair)

Minister of State, Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions

Paymaster General, Treasury

Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office

Minister of State, Home Office

Minister of State, Scottish Office

Minister of State, Ministry of Defence

Minister of State, Department of Health

Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office

Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions

Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department for Education and Employment

Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office

Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Welsh Office

Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department of Social Security

Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food

Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department of Trade and Industry

Other Ministers are invited to attend for items in which they have a departmental interest.

The Chairman of Action 2000 and the Prime Minister's Adviser on the Year 2000 problem are invited to attend.

Terms of Reference

"To drive action in the public and private sector, including the national infrastructure, to prevent damage from the failure of electronic systems related to the Year 2000 date change".

Ministerial Group on the Restructuring of the European Aerospace and Defence Industry (MISC 5)

Composition

Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Chair)

Secretary of State for Defence

Paymaster General

Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office

Minister of State, Department of Trade and Industry

Terms of Reference

"To develop Government policy and co-ordinate related activity in promoting the restructuring of the European aerospace and defence industry".

Ministerial Group on Biotechnology and Genetic Modification (MISC 6)

Composition

Minister for the Cabinet Office (Chair)

Minister of State, Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions

Financial Secretary, Treasury

Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office

Minister of State, Home Office

Minister of State, Cabinet Office

Minister of State, Department of Health

Minister of State, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food

Minister of State, Department of Trade and Industry

Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office

Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department of Trade and Industry

The Chief Scientific Adviser also attends.

Terms of Reference

"To consider issues relating to biotechnology, in particular those arising from genetic modification".

Ministerial Group on Better Government (MISC 7)

Composition

Minister for the Cabinet Office (Chair)

Secretary of State for the Home Department

Secretary of State for Education and Employment

Secretary of State for Health

Secretary of State for Social Security

Secretary of State for Trade and Industry

Chief Secretary, Treasury

Minister of State, Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions

Minister of State, Lord Chancellor's Department

Minister of State, Scottish Office

Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office

Minister of State, Cabinet Office

Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department for Culture, Media and Sport

Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Welsh Office

Terms of Reference

"To develop the Government's programme for improving the quality, coherence and responsiveness of public services and to oversee its implementation".

Intelligence and Security Committee

Mr. Corbett: To ask the Prime Minister when he expects to lay the Intelligence and Security Committee's Annual report before Parliament. [56233]

The Prime Minister: I am grateful to the Intelligence and Security Committee for their valuable work and their latest annual report. Following consultation with them over matters which could not be published without prejudicing the continuing operation of the intelligence and security agencies, I have today laid the report before Parliament. Copies of the report have also been placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

The Government will respond formally to the report shortly.

Economic and Monetary Union

Mr. Cash: To ask the Prime Minister if he will issue a white paper on the constitutional implications of the Government's policy in respect of economic and monetary union. [54868]

The Prime Minister: The Government have no plans to do so.

SCOTLAND

Scottish Parliament

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will give his latest assessment of the timescale for the completion of the Holyrood Parliament Building. [55455]

Mr. Dewar: We still expect completion of the Holyrood building project by Autumn 2001.

Temazepam

Mrs. Irene Adams: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many deaths in Strathclyde resulted from the use of Temazepam in each year since 1994 and in 1998 to date. [55160]

Mr. McLeish: The information available is given in the table. The figures cover all deaths in the categories listed where temazepam was recorded as being present at the time of death, either alone or in combination with one or more other drugs. Information for 1998 is not yet available.

Deaths in the former Strathclyde region involving temazepam

Year	*Number*
1994	67
1995	52
1996	33
1997	24

Underlying cause of death categories included (codes refer to the International Classification of Diseases etc., ninth revision (ICD 9)):

drug dependence (304), nondependent abuse of drugs (305), accidental poisoning (E850-E858), suicidal poisoning (E950-E952) and poisoning undertermined whether accidentally or purposely inflicted (E980-E982).

Mrs. Irene Adams: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many deaths in Strathclyde resulted from more than one drug including Temazepam in each year since 1992 and in 1998 to date. [55159]

Mr. McLeish: The information available is given in the table. The figures cover all deaths in the categories listed where temazepam was recorded as being present at the time of death in combination with one or more other drugs. Improved procedures for recording information about drug-related deaths were introduced in 1994, therefore comparable information is not available for 1992 and 1993. Information for 1998 is not yet available.

Deaths in the former Strathclyde region involving temazepam in combination with one or more other drugs

Year	*Number*
1994	53
1995	47
1996	31
1997	21

Underlying cause of death categories included (codes refer to the International Classification of Diseases etc., ninth revision (ICD 9)):

drug dependence (304), nondependent abuse of drugs (305), accidental poisoning (E850-E858), suicidal poisoning (E950-E952) and poisoning undertermined whether accidentally or purposely inflicted (E980-E982).

Heroin

Mrs. Irene Adams: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many deaths in Strathclyde resulted from the use of heroin in (i) 1996, (ii) 1997 and (iii) 1998 to date. [55161]

Mr. McLeish: In both 1996 and 1997 there were 26 deaths in Strathclyde involving heroin. Information for 1998 is not yet available. The figures cover all deaths in the categories listed where heroin was recorded as being present at the time of death, either alone or in combination with one or more other drugs.

Underlying cause of death categories included (codes refer to the International Classification of Diseases etc., ninth revision (ICD 9)):

drug dependence (304), nondependent abuse of drugs (305), accidental poisoning (E850—E858), suicidal poisoning (E950—E952) and poisoning undetermined whether accidentally or purposely inflicted (E980—E982).

Methadone

Mrs. Irene Adams: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many deaths in *(a)* Scotland and *(b)* Strathclyde have resulted from the prescribed use of methadone in each year since 1992 and in 1998 to date. [55214]

Mr. McLeish: The information is given in the table. The figures cover all deaths in the categories listed where methadone was recorded as being present at the time of death, either alone or in combination with one or more other drugs. Improved procedures for recording information about drug-related deaths were introduced in 1994, therefore comparable information is not available for 1992 and 1993. Information for 1998 is not yet available. It is not possible to identify separately deaths from drugs which have been prescribed.

	Deaths involving methadone in:	
Year	*Scotland*	*The former Strathclyde region*
1994	55	27
1995	58	34
1996	101	36
1997	87	26

Underlying cause of death categories included (codes refer to the International Classification of Diseases etc., ninth revision (ICD 9)):

drug dependence (304), nondependent abuse of drugs (305), accidental poisoning (E850—E858), suicidal poisoning (E950—E952) and poisoning undetermined whether accidentally or purposely inflicted (E980—E982).

Cervical Smear Tests

Mr. Austin: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many cytology laboratories in Scotland are sending their cervical smears to other laboratories for interpretation. [55306]

Mr. Galbraith: Of the 16 NHS Trusts providing cytology services, three are sending their cervical smears to other laboratories for interpretation. This is primarily due to staff shortages which have now been resolved in two of the laboratories and interpretation of the slides in the laboratories will revert to in-house reading.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Cold Weather Payments

Mr. Stringer: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when he will announce the outcome of the annual review of the cold weather payments scheme; and if he will make a statement. [56032]

Angela Eagle: Following advice from the Meteorological Office, the annual review of the Cold Weather Payments scheme has now been completed. Amending regulations were laid on 9 October 1998 and will come into force in time for the beginning of the winter period.

Two of the weather stations used in the scheme last winter have been replaced. The weather station located at Gatwick Airport has now closed and will be replaced by a new one located at Redhill. Waterstein Head, which was introduced into the scheme last winter to represent most of the postcodes on the Isle of Skye, will be replaced by a newly available station located at Lusa which is considered to be more representative. In addition, a number of minor changes have been made to the scheme as a result of postcode changes made by Royal Mail.

Cold Weather Payments are separate from, and paid in addition to, Winter Fuel Payments which are only paid to pensioners.

I have written to each of the hon. Members whose constituencies are affected by the changes.

HEALTH

Accident and Emergency Facilities

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what *(a)* service and *(b)* professional disciplines must be available at a 24 hour accident and emergency facility. [55565]

Mr. Boateng: Guidance on accident and emergency departments suggests they should be consultant led, with appropriately trained staff and with support and back-up available from appropriate clinical specialties at all times. Copies of the guidance are available in the Library.

CJD Screening

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations he has received from the National

CJD Surveillance Unit about the screening of appendicectomy and tonsillectomy specimens; and if he will make a statement. [55539]

Ms Jowell: The Department has received applications from researchers, including the National Creutzfeldt-Jakob Disease Surveillance Unit, for anonymised pilot surveys to assess the prevalence in appendices and tonsils removed during routine surgery of the abnormal prion protein associated with new variant Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease. These proposals are now the subject of expert scientific review before we make a final decision on funding.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Terrorist Activities

Mr. Amess: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many *(a)* civilians and *(b)* soldiers have been killed as a result of terrorist activities in Northern Ireland in each month over the last five years. [55506]

Mr. Ingram: The tables illustrate the number of deaths of civilians and members of security forces over the last five years as a result of the security situation. They include the tragic death earlier this month of RUC Constable Frankie O'Reilly as a result of events at Drumcree.

Deaths in 1998 up to 16 October

	RUC	RUCR	Army	RIR	Civilian	Total
January	—	—	—	—	7	7
February	—	—	—	—	3	3
March	—	—	—	—	4	4
April	—	—	—	—	4	4
May	—	—	—	—	—	—
June	—	—	1	—	—	1
July	—	—	—	—	5	5
August	—	—	—	—	28	28
September	—	—	—	—	1	1
October	1	—	—	—	—	1
Total	—	—	1	—	52	54

Note:
All statistics are subject to minor adjustment as further information comes to light.

Deaths 1997

	RUC	RUCR	Army	RIR	Civilian	Total
January	—	—	—	—	—	—
February	—	—	1	—	—	1
March	—	—	—	—	2	2
April	—	—	—	—	—	—
May	1	—	—	—	3	4
June	2	1	—	—	1	4
July	—	—	—	—	4	4
August	—	—	—	—	1	1
September	—	—	—	—	—	—
October	—	—	—	—	1	1
November	—	—	—	—	1	1
December	—	—	—	—	4	4
Total	3	1	1	—	17	22

Deaths 1996

	RUC	RUCR	Army	RIR	Civilian	Total
January	—	—	—	—	2	2
February	—	—	—	—	—	—
March	—	—	—	—	2	2
April	—	—	—	—	—	—
May	—	—	—	—	1	1
June	—	—	—	—	1	1
July	—	—	—	—	3	3
August	—	—	—	—	—	—
September	—	—	—	—	4	4
October	—	—	1	—	1	2
November	—	—	—	—	—	—
December	—	—	—	—	—	—
Total	—	—	1	—	14	15

Deaths 1995

	RUC	RUCR	Army	RIR	Civilian	Total
January	—	—	—	—	—	—
February	—	—	—	—	—	—
March	1	—	—	—	—	1
April	—	—	—	—	1	1
May	—	—	—	—	—	—
June	—	—	—	—	—	—
July	—	—	—	—	—	—
August	—	—	—	—	—	—
September	—	—	—	—	2	2
October	—	—	—	—	—	—
November	—	—	—	—	1	1
December	—	—	—	—	4	4
Total	1	—	—	—	8	9

Deaths 1994

	RUC	RUCR	Army	RIR	Civilian	Total
January	—	—	—	—	2	2
February	1	—	—	—	4	5
March	1	—	—	—	1	2
April	1	—	—	—	13	14
May	—	—	1	1	9	11
June	—	—	—	—	11	11
July	—	—	—	—	7	7
August	—	—	—	1	6	7
September	—	—	—	—	1	1
October	—	—	—	—	—	—
November	—	—	—	—	1	1
December	—	—	—	—	1	1
Total	3	—	1	2	56	62

RUC—Royal Ulster Constabulary
RUCR—Royal Ulster Constabulary Reserve
RIR—Royal Irish Regiment

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if she will list the number of violent deaths in each month in 1998 in each police division in Northern Ireland attributed to each terrorist organisation in Northern Ireland, indicating the cause of death and whether the victims were army, police or civilian. [53765]

Mr. Ingram: Up to 20 October, there have been 54 deaths in Northern Ireland as a direct result of the security situation. Of the 54 deaths, 38 have been

attributed to Republicans and the remaining 16 to Loyalists. Twenty-nine of these deaths occurred following the horrific bomb explosion in Omagh. Nineteen were the result of fatal gun attacks and 6 were due to other causes, for example the deaths of the 3 Quinn children in Ballymoney.

	Police Division											
	A	*B*	*D*	*E*	*G*	*H*	*J*	*K*	*L*	*N*	*O*	*P*
January												
RUC	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Army	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Civ	4	1	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	—
February												
RUC	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Army	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Civ	2	—	—	—	—	—	1	—	—	—	—	—
March												
RUC	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Army	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Civ	—	1	—	—	—	3	—	—	—	—	—	—
April												
RUC	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Army	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Civ	—	1	1	—	—	—	1	—	—	1	—	—
May												
RUC	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Army	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Civ	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
June												
RUC	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Army	—	—	—	—	—	1	—	—	—	—	—	—
Civ	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
July												
RUC	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Army	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Civ	—	—	1	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	3
August												
RUC	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Army	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Civ	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	28	—	—	—
September												
RUC	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Army	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Civ	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	—	—	—
October												
RUC	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	—	—	—	—	—
Army	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Civ	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Total	6	3	3	1	0	4	3	0	29	1	1	3

Proscribed Organisations

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many people have been convicted of membership of a proscribed organisation in each of the last five years; and what was the punishment received in each case. [55499]

Mr. Ingram: A total of 59 persons have been convicted of membership of a proscribed organisation since 1994 as set out in the table:

Number of people found guilty of membership of, or belonging to a proscribed organisation

Sentence	*Length of sentence*	*1994*	*1995*	*1996*	*1997*
Imprisonment	5 years and under	12	13	4	2
	6 to 10 years	10	6	2	2
Imprisonment (suspended)	less than 1 year	0	0	0	0
	1 year	0	1	0	0
	2 years	0	0	0	0
	3 years	0	1	0	0
	greater than 3 years	0	0	0	0

Number of people found guilty of membership of, or belonging to a proscribed organisation

Sentence	*Length of sentence*	*1994*	*1995*	*1996*	*1997*
Detained Young Offender's Centre	less than 1 year	0	0	0	0
	1 year	0	0	0	0
	2 years	0	0	0	0
	3 years	0	1	0	0
	4 years	0	1	0	0
	greater than 4 years	0	0	0	0
Detained Young Offender's Centre (suspended)	less than 1 year	0	0	0	0
	1 year	0	0	0	0
	2 years	0	3	0	0
	greater than 2 years	0	0	0	0
Total found guilty		22	26	6	4

For 1998, the figures are available only up to 31 March. During the period 1 January to 31 March, one person was found guilty of membership of a proscribed organisation and was sentenced to imprisonment for a period of "five years and under".

Direct Action Against Drugs

Mr. Robathan: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what advice she has received from the Chief Constable of the RUC on talks between Direct Action Against Drugs and the PIRA. [55143]

Mr. Ingram: None. As it is the firm belief of the security forces that Direct Action Against Drugs and the Provisional IRA are the same organisation, it is unlikely that discussions as suggested by the hon. Member's question would have taken place.

Salmon

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if she will list for each of the Foyle Fisheries Commission areas and the Fisheries Conservancy Board area the number and total weight of *(a)* salmon and *(b)* grilse taken by (i) angling and (ii) commercial nets in (1) drift and (2) estuary nets for each of the last five years and for 1985, 1980 and 1975 or as much of such information as is readily available; and if he will provide the same information for fish classed (x) 1 sea winter, (y) 2 sea winter and (z) 3 sea winter fish. [55570]

Mr. Paul Murphy: Such information as is available is contained in the Annual Reports for the Foyle Fisheries Commission and the Fisheries Conservancy Board for Northern Ireland, copies of which are in the Library of the House. The Reports of the Foyle Fisheries Commission for 1996 and 1997 are not yet in the Library and the information available is as follows:

Type of Fishery	*1996*		*1997*	
	Number of Salmon	*Weight (kg)*	*Number of Salmon*	*Weight (kg)*
Drift Net	19,958	56,047	31,407	90,453
Draft Net	10,586	27,118	12,556	33,069
Rod	1,444	3,951	1,020	2,658
Total	31,988	87,116	44,983	126,180

Fraud

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many cases of possible fraud have been identified in agencies of the DOE (NI) since 1995; and what steps were taken to investigate them. [55575]

Mr. Paul Murphy: The Department of the Environment's response is set out as follows:

Rate Collection Agency (figures are only available for period 1 October 1997—9 October 1998)

40 cases involving fraudulent claims by members of the public; 10 cases referred to Fraud and Prosecution Branch, DHSS, for further investigation, the remaining 30 were resolved internally by RCA and action taken to stop the fraudulent claims.

Driver Vehicle Testing Agency

1 case involving the removal of cash from a till in 1997; case proven—further action pending.

Road Service

1995

Materials stolen from store (£3,000); Police notified, but no action taken. Final formal written warning issued; Employee demoted. Materials recovered.

1996

One fraudulent claim for travelling subsistence i.r.o days on which employee failed to attend college; Employee suspended from duty and subsequently dismissed. All monies repaid (£1,700).

One case of theft of materials from store at Castlerevan Quarry; Police notified; Storeman interviewed and admitted theft; employee suspended but since reinstated in another capacity. Police investigated possible collusion with external supplier, but decided on no further action.

One case of theft of fee (£2) accompanying application for Orange Badge; Employee suspended from duty. Police notified; Employee successfully prosecuted and dismissed from Civil Service.

1997

One case of failure to produce proceeds (£20) from sale of scrap materials; Police not notified; Employees issued with 'Final Formal Warnings' and required to make restitution.

Environment and Heritage Service (wef 1 April 1996)

1 suspend fraud case involving the misappropriation of grant-aid. Referred to RUC for investigation but no evidence of fraud or deception. The case is still ongoing.

Driver and Vehicle Licensing NI

3 suspected cases of fraud—1 proven case of theft from petty cash and member of staff dismissed; 2 cases of suspected fraud still under investigation.

Construction Service (wef 1 April 1996)

1 case of suspected patronage of contractor—Internal Audit investigation still ongoing.

Water Service (wef 1 April 1996)

Since 1996 the Water Service has undertaken 9 investigations of suspected fraud. The police were involved in 5 of these investigations. Of the 9 investigations carried out fraudulent activity was confirmed in 2—prosecution has taken place in one case and is currently being considered in the case of another—there cases relate to fraudulent activity by Water Service suppliers. The remaining 7 investigations did not find evidence of fraud.

Four new allegations of fraudulent activity involving staff are currently being investigated.

Prior Options Study

Judy Mallaber: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what was the outcome of the prior options study on the superannuating functions in Northern Ireland departments. [56147]

Mr. Paul Murphy: After consideration of the options for the future delivery of the superannuation functions of Departments of Finance and Personnel, Health and Social Services and Education, I have concluded that, in this case, the Government's aim to achieve best value in public services would be achieved most cost effectively by the application of the management disciplines associated with agencies to the current arrangements, allied to adherence to rigorous targets and benchmarking against best practice in other public and private sector organisations. This solution will contribute to any additional arrangements which the New Northern Ireland Assembly might wish to introduce.

Government Purchasing Agency

Judy Mallaber: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what performance targets were set for the Government Purchasing Agency in 1997–98; what further plans have been prepared by the Agency; and what arrangements have been made for publication for this year's plans. [56148]

Mr. Paul Murphy: As an Executive Agency within the Department of Finance and Personnel, the Government Purchasing Agency provides a professional procurement service to all six Northern Ireland Departments, the Northern Ireland Office and an increasing number of other public sector bodies.

The following key performance targets were set for the Agency in 1997–98:

To break even in the 1998–99 financial year by balancing Agency income and operating costs.

To achieve a 6% rate of return on capital employed.

To increase the number of Agency customers by 10%.

To increase the volume of customer business by 10%.

To achieve a 70% level of satisfaction in the 1997–98 Agency survey of customer organisations.

To achieve a 70% level of satisfaction in the 1997–98 Agency survey of suppliers.

To increase the ratio of outputs to inputs by 3% from the 1996–97 outturn.

The agency has published its Corporate Plan 1997–2000 and Annual Report and Accounts for 1997–98, copies of which have been placed in the Library of the House.

The following key performance targets were set for the Agency in 1998–99:

To break even in the 1998–99 financial year by balancing Agency income and operating costs.

To achieve a 6% rate of return on capital employed.

To increase the number of Agency customers by 10%.

To increase the volume of customer business by 10%.

To achieve a 80% level of satisfaction in the 1998–99 Agency survey of customer organisations.

To achieve a 80% level of satisfaction in the 1998–99 Agency survey of suppliers.

To increase the ratio of outputs to inputs by 3% from the 1997–98 outturn.

Background information is given in the Agency's Corporation and Business Plans 1998–2001, copies of which have been placed in the Library of the House.

Presidential Visit

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if she will list the sums expended by Her Majesty's Government in respect of *(a)* the RUC, *(b)* the Army, *(c)* the RAF and *(d)* the other public bodies in respect of the recent visit by President Clinton. [55496]

Mr. Paul Murphy: The sums expended in relation to the visit of President Clinton were *(a)* RUC £1,300,000, *(b)* Army and RAF approximately £78,000 and *(c)* approximately £195,000 by other public bodies.

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

Independent Schools (Nurseries)

Fiona Mactaggart: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what proportion of the independent schools registered with his Department which admit children of three years old and under have been visited by local social services departments following the invitation of the Registrar of Independent Schools in the last 12 months. [55627]

Ms Estelle Morris: One independent school admitting children of three years old and under has been visited by a local Social Services Department following the invitation of the Registrar of Independent Schools in the last 12 months.

Fiona Mactaggart: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment which local social services departments have recommended action to the Registrar of Independent Schools in respect of nurseries attached to independent schools in their area. [55626]

Ms Estelle Morris: The Department does not maintain statistics in the form requested. All information received from Social Services Departments about nursery provision at independent schools is passed to Ofsted's HMI who inspect such schools. Where weaknesses are found in that nursery provision, the Department takes action with the school to ensure that they are remedied.

Fiona Mactaggart: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many independent schools registered with his Department admit children younger than *(a)* three and *(b)* two years old. [55628]

Ms Estelle Morris: There are currently 2,261 independent schools registered in England. 921 admit children under three years old and 161 admit children under two years old.

Grammar School Ballots

Dr. George Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what representations his Department has received about the draft Education (Grammar School Ballots) Regulations; and when he will lay revised regulations before the House. [56031]

Ms Estelle Morris: A total of 322 responses were received in the Department about the draft regulations which were sent out for consultation on 3 June 1998. Copies of these have been placed in the Library. We have today laid revised draft regulations before the House.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Cyprus

Mr. Corbett: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) what consultations he has held with EU foreign Ministers over the ban imposed by the leader of the Turkish Cypriot community on meetings between members of both Cypriot communities on the island; [52383]

(2) what steps he is taking to encourage the leader of the Turkish Cypriot community to remove his ban on meetings between members of both Cypriot communities on the island; [52388]

(3) what consultations he has held with Turkey and Greece, as co-guarantor powers, over the ban imposed by the leader of the Turkish Cypriot community on meetings between members of both Cypriot communities on the island. [52389]

Ms Quin *[pursuant to the reply, 27 July 1998, c. 45]:* Due to an administrative error only the first paragraph of the answer was published. The full answer is as follows.

We have made clear to Mr. Denktash on numerous occasions that we greatly regret the current suspension on Turkish Cypriot participation in bicommunal activities on Cyprus, and have urged him to lift the current suspension. Bicommunal activities make a valuable contribution to building a foundation of understanding between the two Cypriot communities, which will be essential for the success of a political settlement on the island.

To encourage this process, the UK was involved in securing the inclusion of UN Security Council Resolution 1178 (1998) of 29 June of an expression of regret for the suspension of bicommunal activities by the Turkish Cypriot leadership and a call to both sides, in particular the Turkish Cypriot side, to facilitate arrangements within which bicommunal contacts can take place uninterrupted and without formalities.

Our interest in the promotion of bicommunal contacts includes those held outside Cyprus. Sir David Hannay met Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot businessmen of the Brussels Group during his recent visit to Cyprus (20–22 July). He expressed our appreciation and encouragement of the Group's continuing activity.

My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary is in regular contact with his EU partners on all aspects of the EU's relation with Cyprus. 5 mecu of EU funds is available to Cyprus for bicommunal projects. A further 12 mecu is available for projects which would support progress towards a political settlement.

We use every suitable opportunity to impress upon Greece and Turkey the importance of encouraging Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots to work towards a lasting political settlement through the good offices of the United Nations Secretary-General.

Entry Clearance

Mr. Gapes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many *(a)* permanent and *(b)* temporary posts there are and how many temporary Home Office Immigration Service personnel have been employed at the entry clearance posts in (i) Delhi, (ii) Bombay, (iii) Islamabad (iv) Karachi and (v) Dhaka in (1) May, (2) June and (3) July. [55237]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: The information is in the table.

	Delhi	*Bombay*	*Islamabad*	*Dhaka*
Permanent immigration entry clearance posts	15	12	33.5	15
Temporary posts				
May 1998	7	8	5	0
June 1998	6	7	8	0
July 1998	5	3	7	0
Temporary home office staff employed for summer relief				
May 1998	5	5	5	0
June 1998	5	5	8	0
July 1998	4	3	7	0
Home office staff on full postings to permanent posts				
May-July 1998	7	6	17	6

Defence Exports

Mr. Alan Johnson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the Government's policy on licensing arms exports to Slovenia. [56146]

Ms Quin: We, along with EU partners, have decided, taking into account the well-entrenched democracy in Slovenia and her stable political and economic structures, to remove Slovenia from the EU Common Position on arms exports to the former Yugoslavia. Applications for licenses to export military equipment will be considered on a case-by-case basis in accordance with the criteria announced by my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary on 28 July 1997, *Official Report*, columns *26–29*, and the EU Code of Conduct on Arms Exports.

Mr. Alan Johnson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 28 July 1997, *Official Report*, columns *26–29*, how the criteria for defence exports are used to assess applications for licence to export arms or goods subject to control for strategic reasons, for the purpose of demonstration, trial, testing or evaluation. [56232]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: Licence applications to export goods and technology controlled under Part III of Schedule 1 to the Export of Goods (Control) Order 1994 (the 'Military List'), or dual use goods when there are grounds for believing that the end-user of such goods will be the armed forces or internal security forces of the recipient country, are examined on a case-by-case basis against the published defence exports criteria and the EU Code of Conduct.

When the application is for demonstration, trial, testing or evaluation purposes, attention is paid to the level of control exercised by the exporter and whether the export will be temporary in arriving at a judgment as to whether the equipment might be used for internal repression, international aggression, diverted to an undesirable end-user or otherwise contravene the criteria.

If a decision is taken to issue such a licence, this in no way fetters our discretion in considering future applications for the export of equipment of the type demonstrated or evaluated. Such applications will be treated on their merits against the prevailing circumstances at that time.

In some cases, licensees will be informed that, on the information available at that time, a licence would not normally be granted for the permanent export of the same or a greater quantity of the goods concerned to the same end-user, irrespective of the purpose of the intended export.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Alcopops

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the effectiveness of the new code of practice on the sale of alcopops; and what measures are in place to continue to monitor the industry's marketing of alcopops. [55184]

Mr. George Howarth: We are currently considering the progress made and expect to announce our conclusions in November.

Freedom of Information

Mr. Peter Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what progress he has made with the proposed freedom of information legislation. [54734]

Mr. Connarty: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on his plans for freedom of information legislation. [54719]

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on progress with the freedom of information legislation. [54714]

Mr. Fabricant: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to promote open Government. [54738]

Mr. Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the Government's plans to introduce legislation on freedom of information. [54721]

Mr. Robathan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what progress he has made with his Department's open Government initiatives. [54739]

Mr. John Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he plans to bring forward legislation for a Freedom of Information Act. [54724]

Dr. George Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is his Department's current timetable for implementation of freedom of information legislation. [54717]

Mr. Straw: The Government are committed to the introduction of a Freedom of Information Act as part of their programme for constitutional reform, which aims to modernise British politics and bring Government closer to the people.

We published our proposals for a Freedom of Information Act in a White Paper "Your Right to Know" in December 1997. We made a commitment in that White Paper to publish a draft Bill for consultation. Work is well in hand on this and it will be published early in the new year.

Following consultation on the draft Bill and pre-legislative scrutiny by the Select Committee on Public Administration, I intend to introduce the Bill to Parliament as soon as the legislative programme allows.

Mr. Healey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what recent representations he has received on plans to introduce a Bill to establish freedom of information. [54736]

Mr. Straw: In the period 1 August-9 October, I received 281 representations about the Government's plans for a Freedom of Information Bill. These were generally supportive of our plans, but the majority sought further information about the timetable for the Bill. I have also met my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, West (Mr. Morgan) to discuss our plans and intend to discuss them further with other interested parties and individuals over the coming weeks.

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on how the proposed freedom of information legislation will apply to the Scottish Parliament. [54727]

Mr. Straw: It will be for the Scottish Parliament to determine the approach of the Scottish Executive and other public bodies to openness and freedom of information within areas of devolved competence. Reserved matters would be subject to the proposed United Kingdom Freedom of Information Act.

Policy Co-ordination

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps he is taking to make the procedures relating to inter-departmental communication on policy development more transparent. [54726]

Mr. Straw: I intend to introduce a Freedom of Information Act which will apply to information held by public authorities. Information on the policy development process will be covered by the Act but, as the White Paper "Your Right to Know" made clear, this information could be withheld if disclosure would cause harm to the decision-making and policy advice processes. The Act will also exclude certain information.

CABINET OFFICE

Information Technology

13. **Mr. Todd:** To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what progress has been made in achieving the strategic direction of information technology in the Government's service. [54733]

Mr. Kilfoyle: Our developing Information Technology strategy is an important enabler for our Better Government programme.

The Government Secure Intranet (GSI) launched earlier in the year, is growing rapidly and enabling Government Departments to communicate electronically with each other.

Currently 12 Departments are connected and we intend that all major departments will be connected over the next year.

Ministerial Correspondence

14. **Mr. Ian Bruce:** To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office if he will take steps to ensure that all Ministers reply to letters from hon. Members within a specific time scale. [54735]

Mr. Kilfoyle: The Government attach the greatest importance to the effective handling of correspondence. Challenging targets are set for replying to letters from hon. Members and performance against target is continuously monitored. Departments have recently been reminded of the importance of replying promptly to letters from hon. Members and the Cabinet Office will issue guidance later this month reminding Departments of the correct procedures to be followed when handling ministerial correspondence.

Better Regulation Initiative

15. **Mr. Steen:** To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what proposals he has to extend the better regulation initiative. [54737]

Dr. Jack Cunningham: As part of the Better Regulation Initiative I am determined to extend good practice at all stages of regulatory work. In August we published new guidance to help Departments to apply the Better Regulation Task Force's principles of good regulation.

This means that no regulatory proposal which has an impact on businesses, charities and voluntary bodies should be considered by the Government without a thorough assessment of the risks, costs and benefits, a clear analysis of who will be affected and an explanation of why a non-regulatory approach would be insufficient. The Guide replaces the previous Administration's range of guidance on Deregulation, Compliance Cost Assessment and Risk Assessment with a single document.

The publication of the Guide also heralds the introduction of a more comprehensive system of regulatory reporting to meet the Government's manifesto commitment to monitor the regulatory activity. Every Department is required to publish an account (in the Departmental Report) of their regulatory activity with examples of how they have improved the quality and effectiveness of regulation through the application of the Task Force's principles.

European Directives

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what plans he has to co-ordinate Government policy relating to European directives. [54708]

Dr. Jack Cunningham: I refer the hon. Member to the oral answer I gave to the hon. Member for Mid-Worcestershire (Mr. Luff) earlier today, *Official Report*, column 1264.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Meat (Sulphonamides)

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many slaughtered farm animals in each year since 1990 had sulphonamides present above the maximum permitted levels. [54665]

Mr. Rooker: The Veterinary Medicines Directorate is responsible for a large scale random sampling surveillance programme for residues of veterinary medicines in meat. Under the National Surveillance Scheme samples which reflect the supply profile of red meat to the consumer are taken at randomly selected slaughterhouses and on-farm.

The presence of sulphonamides in cattle, sheep and pigs is specifically monitored using a multi-residue method.

Directive 86/469/EEC, which until the end of 1997 prescribed the number of samples tested for each substance, required a greater proportion of pigs to be tested for sulphonamides because they are more often used in the treatment of pigs compared to cattle or sheep. The results are as follows:

Year	Cattle	Greater than MRL	Sheep	Greater than MRL	Pig	Greater than MRL	% pigs greater than MRL
1990	0	0	0	0	1,210	61	5.04
1991	0	0	0	0	1,207	46	3.81
1992	38	0	68	0	867	26	3.00
1993	103	0	98	0	1,193	19	1.59
1994	111	1	139	0	1,214	23	1.90
1995	109	0	126	0	1,210	16	1.32
1996	89	0	93	0	1,107	18	1.62
1997	77	1	80	0	1,135	17	1.50

In addition, the microbiological assay (FPT) which is used for the wider surveillance of antimicrobial compounds will identify the presence of sulphonamides in cattle, sheep and pigs where concentrations are well in excess of the permitted levels. The results from this survey are:

Sulphonamides FPT 1991 to 1997—Great Britain

Year	Samples	Greater than MRL
1990	0	0
1991	34,081	[1]64
1992	37,186	[1]49
1993	35,590	[1]9
1994	34,037	[2]10
1995	33,931	[3]6
1996	31,619	[1]6
1997	32,444	[1]5

[1] Pigs
[2] (8 pig, 1 cow, 1 goat)
[3] (5 pig, 1 cow)

BSE

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what are his projections for BSE cases in *(a)* England, *(b)* Wales, *(c)* Scotland and *(d)* Northern Ireland for (i) 1998, (ii) 1999, (iii) 2000, (iv) 2001, (v) 2002 and (vi) 2003. [55494]

Mr. Rooker: Predictions of the number of BSE cases in Great Britain and Northern Ireland for 1998, 1999 and 2000 are set out. They are derived from the Veterinary Laboratories Agency's computer model of the epidemic together with additional data provided by the Department of Agriculture for Northern Ireland. The model predicts that the epidemic will continue to decline, a finding that is in agreement with published and unpublished findings of Professor Anderson's group at the Wellcome Trust Centre for the Epidemiology of Infectious Disease, University of Oxford.

Year	Great Britain	Northern Ireland
1998	2,685–2,891	20
1999	1,223–1,741	12
2000	451–784	6

Because the computer model uses data for Great Britain as a whole, it cannot provide separate predictions for England, Scotland and Wales. Supplementary estimates have therefore been made based on the proportional distribution of BSE cases in the three countries in 1997. These are less precise than the national predictions because they do not take into account movements of cattle from one part of Great Britain to another or different rates of decline in the number of BSE cases from region to region.

Year	England	Scotland	Wales
1998	2,402–2,586	84–91	199–204
1999	1,094–1,557	38–55	91–129
2000	403–701	14–25	33–58

It is not possible to provide estimates with any precision for the years 2001, 2002 and 2003 because by this time there will be random, unpredictable effects, particularly arising from cases occurring with long incubation periods.

The VLA predictions represent 95 per cent. confidence intervals around a central estimate. It is inevitable that future predictions contain elements of uncertainty particularly when historical exposure levels to the BSE agent are not known. Nevertheless, based on information currently available, it is expected that the observed number of confirmed BSE cases for 1998 will prove to be close to the upper end of the predicted range provided above.

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list for *(a)* each EU country *(b)* England, *(c)* Wales, *(d)* Scotland and *(e)* Northern Ireland the number of BSE cases recorded in each of the last three years for which figures are readily available and the figures for this year to the latest available date, indicating for each of the United Kingdom countries the figures for each month of the current year to 30 September. [55495]

Mr. Rooker: Figures for confirmed BSE cases in other EU countries for 1995, 1996, 1997 and to the end of September 1998, supplied to us by the Commission, are given in the following table:

EU country	*1995*	*1996*	*1997*	*[1]1998*
Belgium	—	—	1	4
France	3	12	6	10
Germany[2]	—	—	2	—
Luxembourg	—	—	1	—
Netherlands	—	—	2	1
Portugal	14	29	20	60
Republic of Ireland	16	73	77	46

[1] to 30 September 1998

[2] Germany has report no homebred cases of BSE

Equivalent figures for each of the UK countries by year, and for 1998 by month, of confirmation are as detailed.

Year of confirmation	*England*	*Wales*	*Scotland*	*N. Ireland*	*Total*
1995	13,227	1,474	750	170	15,621
1996	7,691	703	346	82	8,822
1997	4,308	374	165	28	4,875
January to September 1998	2,272	186	74	12	2,544

Month of confirmation	*England*	*Wales*	*Scotland*	*N. Ireland*	*Total*
January 1998	281	18	13	1	313
February 1998	422	38	15	2	477
March 1998	319	31	8	0	358
April 1998	248	17	2	1	268
May 1998	216	14	9	0	239
June 1998	328	28	10	1	367
July 1998	164	13	4	0	181
August 1998	101	12	6	4	123
September 1998	193	15	7	3	218

Written Answers to Questions

Thursday 22 October 1998

ENVIRONMENT, TRANSPORT AND THE REGIONS

M6

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will list *(a)* the membership of the West Midlands regional planning conference with responsibility for the proposed M6 capacity study and *(b)* those parties he intends to invite to participate in the study partnership. [55602]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The West Midlands to the North West conurbation study will be taken forward in partnership with the West Midlands and North West regional planning conferences, the Regional Development Agencies, the Highways Agency and OPRAF. In the West Midlands the regional planning conference is the Regeneration and Environment Committee of the West Midlands Local Government Association. The members of the committee are:

Birmingham City Council: Cllrs. B. F. Bird, A. Bore, B. Clarke, A. Coulson, F. Coyne, G. Coyne, J. Chapman, B. Harvey, R. Hassall, I. W. M. McCardle, D. Minnis, P. G. Murphy, R. Pinney, A. M. Rudge, R. Spector, T. J. Stewart, M. Whitby, M. Wells

Bridgnorth District Council: Cllr. C. J. Lea

Bromsgrove District Council: Cllr. R. Clayton

Cannock District Council: Cllr. G. E. Roberts

Coventry City Council: Cllrs. J. V. Gazey, J. McNicholas, H. N. Nolan

Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council: Cllrs. G. H. Davies, A. J. Fletcher, M. C. Knight, D. H. Sparks, R. Tomkinson, C. L. Woodall, R. D. Burt

East Staffordshire Borough Council: Cllr. P. Perry

Herefordshire County Council: Cllrs. T. M. James, R. C. Summers, B. Tannatt Nash, D. W. Rule

Lichfield District Council: Cllr. E. Drinkwater

Malvern Hills District Council: Cllr. J. Ford

Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council: Cllr. H. Matthews

North Shropshire District Council: Cllr. D. Hollis

North Warwickshire Borough Council: Cllr. D. Birkinshaw

Nuneaton and Bedworth Borough Council: Cllr. M. J. Jones

Oswestry Borough Council: Cllr. S. Jones

Redditch Borough Council: Cllr. R. Passingham

Rugby Borough Council: Cllr. B. Levy

Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council: Cllrs. S. C. Eling, S. Smith

Shrewsbury & Atcham Borough Council: Cllr. D. Moore

Shropshire County Council: Cllrs. P. A. Engleheart, E. J. Everall, D. Hill, N. Hartin, R. Walker

Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council: Cllrs. M. Corser, L. W. P. Kyles, J. A. Morris, G. E. Richards, J. Reed

South Shropshire District Council: Cllr. J. H. Meredith

South Staffordshire District Council: Cllr. W. F. Brownhill

Stafford Borough Council: Cllr. P. A. Walker

Staffordshire County Council: Cllrs. T. A. Dix, A. R. Hanchard, D. Heptonstall, C. E. Holland, W. Hughes, R. Roberts, T. J. Wakefield, A. G. Ward

Staffodshire Moorlands District Council: Cllr. S. H. Proffitt

Stoke-on-Trent City Council: Cllrs. B. Holmes, A. Jones, P. A. Shaw, B. G. Stockley, J. Edwards

Stratford on Avon District Council: Cllr. T. Baxter

Tamworth Borough Council: Cllr. S. R. Tonks

Telford and Wrekin City Council: Cllrs. D. Blackwell, D. Davies, C. Smith

Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council: Cllrs. M. R. Burley, B. Douglas-Maul, S. K. Peart, T. Perrett, I. Shires, H. Smith, H. Withnall

Warwick District Council: Cllr. B. Evans

Warwickshire County Council: Cllrs. G. D. Collett, D. A. Forwood, M. Heatley, J. A. Tandy, H. A. Thomas

Wolverhampton Metropolitan Borough Council: Cllrs. A. Hart, R. C. Lawrence, J. McCallum, M. Jaspal, P. Allen

Worcester City Council: Cllr. M. Wills

Worcestershire County Council: Cllrs. R. A. A. Bullock, C. R. Beardwood, P. H. Fallows, E. B. Tucker, H. Purcell, L. Townley

Wychavon District Council: Cllr. J. Payne

Wyre Forest District Council: Cllr. D. A. Lewis

West Midlands Passenger Transport Authority: Cllrs. S. C. Stacey, P. Tilsley, R. Paice, R. Badham, D. Batten

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will list the *(a)* timescale and *(b)* terms of reference for the proposed study of capacity problems on the M6 between the West Midlands and the North West conurbation. [55601]

Ms Glenda Jackson: We will shortly be consulting regional planning conferences on the timing for all the studies proposed in A New Deal for Trunk Roads in England. However, we expect to agree an early start date for this study.

The study will consider the scope for modal shift to address environmental and congestion problems on the M6. The detailed terms of reference for the study will be drawn up in consultation with local authorities and other interests.

Landfill Tax

Mr. Stunell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what exemptions of specific materials are *(a)* in place and *(b)* being considered for the landfill tax. [55665]

Mr. Meale: There are currently exemptions from Landfill Tax for: *(a)* material dredged from harbours and inland waterways; *(b)* mining and quarrying waste; *(c)* waste arising from the reclamation of contaminated land; and *(d)* for disposal of pets in pet cemeteries. As announced in the last budget, there will be an exemption for the restoration of landfill sites and the backfilling of quarries. DETR and Customs have been consulting the landfill and quarrying industries in developing this new exemption. Full details will be announced in due course.

Mr. Stunell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what representations his Department has received from contractors and trade associations about exemptions and rebates from landfill tax, with particular reference to top soil and inert natural materials. [55668]

Mr. Meale: DETR and Customs have been consulting the landfill and quarrying industries in developing the exemption from Landfill Tax for the restoration of landfill sites and the backfilling of quarries. In the course of that consultation there have been many representations from trade associations and individual operators in both industries. The exemption will be restricted in inert materials. Full details will be announced in due course.

Sewage Treatment

Dr. Brand: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what timetable his Department plans to set for the installation of secondary treatment works at the Southern Water sewage treatment plant at Yaverland on the Isle of Wight. [55725]

Mr. Meale: The Government announced in September that secondary sewage treatment would be required for all significant coastal outfalls in England and Wales. In cases which were formerly potential derogations to a lower level of treatment, such as Yaverland, we will encourage water and sewerage companies to make as rapid progress as possible with installation of secondary treatment. The timing of investment is being discussed between the Environment Agency and individual companies and will be agreed by Ministers early next year, as part of an approved company investment programme.

Building Regulations

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many responses his Department received to its consultation on transitional provisions to cover the period before and following the extension of Part M of the building regulations to new dwellings; and what percentage of these were from *(a)* disability organisations, *(b)* building-related bodies and *(c)* housing providers. [55863]

Mr. Raynsford: The Department has received 66 responses to its consultation on transitional provisions to cover the period before and following the extension of Part M of the Building Regulations to new dwellings. Of these responses: 29% were from disability organisations; 41% were from building related bodies (half of which were national or regional associations or professional bodies); and 8% were from housing providers.

A full list of those who responded has been lodged in the House Library.

House Building

Mr. Ruffley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has to revise his Department's estimate that 4.4 million new homes will need to be built by 2016 to satisfy demand; and if he will make a statement. [55763]

Mr. Raynsford: The next set of household projections is due to be published early in 1999.

Climate Change Consultation Paper

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when he intends to publish the Government's climate change consultation paper. [56627]

Mr. Prescott: On Monday 26 October I will launch a consultation paper seeking views on policy options for meeting our climate change targets. Copies of the document will be available from the Vote Office and placed in the Libraries of the House.

National Bus Company Pensions

Ms Rosie Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions for what reasons he has now decided to seek an out of court settlement to the current legal action on National Bus Company pensions. [56628]

Ms Glenda Jackson: Litigation was set in train by the decision of the previous Government to offer the trustees funding to pursue this matter through the courts. In view of this it would not have been appropriate to begin negotiations on a settlement until the details of this complex case had been fully prepared and all the relevant facts and arguments were known to and considered by both parties. The Trustees submitted the final part of their claims in July this year. The Government received strong legal advice that they should lodge their own response with the court before opening discussions on an out of court settlement. The Secretary of State initiated settlement discussions as soon as that stage was reached.

Local Deprivation Index

Mrs. Ellman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when the technical report on revising and updating the Index of Local Deprivation will be published. [56629]

Mr. Caborn: I have placed in the House Library the report describing the technical details of revising and updating the Index of Local Deprivation, the results of which were published in June of this year.

Environmental Pollution Report

Mr. Gapes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when he intends to respond to the Twentieth report of the Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution. [56677]

Dr. Reid: The Government have today published their response to the Twentieth Report, on Transport and the Environment. Copies of the Response have been Laid before the House.

The Government's response to the Commission closely follows their recently published White Paper on Integrated Transport. The Government note the clear resonance between the themes emphasised in the White Paper and in this Royal Commission report and its predecessor, the Eighteenth Report. These include recognition that the consequences of future traffic growth are indeed unacceptable; the need to take action to secure more sustainable transport for the future; the need for integration, both within and between transport modes, and of transport policies with other policies; agreement that Government should aim to provide the framework for all those with an interest in transport to play their part; the potential for technology to provide solutions through innovation, amongst other things, in fuel efficiency and emissions; and the need to encourage awareness of transport issues, and to send consistent signals such that we all work to further sustainable development objectives.

The Government have warmly welcomed the Royal Commission's reports, which have been influential in shaping the new mood for change, away from policies dominated by the short-term, and towards a more sustainable approach to transport policy that tackles both congestion and pollution. The Government look forward to developing this common ground as we all work to implement the new integrated transport policy.

DEFENCE

Young Navy Personnel

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement about the deployment of young people under the age of 17 years in the naval service. [56418]

Mr. Doug Henderson: Following a recent review of the policy for the deployment of young people into operational service in Royal Navy vessels and Royal Marine units I have decided that, with immediate effect, Naval Service personnel will not be deployed below the age of 17. Recruitment and training at age 16 will, however, continue. This change brings the Naval Service into line with the Army and RAF, which do not deploy young people below the age of 17.

Civilian Jobs (Scotland)

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many MOD civilian jobs there are in Scotland by location. [55410]

Mr. Spellar: The Ministry does not keep central records of the number of posts. The table gives the total number of full time equivalent personnel, both permanent and casual, by the location recorded on their pay and personnel records as at 1 September 1998.

Ministry of Defence personnel based in Scotland— 1 September 1998

Location	*Number (Full time Equivalents[1])*
Abbotsinch	5
Aberdeen	90
Almond	263
Arbroath	95
Aultbea	1
Aviemore	5
Ayr	3
Badenoch	3
Beith	568
Benbecula	54
Bishopton	20
Buchan	79
Burntisland	6
Carnoustie	22
Clyde	27
Clydebank	1
Coatbridge	2
Comrie	13
Coulport	1,083
Craigiehall	148
Crombie	257
Cupar	2
Dingwall	4
Dounreay	3
Dreghorn	12
Dumbarton	6
Dumfries	3
Dunblane	71
Dundee	59
Dunfermline	34
Dyce	5
East Kilbride	6
Eastriggs	6
Edinburgh	372
Edzell	1
Elgin	22
Eskdalemuir	6
Fairlie	10
Faslane	1,885
Galashiels	1
Garelochead	4
Glasgow	1,794
Glen Douglas	2
Glencorse	43
Grangemouth	3
Greenock	59
Hamilton	1
Helensburgh	26
Invergowrie	3
Inverness	55
Irvine	2
Isle of Tiree	5
Kinloss	334
Kinross	6
Kirkcaldy	1
Kirkcudbright	26
Kirkwall	4
Kyle of Lochalsh	16
Lerwick	12
Leuchars	311
Livingstone	4
Loch Goil	26
Lossiemouth	313
Machrihanish	2
Milton Bridge	33
Monkton	6
Motherwell	1
Nairn	3
North Gerwick	10
Paisley	3
Penicuik	19
Perth	156
Peterhead	3
Pitreavie	5
Prestwick	57
Rosneath	154
Rosyth	515
Saxa Vord	40
Stirling	251
Stornaway	7
Tain	1
West Freugh	50
Wick	1
Total	9,612

[1] The total may not equal the sum of the parts due to rounding

Accommodation (Scotland)

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many single accommodation places exist for each of

the services in Scotland, for *(a)* officers and *(b)* other ranks, by location; and if he will estimate the total number of service personnel that could be accommodated on shore in Scotland if all the available accommodation were utilised. [55407]

Mr. Spellar: There are a total of 9,576 single accommodation places on shore in Scotland. Currently, 6,164 accommodation spaces are occupied. The breakdown by Service, location and by Officers and Other Ranks accommodation is shown on the table:

Ser	Service	Location	Officers		Other Ranks	
			Total SLA[1]	Occupied SLA[2]	Total SLA[1]	Occupied SLA[2]
1	Navy	HMS Neptune	238	144	2,142	1,417
2		HMS Caledonia	28	20	509	277
3		HMS Gannet	21	19	264	145
4		RM Condor	80	[3]53	1,082	[3]514
	Total		367	236	3,997	2,353
5	Army	HQ Craigiehall	26	16	153	39
6		HQ Edinburgh Castle	8	5	113	[4]40
7		Dreghorn Barracks	22	19	395	278
8		Redford Infantry Barracks	23	22	386	356
9		Ford George	25	18	468	235
	Total		104	80	1,515	948
10	RAF	Benbecula	0	0	35	35
11		Buchan	30	20	233	192
12		Kinloss	101	60	771	602
13		Leuchars	155	48	692	575
14		Machrihanish	51	0	242	0
15		Lossiemouth	115	50	993	853
16		Saxa Vord	14	4	137	90
17		Stornoway	0	0	24	18
	Total		466	182	3,127	2,365
	Tri-Service Total		937	498	8,639	5,666

[1] To show total number of available bedspaces
[2] To show occupied number of bedspaces
[3] As at 1 October 1998. Does not take account of elements of RM Condor who are currently deployed in Belize and Northern Ireland
[4] ORs occupancy figure increases to 80 during Edinburgh Tattoo

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what barrack accommodation is currently surplus to requirements in Scotland and awaiting disposal; and if he will estimate the potential single accommodation capacity of these barracks if modernised. [55409]

Mr. Spellar: The Navy and Army have no surplus single living accommodation awaiting disposal in Scotland. The RAF has 2 sites which are considered to be surplus and which are in the process of disposal, as follows:

a. RAF Edzell. RAF Edzell was passed to the Defence Estate Organisation (DEO) for disposal in September 1998. If modernised, it is assessed that there would be 300 single bed spaces.

b. RAF Stornoway. It was announced on 13 February 1998 that RAF Stornoway was to close on 31 March 1998; however further work is in hand to establish the MOD's legal position regarding Former Ownership of the land which requires resolution before proceeding with the sale. If modernised, it is assessed that there would be 15 single bed spaces.

Lucknow Company (Officer Cadets)

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many officer cadets were in the Lucknow Company at the Royal Military Academy, Sandhurst in *(a)* July 1996, *(b)* July 1997 and *(c)* July 1998. [55530]

Mr. Doug Henderson: The Lucknow Platoon, Royal Military Academy Sandhurst, is a holding platoon, to which officer cadets, out of training for any reason, belong, including those undergoing medical treatment, those awaiting disciplinary action, and those undertaking further education.

The strength of the Lucknow Platoon in July 1996, 1997 and 1998 was as follows:

Year	Total number of cadets
1996	Between 33 and 36
1997	Between 35 and 37
1998	Between 46 and 48

Training Camps (Scotland)

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many places *(a)* are currently available and *(b)* will be available by 2000, in training camps in Scotland, for *(a)* Kirkcudbright, *(b)* Barry Budden and *(c)* Cultybraggan. [55408]

Mr. Spellar: There are 500 bed spaces available at each of the training camps at Barry Budden and Cultybraggan; and no plans to alter this by the year 2000. There is no training camp accommodation at the

Kirkcudbright training area, but there are plans to provide accommodation for up to 240 which may reach fruition by the year 2000.

SCOTLAND

Motorcycle Parking

Mr. Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many motorcycle parking spaces exist at each office or site for which his Department is responsible; and how many are secure spaces. [55257]

Mr. Dewar: There are 25 motorcycle parking spaces associated with the main administrative office buildings of which The Scottish Office is the major occupier. Of these, 19 are secure spaces. Information about other buildings for which my Department or its agencies are responsible is not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Individual Pupil Compacts

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what action his Department has taken to introduce individual pupil compacts setting out targets for pupils in Scottish schools. [55043]

Mr. Dewar *[holding answer 19 October 1998]:* The Government in Scotland are committed to taking forward Personal Learning Plans which will bring together all the relevant information on a child's performance and enable parents, teachers and pupils to agree a programme of development which will include targets for attainment. Further guidance will be issued to education authorities in due course.

Opencast Coal

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what progress he has made on preparing revised planning policy guidance on opencast coal following last year's consultation exercise; and if he will make a statement. [56678]

Mr. Macdonald: The Government are publishing today a consultative draft of proposed new planning policy guidance on opencast coal for Scotland. The proposed revised guidance is intended to supersede the current guidance on opencast coal as set out in National Planning Policy Guideline 4: Land for Mineral Working.

The new guidance sets a more robust framework within which planning authorities must consider all proposals for opencast coal developments. The intention is to ensure that, in considering proposals, full weight is given, in particular, to the effect and potential disturbance on local communities as well as other environmental considerations including nature conservation and the impact on the landscape.

Where a proposal would cause demonstrable harm, the guidance is clear that permission should not be granted except where the benefit of the development proposal to the community clearly outweighs the potential harm.

The highest environmental standards are expected for all opencast and related mineral operations including timely and sensitive restoration and aftercare of sites. A key feature of the policy is to introduce realistic separation distances between communities and sites for opencast extraction.

To re-inforce this policy, the Secretary of State has today directed that, where planning authorities are minded to grant consent, they should notify him of proposals which fall into a number of defined circumstances. In addition, it is the Secretary of State's intention, once the policy guidance has been finalised, to issue a direction requiring those local authorities where proposals for opencast coal and related minerals occur to review their development plan policies and to report on the action taken within a set timetable.

We believe that the proposals set out in the guidance represent a significantly stronger framework which will ensure that the consideration of opencast coal proposals is consistent with the Government's pre-Election commitments. We look to planning authorities and the opencast industry to work within this new policy context in promoting and approving only environmentally acceptable sites.

A copy of the guidance is being placed in the House Library. Copies are being widely circulated to planning authorities, industry and environmental interests. The proposals are open for consultation until 11 December. We will then take steps to ensure that final guidance is in place early in the new year and well ahead of the elections for the new Scottish Parliament. In the meantime, the Secretary of State expects planning authorities to treat the draft guidance as a material consideration in their assessment of all current and future applications.

Scottish Compact

Ms Osborne: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the launch of the Scottish Compact. [56679]

Mr. Dewar: The Scottish Compact sets out the principles underpinning the relationship between Government and the voluntary sector in Scotland. Command Paper No. 4083 will be laid before the House on Friday 23 October.

The publication of the Scottish Compact (which will be complemented by sister Compacts in England, Wales and Northern Ireland) meets another of the Government's pre-election commitments. It will help cement a closer partnership between the Government and the voluntary sector in areas of common concern for the benefit of society as a whole.

Non-Domestic Rating

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will review the method used to define rural areas in the Non-Domestic Rating (Rural Areas and Rateable Value Limits) Scotland Order 1997; and if he will make a statement. [55303]

Mr. McLeish: The Village Shops Rate Relief Scheme was introduced on 1 April 1998 after extensive consultation, with the majority of consultees accepting that the General Register Office (Scotland) (GRO(S))

postcode method of urban/rural classification was the best available for the purposes of the Scheme. The GRO(S) classification method will be reviewed after the 2001 Census.

Study Support

Mr. David Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will report on progress in creating a national framework for study support. [55103]

Mrs. Liddell: Significant resources are being made available for study support in Scotland. In the three years from April 1999, the New Opportunities Fund will commit a total of £23 million and the Government will provide new resources of £27 million as part of the recently announced Excellence Fund to support out of school hours learning activities.

In addition, we are giving The Prince's Trust—Action grant of £40,000 this financial year. The grant will support the development of networking arrangements to share ideas and good practice on study support and the dissemination of a CD ROM. The support arrangements will include regional seminars later this year.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Mediation Services

Mr. Stinchcombe: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will make a statement on the amount of training in mediation services which has been offered to members of the judiciary. [54677]

Mr. Hoon: Judicial training is the responsibility of the Judicial Studies Board. As part of its programme to support the civil justice reforms, the Judicial Studies Board held a series of seminars for all full-time judges who deal with civil cases. They included presentations by three mediators and a report on the mediation pilot scheme at Central London County Court. For the second stage of training, the board is planning further seminars for all full-time civil judges to develop a common approach to the reforms. These seminars will include a presentation designed to assist judges in identifying cases suitable for mediation.

Mr. Stinchcombe: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what studies have been undertaken or evaluated by his Department in respect of the potential role which could be played by mediation in medical negligence cases; and if he will make a statement. [54674]

Mr. Hoon: In her evaluation of the Central London County Court mediation pilot scheme, Professor Genn gathered data according to case type; only one case concerning medical negligence was mediated, and it did not settle. It would be inappropriate to draw conclusions from such a small sample. I await with interest the evaluation of the NHS Executive sponsored mediation pilot project which I understand will be completed shortly.

Mr. Stinchcombe: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what assessment his Department has made, or plans to make, of the potential implications of a compulsory mediation stage in the litigation process in terms of reducing *(a)* delays and *(b)* costs in litigation; and if he will make a statement. [54678]

Mr. Hoon: The Government are considering the role of mediation in the civil justice system in the light of Professor Genn's findings on the pilot mediation scheme at the Central London County Court.

Mr. Stinchcombe: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what assessment his Department has made of the pilot study of mediation services undertaken at Central London County Court; and if he will make a statement. [54675]

Mr. Hoon: The Lord Chancellor's Department funded Professor Hazel Genn to evaluate the mediation pilot scheme at the Central London County Court. Her report was published in July. It shows that, whilst only a small minority of cases were mediated, of those that were, 62 per cent. reached settlement at the mediation; that mediated settlements were achieved earlier than settlements in non-mediated cases; and that the litigants involved welcomed the opportunity to state their grievance in their own words and to participate in a relatively informal process.

Mr. Stinchcombe: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what meetings have been held by his Department with providers of mediation services concerning the potential role of such services in the civil legal system. [54676]

Mr. Hoon: Officials from the Lord Chancellor's Department have met representatives of ADR Group, and of the Centre for Dispute Resolution to discuss the role of mediation in non-family civil disputes. The Department, with University College London, also organised a major symposium on mediation to which providers of such services were invited.

Persistent Inquirers

Mr. Sanders: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department which of his Department's agencies have procedures to identify persistent inquirers for information. [53951]

Mr. Hoon: No specific procedures are in place to identify persistent inquirers.

Legal Aid (Telephone Inquiries)

Mr. Pond: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many members of staff on *(a)* a full-time and *(b)* a part-time basis are employed to deal with telephone inquiries to the Legal Aid Board for the South East Region. [54065]

Mr. Hoon: The South East Region Area Office has three telephone lines used for Customer Services inquiries. One for legal queries, one for means assessment queries and one for questions relating to finance. The legal line is staffed by a full time receptionist who passes calls to one of eight full time legal caseworkers to take appropriate action. The finance and means assessment lines are each staffed by one full time caseworker.

Legal Aid (Pink Floyd Concert)

Jane Griffiths: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department (1) what is the amount awarded in legal aid, to date, to those pursuing legal action against Arena Promotional Facilities Ltd., co-organisers of the Pink Floyd concert at Earl's Court; and if he will make a statement; [54409]

(2) what is the amount awarded in legal aid, to date, to those pursuing legal action against Harvey Goldsmith Entertainments Ltd., co-organisers of the Pink Floyd concert at Earl's Court; and if he will make a statement; [54410]

(3) what is the total amount awarded in legal aid, to date, to those pursuing legal action against David McCullum Ltd., in connection with the Pink Floyd concert at Earl's Court; and if he will make a statement; [54158]

(4) what is the amount awarded in legal aid, to date, to those pursuing legal action against Earl's Court Ltd., co-organisers of the Pink Floyd concert at Earl's Court, and if he will make a statement. [54411]

Mr. Hoon: The information is not readily available, as the Legal Aid Board's database records the name only of the applicant for legal aid. However, so far as the Legal Aid Board is able to determine, twelve certificates have been identified which relate to claims being made against a combination of one or more of the four defendants.

Of the twelve certificates, one applicant has been successful in recovering damages and costs from the defendants and therefore no cost claim has been made on the Legal Aid Fund. One other applicant withdrew from the action and the certificate was subsequently discharged resulting in a cost to the fund of £150. The remaining ten certificates are currently in force with claims ongoing but no final bills have yet been submitted.

PRIME MINISTER

Currency Flows

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Prime Minister, pursuant to his statement of 30 September on the policy of Her Majesty's Government concerning world monetary stability, what plans he has to seek agreement between major trading nations to co-ordinate limited regulation of currency flows related to loans and investments of speculative character. [55683]

The Prime Minister: I have no plans to seek to restrict currency flows in the global economy which I believe would damage prospects for stability and growth. Our priority is, instead, to create a more open, transparent and robust financial system, with better information and subject to better and more co-ordinated oversight by national regulators and international financial institutions.

Libya

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Prime Minister, pursuant to his letter of 23 June, if he will discuss with President Clinton and M. Jacques Santer the sanctions imposed on Libya under UN Security Council resolutions. [54965]

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 21 October 1998]:* UN Security Council Resolution 1192 states that the UN sanctions imposed on Libya will be suspended once the two Lockerbie accused are delivered to the Netherlands for trial before a Scottish court, and provided the French Government declare themselves satisfied with Libyan co-operation concerning the UTA bombing. I regularly discuss the need for Libyan compliance with UN Security Council resolutions in my bilateral contacts.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Prime Minister, pursuant to his answer of 27 April 1998, *Official Report*, column *17*, what report he has received from Scotland Yard about the case of the murder of WPC Fletcher; and what is his current assessment of the case as a major obstacle to the United Kingdom's bilateral relations with Libya. [54966]

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 21 October 1998]:* The murder of WPC Fletcher remains a major obstacle to the normalisation of our bilateral relations with Libya. I understand from the Home Office that the Metropolitan Police inquiries are nearing completion.

Transport White Paper

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Prime Minister what meetings he had with non-governmental bodies about transport policy and the Transport White Paper in the three months before the publication of the White Paper; and which of these meetings were attended by employees of professional lobby consultants. [55268]

The Prime Minister: We carried out an extensive consultation as part of the fundamental review of transport policy. Prior to publication of the Transport White Paper my Ministers and I met a large number of individuals and organisations to discuss a wide range of transport issues. The discussions and the written representations we received played an important role in informing the development of our integrated transport policy.

China

Mr. Howard: To ask the Prime Minister what representations he made about human rights during his recent visit to China. [55952]

The Prime Minister: In my meetings with President Jiang Zemin and Premier Zhu Rongji, I welcomed China's signature of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and urged China to commence a dialogue with the Dalai Lama on Tibet. I raised the cases of individuals, including Xu Wenli, who was detained on 7 October and then released. In my speech on 7 October I emphasised the need to address human rights through continued dialogue and encouraged China to take further positive steps.

Committee on Standards in Public Life

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Prime Minister if it is the Government's policy to accept the latest recommendations of the Committee on Standards in Public Life; and if he will make a statement. [55758]

The Prime Minister: The Government strongly welcome the Committee's report on the funding of political parties in the United Kingdom which was published on 13 October. We intend to legislate on the main findings of the report so that robust and rigorous

rules governing the funding of political parties can be in place before the next general election. To that end, my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary will publish a draft Bill before next year's summer recess.

WALES

New Deal

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on progress with the New Deal in Wales. [55593]

Mr. Hain: I refer the right hon. Member to the answer that I gave to the hon. Member for Montgomeryshire (Mr. Öpik) on 20 October 1998, *Official Report*, column *1073*.

Education Funding

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what are the current levels of funding per pupil for education in each Welsh local education authority. [55598]

Mr. Hain: The latest available information for local education authorities is the budgeted gross revenue expenditure per pupil in 1997–98. This is shown in the table.

Gross revenue expenditure per pupil by local education authority, 1997–98[1]

LEA	*£ per pupil*
Blaenau Gwent	2,252
Bridgend	2,250
Caerphilly	2,203
Cardiff	2,124
Carmarthenshire	2,558
Ceredigion	2,750
Conwy	2,144
Denbighshire	2,104
Flintshire	2,162
Gwynedd	2,486
Isle of Anglesey	2,418
Merthyr Tydfil	2,375
Monmouthshire	2,283
Neath Port Talbot	2,429
Newport	2,250
Pembrokeshire	2,486
Powys	2,627
Rhondda Cynon Taff	2,456
Swansea	2,265
Torfaen	2,168
Vale of Glamorgan	1,977
Wrexham	2,121
Wales	2,297

[1] Provisional

Job Creation

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many jobs, in each Welsh county, have been *(a)* created and *(b)* sustained, by (i) inward investment from abroad and (ii) investment from indigenous firms, in each year since 1993. [55591]

Mr. Hain: The information is not available in the form requested. Reliable information is available only in respect of offers of Regional Selective Assistance. Forecasts of employment from offers accepted by companies since April 1993 are set out in the table. For the purposes of historical comparison the table gives information on the basis of the old counties.

	Jobs Forecast			
	Indigenous[1]		*Foreign-Owned*[2]	
Welsh Counties	*New*	*Sustained*	*New*	*Sustained*
1993–94				
Clwyd	1,139	860	423	517
Dyfed	86	15	246	320
Gwent	681	787	1,789	514
Gwynedd	158	268	0	0
Mid Glamorgan	1,577	413	645	304
Powys	107	0	0	0
South Glamorgan	223	4	526	0
West Glamorgan	229	284	171	742
Total	4,200	2,631	3,800	2,397
1994–95				
Clwyd	416	13	242	435
Dyfed	352	0	92	12
Gwent	686	309	296	11
Gwynedd	200	84	181	135
Mid Glamorgan	944	469	407	672
Powys	50	0	0	0
South Glamorgan	191	15	0	0
West Glamorgan	262	32	8	0
Total	3,101	922	1,226	1,265
1995–96				
Clwyd	501	65	471	390
Dyfed	480	296	21	20
Gwent	790	89	722	369
Gwynedd	80	25	37	0
Mid Glamorgan	983	291	811	1,525
Powys	28	0	0	0
South Glamorgan	300	23	1,050	0
West Glamorgan	236	126	59	250
Total	3,398	915	3,171	2,554
1996–97				
Glwyd	742	273	541	443
Dyfed	51	5	0	0
Gwent	883	231	2,431	868
Gwynedd	88	27	15	78
Mid Glamorgan	1,676	251	2,719	2,915
Powys	14	0	0	0
South Glamorgan	714	74	326	0
West Glamorgan	352	174	491	312
Total	4,520	1,035	6,523	4,616
1997–98				
Clwyd	713	2	320	284
Dyfed	227	24	264	0
Gwent	1,112	691	6,943	517
Gwynedd	98	33	63	200
Mid Glamorgan	459	28	676	316
Powys	51	0	0	0
South Glamorgan	324	45	159	293
West Glamorgan	286	95	613	63
Total	3,270	918	9,038	1,673
1998–99 (October)				
Clwyd	60	0	310	0
Dyfed	51	2	85	0
Gwent	265	120	88	15
Gwynedd	0	10	0	0
Mid Glamorgan	462	34	170	0

Welsh Counties	Jobs Forecast: Indigenous[1] New	Indigenous[1] Sustained	Foreign-Owned[2] New	Foreign-Owned[2] Sustained
Powys	0	0	0	0
South Glamorgan	745	0	0	0
West Glamorgan	109	0	117	20
Total	1,692	166	770	35

Note:
For the purpose of these tables:
[1] Indigenous companies are those where the ultimate holding company is registered in the UK
[2] Foreign-owned companies are those where the ultimate holding company is registered overseas

EU Structural Funds

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the negotiations regarding securing Objective one status for western Wales and the valleys. [55596]

Mr. Hain: Today the Office for National Statistics announced GDP figures for all NUTS 2 regions of the United Kingdom. The figures for the West Wales and the Valleys NUTS 2 region make it very likely that it will qualify for Objective 1 status under the new EC regulations governing the Structural funds for 2000–06, assuming that the criterion for Objective 1 remains that an area should have GDP levels below 75 per cent. of the European Union average. The draft regulations are currently being considered by Member States. Negotiations are unlikely to be completed before the end of March next year.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Wave Energy

Mr. Stunell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans his Department has to announce investment in wave energy. [55677]

Mr. Battle: The Government propose to undertake a new and strong drive to develop renewable energy sources in line with their manifesto commitment. To this end, I have commissioned a review of policy towards new and renewable energy, including consideration of what would be necessary and practicable to achieve 10 per cent. of UK electricity needs from renewables by the year 2010, and how renewables can make an effective contribution to meeting requirements for future greenhouse gas reduction commitments. The prospects for wave energy technology will be considered in that review, the outcome of which I hope to be able to announce later this year.

In the meantime, Scottish Office Ministers have launched the third competition under the Scottish Renewables Obligation (SRO-3) and are minded that the SRO-3 Order should make limited capacity available to wave power projects, among others.

Start-up Grant

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what is the Government's policy on repayment of start-up grant when companies close within five years of opening. [55962]

Mr. Mandelson: All offers of Regional Selective Assistance grant require the beneficiaries to accept terms and conditions under which we may vary, withhold or seek repayment of grant in circumstances where the project under-achieves. Normal policy is to clawback or withhold on a pro-rate basis to the progress achieved.

Siemens (North-east Plant)

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how much start-up grant Siemens received for their plant in the North East. [55961]

Mr. Mandelson: The company has received £18 million Regional Selective Assistance from the offer of £30 million made in December 1995.

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will seek repayment of start-up grant from Siemens following the planned closure of their plant in the North East. [55964]

Mr. Mandelson: A decision was made not to clawback the Regional Selective Assistance grant immediately while officials worked with the company to find a buyer. If, however, we are unsuccessful in this, recovery of grant will be considered in the normal way.

Post Office

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what are the planned levels of annual borrowing and returned cash available to the Post Office for re-investment. [55954]

Mr. Mandelson: The Post Office has no annual borrowing planned and expects to spend some £500 million on capital investment in the current financial year.

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) when he plans to introduce measures allowing greater commercial freedom to the Post Office; [55953]

(2) when he plans to announce the conclusions of his review of the Post Office. [55955]

Mr. Mandelson: Work on the Government's review aimed at allowing the Post Office greater commercial freedom is proceeding apace. I will present our proposals as soon as I am ready to do so.

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry by how much the Post Office has proposed to reduce its negative EFL in 1999. [55965]

Mr. Mandelson: The Post Office has made clear its wish to have an EFL set at a commercial dividend level.

Fairness at Work White Paper

Mr. Lansley: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations he has received on the Fairness at Work White Paper. [55115]

Mr. Ian McCartney: The Department has received 474 responses, reflecting a wide range of views, to the White Paper on Fairness at Work, published on 21 May. I am placing a list of respondents in the Library of the House.

Manufacturing Employment

Mr. Fabricant: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on the prospects for employment in manufacturing industry over the next 24 months. [55125]

Mr. Battle: The Government appreciate that the level of sterling and, more recently, the impact of financial problems in Asia have been causing difficulties for some manufacturers. We are ensuring that the necessary conditions are in place for a high and sustainable level of manufacturing employment over the long term: low inflation and sound public finances.

As well as setting in place the framework for securing economic stability, the Government are committed to helping the manufacturing sector, and each worker within it, to become more productive. We encourage individuals to gain knowledge and skills to enhance their employability. Measures such as the University for Industry will assist in this and will help boost the productivity and competitiveness of business through a new approach to learning. The Government are intent on providing the best environment for research and development, to help ensure dynamic and innovative businesses are continually developing new products and services. The new University Challenge fund will provide £50 million in venture capital to help university scientists commercially exploit their research.

Special Advisers

Mr. Ian Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many special advisers and their staff are employed in his Department. [54467]

Mr. Mandelson *[holding answer 31 July 1998]:* There are two special advisers employed by my Department. They are given the usual level of administrative support by the Department.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Overseas Visits (Advisers)

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will list the overseas visits between 1 July and 19 October on which Ministers have been accompanied by special advisers and, for each trip, *(a)* the name of the adviser, *(b)* the class and cost of travel booked for the adviser, *(c)* the class of travel actually used by the adviser and *(d)* the accommodation and ancillary costs for the adviser. [55996]

Clare Short: The Ministerial Code requires Ministers always to make efficient and cost effective travel arrangements. In line with the practice of successive Administrations, civil servants (including Special Advisers) accompanying Ministers on overseas visits are entitled to use the same class of travel as the Minister they are accompanying to facilitate briefings and discussions. Ministers in this Department were accompanied by two civil servants and a Special Adviser on an overseas visit to Tanzania and Kenya at a cost of £14,054.30. This is the total cost, including hotels, for all members of the delegation.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Departmental Vehicles

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how much his Department expects to spend in each year from 1998–99 to 2000–01 on vehicle replacements. [54983]

Mr. Fatchett: We plan to spend £4,384,833 on vehicle replacements in 1998–99. We are still formulating our spending plans for 1999–2000 to 2000–01 in light of the budgetary outcome of the Comprehensive Spending Review.

EC Referendums

Sir Richard Body: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is his Department's policy on the basis of the distribution of European Community funds between opposing sides on referendums on EC issues. [55378]

Ms Quin: We have not taken any decision about policy on funding in any future referendums on EC issues. We are giving careful consideration to the Neill Committee's recommendations on the conduct of referendums generally.

Cyprus

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions his Department has had with President Clerides on the subject of a demilitarisation of the Island of Cyprus; and if he will make a statement. [55616]

Ms Quin: We are in regular contact with President Clerides on all aspects of the situation in Cyprus, including the question of demilitarisation.

We believe that the key to assuring the security of all Cypriots is not by increases in military forces and armaments, but through a comprehensive political settlement. We recognise eventual demilitarisation as an important objective in this context.

We therefore warmly welcome the UN Secretary-General's recent announcement of a UN process for contact between the parties aimed at reducing tensions and promoting progress towards a political settlement. We strongly support this process and urge the parties to co-operated with it in a constructive and flexible manner.

Lebanon

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs which Minister from his Department has visited the Lebanon since 1 May 1997. [55932]

Mr. Fatchett: My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary visited the Republic of Lebanon on 18 March 1998. I visited Lebanon on 29–30 May 1997.

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs which Lebanese Government Ministers have visited the United Kingdom since 1 May 1997. [55931]

Mr. Fatchett: The Lebanese Prime Minister visited the United Kingdom on 17–18 July 1997.

General Pinochet

Mr. Howard: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations *(a)* he and *(b)* other Foreign Office Ministers have made in relation to the arrest and possible extradition of General Pinochet. [55950]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: None. The arrest and possible extradition of Senator Pinochet are a judicial not a political matter. There is no reason for my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary to intervene.

Mr. Anwar Ibrahim

Mr. Howard: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to the Government of Malaysia about the case of Mr. Anwar Ibrahim. [55951]

Mr. Fatchett: I refer the right hon. Member to the answer I gave on 19 October 1998, *Official Report*, columns *993–94*, to my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn).

CABINET OFFICE

Overseas Visits (Advisers)

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office if he will list the overseas visits between 1 July and 19 October on which Ministers have been accompanied by special advisers and, for each trip, *(a)* the name of the adviser, *(b)* the class and cost of travel booked for the adviser, *(c)* the class of travel actually used by the adviser and *(d)* the accommodation and ancillary costs for the adviser. [56001]

Dr. Jack Cunningham: No special advisers accompanied me, or my predecessor, on overseas visits between 1 July and 19 October.

Public Bodies

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office if he will list the non-departmental public bodies which have been *(a)* established and *(b)* abolished since 2 May 1997. [55730]

Mr. Kilfoyle: Since 2 May 1997, the Government have established 29 new non-departmental public bodies (NDPBs) and abolished 44. These are listed. The Government have also announced plans to abolish a further 37 NDPBs and Ministers are continuing to examine all the NDPBs they sponsor with a view to identifying further candidates for abolition.

NDPBs established since 1 May 1997

Advisory Committee for Disabled People in Employment and Training
Better Regulation Task Force
British Potato Council
Civil Justice Council
Civil Procedure Rule Committee
Committee on Chemicals and Materials on Construction for use in Public Water Supplies and Swimming Pools
Commission for Racial Equality for Northern Ireland
Development Awareness Working Group
Disability Rights Task Force
Docklands Light Railway
Expert Panel on Sustainable Development Education
Expert Group on Airborne Particles
Expert Group on Cryptosporidium in Water Supplies
Football Task Force
Historic Royal Palaces
National Endowment for Science, Technology and the Arts
National Museums and Galleries of Northern Ireland
New Deal Task Force
New Opportunities Fund
Police Information Technology Organisation
Qualifications and Curriculum Authority
Race Employment and Education Forum
Race Relations Forum
Royal Commission on Long Term Care of the Elderly
Security Vetting Appeals Panel
Skills Task Force
Spectrum Management Advisory Group
Treasure Valuation Committee
Youth Justice Board

NDPBs abolished since 1 May 1997

Advisory Committee for the Joint Environmental Markets Unit
Advisory Committee on Design Quality in the NHS
Advisory Committee on Plant and Machinery
Advisory Committee on Service Candidates
Agricultural Advisory Panel for Wales
Assessment Panel for Construction Research
Citizen's Charter Panel of Advisers
Consultative Panel on Badgers and Bovine Tuberculosis
Deregulation Task Force
Local Government Property Commission for Scotland
Local Government Staff Commission for England
National Advisory Council for the Employment of People with Disabilities
National Council for Vocational Qualifications
Northern Ireland Citizen's Charter Advisory Panel
Overseas Project Board
Race Relations Employment Advisory Group
Regional Panels in MAFF (nine)
School Curriculum and Assessment Authority
Scottish Agricultural Consultative Panel
Scottish Economic Council
Scottish Seed Potato Development Council
Staff Commission for Wales
Supported Employment Advisory Group
Treasure Trove Reviewing Committee
Ulster Folk and Transport Museum
Ulster Museum
Urban Development Corporations (nine)
Welsh Council for Postgraduate Medical and Dental Education.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office if he will list the members who have been *(a)* appointed and *(b)* dismissed from non-departmental public bodies since 2 May 1997, giving in each case their declared political affiliation if any. [55729]

Mr. Kilfoyle: The Commissioner for Public Appointments collects statistics on appointments to non-departmental public bodies within his remit on an annual basis, including the declared political activity of successful candidates. His last annual report (placed in the Library of the House) contains such information on appointments made during the year ending 31 March 1998. The Commissioner requires that all appointments should be for a fixed term. Information on any appointments which are terminated early is not collected centrally.

Marsham Street Buildings

Sir Michael Spicer: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office if he will make a statement about the future of the former Department of the Environment and Transport buildings on Marsham Street. [55717]

Mr. Kilfoyle: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated under the terms of the Framework Document to the Property Advisers to the Civil Estate. I have asked its Chief Executive, Mr. John Locke, to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from John C. Locke to Sir Michael Spicer, dated 22 October 1998:

The Parliamentary Secretary for the Cabinet Office, Peter Kilfoyle, has asked me as Chief Executive of PACE with management responsibilities for the former Department of the Environment and Transport (DETR) building on Marsham Street, to respond to your Parliamentary Question about the future of this building.

The building at 2 Marsham Street is a Government freehold property which until April this year was occupied by staff of the DETR. While it remains vacant, this Agency is responsible for its general upkeep to ensure it remains wind and watertight and is not subjected to vandalism of any kind.

There is a possibility that Marsham Street will be used as temporary decant accommodation for another Government Department while its premises are refurbished. A decision on this is expected early in the New Year. If reuse of the building cannot be justified in Exchequer terms, the building will be demolished. This is expected to take some eighteen months following the letting of a contract.

HEALTH

Music Therapy

Mr. Colman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which Ministers have responsibility for music therapy. [55625]

Mr. Boateng: My noble Friend the Baroness Hayman is the Minister responsible for therapy services, including music therapy.

Fraud

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he has taken in reported cases of *(a)* doctors, *(b)* opticians and *(c)* pharmacists who have defrauded the National Health Service; and if such incidents are reported to their professional bodies. [55531]

Mr. Milburn: Health authorities are responsible for investigating cases of fraud by practitioners. They may refer such cases to the relevant regulatory or professional body. Where criminal prosecution is being considered, the case will normally be referred for investigation by the police before being referred to a professional body.

The Prescription Pricing Authority Fraud Investigation Unit provides expert advice and an investigative service to health authorities in England for prescription fraud.

A director of counter fraud services within the National Health Service Executive was appointed on 1 September. A document outlining a comprehensive strategy for ensuring that the NHS in England has the professional resources it needs to prevent, deter and investigate all types of fraud will be published later this year.

Waiting Lists

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people in England had been on hospital waiting lists for over one year at the latest available date. [55618]

Mr. Milburn: At the end of August 1998 there were 65,200 English residents waiting over 12 months for National Health Service treatment.

Mid Essex NHS Hospital NHS Trust

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people in the Mid Essex Hospital NHS Trust area had been waiting to see a consultant for more than *(a)* 0 to six months, *(b)* six to 11 months and *(c)* 12 months or more, on (i) 31 March 1997 and (ii) the latest available date. [55760]

Mr. Milburn: The number of people waiting to see a consultant at Mid Essex Hospital National Health Service Trust at 31 March 1997 and 30 June 1998 is given in the table:

Number waiting at:	*Time waited*	
	13 to 25 weeks	*26+ weeks*
31 March 1997	481	74
30 June 1998	1,348	256

Note:
1. Figures refer to those waiting to see a consultant for first outpatient appointment following referral by a General Practitioner (medical or dental)
2. Information on the number of patients waiting for less than 13 weeks is not collected centrally

All health authorities and National Health Service trusts have agreed targets for reducing waiting lists by March 1999. Mid Essex Hospital NHS Trust is currently working with the North Thames Task Force and the National Patients' Access Team to ensure it meets its waiting list target.

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people in the Mid Essex Hospital NHS Trust area had been waiting for treatment for 12 months or more on *(a)* 31 March 1997 and *(b)* the latest date for which figures are available. [55759]

Mr. Milburn: The number of patients waiting for inpatient treatment at Mid Essex Hospital National Health Service Trust at 31 March 1997 and 31 August 1998 is given in the table:

Number waiting at:	*12+ months*
31 March 1997	104
31 August 1998	1,063

Note:
The figures refer to the number of people waiting for treatment as an ordinary admission or day case

All health authorities and National Health Service trusts have agreed targets for reducing waiting lists by March 1999. Mid Essex Hospital NHS Trust is currently working with the North Thames Task Force and the National Patients' Access Team to ensure it meets its waiting list target.

Overseas Visits (Advisers)

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the overseas visits between 1 July and 19 October on which Ministers have been accompanied by special advisers and, for each trip, *(a)* the name of the adviser, *(b)* the class and cost of travel booked for the adviser, *(c)* the class of travel actually used by the adviser and *(d)* the accommodation and ancillary costs for the adviser. [56003]

Ms Jowell: None.

Oxfordshire Health Authority

Mr. Woodward: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people in the Oxfordshire Health Authority area were waiting to see a consultant for 12 months or more on *(a)* 31 March 1997 and *(b)* the latest available date. [55761]

Mr. Milburn: Information on the number of patients waiting over 12 months for a first out-patient appointment following a general practitioner written referral is not collected centrally.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Housing Benefit Fraud

Dr. Iddon: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) what factors underlay her decision to withdraw the offer of extra subsidy to local authorities to detect housing benefit fraud; [53277]

(2) if she will require retrospective introduction of weekly benefit savings for the 1997–98 financial year; [53274]

(3) for what reasons subsidy to local authorities will be lost if housing benefit *(a)* ceases and *(b)* is reduced before a designated fraud officer becomes involved; [53272]

(4) what incentive she will provide for local authorities to detect housing benefit fraud; [53273]

(5) when she will reply to the Local Government Association representations on the Draft Weekly Benefit Savings Subsidy Guide. [53267]

Mr. Denham *[pursuant to his reply, 30 July 1998, c. 474–75]:* This Government are committed to taking tough action against all benefit fraud including Housing Benefit. Significant incentives for local authorities to detect Housing Benefit fraud are already in place. A financial incentive scheme has been in operation since 1993 which rewards local authorities for good performance in detecting benefit fraud. Payments of additional subsidy to local authorities to reward them for their anti-fraud work has risen year on year (£5.9 million in 1993/94 to £65.6 million in 1997/98).

Recent National Audit Office and Audit Commission reports questioned the interpretation of the Subsidy Order by some local authorities when claiming additional subsidy for anti-fraud work. We have therefore made the criteria explicit in the Subsidy Order 1998. To qualify for this additional subsidy authorities must show that benefit was reduced or stopped following investigation by a designated fraud officer. In each case they must show that benefit has been overpaid as a result of fraud or, in a case where benefit has not been put into payment, an attempt was made to claim fraudulently and this was prevented by their action.

The Department is still awaiting comments from the Local Government Association on the draft instructions on claiming weekly benefit savings. When received they will be considered and a reply issued as soon as possible. We have, however, already had the opportunity to consider some of the initial comments made to me by the Local Government Association and, as a result of this, the strengthened criteria for claiming fraud weekly benefit savings will not now be introduced for the 1997/98 financial year but will commence from 1 April 1998.

Jobseeker's Allowance

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is his Department's forecast for spending on jobseekers allowance in *(a)* 1999–2000, *(b)* 2000–01 and *(c)* 2001–02 on the basis of (i) the growth forecasts in the EFSR published in July and (ii) his revised growth forecasts. [55839]

Angela Eagle: The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is set out in the table.

Forecast expenditure on Jobseeker's Allowance

£ million

	1999–2000	*2000–01*	*2001–02*
Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA)	3,746	3,841	3,977
Contributory based JSA	516	523	535
Income based JSA	3,230	3,318	3,442

Notes:

1. The Economic and Fiscal Strategy Report 1998 was published in June 1998 and sets out the framework for the Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR) in Chapter 4. These figures are consistent with those set out in the CSR White Paper published on 14 July 1998.

2. There has been no revision to Social Security expenditure plans since the CSR.

Disability Living Allowance

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list for *(a)* Wales, *(b)* Scotland, *(c)* Northern Ireland and *(d)* each region of England, the number of people whose main disabling condition is deafness who were awarded disability living allowance (i) between 1 June 1996 and 31 May 1997, (ii) between 1 June 1997 and 31 May 1998 and (iii) since 1 June 1998 (1) on their initial application, (2) at review and (3) at appeal. [55858]

Mr. Timms: The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is set out in the tables.

Awards of disability living allowance between 1 June 1996 and 31 May 1997 for people whose main disabling conditions is deafness

Region	All awards	On initial claim	At review	At appeal
United Kingdom	3,178	1,841	728	607
England[1]	2,420	1,400	500	520
Great Britain[1]	2,980	1,700	680	600
Northern Ireland[2]	198	141	48	7

Awards of disability living allowance between 1 June 1997 and 31 May 1998 for people whose main disabling condition is deafness

Region	All awards	On initial claim	At review	At appeal
United Kingdom	4,712	2,447	1,255	1,010
England[1]	4,040	2,100	1,060	880
Great Britain[1]	4,540	2,320	1,220	1,000
Northern Ireland[2]	172	127	35	10

Awards of disability allowance between 1 June 1998 and 31 August 1998 for people whose main disabling condition is deafness

Region	All awards	On initial claim	At review	At appeal
United Kingdom	—	—	—	—
England[1]	120	100	0	20
Great Britain[1]	1,020	580	220	220
Northern Ireland[2]	—	—	—	—

[1] DSS Analytical Services Division 5 per cent. data
[2] Northern Ireland DHSS 100 per cent. data
Notes:
1. Figures for awards made since 1 June 1998 are not available for Northern Ireland
2. As the figures for regions within Great Britain are based on 5 per cent. data, the margins of error are too large for individual regions

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list for *(a)* Wales, *(b)* Scotland, *(c)* Northern Ireland and *(d)* each region of England the number of people who applied (i) successfully and (ii) unsuccessfully in the last year for disability living allowance. [55859]

Mr. Timms: The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is set out in the table.

Applications for disability living allowance in 1997

Region	Successful	Unsuccessful
United Kingdom	234,078	282,469
England[1]	180,309	209,494
Wales[1]	18,739	21,627
Scotland[1]	21,179	35,217
Northern Ireland[2]	13,851	16,131

[1] DSS Analytical Services Division 100 per cent. data
[2] Northern Ireland DHSS 100 per cent. data
Note:
The only regional figures for Great Britain are those collected for the initial claims processed by the Disability Benefit Centres (DBCs) These serve different areas of the country and the boundaries are not clearly enough defined to be useful: the exceptions are Scotland which is served by Edinburgh and Glasgow DBCs and Wales which is served mainly by Cardiff DBC but to a small extent by Bristol DBC

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list for *(a)* Wales, *(b)* Scotland, *(c)* Northern Ireland and *(d)* each region of England the number of people whose main disability was deafness who applied (i) successfully and (ii) unsuccessfully in the last year for disability living allowance. [55860]

Mr. Timms: The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is set out in the table.

Applications for disability living allowance in 1997 for people whose main disabling condition is deafness[1]

Region	Successful applications
United Kingdom	2,502
England[1]	2,040
Great Britain[1]	2,380
Northern Ireland[2]	122

[1] DSS Analytical Services Division 5 per cent. data
[2] Northern Ireland DHSS 100 per cent. data
Notes:
Figures relate to awards made on initial application and relate to the 12 months ending 30 November 1997
Figures giving a breakdown by medical condition are not collected by the Department for people who are unsuccessful in their initial application. As figures for regions within Great Britain are based on 5 per cent. data, the margins of error are too large for individual regions

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list for *(a)* Wales, *(b)* Scotland, *(c)* Northern Ireland and *(d)* each region of England the number of disabled people who were awarded disability living allowance (i) between 1 June 1996 and 31 May 1997, (ii) between 1 June 1997 and 31 May 1998 and (iii) since 1 June 1998 (1) on their initial application, (2) at review and (3) at appeal. [55857]

Mr. Timms: The information requested is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is set out in the tables.

Awards of disability living allowance between 1 June 1996 and 31 May 1997

Region	All awards	On initial claim	At review	At appeal
United Kingdom	309,514	249,279	45,699	14,536
England[1]	233,040	191,860	30,500	10,680
North East	19,080	15,300	2,320	1,460
North West	32,700	25,080	5,680	1,940
Merseyside	13,060	9,540	2,620	900
Yorkshire and Humberside	27,640	22,960	3,160	1,520
East Midlands	19,800	16,940	2,100	760
West Midlands	27,300	23,060	3,160	1,080
East	19,560	17,120	1,920	520
London	31,300	26,140	3,980	1,180
South East	22,960	18,940	3,280	740
South West	19,640	16,780	2,280	580
Wales[1]	23,780	19,200	3,640	940
Scotland[1]	30,640	22,920	5,560	2,160
Northern Ireland[2]	22,054	15,299	5,999	756

Sources:
[1] DSS Analytical Services Division 5 per cent. data
[2] Northern Ireland DHSS 100 per cent. data

Awards of disability living allowance between 1 June 1997 and 31 May 1998

Region	All awards	On initial claim	At review	At appeal
United Kingdom	266,174	211,173	40,939	14,062
England[1]	202,380	163,840	28,600	9,940
North East	15,540	12,020	2,120	1,400
North West	26,400	20,740	4,240	1,420
Merseyside	9,960	6,760	2,320	880
Yorkshire and Humberside	22,340	17,180	3,720	1,440
East Midlands	19,940	16,640	2,660	640
West Midlands	24,100	20,320	3,020	760
East	18,360	15,560	2,180	620
London	26,720	21,980	3,620	1,120
South East	21,540	17,620	2,920	1,000
South West	17,480	15,020	1,800	660
Wales[1]	19,140	15,540	2,820	780
Scotland[1]	26,500	19,020	4,980	2,500
Northern Ireland[2]	18,154	12,773	4,539	842

Sources:
[1] DSS Analytical Services Division 5 per cent. data
[2] Northern Ireland DHSS 100 per cent. data

Awards of disability living allowance between 1 June 1998 and 31 August 1998

Region	All awards	On initial claim	At review	At appeal
United Kingdom	—	—	—	—
England[1]	44,980	36,500	5,200	3,280
North East	3,400	2,800	300	300
North West	6,100	4,480	840	780
Merseyside	1,820	1,320	260	240
Yorkshire and Humberside	5,100	3,940	680	480
East Midlands	4,200	3,680	400	120
West Midlands	6,160	5,300	640	220
East	3,400	2,820	320	260
London	6,460	5,240	780	440
South East	4,860	3,960	620	280
South West	3,480	2,960	360	160
Wales[1]	4,180	3,500	500	180
Scotland[1]	5,800	4,080	980	740
Northern Ireland[2]	—	—	—	—

Note:
Figures for awards made since 1 June 1998 are not available for Northern Ireland
Sources:
[1] DSS Analytical Services Division 5 per cent. data
[2] Northern Ireland DHSS 100 per cent. data

Vaccine Damage

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when he expects to make a statement in respect of payment to vaccine-damaged children who are now adults other than those affected by payments in 1979. [55669]

Mr. Timms: Consideration is still being given to this complex and sensitive issue and an announcement will be made in due course.

Pensions Review

Mr. Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will place in the Library a copy of the letter to which the hon. Member for Northavon (Mr. Webb) made reference in his Oral Question on 19 October 1998, *Official Report*, column 948. [56347]

Mr. Denham: Yes.

National Insurance

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what estimate he has made of the reduction in national insurance contributions resulting from the raising of the starting point for employees' contributions in April 1999; how much of this sum will accrue to the benefit of employees with earnings above the upper earnings limit; and what increase in the upper earnings limit would be required to neutralise the effect on the income of the National Insurance Fund. [55681]

Mr. Timms: In his Budget statement on 17 March 1998, *Official Report*, columns 1097–112, my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer, announced the most radical changes to National Insurance contributions in over 20 years. He made it clear that some of these changes will be introduced from April 1999, but that raising the starting point for employees' contributions to the level of the single person's tax allowance would take place at a later date.

Overseas Visits (Advisers)

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list the overseas visits between 1 July and 19 October on which Ministers have been accompanied by special advisers and, for each trip, *(a)* the name of the adviser, *(b)* the class and cost of travel booked for the adviser, *(c)* the class of travel actually used by the adviser and *(d)* the accommodation and ancillary costs for the adviser. [56002]

Mr. Denham: No such visits have been made.

Agencies

Mr. Geraint Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a statement on the involvement of the private sector in providing office support services for the Benefits Agency and Child Support Agency. [56407]

Angela Eagle: My right hon. Friend the previous Secretary of State announced in July 1997 that we would proceed with PRIME (Private Sector Resource Initiative for Management of the Estate) and that we would explore whether further private sector involvement could improve the delivery of associated office support services, mainly in the Benefits Agency but also within the Child Support Agency.

We said that in proceeding with this project we expected to see an improved quality of services. We therefore asked officials to proceed with the tender but also to invite prices from in-house teams.

We want to ensure that the public gets the best services at the best price.

In the case of Accommodation and Office Services (AOS) we have looked at what both the private sector and in-house teams can offer and treated each case on its merits. During the process we have emphasised our concern for the treatment of any staff who transfer and stressed our commitment to the ongoing monitoring of suppliers in this respect.

Today's announcement demonstrates these policies. The services to Scotland, Fylde and Wales will be retained in-house and provided by BA staff under formal service

level agreements (SLAs). In these areas in-house staff have demonstrated their ability to provide the best value for money.

For the other services, contracts have been awarded to:

Trillium for office services to:

Yorkshire and Tyne Tees

North West Coast and Greater Manchester

West Midlands and Mercia

Haden Facilities Management for office services to:

The South East, London and East Anglia

The West Country and Chilterns.

In these cases staff from this Department and from other suppliers will transfer to the new suppliers with their terms and conditions protected by TUPE and with monitoring arrangements in place to ensure that staff are fairly treated.

These arrangements will provide the flexible, quality office services needed to support our modernisation of Social Security and our programme of welfare reform. One of the benefits of this approach is the rationalisation of the 48 contracts we inherited into a more flexible and efficient contracts regime to meet the changing business needs of the Benefits Agency and the Department.

The total cost of these contracts is £161 million over a three year period.

NIRS II Computer

Mr. Rendel: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what level of compensation, and to which pension companies, has been offered by his Department as a result of late payments and national insurance contributions due to the difficulties with the introduction of the NIRS II system. [55847]

Mr. Timms: Pension companies will start to receive compensation payments for the delay to age-related rebates from 1 November 1998. The payment calculation is based on the assumption that payments should have been made, on average, by October following the end of the tax year to which the rebate relates.

Payments made at the beginning of November will be increased by 0.5 per cent. Payments will be increased by a further 0.5 per cent. for each subsequent month until the expected level of payment is reached.

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when he expects the NIRS II computer system to be fully operational; and if he will make a statement. [55852]

Mr. Rendel: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when he expects the NIRS II system to be handling the number of cases which it was originally planned to handle. [55849]

Mr. Timms: The NIRS2 computer system is being introduced using a phased release strategy. The final phase, combining Release 2 and Release 3, is planned for April 1999.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Temporary Office Accommodation

Mr. Trend: To ask the Chairman of the Accommodation and Works Committee what was the nature of the work carried out on the Lower Ground Floor Secretaries' Room which necessitated the removal of personnel and equipment to temporary accommodation from 4 August to 1 September; on what date the work commenced; and for how many days the room was required to be unoccupied. [55391]

Sir Sydney Chapman: An Automatic Fire Detection system was installed in the Lower Ground Floor Secretaries' area. The decanting process commenced on the 4 August with re-occupation on 1 September. The conditions of the contract give the contractor possession of the site from 4 August for 27 days and work started on 8 August.

State Opening

Mr. Bayley: To ask the President of the Council if she will announce the date of the State Opening of Parliament. [56672]

Mrs. Beckett: As I announced in my Business Statement today, the new session of Parliament will be opened on 24 November 1998. I anticipate the House will be Prorogued late in the week preceding that.

Recall Costs

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the President of the Council what was the direct cost of recalling the House for the sittings on 2 and 3 September, separately identifying *(a)* staff and *(b)* works costs. [55356]

Mr. William Ross: To ask the President of the Council if she will estimate the cost to public funds of the recall of Parliament for 2 and 3 September. [55493]

Mr. Baker: To ask the President of the Council what is the estimated total cost to public funds of the current recall of Parliament. [55465]

Mrs. Beckett: The estimated total cost, excluding works projects, is £33,200. The works costs cannot be known with certainty until contractors' claims for prolongation and disruption have all been received and verified. However, the total works cost may be of the order of £375,000.

Mr. Baker: To ask the President of the Council how many parliamentary staff, including security staff, were required to be present as a result of the recall of Parliament; and how many of these were paid *(a)* no extra, *(b)* standard hourly rates, *(c)* overtime rates and *(d)* expenses; and if she will make a statement. [55466]

Mr. Kirkwood: I have been asked to reply on behalf of the President of the Council.

Approximately 230 staff, excluding security staff, were present as a result of the recall of Parliament. Additional security costs amounted to £23,700. The only pay costs incurred for staff of the House were for night fees/allowances totalling £3,000 and overtime payments for Refreshment Department staff totalling £4,000.

Expenses totalling £2,500 were incurred for overnight accommodation and late night transport etc. although further claims may still be submitted.

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

Further Education Funding Council

13. **Mrs. Ellman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what plans he has to make the Further Education Funding Council more accountable to the regions. [55106]

Mr. Mudie: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has recently appointed a number of additional representatives from the local authority sector to the FEFC's regional committees. In the future, FEFC regional committees will be working closely with the Regional Development Agencies.

National Literacy Strategy

14. **Mrs. Humble:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will make a statement on progress achieved on the Government's National Literacy Strategy. [55107]

Ms Estelle Morris: The daily Literacy Hour began in primary schools this September. To support schools, we have provided training for every primary teacher, distributed over 300,000 copies of the literacy Framework for Teaching and allocated almost £60 million of funding, including support for over 200 local literacy consultants.

New Deal (West Midlands)

15. **Mr. Burden:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will make a statement on the progress of the new deal in the west midlands. [55108]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The New Deal for 18 to 24 year olds has made a promising start throughout the country and in the West Midlands over 14,000 young people have started on the path to employment.

Lifelong Learning

16. **Mr. Wyatt:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will take steps to ensure that technologies used in *(a)* the lifelong learning initiatives, *(b)* the university for industry and *(c)* the national grid for learning are inter-operable; and if he will make a statement. [55109]

Mr. Mudie: The National Grid for Learning, the University for Industry and lifelong learning initiatives will be accessible via a range of technologies including the Internet, which offers an interoperable standard accessible to all users.

Education Welfare Officers

17. **Mr. Cohen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what plans he has to improve the training of education welfare officers. [55110]

Mr. Charles Clarke: Local Education Authorities, as the employers, are responsible for making arrangements for the training and professional development of education welfare officers. The Department is providing support for EWO training through the recently announced "School Inclusion: Pupil Support" grant programme. We also actively support the work of the Training Advisory Group for the Education Welfare Service.

Rural Schools

18. **Mr. Peter Atkinson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what plans he has to preserve the ability of parents in rural areas to select schools of their choice. [55111]

Mr. Charles Clarke: We have made it clear that our presumption is against the closure of rural schools. We have recently published interim guidance on school admissions which aims to maximise parental preference in all areas of the country.

Child Care

19. **Caroline Flint:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many new child care places will be created in 1997–98. [55112]

Ms Hodge: In 1997–98, 7,455 places were created through the Out of School Childcare Initiative in England, exceeding our target. This year, to support our National Childcare Strategy, we will create at least 40,000 new places through the Initiative and a further 20,000 places through other schemes.

24. **Judy Mallaber:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what estimate he has made of the number of new child care places to be created this year. [55119]

Ms Hodge: In this financial year up to 2 August 1998, 4,270 new childcare places have been created through the Out of School Childcare Initiative (England). We have not yet received data from all the TECs for the summer holidays when many new schemes started, but we are confident that we are on course to meet the end of year target of 40,000 places.

In addition, 10,000 new places will be created for pre-school children aged 0–3 and 4 year olds in full-time education through the £6 million in childcare grants allocated to local education authorities and Early Years Development Partnerships.

A further 10,000 out of school childcare places will be created in further education colleges and other institutions in 1998 through a £5 million grant administered by the Further Education Funding Council.

We will be making available £44 million to support Early Years Development and Childcare Partnerships from next year. This money will help Partnerships to increase the number of childcare places beyond the 60,000 to be set up this year.

Chief Inspector of Schools

20. **Mr. Edward Davey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment in which years since his appointment Her Majesty's chief inspector of schools has

been awarded a bonus; and what was the value of each such bonus *(a)* in cash terms and *(b)* as a percentage of his salary. [55113]

Ms Estelle Morris: The following bonuses have been paid to Chris Woodhead, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools in England: in 1996, in respect of the period 1 September 1994 to 31 March 1996, 7 per cent. of salary (£5,697); in 1997, in respect of the year ended 31 March 1997, 10 per cent. of salary (£8,550); and in 1998, in respect of the year ended 31 March 1998, 10 per cent. of salary (£8,621).

Learning Age

21. **Shona McIsaac:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will make a statement on the responses he has received from the consultation on the learning age. [55114]

Mr. Mudie: We have had nearly 3,000 responses to the Learning Age Green Paper—from members of the public, employers, education and training organisations and others. Our proposals have been widely welcomed. We are analysing and considering carefully all the detailed comments made and we will publish a summary of the responses in due course.

School Meals

22. **Charlotte Atkins:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what progress is being made with bringing in nutritional standards for school meals. [55116]

Mr. Charles Clarke: We published "Ingredients for Success", our consultation paper on nutritional standards for school lunches, on 15 October.

Education Action Zones

23. **Miss McIntosh:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will make a statement on the timetable and target numbers for additional schools to become part of education action zones. [55117]

Ms Estelle Morris: I expect to invite applications for more zones in the New Year.

Unemployment

25. **Mr. Robathan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will make a statement on the current level of unemployment. [55120]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The internationally comparable Labour Force Survey measure showed 1.82 million people as ILO unemployed in June to August 1998 (a rate of 6.3 per cent.).

The more recent claimant unemployment figure, for September 1998, was 1.3 million (a rate of 4.6 per cent.).

28. **Mr. Wilkinson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what representations his Department has received on the percentage change in national unemployment during the last month. [55123]

Mr. Andrew Smith: I have received no such representations in the last month.

Employment Creation Measures

26. **Mr. Skinner:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will make a statement on the impact of his Department's employment creation measures. [55121]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The latest figures from the New Deal for Young Unemployed People show that over half of those leaving the Gateway did so to start work and most of those went into unsubsidised jobs.

It is important, however, to consider the net overall effect of the New Deal and we have therefore put in place an extensive and comprehensive monitoring and evaluation strategy to realise this.

Higher Education (Cornwall)

27. **Mr. Andrew George:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what representations he has received on the future of higher education in Cornwall. [55122]

Mr. Mudie: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has received a number of representations about the future of higher education in Cornwall. I welcome the initiative taken by the three higher education institutions in Cornwall to form a new partnership to develop plans for improving the quality and range of higher education opportunities in Cornwall.

Grammar Schools

29. **Mr. Syms:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what representations he has received from grammar school heads about his policies towards grammar schools. [55124]

Ms Estelle Morris: 100 responses have been received from grammar school headteachers and governing bodies about the draft Education (Grammar School Ballots) Regulations which were sent out for consultation on 3 June. Revised regulations will be debated in the normal way.

University for Industry

30. **Mr. Sheerman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what plans he has to expand the university for industry pilots. [55126]

Mr. Mudie: Following the European Social Fund ADAPT Third Call for Applications earlier this year, over 100 projects are being established to contribute towards the University for Industry's development. We expect further relevant projects to be funded through the ESF Objective 4 programme.

Welfare to Work

32. **Mr. Ben Chapman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what assessment he has made of the impact of the Welfare to Work programme in helping unemployed people over the age of 25 years off benefit and back into work. [55128]

Ms Hodge: It is too early to make an assessment of New Deal for people aged 25 or more. It only started in June of this year. I expect to make a statement in November.

Ministerial Visits

33. **Mrs. Virginia Bottomley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will visit the Farnham and Godalming sixth-form colleges to discuss the allocation of funds for 16 to 18-year-olds. [55129]

Mr. Mudie: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has no current plans to do so.

Millennium Compliance

Mr. David Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment, pursuant to the oral statement by the Chancellor of the Exchequer of 17 March 1998, *Official Report*, column 1097, if he will make a statement on the training of 20,000 bug busters. [55948]

Mr. Cotter: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many people have to date *(a)* applied to become millennium bugbusters and *(b)* successfully completed the training. [55867]

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) how many bugbusters have been trained to date; [55966]

(2) how much money his Department has spent to date on grants to SMEs, under the bugbusters programme; [55967]

(3) how much money his Department has spent to date on advertising and marketing its bugbusters programme; and how much it intends to spend in the rest of 1998–99; [55968]

(4) how many SMEs have so far received grants under his Department's bugbusters training programme; [55969]

(5) how many training organisations have become accredited providers under the bugbusters training programme to date. [55970]

Mr. Mudie: The infrastructure for the Bug Buster programme is now in place. 160 training providers throughout the country have been accredited by the IT National Training Organisation to offer courses. At 16 October, 284 people had started the training: 194 of them had completed courses. A further 620 were booked to go on courses. There is a short time lag between individuals completing courses and payments being made to training providers. As a result only a small number of grants have so far been paid out to small and medium sized enterprises.

Our key objective has been to put in place a high quality programme in which employers would have confidence. It has inevitably taken time to design courses, to accredit training providers and for Training and Enterprise Councils to plan local provision and arrange contracts. However, take up by employers in the early stages of the full operation of the programme has been slower than expected. Some smaller employers still do not appreciate fully the threat posed by the year 2000 problem. Others are concerned about the costs of training.

Action is being taken to address both of these issues. A major marketing and publicity campaign, is being launched at the end of this month. This is in addition to the local marketing carried out by TECs. Courses will now be offered free to employers. This change has been made possible by lower than expected fees being charged by training providers. In addition, IT consultancy firms will now be eligible to claim grant for trainees they take on to work with employers.

The progress of the programme is being kept under constant review. Take up of places under the programme depends on employers' willingness to take this opportunity offered to provide their staff with the skills necessary to deal with an important business problem.

Overseas Visits (Advisers)

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will list the overseas visits between 1 July and 19 October on which Ministers have been accompanied by special advisers and, for each trip, *(a)* the name of the adviser, *(b)* the class and cost of travel booked for the adviser, *(c)* the class of travel actually used by the adviser and *(d)* the accommodation and ancillary costs for the adviser. [56004]

Mr. Mudie: No overseas visits were undertaken between 1 July and 19 October on which Ministers were accompanied by Special Advisers.

Teachers (Fixed-term Contracts)

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what percentage of teaching staff in *(a)* local authority schools and *(b)* grant maintained schools are currently on fixed-term contracts, broken down by local education authority. [55831]

Mr. Charles Clarke: The percentage of full and part-time fixed term contracts (of one month or over) for teaching staff in local authority maintained nursery, primary and secondary schools in England at January 1998 are given in the table. Teachers with more than one contract have had all contracts included in the calculation. Similar information for grant maintained schools is not held by the Department.

Percentage

LEA	*Full-time*	*Part-time*	*All contracts*
City of London	21.4	14.3	19.0
Camden	3.9	8.7	5.0
Greenwich	4.0	37.9	11.9
Hackney	5.3	11.6	6.1
Hammersmith and Fulham	11.2	84.6	19.8
Islington	4.6	7.4	5.0
Kensington and Chelsea	4.8	19.1	8.0
Lambeth	6.0	36.4	10.7
Lewisham	7.1	12.7	8.3
Southwark	9.3	28.4	11.8
Tower Hamlets	8.0	35.3	11.9
Wandsworth	11.4	32.5	15.6
City of Westminster	6.5	30.8	10.5
Barking	4.9	51.8	8.6
Barnet	6.4	25.3	10.8
Bexley	4.5	26.0	7.7
Brent	9.2	51.3	15.8
Bromley	n/a	n/a	n/a
Croydon	5.8	46.6	13.4
Ealing	6.4	49.1	13.1
Enfield	4.2	21.1	6.2
Haringey	3.2	9.4	4.0
Harrow	n/a	n/a	n/a
Havering	3.9	60.7	13.9

Percentage

LEA	Full-time	Part-time	All contracts
Hillingdon	4.0	42.9	10.5
Hounslow	n/a	n/a	n/a
Kingston	6.2	22.9	10.0
Merton	8.5	43.1	15.0
Newham	3.3	26.9	4.5
Redbridge	3.1	28.0	6.5
Richmond	8.3	64.2	25.2
Sutton	5.2	31.0	9.4
Waltham Forest	3.1	19.0	4.9
Birmingham	6.1	26.0	8.1
Coventry	3.6	23.6	6.6
Dudley	9.7	48.6	13.2
Sandwell	8.0	43.6	11.2
Solihull	5.8	42.9	10.7
Walsall	5.7	33.8	8.8
Wolverhampton	4.3	24.8	6.6
Knowsley	5.6	13.2	6.1
Liverpool	n/a	n/a	n/a
St. Helens	4.0	29.5	5.5
Sefton	6.8	26.3	8.8
Wirral	1.0	5.8	1.5
Bolton	4.8	30.7	7.2
Bury	5.5	30.5	8.2
Manchester	8.6	37.7	11.0
Oldham	6.6	59.3	11.7
Rochdale	5.2	36.0	8.3
Salford	4.3	33.8	5.4
Stockport	8.5	53.1	13.9
Tameside	6.6	38.0	9.0
Trafford	9.6	62.0	13.4
Wigan	6.6	38.4	9.3
Barnsley	5.9	30.1	7.0
Doncaster	4.8	33.3	7.5
Rotherham	6.6	33.2	9.1
Sheffield	6.8	31.3	11.3
Bradford	8.9	27.2	11.5
Calderdale	6.9	30.1	9.7
Kirklees	8.2	45.6	13.5
Leeds	4.3	20.9	6.2
Wakefield	7.1	76.4	11.3
Gateshead	6.9	55.6	11.2
Newcastle upon Tyne	5.4	40.8	8.8
North Tyneside	6.0	28.3	8.3
South Tyneside	6.2	52.6	9.7
Sunderland	6.1	45.0	7.9
Isles of Scilly	0.0	55.6	17.9
Bath and NE Somerset	7.2	32.0	11.9
City of Bristol	9.5	54.4	18.8
North Somerset	4.9	41.3	10.7
South Gloucestershire	5.5	37.2	11.7
Hartlepool	8.3	64.2	12.0
Middlesbrough	7.7	83.9	11.4
Redcar and Cleveland	6.7	38.5	10.0
Stockton on Tees	5.4	33.3	8.9
City of Kingston upon Hull	3.6	47.8	7.5
East Riding of Yorkshire	5.9	30.3	9.3
North East Lincolnshire	5.7	17.9	6.8
North Lincolnshire	4.7	36.2	8.4
North Yorkshire	6.5	58.4	16.0
York	4.8	37.7	10.7
Bedfordshire	8.2	36.4	12.7
Luton	10.5	36.3	14.3
Buckinghamshire	10.1	44.1	17.8
Milton Keynes	4.6	85.0	16.8
Derbyshire	4.2	21.7	7.0
Derby	n/a	n/a	n/a
Dorset	7.6	39.7	13.3
Poole	6.1	39.6	11.4
Bournemouth	5.7	33.3	9.9
Durham	9.6	80.1	14.4
Darlington	6.9	12.5	7.7
East Sussex	6.3	41.2	13.4
Brighton and Hove	0.2	0.8	0.3
Hampshire	5.7	43.5	11.8
Portsmouth	5.9	38.2	9.9
Southampton	0.0	0.0	0.0
Leicester	7.9	62.8	21.4
Leicester City	10.1	67.3	21.3
Rutland	27.0	0.0	20.3
Staffordshire	6.6	45.9	11.1
Stoke	7.2	34.8	9.3
Wiltshire	13.5	50.8	21.8
Swindon	8.2	53.9	14.3
Berkshire	6.6	34.7	12.5
Cambridgeshire	6.1	39.6	11.7
Cheshire	8.7	53.9	14.5
Cornwall	6.9	50.6	16.6
Cumbria	9.0	75.4	24.3
Devon	7.0	42.0	13.9
Essex	4.4	34.8	9.3
Gloucestershire	13.0	36.5	19.2
Hereford and Worcester	6.5	37.5	12.1
Hertfordshire	6.2	35.4	11.9
Isle of Wight	6.2	48.1	12.4
Kent	4.9	47.0	13.1
Lancashire	6.2	46.8	11.0
Lincolnshire	5.5	34.6	9.5
Norfolk	3.6	77.0	15.4
Northamptonshire	7.6	50.5	13.7
Northumberland	4.4	43.6	11.9
Nottinghamshire	2.4	12.0	3.7
Oxfordshire	6.2	35.5	11.4
Shropshire	9.8	64.4	18.6
Somerset	5.5	37.0	11.7
Suffolk	4.9	48.6	13.4
Surrey	5.4	34.8	11.5
Warwickshire	7.5	47.6	15.1
West Sussex	4.8	26.5	8.8
Total	6.2	41.2	11.5

School Reserve Accounts

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) what estimates he has made of the amount of money currently held in reserve accounts by schools in *(a)* England and Wales, *(b)* Cheshire and *(c)* Warrington; [55833]

(2) what estimate he has made of the amount of money from delegated budgets underspent by schools in *(a)* England and Wales and *(b)* Cheshire in each of the past five years. [55834]

Ms Estelle Morris: The table shows the amount held as balances by LEA schools in *(a)* England and *(b)* Cheshire for each of the financial years 1992–93, 1993–94, 1994–95, 1995–96 and 1996–97. Responsibility for schools in Wales rests with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales. Information on the position at the end of the financial year 1997–98 will not be available centrally until local education authorities publish their outturn statements later in the Autumn. I will write to my hon. Friend when those figures are available, and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library.

Balances held by LEA schools

£000

Financial years	(a) England	(b) Cheshire
1992–93	605,304	16,677
1993–94	646,810	16,196
1994–95	649,949	15,314
1995–96	581,456	14,410
1996–97	523,679	13,375

School Finances (Auditing)

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what plans he has to

introduce sample auditing of school finances; and if he will make a statement. [55832]

Ms Estelle Morris: Under the Fair Funding arrangements to be introduced from 1999, local education authorities will be responsible for determining their own audit arrangements for school expenditure, and these arrangements (which normally include a cycle of school-based audits) will be authorised by schemes made under section 48 of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998. Individual schools may also be audited as part of the external audit regime for LEAs, which is determined by the Audit Commission.

Headteachers (Salary Increases)

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) what was the average percentage salary increase received by *(a)* primary school headteachers and *(b)* secondary school headteachers for each of the past five years; [55836]

(2) what was the average percentage salary increase received by *(a)* primary school deputy headteachers and *(b)* secondary school deputy headteachers in each of the past five years. [55835]

Ms Estelle Morris: The average percentage salary increase from 31 March each year to 31 March the following year, for full-time headteachers and deputy headteachers in England and Wales, is as follows:

	Maintained nursery/primary	*Maintained secondary*
Headteachers		
1992 to 1993	9.2	9.6
1993 to 1994	4.3	5.2
1994 to 1995	4.2	4.6
1995 to 1996	3.7	4.1
1996 to 1997	4.8	5.4
Deputy headteachers		
1992 to 1993	9.8	9.7
1993 to 1994	6.2	5.1
1994 to 1995	3.9	4.6
1995 to 1996	3.5	3.6
1996 to 1997	4.5	4.7

The percentage increases include the effects both of the annual teachers' pay award and the effects of individual postholders' movement up the pay spine.

New Deal (Young People)

Mr. Rowlands: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will make a statement on the number of people under the New Deal in *(a)* England and *(b)* Wales who have entered full-time employment. [55105]

Ms Hodge: In England 18,500 young people under the 18–24 New Deal have entered employment. In Wales the figure is 2,000. This is a promising start.

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what percentage of New Deal trainees were placed in subsidised employment at the latest available date. [55118]

Mr. Andrew Smith: Of those young people taking part in New Deal options 44 per cent. have entered subsidised jobs.

LEA Schools (Managerial Responsibilities)

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what measures he plans to help LEA schools take on the managerial responsibilities required under the School Standards and Framework Act 1998. [55147]

Ms Estelle Morris: LEA schools already have much experience in managing delegated budgets, and in exercising the staffing powers associated with financial delegation. They are therefore well-placed to take on the responsibilities resulting from the decisions on further delegation recently announced by the Government in the light of responses to the consultation paper "Fair Funding". A number of elements in the Standards Fund programmes for 1998–99 and 1999–2000 are designed to support training for heads and governors relating to the Government's key priorities.

New Deal (Widows)

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if widows are eligible for the same benefits, incentives and advice as other lone parents under the New Deal; and if he will make a statement. [55155]

Ms Hodge: The term "lone parents" covers all those who are bringing up their child or children on their own, and this includes widows and widowers. All lone parents with dependent children who are on Income Support can join the New Deal for Lone Parents. Since April, the New Deal for Lone Parents has been available across the country to lone parents who make a new claim for Income Support. From 26 October, it will be extended to include those with existing claims for Income Support. Those lone parents whose youngest child is aged over five will be sent a letter inviting them to a meeting with a Personal Adviser. The service is also available to lone parents with children under five who wish to participate.

Careers Services

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment, pursuant to his answer of 28 July 1998, *Official Report*, column *137*, if he will make a statement on the activities of commercial companies providing careers information which have been able to generate a surplus through the efficient delivery of their contracts, legitimate dividends to shareholders or cash transfers to a parent company, indicating the amount attributed to shareholders retained as company profits and the amount of cash transfers to parent companies in the last period for which figures are available. [55458]

Mr. Mudie: Twenty seven of the sixty six Careers Services operating under contract with the Department are run by companies limited by share with the power to distribute profits to the shareholders. The majority of these organisations have retained within the company any profits arising from efficient delivery of the Careers Service. The value of the contracts with the 66 Careers Services was just over £220 million in 1996–97. According to the latest information available, which is taken from the statutory accounts for the financial year ended 31 March 1997, dividends amounting to some £359,300 were paid in respect of contracts held by Lifetime Careers, Guidance Enterprises Ltd, Careers

Management Ltd and Northumberland Guidance Company. West London Careers Service Ltd and CfBT Thames Careers Guidance Ltd made a transfer of £820,000 to their parent company CfBT which is an educational trust which includes within its objects the provision of careers information, guidance and advice.

Middle and First Schools

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will make a statement on his policy on middle and first schools. [55099]

Mr. Charles Clarke: We have no policies which relate solely to middle and first schools. Schools should be organised to deliver the highest possible standards of education and to reflect parental preference. Local Education Authorities and School Governing Bodies are best placed to decide on the most effective pattern of provision within their areas, taking account of local circumstances.

Undergraduate Degree Students (Costs)

Mr. Hopkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what is the average annual cost of a full-time undergraduate degree student at *(a)* Oxford and Cambridge universities, *(b)* all United Kingdom universities and *(c)* previously PCFC funded institutions. [55651]

Mr. Mudie *[holding answer 19 October 1998]:* The average annual funding through HEFCE grant and tuition fees for teaching a full-time undergraduate degree student is around £4,000 in English universities and colleges, including previously PCFC funded institutions. The comparable figure for the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge, which attract additional funding via the college fee, is around £5,800.

Higher Education Staff

Dr. Iddon: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what plans he has to report to Parliament the recommendations of the Independent Review Committee on Higher Education Staff Pay and Conditions. [55762]

Mr. Mudie: The pay and conditions of staff in higher education are a matter for the employers. The Independent Review Committee was set up by the Universities and Employers Association (UCEA) to look into the framework for determining pay and conditions of service in the higher education sector. The Review Committee will report to UCEA and it will be for the employers and unions to respond to any recommendations.

School Budgets

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will make changes to the area cost adjustment in time to affect the 1999–2000 schools' budgets. [55127]

Ms Estelle Morris: We will announce our decisions on the SSA formula, including the area cost adjustment, for 1999–2000 later in the autumn according to the normal timetable.

TREASURY

Retail Prices Index

Dr. Lienee Jones: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he expects the research by the Office for National Statistics into bias in the Retail Prices Index to be published. [56025]

Ms Hewitt: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the Director of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Tim Holt to Dr. Lynne Jones, dated 22 October 1998:

As Director of the Office for National Statistics (ONS), I have been asked to reply to your recent parliamentary question on when the Chancellor of the Exchequer expects the research by the ONS into bias in the Retail Prices Index (RPI) to be published.

Our work programme into potential bias in the RPI is an expansive one that will look into a number of conceptual and technical issues relating to index number construction. We have identified those aspects of the current methodology which should be given the highest priority and will undertake research on these first. A description of the research programme will be published in the ONS publication Economic Trends.

I am sorry that I cannot be more specific about the time of completion of particular research projects at this stage but further consideration will be given to the precise form and timing of dissemination as the work progresses further.

As you know, our initial assessment of the potential for bias in the RPI was published in an article in the October 1997 edition of Economic Trends entitled *Implications of the US Boskin report for the UK Retail Prices Index*. A copy of Economic Trends is available in the House of Commons Library.

Overseas Visits (Advisers)

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the overseas visits between 1 July and 19 October on which Ministers have been accompanied by special advisers and for each trip *(a)* the name of the adviser, *(b)* the class and cost of travel booked for the adviser, *(c)* the class of travel actually used by the adviser and *(d)* the accommodation and ancillary cost for the adviser. [56007]

Mr. Gordon Brown: I refer the hon. Member to the answers I gave to the hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth) on 24 July 1998, *Official Report*, column *750*, and the hon. Member for Spelthorne (Mr. Wilshire) on 31 July 1998, *Official Report*, columns *663–64*. Special advisers, along with other departmental officials, have accompanied Ministers to meetings of European finance ministers and to international meetings including the Commonwealth Finance Ministers' Meeting and the IMF/World Bank Annual Meetings.

Correspondence

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when the hon. Member for Walsall, North will receive a reply to his letter of 15 September, ref. 3/05775/1998. [55752]

Dawn Primarolo: A reply was sent to my hon. Friend on 20 October.

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when the hon. Member for Walsall, North will receive a substantive reply to his letter of 1 July, ref. 3/05072/1998. [55753]

Dawn Primarolo: My hon. Friend the Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick) received an interim reply to his letter of 1 July on 14 July. A full reply will be sent when an announcement is made about the outcome of the Government's review of the withdrawal of payable tax credits from individuals after 5 April 1999.

Transport White Paper

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what meetings he held with non-Governmental bodies about transport policy and the Transport White Paper in the three months before the publication of the White Paper; and which of these meetings were attended by employees of professional lobby consultants. [55269]

Mr. Byers: Prior to the publication of the Government's White Paper "A New Deal for Transport", the Government were keen to hear the views of all interested parties and accordingly consulted widely before any policy decisions were taken. Between 21 August and 14 November 1997, the Government carried out a major consultation exercise resulting in over 7,300 written responses and a number of consultation meetings and seminars throughout the UK. It is intended that this consultation be an ongoing process. In the three months prior to the publication of the Government's White Paper, the Chancellor did not hold any meetings with non-governmental bodies specifically in relation to transport policy.

Cross-border Smuggling

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the annual loss of UK hydrocarbon duty on *(a)* petrol, *(b)* diesel and *(c)* other fuels from cross-border smuggling. [55731]

Ms Hewitt: HM Customs and Excise have no estimates for the revenue lost to the Exchequer through these activities.

Euro (Conversion Costs)

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the costs of converting to the euro for *(a)* Government departments, *(b)* the financial sector and *(c)* the economy as a whole; and if he will make a statement. [55727]

Ms Hewitt: The cost of the changeover should the UK decide to join the euro would depend on the manner in which businesses and other organisations were to approach the changeover. The extent to which organisations have considered the euro as a factor when making investment decisions prior to joining would also be a factor.

The Government are committed to publish an Outline National Changeover Plan which will set out the steps involved should the UK join the single currency. Work on the plan is being carried out in consultation with a wide range of representative organisations. This will help the selection of changeover arrangements which would be practical and cost-effective for a wide range of businesses and other organisations.

Tax Receipts

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his Department's revised forecast for the public sector net cash requirement in *(a)* 1999–2000, *(b)* 2000–01, and *(c)* 2001–02 following the revisions to his growth forecast. [55838]

Mr. Whittingdale: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what is his Department's current forecast for tax receipts in *(a)* 1999–2000, *(b)* 2000–01 and *(c)* 2001–02; [55722]

(2) what is his Department's current forecast for *(a)* corporation tax receipts and *(b)* VAT receipts in (i) 1999–2000, (ii) 2000–01 and (iii) 2001–02. [55724]

Ms Hewitt: A new forecast of the public finances will be published in the Pre-Budget Report on 3 November.

Minimum Wage

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the effect on UK interest rates of *(a)* the decision to introduce a statutory minimum wage and *(b)* his spending plans published in July. [55837]

Ms Hewitt: Interest rate decisions are a matter for the Bank of England's Monetary Policy Committee. The MPC sets interest rates to meet the Government's inflation target, taking into account all available information. We will continue to give the MPC one hundred per cent. support in whatever difficult decisions it has to make on interest rates.

Revised Growth Forecast

Mr. Maude: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what briefing was given by his special advisers regarding the revised growth forecast. [55841]

Mr. Gordon Brown: The revised growth forecast will be published in the Pre-Budget Report on 3 November.

Mr. Maude: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer for what reasons his intention to publish revised growth forecasts was first announced *(a)* to the IMF and *(b)* on 6 October. [55844]

Ms Hewitt: The Annual Meetings of the IMF and World Bank always discuss the world economic situation. Previous Chancellors have used this occasion to comment on the prospects for the UK. And other Finance Ministers comment on their own economies. It would have been unusual for the Chancellor not to do so in his statement to the Annual Meeting on 6 October. And in view of the rapid deterioration in the world economic outlook since the summer, it would have been even less credible not to acknowledge that the Government's next published forecast would include a downward revision to growth in 1999.

Bank of England

Mr. Maude: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the impact on the

market's perception of the independence of the Bank of England as regards UK interest rates of his statements on the level of UK interest rates. [55842]

Ms Hewitt: The Chancellor does not comment on the month to month decisions of the Bank of England's Monetary Policy Committee. Market expectations of inflation remain close to the inflation target and long-term interest rates are at the lowest levels in 35 years.

Mr. Maude: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what discussions he had with the Governor of the Bank of England in the month prior to 8 October. [55840]

Ms Hewitt: The Chancellor has regular discussions with the Governor every month.

Dr. Cable: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what recent discussions have taken place between the Treasury and the Bank of England on the circumstances in which action would be taken under section 19 of the Bank of England Act 1998 relating to emergency powers. [56349]

Ms Hewitt: The Chancellor has no plans to use the emergency powers under section 19 of the Bank of England Act 1998.

Pre-Budget Report

Mr. Maude: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he will publish his pre-Budget report. [55845]

Mr. Gordon Brown: I refer the right hon. Member to the reply I gave on 21 October 1998, *Official Report*, column *111*, to my hon. Friend the Member for Hove (Mr. Caplin).

Savings Ratio

Mr. Whittingdale: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his assessment of the impact on the savings ratio arising from *(a)* the abolition of repayment dividend tax credits and *(b)* the abolition of TESSAs and PEPs. [55723]

Ms Hewitt: Changing the tax treatment will encourage savings on a sustainable basis in the long term, promoting economic prosperity and rebalancing tax relief towards those who need it.

European Single Currency

Mr. Gill: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer at what rate of exchange each of the 11 countries will join the European single currency on 1 January 1999. [55943]

Ms Hewitt: The bilateral conversion rates between currencies joining in the first wave were pre-announced in a declaration by the Finance Ministers and central bank governors of participating member states on 2 May 1998. Copies of the declaration have been placed in the Library of the House of Commons. Details of the rates are also available on the Treasury's Internet Web-site. These bilateral rates will be used to determine conversion rates against the euro on 31 December 1998.

Mr. Gill: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what criteria will be used to establish the rate of exchange at which the UK could join the single European currency. [55946]

Ms Hewitt: If and when the UK joined the single currency, the rate at which Sterling would join would be decided then, in conjunction with our European partners. The rate would need to be compatible with economic fundamentals in the UK and with sustainable convergence between the UK and other euro-area economies.

Monetary Policy Committee

Mr. Cotter: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will review the membership of the Monetary Policy Committee. [55792]

Ms Hewitt: The members of the Monetary Policy Committee have fixed terms of office which have been publicly announced. The Chancellor has no intention of changing these. Two members' terms are due for renewal in June 1999.

Population Censuses

Mr. John M. Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list those 1901–1991 decennial population censuses *(a)* for which the then Registrar General did not promise informants that the householders' forms would be treated as confidential for 100 years and *(b)* for which the Lord Chancellor has not granted, and is not intending to grant, the Registrar General statutory permission for an extended 100-year retention of the census forms. [55824]

Ms Hewitt: In the period 1901–1991, only the 1981 and 1991 Census forms have contained specific assurances from the Registrar General for England and Wales with regard to the 100 year closure period, as specified under the terms of the Lord Chancellor's Instrument 12 of the Public Records Act 1958.

Access to the census returns prior to 1920 is governed by the Public Records Act 1958, section 5(1). They are closed to public inspection for 100 years by virtue of Lord Chancellor's Instrument No 12 of June 1966. The returns for 1901 and 1911 are in the custody of the Public Record Office.

Access to the census returns of 1921, 1951 and 1961 is covered by the Census Act 1920, as amended by the Census (Confidentiality) Act 1991. The Public Records Act 1958 section 3(4) permits those public records selected for permanent preservation to be retained for more than 30 years by the person responsible for them, with the Lord Chancellor's approval. In the case of census returns that person is the Registrar General, and permission is sought from the Lord Chancellor for the retention of census records every 10 years. The Lord Chancellor has granted permission for the census records for 1921, 1951 and 1961 to be retained by the Registrar General. The census returns for 1931 were destroyed by fire, and no census was taken in 1941.

The census returns for 1971, 1981 and 1991 are similarly covered by the Census Act 1920, and the Census (Confidentiality) Act 1991. No retention instrument is yet necessary for the returns for 1971, 1981 and 1991 since the records are less than 30 years old.

HOME DEPARTMENT

General Pinochet

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the application for the extradition of General Pinochet from the United Kingdom. [55754]

Mr. Straw: Senator Pinochet was arrested on 16 October 1998 on the basis of a provisional warrant issued under section 8 of the Extradition Act 1989 by the Bow Street Magistrate, in response to a request transmitted to the United Kingdom police via Interpol, from the Spanish authorities. Under the European Convention on Extradition, the Spanish authorities have 40 days—until 25 November in this case—to submit a formal extradition request. If the deadline is not met, Senator Pinochet will be discharged.

I will consider the formal extradition request against the requirements of the Extradition Act 1989. I must decide whether to issue an Authority to Proceed, exercising my discretion under the Act. I will consider, among a range of issues, whether the offences are extradition crimes; whether the request is properly authenticated; whether the offences are of a political character; and any compassionate circumstances. This will not be a political decision; I am exercising my statutory responsibilities.

If I decide to issue an Authority to Proceed, the Spanish request will pass to the United Kingdom courts, where it will be considered, in the first instance, at Bow Street Magistrates' Court in a committal hearing, with routes of appeal to the Divisional Court and the House of Lords. If the request passes through the court stages, it reverts to me to take a final decision on surrender, again governed by the Extradition Act 1989. If I decide not to issue an Authority to Proceed, Senator Pinochet will be discharged.

Senator Pinochet's legal representatives have now lodged a writ of habeas corpus against his detention. The hearing has been adjourned until Monday 26 October.

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the charges against General Pinochet contained in the extradition application by the Spanish judicial authorities. [55757]

Mr. Straw: The formal extradition request for Senator Pinochet, which must be submitted by the Spanish authorities within 40 days of his arrest, will contain particulars of the offences of which he is accused under Spanish law. These will be converted into equivalent charges under English law when the formal request is considered. The provisional warrant issued by the Bow Street Magistrate on 16 October for Senator Pinochet's arrest cites the offence of murder; I will re-examine this in the light of the formal extradition request.

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department on what date General Pinochet last arrived in the United Kingdom. [55755]

Mr. Straw: Senator Pinochet last arrived in the United Kingdom on 22 September 1998.

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department on *(a)* how many occasions and *(b)* what dates General Pinochet has visited the United Kingdom in the last five years. [55756]

Mr. Straw: I understand that Senator Pinochet has visited the United Kingdom five times in the last five years. In addition to his current visit, I understand that he visited in February and June 1994, October 1995 and October 1996.

Overseas Visits (Advisers)

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the overseas visits between 1 July and 19 October on which Ministers have been accompanied by special advisers and, for each trip, *(a)* the name of the adviser, *(b)* the class and cost of travel booked for the adviser, *(c)* the class of travel actually used by the adviser and *(d)* the accommodation and ancillary costs for the adviser. [55997]

Mr. Straw: Neither my Ministers nor I have been accompanied overseas by Special Advisers between 1 July and 19 October 1998.

Prisoners (Health Care)

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects to publish the report of the Joint Prison Service/Department of Health Working Group on the future organisation of prisoners' health care. [55830]

Mr. George Howarth: Ministers have been working closely with the Prison Service on these issues. I expect to receive the report of the Joint Prison Service/Department of Health Working Group on the future organisation of prisoners' health care very shortly. The Government will consider the group's findings and recommendations and make an announcement in due course.

Temazepam

Mrs. Irene Adams: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many export licences were issued, and for what quantity, of Temazepam *(a)* capsules and *(b)* tablets in each year between 1990 and 1998; [55183]

(2) how many Temazepam *(a)* tablets and *(b)* capsules were manufactured in the United Kingdom in each year since 1992. [55163]

Mr. George Howarth: Records for production of Temazepam, a drug contained in Schedule 3 of the Misuse of Drugs Regulations 1985, are required to be kept for a period of two years only. Export licence numbers are not routinely recorded as most consignments are covered by blanket export licences.

The following information is available from existing records:

	1996	*1997*
Export		
Tablets	47,150	43,192
Capsules	3,288,500	1,353,860

	1996	1997
Manufacture		
Tablets	94,260,000	48,580,000
Capsules	9,760,000	—

Young Offenders (Drugs)

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what changes his Department has made to the requirement for young offenders to be tested for drugs; and what plans he has to require young offenders taking drugs to undertake treatment programmes. [55139]

Mr. George Howarth: The Crime and Disorder Act 1998 introduced a new community sentence aimed at drug misusing offenders who commit offences to fund their drugs habit: the drug treatment and testing order. It is available to the courts in respect of offenders aged 16 or over and is currently being piloted under the management of the probation service in Liverpool, Croydon and Gloucestershire. Offenders who are considered to be susceptible to treatment and who express willingness to do so, will have to undergo treatment for their drug misuse, monitored by random and compulsory testing. Plans are also in hand to pilot the new order in Scotland.

The Act also introduces the action plan order for 10 to 17 year-olds, which is a new community sentence aimed at addressing young offenders' offending behaviour. An action plan order will be tailored for the individual young offender and may include elements such as, for example, drug treatment programmes.

In 1995, the Prison Service introduced a programme of mandatory drug testing. In this scheme all offenders, including young offenders, may be tested for drug misuse. The Prison Service is currently addressing access to, as well as availability and quality of, treatment programmes for young offenders held in Prison Service establishments. This is a key element of the Prison Service's Drug Strategy launched in May this year.

Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities

Mr. Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) which (i) communities and (ii) organisations in *(a)* Scotland, *(b)* Cornwall, *(c)* Wales, *(d)* Northern Ireland, *(e)* elsewhere in the United Kingdom, *(f)* Isle of Man and *(g)* the Channel Islands, have been invited to submit evidence to the Government in preparation for its report to the Council of Europe on progress made by the United Kingdom under the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities; [55447]

(2) what measures he has taken to ensure that national minorities are able to submit comments on the Government's report to the Council of Europe on progress made by the United Kingdom since ratifying the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities. [55448]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: We have written to the organisations listed to seek their views on the issues which might be covered in the United Kingdom's report and intend to consult them once the report has been drafted:

Commission for Racial Equality
The Runnymede Trust
Churches Commission for Racial Justice
West Indian Standing Conference
National Council of Hindu Temples
The Sikh Council for Inter-Faith Relations
Board of Deputies of British Jews
Joint Council for Anglo-Caribbean Churches
Union Muslim Organisations
The Sikh Forum (UK)
Anti-Racist Alliance
1990 Trust
The Muslim College
Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants
Black Jewish Forum
Interfaith Network
Society of Black Lawyers
Al-Khoei Foundation
Inner Cities Religious Council
Muslim Council of Great Britain
Justice
Liberty
Standing Advisory Commission on Human Rights (SACHR)
SIA
Institute of Race Relations
Chinese Community in Britain
The African and Caribbean Finance Forum
Inter-Parliamentary Council Against Antisemitism
Policy Studies Institute
Greater Sylhet Development and Welfare Council in the United Kingdom
The Consortium of Bengali Associations
Northern Ireland Council of Ethnic Minorities
CAJ, Belfast
African Caribbean Leadership
Commission for Racial Equality (NI)
Belfast Travellers Education and Development Group
The Islamic Foundation
Minority Rights Group
Confederation of Indian Organisations
Charter 88 Ltd.
Society of Asian Lawyers
Central Scotland Racial Equality Council
Fife Racial Equality Council
Grampian Racial Equality Council
Lothian Racial Equality Council
Tayside Community Relations Council
West of Scotland Community Relations Council
Commission for Racial Equality, Scotland Office
SCVO Race Equality Development Unit
Commun na Gaidhlig
Welsh Development Agency
Development Board for Rural Wales
Wales Tourist Board
Cardiff Bay Development Corporation
Land Authority for Wales
National Museums and Galleries of Wales
National Library of Wales

Sports Council for Wales

Welsh Language Board

Bwrdd yr Iaith Gymraeg

Arts Council of Wales

Tai Cymru

Countryside Council for Wales

Qualification, Curriculum and Assessment Authority for Wales

Residuary Body for Wales

Welsh National Board for Nursing, Midwifery and Health Visiting

Royal Commission on Ancient and Historical Monuments of Wales

Further Education Funding Council for Wales

Higher Education Funding Council for Wales

Members of the Race Relations Forum.

Mr. Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what definitions are used of *(a)* culture, *(b)* ethnic and *(c)* ethnicity in his Department's work to support its ratification of the Council of Europe Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities; [55446]

(2) which groups are currently under consideration for acceptance by his Department as a National Minority in addition to those national minorities already recognised by his Department as existing within the United Kingdom under the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities; [55449]

(3) which national minorities his Department has identified within the United Kingdom for the purposes of its ratification of the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities. [55450]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: "National Minority" is not a legally defined term within the United Kingdom. For the purposes of the Convention, our report will be based on the definition of racial group as set out in the Race Relations Act 1976. This defines a racial group as

"a group of persons defined by colour, race, nationality (including citizenship) or ethnic or national origins".

Mr. Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what timetable he has set for the consultation and report on progress made by the United Kingdom since the ratification of the Council of Europe Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities. [55445]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: We are due to report on progress under the Convention by May 1999. To meet this deadline, we have invited interested parties to suggest issues which might be included in our report and will consult them early next year on a draft.

Criminal Injuries Compensation Board

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what steps he is taking to encourage speedier responses to claims by the Criminal Injuries Compensation Board; [55150]

(2) what is the current average time that the Criminal Injuries Compensation Board takes to deal with a claim. [55149]

Mr. Michael: There are no meaningful average waiting times applicable to criminal injuries compensation claims. Applications range from the very straightforward ones, in which a decision may be issued within weeks, through to exceptionally complex cases where it may take a number of years for the injury to be fairly assessed. It is sometimes impossible to assess fully the level of permanent injury for some considerable time, and this can contribute to delay. Interim payments are usually made in such cases to assist the victim return in the shorter term.

The work of the board is confined to the clearance of cases outstanding under the 1990 common law damages scheme at 31 March 1996. There were then some 110,000 such cases. By 30 September 1998 the board had reduced this figure to 17,500, most awaiting an appeal or other hearing. The aim is to clear these cases by 31 March 2000.

The tariff-based scheme, effective for all claims received on or after 1 April 1996, is operated by the Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority (CICA), with appeals being dealt with by the independent Criminal Injuries Compensation Appeals Panel (CICAP). The new scheme was designed to be simpler and faster. CICA's target is to issue a first decision in 90 per cent. of claims within 12 months of receipt. In 1997–98, achievement was 86 per cent. CICAP's target is to resolve appeals in 80 per cent. of cases within six months. In 1997–98, achievement was 82 per cent.

Immigration Service

Mr. Wyatt: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what change there was in the number of front-line immigration officers between January 1988 and January 1998. [55654]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: On 1 January 1988, the Immigration Service employed a total of 1,350 permanent immigration officers for its combined on-entry and enforcement operations. On 1 January 1998, the total figure was 1,976, of which 1,764 were in the Immigration Service Ports Directorate and 212 were in the Immigration Service Enforcement Directorate. In addition, the Assistant Immigration Officer grade was introduced in 1991. On 1 January 1998, there were 154 Assistant Immigration Officers, of whom 129 were in the Immigration Service Ports Directorate and 25 were in the Immigration Service Enforcement Directorate.

Drug Smuggling

Mr. Wyatt: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what estimate he has made of the *(a)* direct and *(b)* indirect cost of illegal drug smuggling to the United Kingdom in the last year for which figures are available. [55655]

Mr. George Howarth: Estimates of the costs of problematic drug misuse were produced by Professor Michael Hough of South Bank University and included in the Home Office Drug Prevention Initiative report "Arrest Referral: Emerging Lessons from Research", published in April 1998.

The total annual cost was put at between £3.2 billion and £3.7 billion, made up of £100 million health costs, £600 million unemployment and sickness benefit

payments, £500 million criminal justice system costs and costs of between £2 billion—£2.5 billion to victims of drug-related crime.

These estimates do not distinguish between costs arising from drugs smuggled illegally and drugs produced in this country, although other studies suggest that the overwhelming majority of the drug misused in this country are produced overseas.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Growth Promoters

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many infringements of the regulations concerning the growth promoter Olaquindox have been recorded in each year since 1987. [54663]

Mr. Rooker: Olaquindox is a growth promoter permitted for use in feed for piglets up to 4 months of age under the requirements of Council Directive 70/524/EEC as amended. The Royal Pharmaceutical Society of Great Britain enforces the relevant provisions of the Directive in Great Britain and routinely monitors the use of zootechnical additives in feedingstuffs. There are no records of infringements specific to the use of Olaquindox.

Persistent Inquirers

Mr. Sanders: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food which of his Department's agencies have procedures to identify persistent inquirers for information. [53949]

Mr. Morley: The Department's Executive Agencies are the responsibility of their Chief Executives. I have asked them to reply to the hon. Member direct.

Letter from G. K. Bruce to Mr. Adrian Sanders, dated 22 October 1998:

The Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food has asked me to reply to your question about procedures to identify persistent enquirers for information.

The Pesticides Safety Directorate aims to respond helpfully to all enquirers for information and has no procedures in place to identify persistent enquirers.

Letter from P. I. Stanley to Mr. Adrian Sanders, dated 22 October 1998:

The Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food has asked me to reply, in respect of the Central Science Laboratory (CSL), to your question concerning procedures to identify persistent enquiries for information.

Requests for information under the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information are routinely monitored, but it has not been found necessary to introduce specific procedures to identify persistent enquiries.

Letter from Dr. J. M. Rutter to Mr. Adrian Sanders, dated 8 October 1998:

The Minister has asked me to reply to your question about which of his Department's agencies have procedures to identify persistent enquirers for information.

Although the Veterinary Medicines Directorate (VMD) monitors all requests for information under the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information, it has not been found necessary to introduce specific procedures for persistent inquirers. The VMD follows the guidance on interpretation of the Code issued by the Office of Public Service.

Letter from Johnston McNeill to Mr. Adrian Sanders, dated 22 October 1998:

As Chief Executive of the Meat Hygiene Service (MHS), your question to the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food enquiring whether agencies have procedures to identify persistent enquirers for information has been passed to me to respond on behalf of this Executive Agency.

The MHS receives many requests for information from various sources and aims to respond helpfully to all such requests. The Agency does not have any formal procedures to identify persistent enquirers.

Letter from T. W. A. Little to Mr. Adrian Sanders, dated 22 October 1998:

The Minister has asked me to reply to your question on the procedures in place at the Veterinary Laboratories Agency (VLA) to identify persistent enquirers for information.

I can confirm that the VLA has a process in place for tracking *all* enquiries addressed to the Agency.

Letter from Sarah Nason to Mr. Adrian Sanders, dated 22 October 1998:

Mr. Nick Brown has asked me to reply, in respect of the Farming and Rural Conservation Agency (FRCA), to your question about which of his Department's agencies have procedures to identify persistent enquirers for information.

In accordance with FRCA's Charter and Statement of Service Standards correspondence is recorded and monitored locally. FRCA Directors report on a quarterly basis to the Agency's Management Board so that service improvements and opportunities for efficiencies can be identified. This process should ensure the identification of persistent enquirers.

Letter from P. W. Greig-Smith to Mr. Adrian Sanders, dated 22 October 1998:

As Agency Chief Executive, I am responding to your question to the Minister of Agriculture in relation to the Centre for Environment, Fisheries & Aquaculture Science (CEFAS).

With regard to the operation of monitoring of persistent inquirers for information, CEFAS receives many requests from individuals and organisations seeking information. These are monitored as required by the Agency's obligations under the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information, and the Environmental Information Regulations 1992.

There are no specific procedures by which people who make frequent requests are identified, but any such cases would be evident from inspection of the records when annual summaries are prepared.

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PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

OFFICIAL REPORT

SIXTH SERIES **VOLUME 317**

SESSION 1997–98

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SCOPE OF THE INDEX, ARRANGEMENT AND ABBREVIATIONS

This index is derived from the House of Commons Library's Parliamentary On-Line Information System (POLIS), and the subject terms used are based on those used in POLIS. There are often changes in column numbering, etc., between the daily part or weekly Hansard (which simply collects together the daily parts without revision) and the bound volume. The index for the bound volume is revised to take account of these changes and cannot therefore, be used in connection with the daily part or weekly Hansard. For these versions use the Fortnightly Index.

Scope and arrangement of the Index

Oral and Written Parliamentary Questions are indexed under subject headings and the names of Members asking and Ministers replying to them. Questions are not listed under the names of Departments replying. Departmental listings can be arrived at indirectly by looking under the names of the Minister(s) of that Department. There are, however, the headings 'Northern Ireland', 'Scotland', and 'Wales' under which one can find not only most Questions answered by the Northern Ireland Office, Scottish Office, Welsh Office but also Questions about these areas of the United Kingdom which are answered by other Departments. Ministerial statements are indexed under subject headings, under 'Ministerial statements' and the names of Ministers making them and Members speaking on them. General debates are indexed under broad subject headings and under the names of all Members and Ministers taking part. Debates on legislation (Bills, Orders, Regulations etc.) are indexed under the name of the Bill, Statutory Instruments etc, under subject headings and under the names of those taking part.

Rulings and Statements by Speaker and deputies are brought together under the heading 'Speaker's rulings and statements'.

Other contributions by Speaker and deputies appear under the heading Speaker.

Opposition Day Debates and Estimates Day Debates and Standing Order No. 10 applications are listed under those respective headings and under subject headings too.

The date of each item except Parliamentary Questions is inserted immediately before the reference.

Members' names are given in the form by which they prefer to be known and are printed in bold italics. Under their names, entries are arranged under one of the two headings *Debates, etc.* (to include interventions on statements, points of order and so on) or *Questions.*

Abbreviations

Bills 1R = first reading, 2R = second reading, Money res = money resolution, Comm = Committee stage, Rep = Report stage, 3R = third reading, amendt/amendts = amendment/amendments, * = matter taken formally, without debate.

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